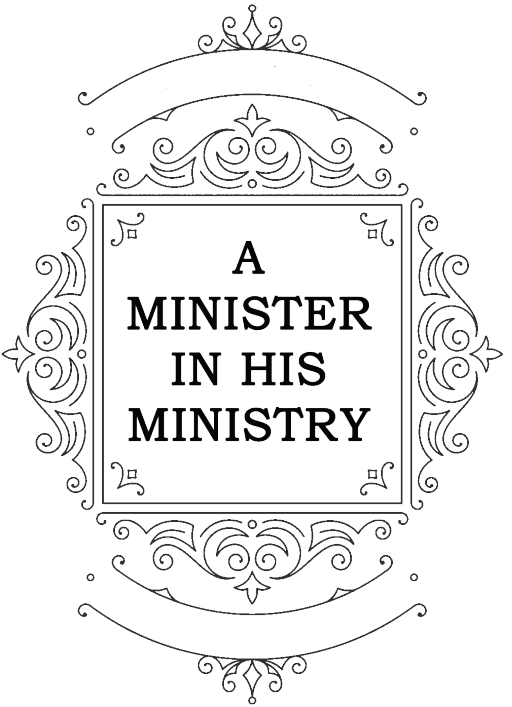
FRANK W. BOREHAM



A MINISTER IN HIS MINISTRY

Compiled by MIKE FOCHT

Frank W. Boreham—A Minister In His Ministry

by Frank W. Boreham, compiled by Mike Focht

Minimal wording and spelling were updated for the modern reader.

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I must express my humble gratitude to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In the words of Boreham, He has placed His holy hand on my unholy head, and for that, I am forever joyfully in His debt. This book is a fruit of His ministry.

- Pastor Mike Focht

Frank W. Boreham

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PREFACE

My interest in F.W. Boreham began with a quote. I don't recall the line, but I remember thinking I wanted to hear more. So I purchased one of F.W. Boreham's books and was hooked. Boreham's ability to see beauty in all of life, describe it in a beautiful way, and present it as a reflection of the Beautiful One was a true gift from God.

His written voice remains unique and charming in a timeless fashion. To me, Boreham is an embodiment of a person who constantly thought on things true, noble, just, pure, lovely, good, virtuous, and praiseworthy.
The problem I had once I was finished reading most of Boreham's material—over fifty books, the bulk of which are out of print and hard to find—was that I couldn't remember which book held the particular story or illustration or insight I was seeking. So for my own benefit, I went back and culled through what was to me, the best of Boreham's material.

As a pastor, I was particularly blessed by the witness of Boreham's life in ministry and the faithful testimony of God's work in and among the people he pastored. My attempt to distill the best of that witness and testimony led me to compile the following volumes: *F.W. Boreham: A Minister In His Ministry* and *F.W. Boreham: A Pastor With His People*. The first focuses on Boreham's life as a minister of the everlasting Gospel. The second focuses on Boreham's life as a faithful shepherd of God's people. I believe these books will bless and encourage anyone who desires to serve God and live joyfully among His people.

It is my prayer that God graciously uses Boreham's unique insights and illustrations to bless you the same way He has used them to bless me.

Chapter 1

COLLEGE

From *My Pilgrimage*

Southey used to say that, however long a man's life, the first twenty years represent by far the bigger half of it. That being so, my tale is more than half told. For, in 1892, I came of age and entered college.

It was on a typical summer's day in mid-July that I walked out of the Tramways office for the last time. The vacancy created by my resignation had been advertised, and applicants for the position were instructed to present themselves personally at the office. As I marked the multitude of men who were eager to step into my shoes, my heart was in my mouth. Looking back, I smile at the absurdity of that momentary wave of apprehension. The editor of a popular magazine recently invited me to write on *The Lights and Shadows of the Ministerial Life*. It seems to me that a minister's life is *all* bright light and deep shade. If there are any dull or drab passages in it, I have to confess that I have failed to discover them. If there is anything in the doctrine of reincarnation I intend to spend at least one of my future spans of existence as a novelist, working up into thrilling romances the plots that I have collected in the course of my career as a minister. Every day of his life a man who is really in touch with his people finds himself confronted by tangles of circumstances as richly suffused with sentiment, with mystery, and with passion as any conditions set forth in the pages of fiction. Or—to put the matter another way—if I were a young fellow just setting out into life, and

if I wanted a career that would provide the most absorbing interest, every day offering my delighted eyes some new and beautiful turn of the kaleidoscope of human romance, I should once more give myself without a moment's hesitation to the Christian ministry. For romance is simply the expression of the deepest human instincts; and one gets nearer to those palpitating instincts in the ministry than in any other walk of life. My own experience has taught me that he who is called to the Christian ministry lays his fingers on the quivering heartstrings of men's deepest emotions; and he who has once tasted the poignant raptures of the ministry would not be anything but a minister for all the gold of the Indies.

I entered college on August 9, 1892. In a way, this important step was singularly ill-timed. I could scarcely have chosen a less auspicious moment. Exactly six months earlier, I had stood with the students then in college beside Mr. Spurgeon's grave at Norwood. Exactly six months after my admission—to the very day—Principal David Gracey also passed away. The loss of both President and Principal naturally threw the entire machinery of the institution into confusion; and, for some months, it was a common experience for students, on arriving at the college, to be met with the announcements that there would be no classes that day. At the time, this seemed a disaster of the first magnitude; but, reviewing it in the perspective of the years, I am not so sure. For it had the effect of fastening upon my mind the necessity for making up the leeway after leaving college. And, in the attempt to regain this lost ground, I later on devoted to study many hours that might otherwise have been frittered away, thus acquiring the habits of systematic reading that have remained with me all through the years.

My college course was not a long one. It occupied two years and a half. Two factors contributed to its abbreviation. The *first* was the fact that, in my boyish studies as a pupil teacher, and in the night classes that followed, I had mastered most of the subjects that made up the first year's curriculum. The *second* was that, at the close of one of my open-air meetings at Clapham, a saintly and scholarly old clergyman, obviously pitying the paucity of my intellectual equipment, had kindly offered to give me lessons in Greek. I, as conscious as he was of my own deficiencies, had snatched with avidity at such a golden opportunity. And, as a result, I found myself, on entering college, able to take my place with the men who had already been there for twelve months.

Notwithstanding the somewhat brief and somewhat disturbed character of my course, however, I owe much to the college. I have often heard it said that young fellows, aflame with spiritual intensity and evangelistic passion, lose in college the ardour that drove them to its doors. I can only say that I saw no sign of any such tendency. In addition to our classwork, we had ample opportunities for intimate spiritual fellowship. The Friday prayer meeting, followed once a month by the Communion service, was a means of grace to all of us, creating an atmosphere in which it became easy for us to open our hearts to one another.

The Friday lectures, too. In my time, many—if not most—of them were delivered by Dr. A. T. Pierson, who supplied the pulpit of the Metropolitan Tabernacle during the illness, and for some time after the death, of Mr. Spurgeon. Dr. Pierson looms largely on the horizon of my college days. He was distinctly a personality. He magnetized us all. I still possess a series of cartoons which, in December, 1892, appeared in a London comic paper, caricaturing his favorite gestures, attitudes, and expressions. We students missed no opportunity of hearing him. For sheer down-right oratory I regarded him as peerless. He would lecture at the Metropolitan Tabernacle on such subjects as The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture, holding six or seven thousand people spell-bound for nearly two hours. His Friday afternoon lectures to the students were no less masterly. I realized, as I listened to him, that his rhetorical effects were produced by the most diligent and careful preparation. He knew beforehand exactly what he was going to say and exactly how he was going to say it.

He possessed, as we all do, the defects of his virtue. In college we took the liberty of changing his initials. We spoke of him, not as Dr. A. T. Pierson, but as Dr. M. R. Pierson. The M. R. stood for Most Remarkable. Every text that he announced in the Tabernacle pulpit was the most remarkable text in the Bible; every subject on which he lectured was the most remarkable with which a man could possibly deal; and every historical reference was introduced as one of the world's most remarkable happenings. And the extraordinary thing was that, at the moment, he really believed it! To him, his immediate theme—whatever that theme might be—was absolutely incomparable. He completely forgot the glowing superlatives with which he had stressed the paramount importance of other subjects. Every tadpole that he touched became, for the

time being, an archangel. All his geese were swans. The poet that he chanced to be quoting was always a Shakespeare. The slope that he was climbing was, to him, Mount Everest. To those of us who heard him almost daily, this amiable frailty seemed a trifle grotesque; yet we were compelled to recognize that his tongue acquired a magic eloquence, and his arguments a resistless driving-power, from his sincere conviction of the unrivalled splendor of his immediate theme.

Almost simultaneously, another eminent American laid hold of London and left an indelible impression on the students of that day. In 1893, Mr. Moody, accompanied by Mr. Sankey, held his last mission in London. The services were held in the Metropolitan Tabernacle and the students were invited to act as ushers. It was our duty to show people to their seats before the service; to study Mr. Moody's message and methods during the services; and to be on the lookout for inquirers at the close of the service.

I must have heard Mr. Moody thirty or forty times during that fortnight. I learn from his biography that it was during that mission that his health collapsed, compelling him to consult Sir Andrew Clark. I am surprised: he certainly gave no outward indication of any physical frailty. To us students he seemed like a volcano in ceaseless eruption, a miracle of tireless activity. I well remember a day on which, between the afternoon and evening services, he was enjoying a breathing-space and a cup of tea. He was told that, although it was not yet six o'clock, there were enough people waiting outside the Tabernacle to crowd it for the evening service.

'Let them in!' he exclaimed; and the doors were at once thrown open. He then made his way to the pulpit; delivered a gripping and unforgettable address to the assembled multitude; dismissed them; and, at the appointed time, was once more in the pulpit ready to grapple with a second evening congregation!

I doubt if any of the students of that day have ever shaken off, or would like to shake off, the impact upon their own plastic and impressionable minds of the rugged and commanding personality of Mr. Moody. As Dr. J. Stuart Holden said at the time, 'Moody's honesty, his loyalty to God's Word, his passion for exalting Christ; these endeared him to thousands to whom he will always stand for the best things of their Christian experience'. It is very pleasant now to reflect that, as a small boy, I fell under the magic of Mr.

Moody when, on the day on which the wind so suddenly changed, he visited my own home-town; and that, later on, as a theological student, I saw him close his memorable English ministry.

At that mission, each student was allotted a little block of seats. We were carefully instructed as to the way in which we were to shepherd the people in those pews. We were to see that every one was comfortable; that every one was supplied with a hymn-book; and that, without undue button-holing, those who needed individual counsel could readily find it. I like to remember that, among those who attended the afternoon meetings, and who occupied a front seat in the section apportioned to me, was a stately young lady in black who listened to Mr. Moody with marked reverence and the closest attention. We knew her then as Princess May, the daughter of the Duke and Duchess of Teck. But I have lived to see her become, in turn, the Duchess of York, the Princess of Wales, the Queen of England, and the Venerable Queen-Mother—an altogether regal figure, universally honored and greatly beloved.

Chapter 2

LOVE

From *My Pilgrimage*

In my time the students were boarded out in groups of six or eight. The system may not be ideal, yet it has its advantages. It developed personal intimacy, loyal comradeship, and, in many cases, laid the foundations of lifelong friendships. Moreover, it developed in each man the delicate art of harmonizing his own tastes and temperament with those of the men whose room and whose table he daily shared. And it excited a healthy rivalry between the different houses. If a man excelled in classes, in debate, in university examinations, or in public life, the glory of his achievement shed a luster on the house to which he belonged.

For some reason that I have never quite fathomed, the student-pastorates attached to the College were divided among the different houses, and, within the house, were passed on from one student to another in order of seniority. Our house at Durand Gardens, Stockwell, was responsible for two of these student-pastorates—Forest Row in Sussex and Theydon Bois in Essex. Long before I had set foot in either of those charming English villages I seemed to know them thoroughly. And I knew the people who lived in them—at least by name.

For, on Monday evenings, having returned from our various preaching appointments, we pulled ourselves together for another week's work. And, in the process, we naturally compared notes as to our weekend experiences. And as, in the discharge of his duties

as student-pastor, one of the men had, of necessity, been to Forest Row and another to Theydon Bois, we all became familiar with the outstanding phenomena of those two places.

The student-pastorate of Forest Row never came my way. I often spent a Sunday there, mainly because it was near to Tunbridge Wells; and, during the College vacations, when I was returned to my own home, it was easy for me to slip over to Forest Row to conduct the Sunday services. It was here that I stayed with Old Bessie, the minister's widow, of whom I have written in *This is the Day!* and other stories.

But the student-pastorate at Theydon Bois, upon which I entered after completing my first year of College life, always interested me. In the course of that Monday evening gossip concerning our weekend adventures, we discussed everything under the sun: the scenery that had charmed us, the homes that had entertained us, and—so human were we!—the young ladies whose acquaintance we had made.

I noticed, from the first, that the conversation invariably took this romantic turn as soon as Theydon Bois came into the picture. I gathered that the student pastor was usually lodged in a home that was adorned by a most attractive garden of girls. All the men in the house, with the exception of myself, had taken the Theydon Bois engagement at some time or other and were therefore in a position to discuss appreciatively the members of this delightful family. I alone was out in the cold, and I confess that their encomiums piqued my curiosity.

At long last, however, my turn came. The student-pastor was asked by the authorities to preach elsewhere, and the Theydon Bois appointment automatically devolved upon me as being next in order of seniority. I went: I liked the picturesque little village nestling in the heart of the forest: I liked the chapel perched on the edge of the green: I liked the kindness and cordiality of the people: and, quite frankly, I liked the girls. The only fly in the ointment was that one of the girls was missing. 'What a pity,' some member of the household would remark every now and again, 'what a pity that Stella is not here!' Stella, I gathered, both from her sisters and from my fellow-students, possessed attractions peculiarly her own.

A few weeks later, on August 2, 1893, I went to Theydon Bois, not as a mere stop-gap, but to assume the student-pastorate. Stella was there; but, as I was on that occasion entertained at

another home, I only met her at the church. The following week, however, I was the guest of her parents. Stella was at the home on my arrival on the Saturday evening. I learned that, after tea, she was walking over to Epping to do some shopping. I saw no sign of any escort: and so, unwilling that she should undertake so lengthy a trudge in solitude, I gallantly craved permission to accompany her. And thus my troubles began. We met with no misadventure on the outward journey. But, walking home through the forest in the moonlight, a vexatious wind sprang up. She chanced to be wearing a very becoming broad-brimmed hat that, buffeted by these untimely gusts, refused to keep its place. It blew from her head again and again. At last I suggested that she should allow me to tie it down with my handkerchief. She demurely submitted, and, as she stood there with the silver moon shining upon her face, I thought the new arrangement of her millinery even more bewitching than the old. I was thankful that she could not read the daring thought that swept into my mind, as tying the 'kerchief beneath her chin, I looked into her upturned eyes: she would have adjudged her new minister totally unworthy of the nice things that her sisters had said about him. Anyhow, the delicious temptation was successfully resisted and the rapturous moment passed. We saved the hat; but, as we eventually discovered, we lost our hearts. And, since we have neither of us regretted that heavy loss, it seems to follow that the hat must have been a particularly valuable one.

When, on the Monday evening the conclave of students met in the big general study at the College house to talk over our Sabbatic experiences, I was careful, when my turn came, to raise quite a number of thorny theological questions arising out of my own sermons and out of those of the other men. I was prepared to dilate at great lengths on the unseasonable weather, on the choice of hymn-tunes, on railway connections, and on autumn tints. On one theme, and one theme only, had I no syllable to say.

In 1894 Mr. Thomas Spurgeon was called from New Zealand to succeed his father in the Tabernacle pastorate. In common with all the other students, I marked this development with deep interest and attended the various services held in connection with the new minister's induction. I little dreamed, however, that the return of Mr. Thomas Spurgeon from the Antipodes would have the effect of banishing me to the ends of the earth.

On Wednesday, November 14, of that year, however,

a strange thing happened. After the morning classes, the entire College assembled, in accordance with the customary routine, for the sermon and its criticism. At the close of this session we sprang to our feet as usual whilst the professors retired, and then gathered up our books and papers preparatory to returning to our various houses. It chanced that my next neighbor on the desk-room benches was F. W. Jarry, who had since won universal admiration by his magnificent lifework in India. Even then his whole heart was set on missionary enterprise and he made no secret of his enthusiasm. On this particular day, instead of rushing out of the hall on the heels of the tutors, Jarry quietly turned and faced me.

'Where,' he inquired, 'are you going to settle when you leave?'

Since I had expected to remain in College for at least another year—possibly two—the question took my breath away. As a rule, a man only hears of a possible pastorate a few weeks before he is invited to it. I had scarcely given the matter a thought.

'Suppose,' Jarry persisted, 'suppose that the whole wide world were open to you, and you were free to settle in any part of it, where would you go?'

'I would go to New Zealand!' I replied on the instant. I was astonished at my own temerity, for the matter had never exercised my mind. But, regarding the conversation as a purely casual and irresponsible affair, I blurted out my reply with that assumption of confidence that is characteristic of young people generally and of students in particular.

'New Zealand!' echoed Jarry, as startled as I was. 'And why New Zealand of all places?'

'Well,' I answered, 'I should love to be a missionary in China or Africa; but there's no chance of that. The China Inland Mission has already turned me down and no other Society would look at me. That door is closed. Seeing, then, that missionary work is not for me, I should like to go where men are urgently needed, where one would have ample scope and could lay foundations of his own instead of building on foundations laid by others. I imagine that New Zealand would provide just such a field!'

'It probably would; Jarry replied thoughtfully. 'We must pray about it!' And away we went.

The next day, on reaching College, I received a message to the effect that, at the close of the sermon-class, Professor Marchant

wished to see me in his room.

'Before leaving New Zealand,' the Professor began, 'Mr. Thomas Spurgeon was commissioned by the church at Mosgiel—a church that has never yet had a minister—to send out a suitable man. He has invited the tutors to introduce him to the student whom we should select for the appointment and our unanimous choice has fallen upon you. Will you go? If you are prepared to consider it, Mr. Spurgeon would like to see you as soon as possible.'

I sought out Jarry. 'You knew all about this when you asked me that question yesterday!' I exclaimed, accusingly.

'My dear fellow!' he replied, 'I give you my word of honor that I never heard of it until this moment, and I assure you that I never breathed to a soul the confidence you gave me. It certainly looks as if you are being guided!'

I wrote to my father and mother that afternoon. My mother replied by return of post. 'If you go to New Zealand,' she said, 'I shall never see you again. I am afraid we could never consent to it!' After posting that letter, however, she remembered her vow at Prebendary Webb-Peploe's meeting eight years earlier. She therefore sat down and wrote a second letter.

'I am sorry I wrote as I did,' she said. 'We have talked it over and now feel differently. If you decide to go to New Zealand, it will be a terrible wrench. But it may be God's will for you, and, if so, we shall have nothing to say but a fervent God bless you!'

During the next few days everything seemed to be pointing me to New Zealand. Until that critical fourteenth of November, I had scarcely given New Zealand a thought. Of its history, geography, and climatic conditions I knew next to nothing. But now! New Zealand shouted at me from all the hoardings; it figured prominently in all the newspapers; it was the theme of every conversation; I met New Zealand everywhere. Everybody seemed to have brothers there or cousins there, or friends who had just been there or relatives who were just going there. The world appeared to be divided into two hemispheres—New Zealand and The Rest—and of the two, the former seemed to be by far the more important.

And against all this, however, there was one factor that occasioned me a hurricane of concern. I had fallen in love, although, so far as I knew, I had betrayed my secret to nobody, least of all to the young lady herself. How, until I had brought this vital matter to a satisfactory issue, could I dream of leaving England?

The situation was extremely complicated. On the one hand, she was only just seventeen; she was only fifteen on the night of our fateful struggle with the ill-behaved hat. And, on the other hand, I knew nothing at all of the conditions that would await me on the other side of the world. New Zealand was in its infancy; within living memory it had been a wilderness of virgin bush. Would it be fair to say a single word that would commit a girl of such tender years to a life in such a land? I decided that such a course would be unpardonable.

Yet every hour made my duty more crystal clear. I therefore informed Mr. Spurgeon and the tutors that I was willing to go. On December 3, 1894, at Mr. Spurgeon's request, I delivered a farewell address at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, and, on January 24, 1895, I sailed on the *Tainui* from the Royal Albert Docks. On my way to the ship, Mr. Spurgeon gave me a Birthday Book which I still treasure. I handed it round for signatures and among those who autographed it was my college-companion, Jarry, whose unexpected question had first pointed the finger of destiny. Unlike the others, he added a text to his signature—the text in which Paul claims that he had preached the gospel in places in which he was building on no other man's foundation.

And so I left the dear Homeland. My father and mother came to see me off. So did my brothers and sisters, my college companions and many of the people to whom I had ministered at Theydon Bois. And of course, with her father, my Stella was there. Did she understand? Did she guess? To this day I am not sure. The only hint that I allowed myself to give her—perhaps a broad one—was in the actual moment of leave-taking. With the other young ladies who had come to the ship, I probably shook hands. But, in her case, I deliberately and of malice aforethought yielded to the alluring temptation to which I so nearly succumbed on the night on which I wrestled with her hat.

Chapter 3

MARRIAGE

From *My Pilgrimage*

Early in the morning of Monday, April 13, 1896, we were married, my bride being eighteen and I five-and-twenty. I was, of course, unconsciously proud of her. I have never ceased to admire her courage in leaving her village home in England at such an age in order to sail, quite unattended, to earth's remotest bound and to live a life every tiniest detail of which was entirely unfamiliar to her.

When I left London on that bleak January afternoon, I intended to maintain a decorous and friendly correspondence with my sweetheart, making no faintest reference to my fondest hopes until I had firmly entrenched myself in my New Zealand pastorate. By that time, I argued, I should be in a position to judge as to whether it was the kind of land and the kind of life to which to invite her. This plausible project satisfied me less and less each day. During the six long weeks at sea, the haunting theme monopolized my mind sleeping and waking. In the process, the most delicate problems presented themselves. I realized that, since she was absolutely uncommitted, and perhaps sublimely unaware of the tumult that she had awakened in my breast, it would be the easiest thing in the world for her to become involved in some other entanglement. Indeed, thinking of her as I naturally thought of her, such a tragedy appeared almost inevitable. Who, seeing her, could be insensible of her attractions? Then, surveying the matter from *her* standpoint, I was forced to recognize that, by deferring all action until after my arrival in New Zealand, I was laying myself open to the suspicion

that I desired to exploit the femininity of that far field before deciding on the importation of a bride.

Impressed by the cogency of this shipboard reasoning, I therefore resolved upon an immediate overture. When, a few days before reaching my destination, the *Tainui* called at Hobart in Tasmania—destined to be our future home—I posted a private and confidential letter to her father, apprising him of my sentiments and intentions and leaving it to his own discretion as to whether or not he unfolded my secret to the young lady herself.

Having posted that fateful letter and again put out to sea, my tortured mind swung to its normal poise and I was able to concentrate on the preparation of my opening sermons in New Zealand. Those sermons—the manuscripts of which I still possess—were preached on March 17, 1895—St. Patrick's Day. In view of the warmth of the welcome that had been accorded me, and the enthusiasm that had marked those opening services, I felt that any delay in the development of my love affair would be absurd. I therefore wrote the very next day begging my lady-love to join me and entreating her to wire her reply. On the third of May that cable reached me and I was the happiest man in either hemisphere.

How, I wondered, could I break this glorious news to my people? But old Wullie, my old deacon, took the matter entirely out of my hands. It chanced that, at about this time, the church found itself in financial difficulties. I do not mean that they had insufficient money: I mean that they had too much. The one paralyzing dread of these cautious Scots folks had been lest they should lure a young minister from the distant Homeland and then find themselves unable to support him. This terrifying apprehension, and this alone, had constrained them, through several years, to postpone the realization of old Wullie's darling dream—the calling of a minister.

And now that the minister was actually in residence, the fear became still more acute, with the result that the members contributed with frenzied munificence. The money poured in: the exchequer literally overflowed: and poor Tammas, the treasurer, was at his wit's end.

'If the church gets to know that we have all this money,' he exclaimed, aghast, to his fellow-officers in the privacy of the vestry, 'the collections will drop off to nothing!' It was generally agreed that, in some way or other, the money must be spent, and each man undertook to think out some means of disposing of it.

But murder will out! At the church meeting held a day or two later, a private member, little dreaming that he was precipitating a crisis of the first magnitude, asked for a financial statement. Tammas rose ponderously, the picture of abject misery. Anguish was stamped upon his face. He could scarcely have looked more forlorn or woebegone had he stood convicted of misappropriating the church funds. He confessed, with the countenance of a culprit, that he had fifty pounds in hand! The position was appalling.

But, at the crucial moment, Wullie, as his custom was, sprang into the breach and saved the situation. He rose deliberately, a sly twinkle in his eye, and quietly asked:

'Would the meenister tell us if he has a lassie?'

I was covered with confusion: the cablegram was in my pocket: and I hid my face to conceal my blushes. I confess that, for a few seconds, I lost control of that meeting. But, happily, my very confusion saved me the necessity of a reply. My secret was out. Wullie was on his feet again.

'Then, Mr. Chairman,' he said, with the gravity of a statesman, 'I move that we buy a block of land with that fifty pounds and proceed to build the meenister a manse!'

The motion was carried with enthusiasm. The treasurer looked like a man who had been saved from the very brink of destruction.

The house was built and was for many years my home. It had but one discomfort, and that was the sorrowful reflection that poor Wullie never lived to see either the manse or its mistress. One Saturday afternoon, shortly after his adroit move at the meeting, without a sickness or a struggle, he suddenly passed from us. It seemed incredible. The entire township was in tears. I have seldom seen grief so universal and sincere.

By this time I was absorbed in a whirl of rainbow-tinted plans. On November 14, I received a cablegram telling me that my bride-elect would sail by the *Ruapehu* in February. And on March 25 she landed at Wellington, the New Zealand capital. Wellington is nearly five hundred miles from Mosgiel; but I was determined to meet her. As to whether or not I did actually meet her has always been a moot point between us. Here are the facts.

The *Ruapehu* was due on March 24. In those days ships had no way of advising ports of their approach. The only way of meeting a vessel was by haunting the wharves till she appeared.

At dawn on March 24, I took up my vigil on the pier. It rained—a steady, misty drizzle—all through the day. I was chilled to the bone and soaked to the skin. When, late at night, I was assured that the boat would not venture in until daylight, I returned to the home of the Rev. C., and Mrs. Dallaston—my host and hostess—for a few hours' sleep. At daylight I was again on the rain-swept pier. In the early afternoon, visibility having become poorer than ever, the harbor officials advised me to go home. 'No captain in his senses would bring his ship through the heads in this water!' they said. And, as I was again saturated, I acted accordingly.

On reaching the house, Mrs. Dallaston, good motherly soul, insisted on my changing my clothes. Having no other garments with me, she considerately produced a suit of Mr. Dallaston's. Now my good host was of a distinctly *petite* build, whilst I was of clumsier proportions. Recognizing the wisdom of Mrs. Dallaston's kindly counsel, however, I contrived with a struggle to encase myself in the diminutive attire placed at my disposal. My own wet clothes were put to dry.

This transformation had scarcely been completed when, looking from the window, I descried the tops of two tall masts moving above the roofs of the city buildings. I cried to my good hostess to bring me my dripping suit, and, making no attempt to wrestle with the skin-tight cloth I was wearing, I pulled the wet garments over the dry ones and dashed frantically from the house. A city-bound tram was passing the door, and, catching the driver's eye, I boarded it. At the very first curve, that hideous tram left the rails and shot across the pavement. How I eventually reached the wharf I cannot now remember. I only know that, by the time I hurried breathlessly on to the pier, the *Ruapehu* had already berthed, and the fond embraces of which I had dreamed a thousand dreams had to be punctuated by laborious explanations and humiliating apologies.

All's well that ends well, however. The laws of New Zealand required that, my lady-love being under age and having no relatives in the Dominion capable of giving legal assent, a delay of three weeks must intervene between her arrival and her wedding. But even three comes to an end at last; and, as soon as their tardy course was full run, we were married. That early morning ceremony, at which exactly half a dozen people, including ourselves, were present, was conducted by the Rev. J. J. Doke. My friendship with Mr. Doke stands out as one of the most beautiful memories of my

New Zealand experience. After leaving New Zealand, Mr. Doke became intimately associated with Mr. Gandhi, and, on one notable occasion, saved the Mahatma's life.

In the years that followed, Mr. Doke was often our guest at the Mosgiel mase and nothing contributed to the happiness and enrichment of our early married life more than those memorable visits. In a way we felt sorry for him. He was so small and so frail; he looked at times as if a puff of wind would blow him away. His asthma racked him pitilessly, day and night. Yet he never behaved as a sick man; never, if he could possibly help it, referred to his weakness. In all his movements he was brisk, alert, vigorous, sprightly. He emerged from his room every morning with the sunniest of smiles; whilst, long before breakfast was over, his clever witticisms and excellent stories would have everybody in the best of humor. His comments on the morning's paper represented a liberal education. His favorite studies—that every item in the news drew from him striking comparisons and contrasts gathered from the storied Past. The outlook from each window captivated him. As often as not, he would draw his sketchbook from his breast pocket and limn some pretty peep that particularly took his fancy. His home was luxuriously beautified by the multitude of his oil-paintings. When he slipped out into the garden, every flower and bird awoke his enthusiasm. He loved life—life in every form and phase. In his later days he established a little zoo of his own and filled the house with the strangest pets. He would tell me in his letters of his lemurs, his meercats, and his monkeys; and of the many-colored birds in his aviary. And, as though real life failed to satisfy him, he invaded the realm of fiction. He wrote two novels—stories of the Karoo—that, for mystery and adventure, have been compared with the fancies of Rider Haggard. His lust of life was insatiable. I seldom saw him without his camera. He was eager to perpetuate every scene that confronted him, every experience that befell him.

In addition to all this—and perhaps explaining all this—he represented in his own person the most engaging and most lovable type of masculine saintliness of which I have ever had personal experience. He literally walked with God. He dwelt in the secret place of the Most High and abode under the shadow of the Almighty. God was never far away when *he* was near. To him the study of the Bible was a ceaseless revelry. During his earlier ministry he read it, from cover to cover, four times a year.

I was ten years his junior. He never made me feel that he was presuming upon his seniority; and yet he always impressed me as being intensely anxious that I should acquire, without the toil of patient and laborious search, the intellectual and spiritual wealth that he had gathered in the course of those extra years of pilgrimage. Seated on the broad and sunlit veranda of my Mosgiel manse, he would pour the golden treasure of his mind and heart into my hungry ear. All that he had learned about the choice of books, about systems of study, about the conduct of public worship, about the art of preaching, and about the best methods of pastoral visitation he endeavored, in its entirety, to impart to me. And, nine times out of ten, before we rose from our lounge-chairs, he would strike a deeper note. How can a minister keep his soul in rapt communion with God? How can he inflame his personal devotion to his Savior? How can he ensure the indwelling of the gracious Spirit? How can he prevent the evaporation of his early consecration, the fading of his youthful ideals? How can he keep his faith fresh, his passion burning, and his vision clear? When my companion turned to such topics, as he often did, his eyes lit up; his soul shone in his face; he would lean forward in his chair in an ecstasy of fervor; he would talk like a man inspired.

I recall a day on which the three of us—the Mistress of the Manse, Mr. Doke, and I—had just finished afternoon tea on the lawn. We were still toying with our cups when a young fellow rode up on a bicycle. Taking me aside, he told me that Nellie Gillespie, a member of my young people's Bible-class, was sinking fast: it was unlikely that she would last the night. As soon as the messenger had left, I explained the position to Mr. Doke and begged him to excuse me.

'Of course,' he replied, 'but, first, come and sit here beside me.' He threw himself full length in the lounge-chair, his body almost horizontal.

'See,' he said, '*I* am Nellie Gillespie. I am just about to die. I have sent for you. What have you to say to me?'

Entering into the spirit of the thing, I leaned towards him and unfolded to him the deathless story that I shortly intended to pour into the ears of the real Nellie Gillespie.

'Oh, my dear sir,' he moaned, 'you're saying far too much. It's almost as bad as a theological lecture. Remember, I'm utterly exhausted…months of languishing consumption…I shall be gone

in an hour or two…Make it very short and very simple.'

I began again, condensing into a few sentences all that I had said before.

'Shorter still,' he demanded; 'shorter and simpler! Remember, I'm dreadfully tired and weak! Shorter and simpler!'

I made a third venture, telling in just a word or two of the eternal Love and the eternal Cross.

'Splendid!' he cried, springing suddenly to his feet, and clasping my hand. 'Now away you go, as quickly as you can; and remember, whilst *you* are praying for Nellie Gillespie, I shall be praying for *you*! God bless you!' And the next day he assisted me at Nellie's funeral.

The amazing thing is that, in defiance of the physical frailty that dogged all his days, my old friend laid his bones in a missionary grave away in the heart of Africa.

Being a minister at Johannesburg at the time, Mr. Doke conceived the idea that it would enormously enrich the spirituality and increase the effectiveness of his own church, and of all the South African churches, if they had a specific missionary objective, and especially an African objective. He talked it over with Fred Arnot, the renowned explorer and evangelist. Arnot told him of a lonely mission station away up in the interior—not far from the upper reaches of the Congo—that might be taken over by the South African churches and made the center from which a vast unevangelized territory might be worked. The idea captivated Mr. Doke's imagination, and he resolved to set out on a great trek into the heart of the continent.

His journal, carefully kept to the last, reads like a section of Livingstone's *Missionary Travels* or Stanley's *In Darkest Africa*. Here, as in those classics, we have the swamp and the jungle, the long grass and the winding trails, the lions and the hyenas, the zebras and the impalas, the mosquitoes and the tsetse flies. His attempts to make the natives of the various villages understand his message are strangely reminiscent of Livingstone. The travelers reached their objective and were given a boisterous welcome. But on the homeward journey his meager strength gave out and he passed triumphantly away.

My wife and I have always felt that our wedded life received a sanctifying touch at the very outset under the benediction of Mr. Doke's friendship. Life becomes wonderfully sacramental when it

is hallowed by such beautiful and heroic memories.

Chapter 4

'WULLIE!'

From *Mountains in the Mist*

Wullie was my first deacon. That is to say, he was the senior deacon of my church in Maoriland when I arrived. It was a great and memorable night in my life when I met him first. I had been asked by the college authorities to go out to New Zealand and be the first minister of the church at Mosgiel. I consented with a light heart. But the long, long voyage had opened my eyes to the enormous chasm that yawned between me and all that I really loved. Here was I, a stranger in a strange land, an exile in the uttermost ends of the earth. And it was a very dejected and miserable and home-sick young minister who was being borne into Dunedin on the Christchurch express that night. It was the last stage of a journey that had seemed interminable. Or almost the last stage. For at Dunedin I was to change, and take the suburban train that was actually to land me in Mosgiel. I sat there in the express, trying to imagine the people who would presently meet me—the people who were to be father and mother and brothers and sisters to me through the long years to come. A few names had reached me, and I attempted to conjure up forms and faces to fit them. It is never a very satisfactory business, and I was not sorry when the twinkling lights of the city and the wild scream of the engine announced that we were approaching Dunedin at last.

I suspected that some of my new people might be lying in wait for me here, and I was not mistaken. As the train slowed into the brightly-lit platform, I caught a glimpse of a group of eager and

inquisitive faces anxiously scanning every carriage. I was soon in the midst of them, receiving a most gracious welcome. They were all kindly and reassuring; but of all of those honest and homely faces one stood out from among the rest. It was one of the simplest, and yet one of the saintliest, faces I have ever seen. What ruggedness was there! And yet it was luminous, for it fairly shone! It was a winsome face, and mischief twinkled in those eyes. It belonged to an elderly little Scotsman. My dejection thawed beneath his smile. All loneliness vanished. In some occult way of his own he made me feel that I was trusted and honoured already. His wrinkled face beamed; his bright eyes sparkled; and his speech faltered through deep emotion. Lookers-on might have been pardoned for supposing that I was his son. I had dreaded that night's experience as the greatest ordeal of my life. He dispelled the illusion and turned it into a home-coming. I was among my own people. One man at least loved me, and that man was Wullie. 'Pur laddie!' he said, as he reflected on my long voyage to a strange folk.

I have said that I was the first minister at Mosgiel. That is scarcely true. Wullie was the first minister. He was the father of them all. It was a very well-worn path that led to Wullie's door. The young people confided their love affairs to Wullie; the older people poured all their troubles into his sympathetic ear. He was pastor and peacemaker. I always think of Wullie when I recall that great saying in *Ecce Homo*: 'The truth is that there has scarcely been a town in any Christian country since the time of Christ where a century has passed without exhibiting a character of such elevation that his mere presence has shamed the bad and made the good better, and has been felt at times like the presence of God Himself. And if this be so, has Christ failed? Or can Christianity die?' No; Christianity is safe as long as there are men like Wullie about.

And yet I was the first minister after all. I learned afterwards how Wullie had set his heart on having a minister at the church. He had thought about it, talked about it, and prayed about it until it had become the one fond dream of his old age. At every church meeting he rose and wistfully referred to it. Were the members quite sure that the time was not yet ripe? And when at last, with great trepidation, the church yielded to his importunity, and committed itself to the formidable proposal, Wullie's delight broke all bounds. How impatiently he had awaited the letter from the English college! How excitedly he had spread the great news that a minister was

actually coming! How he had pored day by day over the shipping news for any fragmentary tidings of the vessel that bore me! I could understand all this afterwards in the light of the welcome he gave me.

Four months later, on Wullie's motion, of course, the church decided to terminate the temporary character of my appointment and to call me to its permanent pastorate. On my acceptance the good people presented me with a cosy arm-chair. Wullie was appointed to make the presentation. He read his speech. He could trust himself that night without a manuscript. His heart was full. I shall never forget his tenderness and enthusiasm. I little dreamed that Wullie was addressing us all for the last time.

Nor was it quite the last time. For Wullie's last speeches—if single sentences can properly be classified as speeches—were delivered at a church meeting. If I must enter into details of a distinctly domestic order, the church was in financial difficulties. I do not mean that they had not enough money. I mean that they had too much. The one overpowering dread of these cautious Scots folk had been lest they should lure a young minister all the way from England and then find themselves unable to support him. This horror had alone constrained them, through many years, to postpone the realization of Wullie's darling dream. And when the minister was actually there, the fear became still more acute, with the result that the members contributed with frantic munificence. The exchequer was overflowing, and the poor treasurer was at his wit's ends.

'If the church get to know that we've got all this money,' he exclaimed in despair, 'the collections will drop off to nothing!'

This was at a deacons' meeting. It was generally agreed that in some way or other the money must be spent, and each man undertook to try to think out the best means of disposing of it.

But their plans were all shattered. At the church meeting held a few days later one of the members, little dreaming that he was precipitating a crisis, asked for a financial statement. The treasurer slowly rose. He was the picture of the abject misery. Anguish was stamped upon his face. He could not have looked more forlorn or woebegone had he stood convicted of misappropriating the church funds. He confessed, with the countenance of a culprit, that he fifty pounds in hand! The position was appalling!

But at that fateful moment Wullie, as his custom was, sprang into the breach and saved the situation. He rose deliberately,

a sly twinkle in his eye, and quietly asked:

'Would the meenister tell us if he has a lassie?'

I was covered with confusion, and I buried my face to hide my blushes. I confess that, for two minutes at least, I lost control of that meeting. But, happily, my very confusion saved me the necessity of a reply. My secret was out. Wullie was on his feet again.

'Then, Mr. Chairman,' he said, with the gravity of a statesman, 'I move that we buy a piece of ground with that fifty pounds, and that we build the meenister a manse.'

The resolution was carried with enthusiasm. The treasurer looked like a man who had been saved from the very brink of destruction.

The manse was built, and it was for many years my home. It has been but one discomfort, and that was the sorrowful reflection that poor Wullie never lived to see either the manse or its mistress. One Saturday afternoon, as we were all preparing for an anniversary celebration on the Sunday, without a sickness or a struggle Wullie suddenly passed away. We were thunderstruck. It was incredible. I have rarely seen grief so general and so sincere.

Wullie had some queer little ways. Among his peculiarities was this: When he went to the pay office at the factory and drew his weekly wage, he always looked the coins carefully over with a keen and critical eye, and laid aside the bright ones for the church collection. 'The Lord must aye hae the best, ye ken!' he used to say. He could not bear to put a worn or battered coin upon the plate. At a crowded memorial service, at which the whole countryside turned out to do honour to his memory, there fell to me the heavy task of preaching Wullie's funeral sermon. I referred to this habit of his with the coins. It was so eminently typical and characteristic. 'If,' I said, 'I were asked to suggest a suitable epitaph to write above his grave, I should inscribe upon the stone these words: "HERE LIES A MAN WHO ALWAYS GAVE HIS BEST IN THE SERVICE OF HIS SAVIOUR!"' And he who visits the pretty burying-place on the outskirts of Mosgiel at this day may easily find the green spot where Wullie sleeps, and read that faithful record engraved above his head.

Chapter 5

SCARLET GERANIUMS

From *The Home of the Echoes*

The scarlet geraniums under my window are at their best just now, and I plucked a handful this morning in memory of Little Doctor Dignity. The little old gentleman would have become a centenarian to-day if he had lived. He was born exactly a hundred years ago. That is why I can think of nobody else this morning, especially when the flaming heads of scarlet catch my eye. For I never saw Little Doctor Dignity without a scarlet geranium in his buttonhole. We were all very fond of the little doctor. In those far-off days no man in the Mosgiel Church was more revered, more trusted, more beloved than he. His real name was quite an ordinary affair; but that did not matter in the least; it was never used. No ordinary name would have suited so extraordinary a personage. Perhaps it was some instinctive feeling of this kind that led us to abandon his ordinary name as hopeless, and to give him a name of our own. His ordinary name fitted him as a ready-made suit, picked at random from a box, might have been expected to fit him. But the name by which we knew him fitted him like a glove. Harold Fortescue, in telling his story of Michael Murphy, says that that redoubtable philosopher once wondered why pigs were called pigs. He opened his heart on this troublesome problem to Patrick O'Halloran. O'Halloran pointed to a sty not far away. The pigs had just been fed. Each of the animals had his forelegs in the trough, and all were struggling greedily for the morsels most esteemed. 'Shure,' said O'Halloren, 'and what else could ye call them?' Precisely! I have exactly the same feeling in

respect to Little Doctor Dignity. What else could you call him? With us he was always 'the doctor.' He responded to it with perfect ease; you would have supposed that a framed diploma of some kind hung conspicuously on his wall. He must have known his full appellation, although I never heard it employed in his presence. We addressed him as 'doctor'; only in his absence did we speak of him as 'Little Doctor Dignity'; and the arrangement worked admirably.

He was a loveable little man, with a ruddy face, merry laugh, sparkling eyes, and silky, snow-white hair. He had an annuity of some kind and spent a good deal of his time in visiting. I often came upon him at the firesides of the old people and at the bedsides of the sick. If you met him on the street you would notice that, whilst he was quietly and neatly dressed, his attire betrayed one peculiarity. The left-hand pocket of his coat was always flat and smooth, as though his hand had never entered it; but the right-hand pocket was bulged considerably and was distinctly worn. The children were best qualified to explain that mystery. I remember being with him on the street one day when we met a tiny little thing hurrying home from school. The doctor's hand was in his pocket in a second. But, in stooping to play with the toddler, his buttonhole came to grief. Perhaps the child's hand touched it; I am not sure. At any rate, the bright red petals were strewn upon the path and only the green stalk remained in his coat. A look of singular gravity, almost of pain, overspread the doctor's face. He took out his handkerchief and carefully brushed the petals from the footpath. 'I should not like them to be trampled on!' he said. I thought it strange at the time; but afterwards I understood.

Why was he called Little Doctor Dignity? I fancy the title was first given him because of his extreme jealousy for the dignity of all sacred things. The doctor was an officer of the church. I can see him now as he used to sit in his place in the very centre of the diaconal semi-circle, right opposite me. I never knew him to come late to a meeting; I never knew him to get excited; I never knew him to make a long or elaborate speech. And yet he wielded an enormous influence. A word from the doctor went a very long way. He had a crucible of his own to which he submitted most of our crude and immature proposals.

'Would this be quite dignified?' he would ask quietly, peering over his glasses; and many a plausible scheme looked like a bubble that had been pricked as soon as the doctor had raised that

searching question.

There was nothing stilted or artificial about the doctor. He had too much respect for his dignity to stand on it. He was the essence of simplicity. And the singular thing about his characteristic test was that, like a two-edged sword, it cut both ways. Gavin, for example, was severely practical. He had not a scrap of aestheticism in his composition. Whenever some scheme was submitted for the ornamentation of the church, a thunderstorm swept the face of Gavin. His critics thought him parsimonious, but they did him an injustice. He was not niggardly. He spent money freely on his own home and he gave to the church with a liberal hand. But, perhaps, because the money that he gave had cost him hard and strenuous toil, he watched very narrowly every item of church expenditure. When the church needed a new carpet, or a new table, or something of the kind, Gavin's suggestion was invariably of a type severely plain. His presence was an effective check on ecclesiastical extravagance, but sometimes he went to the opposite extreme. And, as surely as, at the opposite extreme, he proposed a purchase upon which nobody could look with pride, the doctor looked anxiously over his glasses and asked his question. And, as soon as the question was asked, Gavin knew that his proposal was dead and buried.

Andrew, on the other hand, liked to go in for the very best. In his judgement, nothing could be too good for the church. The principle was excellent, but it can be carried too far. At least, it could be carried too far at Mosgiel. The Mosgiel church was the home of all our hearts. To us there was no place like it. But we could not conceal from ourselves the fact that, from a strictly architectural point of view, the building had its limitations. There was a distinct difference, to put it mildly, between the Mosgiel church and St. Paul's Cathedral. But for that difference, Andrew's suggestions would have been excellent. But, bearing that difference in mind, they were sometimes open to criticism. Things that would have appeared quite in place at St. Paul's would have looked incongruous and even gaudy at Mosgiel. A tradesman's daughter does not look well tricked out like a millionaire's heiress or a foreign princess. As soon as Andrew proposed a course which would have exposed us to criticism of this kind, the doctor interpolated his fatal question. We saw at once that Simplicity has its dignities as well as Splendour; and Andrew rarely failed to see the doctor's point.

It was thus, if I remember rightly, that the name was first

conferred. But, after all, there were only eight of us at those solemn conclaves—the seven deacons and myself—and it is inconceivable that the appellation would have become public property, save on the ground of its intrinsic suitability. Professor William James once said of Professor Henri Bergson that his language fitted his thought as elastic silk underclothing fits the body. The figure recurs to my mind as I admire the perfection with which the doctor's popular cognomen fitted his personality. We called him Little Doctor Dignity because he *was* Little Doctor Dignity. Along that line there is no more to be said. This morning I catch myself setting out on involuntary voyages of discovery. Wherein, I keep saying to myself, wherein did the dignity of the little doctor consist?

And, now that I come to think of it, it occurs to me that I never saw the doctor in a temper. Gavin and Tammas and Andrew and Davie used to get angry and excited on occasions, but the doctor, never! He was always collected and calm. I do not mean that he was incapable of strong feeling; I only reason that he was incapable of giving his strong feeling a weak expression. A flash of lightning often does more damage than many reverberating peals of thunder. The doctor could reprove with a smile; he could incline his head, peer over his glasses, and give you a look of surprise that would make you feel thoroughly ashamed of yourself; he could knit his brows as though in pain and reduce you to abject contrition. But he never stormed. I imagine that he would have regarded an exhibition of passion as a very undignified affair. I once saw a man walking up Grosvenor Hill leading an enormous mastiff at the end of a chain; five minutes later I saw the mastiff descending the hill dragging his struggling master behind him. It was not an edifying spectacle. The doctor would have placed a show of temper in the same category. One of the first elements in dignity is control.

Nor do I remember seeing him in a hurry. He had a good deal to do, but he always gave me the impression that he had allotted to each task its proper time and had the day well in hand. I have often met him on his way to the station; he was always walking quietly to the train with just about as much time at his disposal as would allow him comfortably to catch it. I have already said that, at church, he was never late. I remember once finding myself under the necessity of changing a hymn. It was at a week-evening service. I asked the doctor if there was any hymn that he would particularly like. He asked for, 'Dear Lord and Father of Mankind.' I walked home with

him that night, and asked him if he had any special reason for that choice. And he told me that he always enjoyed singing this verse:

Drop Thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our strivings cease;
Take from our souls the strain and stress,
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of Thy peace!

'*Our ordered lives!*' –words seemed to acquire a fresh significance and a new beauty as I reviewed them in the light of the little doctor's winsome personality. I have never since joined in the singing of that lovely hymn without a wayward thought of him.

But here I am, taking the doctor's dignity to pieces! You never discover, by that meddlesome process of analysis, the elusive beauty of a thing as a whole. I suppose that the secret of the doctor's dignity lay in his perfect simplicity, his charming naturalness, his utter innocence of any kind of affection. He was dignified because he never tried to be dignified. The man who is inordinately anxious to appear dignified usually walks on stilts to make himself seem bigger than he really is. The performance is a comedy as long as he contrives to remain perpendicular, and it develops into a screaming farce or a painful tragedy as soon as he abruptly descends to the horizontal. At neither stage is it dignified. Our little doctor made no such mistakes. True dignity, as Wordsworth says in his 'Yew-tree Seat':

True dignity abides with him alone
Who, in the silent hour of inward thought,
Can still suspect, and still revere himself,
In lowliness of heart.

The words constitute themselves a lifelike photograph of our Little Doctor Dignity.

I used to think that the doctor's life was destitute of pathos and romance. So easily do we misjudge each other! On the day which we buried him—a heavy day at Mosgiel—I discovered my mistake.

He boarded with a gracious old Scottish lady who had been very kind to him. One Sunday afternoon—it happened to be Easter

Sunday—he had complained of a strange weariness and had gone to lie down. Impressed by the silence, his landlady had gone to his room a couple of hours later and had found him quite dead on his bed. His hands were folded as though in sleep. On the table beside him were—his Bible and a *vase of scarlet geraniums*.

It seemed that he had told his landlady some months before that if anything happened to him he wished me to go through all his papers, sorting out those that would require attention, and destroying those that were of no further use. I set to work the next morning. In the prosecution of this melancholy task I came upon a packet of papers neatly folded, and secured with a piece of blue ribbon. As I untied the bow there fluttered to the ground the faded petals of some pressed geraniums. They looked almost like confetti as they lay at my feet on the floor. The letters were love-letters! I learned from their perusal that they had plighted their truth, he and she, as lad and lassie, among the Scottish hills. Then, seeing little prospect of advancement at home, he had emigrated; and she had promised that, when he had built a nest in the new and distant land, she would follow him across the seas. But, alas, the tasks that awaited him were tough, and the world was wide, and the time was long; and, after all, she was only a girl! Courtship by correspondence was a tedious business; each letter took three months in reaching its destination. She saw the love-light in another face; she lent her ear to the wooing accents of another voice. And, whilst our little doctor worked on one side of the world, she wedded on the other. In almost every letter there were references to the geraniums. The bright flowers held some mystic meaning for them. Perhaps it was her favourite; or perhaps it was among the geraniums that he kissed her for the first time, and the blossoms matched her blushes. I could not tell. I only know that she married, and married badly. There is a long break in the letters—a gap of twenty years. It may be that, during those unkind years, her heart turned wistfully back to her earlier love. It may be that, during those bitter years, the geraniums looked reproachfully, almost angrily, at her. It may be; but I am not the historian of life's may-bes. We must return to facts. And the facts are that, after twenty years, her husband was brought home dead from the mill. Our little doctor read of the accident in the newspaper that came by the mail; he wrote a letter of restrained but affectionate sympathy; and the correspondence was renewed. Once more they became engaged. To his delight she sailed. There

are no more letters. The only other document is a faded newspaper. It contains the report of a wreck off of the coast of Brazil. There are two lists—the list of the *saved* and the list of the *lost*!

This was in the morning. In the afternoon we buried him. I rode from the cottage to the grave with his doctor.

'The little man must have been a great sufferer,' the doctor remarked thoughtfully. I was astonished.

'It seems incredible,' I replied. 'I knew him intimately for many years, and this is the first that I have heard of it!'

'I dare say,' the doctor answered, 'but he died of a pitiless disease that must have been a perpetual agony to him; and I know, from occasional consultations, that he was seldom free from pain!'

I suppose our Little Doctor Dignity had some instinctive feeling in that gentle soul of his that, in a world that is sanctified by suffering, it would have been undignified to have talked of his own aches and pains; and that, in a world that has tears enough as it is, there could have been no profit in publishing his terrible but secret grief.

Whenever, in the days that followed, I had occasion to visit the little cemetery on the side of the hill, I noticed that bunches of geraniums had been left, perhaps by the children, on the little doctor's grave. How well they remembered those red, red buttonholes of his! How little they guessed the red, red secret that lay behind the flowers!

Chapter 6

A DIVIDED DIACONATE

From *The Uttermost Star*

It is part of the poignant pathos of a minister's life that the good old men who, as his first officers, fathered him in his callow youth, fall into their honoured graves before he is well launched upon his long career. Like the pilot who steers the vessel through the narrow and treacherous channel to the harbour's mouth, and is dropped as soon as the ship is once tossing on the open sea, those revered fathers in Israel leave the young minister as soon as the initial difficulties have been safely surmounted. I confess that, as the years have multiplied behind me, I have felt an ever-increasing longing to go back, just for once, to the queer old vestry in which my first deacons were wont to assemble, and to find myself once more surrounded by those rugged old stalwarts, grizzled and grey, who welcomed me to Mosgiel nearly a quarter of a century ago. I looked into their faces for the first time as I stepped from the train at the end of my long, long journey from London to that little New Zealand township. They were standing, the centre of a large and excited multitude, on the railway platform in the moonlight; and nobody thought of shaking hands with me until those solemn elders had approached and gravely welcomed me. How my heart quailed that night as I gazed into their venerable faces! How ridiculously young and inexperienced I felt! But I soon discovered that behind countenances that were like granite cliffs there lay a great wealth of human tenderness. They pitied my loneliness, for had they not each of them crossed the same wide seas in the days of long ago? And, deep down in their hearts, I think that each man felt that I had

come to bury him, and the thought brought a new softness into all their breasts. During the twelve years that I spent at Mosgiel they, one by one, slipped silently away. I was their first minister, and they were my first deacons. I dare say that the Mosgiel church has been excellently served by its officers since then; but no group of faces assembled in that vestry could look to me like the successors of the old men of whom I am thinking to-day.

Of the brave battles that were fought in that old vestry I could, if I would, tell a stirring tale. The congregation had no idea that such tremendous debates ever took place.

'It's our practice,' Wullie explained to me at the first meeting I ever attended, 'it's our practice always to lay a matter unanimously before the kirk. The minority never says a word after we leave this room.'

And so it came to pass that no echo of the great debates held in that vestry ever reached the church meetings. At the larger assembly it was always my duty to announce that the deacons recommended that certain courses of action be pursued, and the matter passed without discussion. As a rule the faces of the men who had made up the minority at the earlier meetings were a study at such moments; but only the chairman had the opportunity of surveying those lightning-flashes and thunder-clouds. Only once did the argument in the vestry become so heated as to be worthy of classification as a quarrel; and, as it has proved my only experience of the kind, I have promised myself the satisfaction of seeing it placed on permanent record.

It was Gavin—surnames were regarded as a redundance among these men—who made the proposal that led to all the trouble. Gavin was severely practical. He had a keen eye for the cutting of the hedges, the weeding of the paths, the painting of the buildings, and all that kind of thing. A most useful man was Gavin. He was absolutely innocent of aestheticism; his one criterion of church music was its volume; he fairly squirmed under a quotation from Dante or Browning. I always associate Gavin with a certain annual church meeting. In order to lure the settlers and their wives from the distant farms and homesteads, it was our custom to supplement the annual business meeting with a coffee supper. On this particular occasion the strategy had been more than usually successful; the place was crowded, and the business had simply romped through. The evening was quite young when the end of the agenda was

reached.

'Before I ask the ladies to bring in the coffee,' I said, 'is there any other matter with which we must deal?'

'Yes,' cried Gavin, springing to his feet, 'there is! We ought to have some rules drawn up concerning the lending of church property. Now there are those urns. They are lent to all the organizations connected with the church for their socials and soirées, and the members borrow them for weddings and house-warmings. And nobody cares how they are returned, or whether they are put back clean. Now, this very afternoon, when I came down to see that everything was in readiness for to-night's supper, I found half an inch of maggots in those urns!'

It was a most incisive and telling speech from his own point of view, but a perceptible gloom fell upon the coffee supper. It was happy for Gavin that the election of officers was over. Had it followed that speech, the ladies who had been busy over the refreshments all afternoon would have voted against him to a man.

But to come back to the quarrel. It was Tammas who led the opposition. Tammas was our treasurer, and the man who got church money out of Tammas was regarded in the light of a genius. I can see him now, a massive old man of flinty and wrinkled countenance, with an odd way of looking searchingly at you over his spectacles. I should have been frightened of Tammas, but he tore all fear out of my heart on the night of my induction. I arrived at Mosgiel on a Thursday night; the induction took place on Friday. When it was all over, and the visiting ministers had departed, Gavin, Tammas, and I found ourselves standing at the gate together.

'And have ye no coat?' asked Tammas, in surprise.

'Oh, no,' I answered airily. 'I didn't think I should need it,' and I reached out my hand to say good-night.

To my astonishment the old man took off his own and insisted on my wearing it. If anybody saw me on my way home, they must have wondered what horrible disease could have reduced me from the bulk that I boasted when that coat was made for me to the modest dimensions that I possessed that night.

A great theologian was Tammas. As soon as I announced my text, Tammas took a huge note-book from his breast-pocket and a stubby blue pencil from his waistcoat. On Monday morning Tammas would be at the manse door looking as though, in the night, the church had been burned down and the treasury pilfered. When

the study door had shut us in, he would very deliberately unbutton the big breast-pocket and draw out the ponderous note-book with its terrible blue records.

'The unthinkable glory of God,' he would read, holding the book close to his face; and then, looking severely at me, 'You spoke yesterday of the unthinkable glory of God.'

'Did I, Tammas?' I replied timidly, fearful of prematurely committing myself.

'You did,' he would say, 'Ye ken I took it doon at the time.'

Then, out of another of his immense pockets came a well-worn Bible. And, from a list already prepared and drawn up in the note-book, he read passage after passage to show that the word *'unthinkable'* was improper and misleading.

After I had committed old Tammas to his grave, I felt a little ashamed of the maneuver by which I circumvented this habit of his.

'I can see how it is, Tammas,' I said to him one Monday morning, when his criticisms had been a little more searching than usual. 'This all comes of trying to preach without a manuscript. I have not had sufficient experience to enable me always to use the precise theological term, and the consequence is I fall back on the second-best, or even an inaccurate one. I begin to see the wisdom of reading the sermon. Such blemishes as these would be less likely to occur.'

I knew that a manuscript in the pulpit was poor Tammas's pet aversion; and, surely enough, the old man came on Monday morning no more.

I shall never forget the meeting at which Gavin and Tammas came to high words. The scheme that Gavin introduced that night was one that he had cogitated for months. He had worked it out to the last detail. He had plans and specifications and estimates, and, as he enlarged upon his proposals, a look of fond pride came into his eyes. He already saw in vision the realization of his dream, and his soul was fired with admiration and affection. He sat back at last, leaving the plans spread out on the table.

Tammas slightly inclined his head and looked at Gavin over his spectacles—always an ominous sign. Then he slowly unbuttoned his coat and drew out the note-book that we all dreaded. He laid it out on the table and very deliberately turned over the pages. Then he plied poor Gavin with a fusillade of questions. To make the long story short, he resisted the proposal on two

grounds, the one financial, the other theological. Gavin had given no indication as to the sources of revenue from which he expected to meet the proposed expenditure, and he, as treasurer, would never consent to apply the offerings of the congregation to such a purpose. And then, taking out his Bible and consulting his blue notes, he proved from a text in the Prophet Amos and another in the Epistle of James that the suggestion was an outrage on the revealed religion. I never saw Gavin more ardent nor Tammas more determined. The position looked to me particularly ugly. In the course of the discussion that followed, some sharp exchanges took place. Gavin gave it as his deliberate opinion that the church finances had drifted into the hands of a niggardly old skinflint, who could find a text or two to prove anything that suited him; and Tammas painted in lurid colours the doom of those stewards who squandered their Lord's money and brought wild-cat schemes into the house of the Lord. At last the proposal was defeated by a single vote. Gavin rose in anger, stuffed the plans hastily into his pocket, and strode out of the vestry. I noticed, however, that, in his wrath, he had forgotten his hat, which still reposed under the seat that its owner had just forsaken. I knew Gavin well enough to feel sure that he would not march home bareheaded.

We concluded the business of the evening about twenty minutes later, and followed Gavin into the dark. The church lay a good distance back from the road, and a number of ornamental trees adorned the open space in front. As we walked up the path through the shrubbery, Davie, the youngest of them all, walked beside me and commented on Gavin's unseemly exit. I was on my guard, remembering the hat that, from my coign of vantage in front of them, I had seen under the vacated seat. I resolved to sound a note of warning.

'Oh, yes,' I said to Davie, but in a voice loud enough for them all to hear, 'but we needn't worry about Gavin; he's all right! He thinks about this church all day and dreams about it at night. He was here before you and I ever heard of the church, and I expect he'll still be here after you and I have left it!'

'I'm hearing all that ye say!' exclaimed Gavin, emerging somewhat shamefacedly from among the shrubs, and walking off towards the church for his hat.

It was a trifling circumstance, but I could tell from the tone of Gavin's voice that a work of grace was proceeding in his soul,

and perhaps the incident paved the way for what followed.

I went to bed that night like a man whose bubbles had all burst, whose dreams had all been shattered. I was excited and dejected and miserable. It was a long time before I could get to sleep; but when I did I must have slept very soundly. I awoke with a start, conscious of a light in the room, of voices in the hall, and of my wife—a bride of but three months—in slippers and dressing-gown bending over me.

'It's Gavin and Tammas,' she explained, 'and they say they want to see you.'

'Why, what time is it?' I asked, rubbing my eyes in astonishment.

'It's twenty to one!' replied she.

'We want to see ye terrible particular!' cried a voice from the hall.

I nodded consent to their admission, and in they came, looking, I thought, extremely penitent. Gavin held out his hand, and, as he came nearer to the light, I saw something glisten in his eyes.

'This is no the way we meant to treat ye the necht ye arrived,' he said, and he pressed my hand again. Tammas also approached.

'Ye must think as weel as ye can of us,' he said, as he too took my hand. 'We shall need all yer patience and all yer luv, and ye must aye teach us better ways. Gavin and I have arranged all about yon plans, and we shall easily fix all that up at the next meeting. Now ye must put up a wee bit prayer for us!'

I crept out of bed and knelt down beside Gavin. Tammas and the mistress of the manse were kneeling on the opposite side of the bed. If the utterance of lowly and contrite hearts is specially pleasing at the Throne of Grace, that must have been a prayer meeting of singular efficacy and acceptance. Even Tammas wiped his spectacles when he rose. Gavin took his arm and helped him along the dark path to the gate, and so ended my first and last of diaconal strife.

Chapter 7

TAMMAS

From *Whisps of Wildfire*

I

It was just getting dusk. Unwilling to go in, I was lingering in the garden till the last moment, pulling up a weed here and cutting out a rose-sucker there. Then, just as I was bidding good-night to God's great out-of-doors, a gig rattled up to the gate. It was Dr. Driver of Deepwater Hill.

'Ah,' he exclaimed, glancing at the little heap of tufts and suckers at my feet, 'so you can't be content to live and let live; what harm have these poor things ever done you, I should like to know!' And then changing his tone, he added, 'But seriously, I was wondering if you had heard that poor old Tammas had a pretty bad turn the other night. I was sent for just before midnight, and I thought at first that there was very little hope for him. He appears to be making a good recovery, however, and I dare say he'll be all right for awhile. But he mentioned your name several times in my hearing, so I thought I'd drop in and let you know.'

As I accompanied him back to his gig, I thanked him for the trouble he had taken, and promised to drive over to Deepwater first thing next morning.

'Good!' he replied, 'I know he'll be pleased to see you; and,' he added, laughing, 'you'll find him as full of figures as ever.'

Tammas was for many years the treasurer of the Mosgiel Church. He was the most tremendous statistician that I ever met.

As I have elsewhere said, he invariably carried a notebook and a blue pencil; and whenever he opened the notebook we caught sight of pages and pages of figures. Tammas reduced everything to mathematics. He could tell us, not only the amount of the collection on any particular Sunday years ago, but the exact number of coppers, threepenny pieces, sixpences, shillings, and half-crowns of which it was composed. He averaged everything; tabulated everything; worked everything out to decimal points; and kept the most elaborate records. In his cupboards he preserved all the notebooks that he had ever carried; he had them dated and labeled; he could put his finger at a moment's notice on any particular blue pencil computation that he had ever made.

It was a fearsome thing to contradict Tammas. At our deacons' meetings his statements were never questioned. If his brother-officers agreed with him, they said so. If not, they let it pass in silence. For they knew that, on the slightest provocation, Tammas would deluge them with a cataract of comparative statistics.

After the doctor's departure, I walked round and told Gavin, our secretary, of the disquieting news that had reached me. Gavin thought all the world of Tammas, although no one had a greater dread of those formidable notebooks that had he.

'I'd like to go with you,' Gavin exclaimed, 'and, if you'll let me, I'll drive you over. Jeanie has been eating her head off in the stable for the last fortnight, and it will do her good to have a run. What time would you like me to call at the manse?'

We soon arranged details. At ten o'clock next morning we were climbing the road that winds up the slopes of Deepwater Hill, and, before noon, we were driving up the long avenue of tall blue-gums that leads up to Tammas' homestead.

II

Propped up by pillows, he was lying on a couch that had been placed beside the window. His face, rugged as granite, yet not without an indefinable expression of kindness, showed indubitable signs of the ordeal through which he had passed. He grasped our hands in silence; there was a moisture in his eyes; he evidently felt like a man who had been passing through deep waters and was glad

to find his feet once more on firm ground. His ruling passion was still strong upon him, however, for a notebook lay upon the rug that was wrapped about him, the blue pencil adorned the window-sill within reach of his hand, and his well-worn Bible reposed upon his pillow.

'Yes,' he said at last, 'it was touch-and-go with me. I've been nearer to the gates of heaven than I've ever been before; and it makes a man think, I can tell you. The doctor's patched me up a bit, but I don't suppose it's for very long; and, since I've been able to get to the couch here, I've been reading all that the Bible says about heaven. And I'm bound to say that it fairly astonished me. Why, in one place it even goes into figures, and I've been working them out this morning in my notebook. Somehow, I had never noticed before that the Bible gives the dimensions of the heavenly city. Man, it's wonderful! It took my breath away. Did you ever preach about it?'

He handed me his Bible and pointed to the sixteenth verse of the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation. The margin contained a big cross, made by his unerring and terrible pencil. I read aloud:

'*And the city lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth, and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal*.'

I had to confess that I had never preached on that glowing theme. In the exercise-book in which I entered suggestions for possible sermons, I had scrawled across the top of one page, *The City Foursquare*: but that was as far as it went. I had a hazy idea of emphasizing the point that the city is perfectly symmetrical. Our conceptions of heaven are sometimes so sentimental, and at other times so stern, that the city of our fancy is rather forbidding than enticing. But the fault is in ourselves. In his *First Men in the Moon*, Mr. H. G. Wells makes his hero attempt to describe the earth and its inhabitants to the Grand Lunar. But the attempt is a ludicrous failure. The description was incomprehensible, for the visitor from the earth found that 'it is impossible to describe the phenomena of one world in the phraseology of another.' I suppose that is why the pictures of heaven that have been painted for us seemed so grotesque and unconvincing and unattractive. 'I will one day preach a sermon,' I said to myself, when I made that crude entry in my exercise-book, 'I will one day preach a sermon in which I will show

that there is nothing extravagant or distorted about the reality. The city is shapely and splendid and symmetrical—a City Foursquare.' But it was only a crude suggestion, an amiable intention; the sermon had never been preached.

'No, Tammas,' I said, 'I've never taken that text. But I want you to tell me what I'm to say about it when I do. What have you been figuring out with your blue pencil? A minister is entitled to consult a commentary, you know; and I should like to know what you've been writing in your notebook.'

He smiled—a wan but gratified smile and reached out his hand for the notebook on the rug.

III

'Did you ever think about the size of the city?' he asked. And, without waiting for a reply, he proceeded to reveal the significance of his statistics. 'Man, it's amazing; it's astounding; it beats everything I ever heard of! John says that each of the walls measures twelve thousand furlongs. Now, if you work that out'—he bent closely over his notebook—'it will give you an area of 2,250,000 square miles! Did you ever hear it like that? The only "city foursquare" that I ever saw was Adelaide in South Australia. The ship that brought me out from the Old Country called in there for a couple of days, and I thought it a fine city. But, as you know very well, the city of Adelaide covers only one square mile. Each of the four sides is a mile long. London covers an area of one hundred and fifty square miles. But this city—the City Foursquare! It is 2,250,000 times as big as Adelaide! It is 15,000 times as big as London! It is twenty times as big as all New Zealand! It is ten times as big as Germany and ten times as big as France! It is forty times as big as England! It is much bigger than India! Why, it's an enormous continent in itself. I had no idea of it until I went into the figures with my blue pencil here.'

He would allow no comment at this stage. 'Wait a minute,' he pleaded, as Gavin turned to ask a question, 'wait a minute: I've been going into the matter of population, and it's even more wonderful still. Look at this! Working it out on the basis of the number of people to the square mile in the city of London, the

population of the City Foursquare comes out at a hundred thousand millions—seventy times the present population of the globe!'

I confessed that the figures were both startling and suggestive; but Gavin, who was always on the look-out for some weak point in his old friend's armour, made an opportunity to ask the question that, at an earlier stage, Tammas had forbidden.

'Ay, but Tammas,' remonstrated Gavin, 'aren't you taking it just rather literally? It's a spiritual revelation, ye ken, and it seems to me that it's to be understood metaphorically, as you may say: I never heard of working out the Book of Revelation by arithmetic before.' But Tammas had anticipated the objection and was ready for him.

'To be sure! To be sure!' he replied, 'I was coming to that, Gavin, if you'd let me go on. For that's just the beauty of the whole thing. As you say, the words are not to be taken literally. They're what ye may call symbolical. But, then, Gavin, you never heard of a symbol that was bigger than the thing that it symbolized. When I was a laddie and went to school away in the Old Country, the teacher used to hold up an orange. "The earth," she would say, "is like this orange!" Of course I never went to measure the orange to see how big the earth was. I understood that the thing that the orange symbolized was millions of times as big as the orange itself. And if you tell me that this City Foursquare is symbolic, you only make the reality millions of times bigger than I have shown. As the orange is to the earth, so are these statistics'—he glanced at his notebook—'to the City of the Lord. Do you see?' Gavin was apparently satisfied, for he raised no further objection.

I thought I saw symptoms of fatigue in the old man, so I rose.

'Well, Tammas,' I said, in taking leave of him, 'now that I know what your blue-pencil commentary contains, I shall certainly preach one fine day soon on *the City Foursquare*.'

'It will have to be a missionary sermon,' he answered, 'for where are all the people to come from to fill the city with life? It will take all China and Africa and India and all the other continents and islands to provide the millions of millions that that city will hold. And,' he added, as he took my hand, 'you'll see when you look the passage up at home, that it's meant to be a missionary vision. It talks about the gates—the twelve gates—three to the East, three to the West, three to the North and three to the South. I wondered,

when I read it, if that was what Jesus had in mind when He said that *they shall come from the East and the West and from the North and from the South and sit down in the kingdom of God*. But, however that may be, you'll find when you study it that you can't preach any sermon but a missionary sermon on the City Foursquare. The vision of the City Foursquare is a missionary vision, and the twelve gates are the secret of its deeper meaning. You will see what I mean when you prepare your sermon: I hope I may be back in my old place to hear it.'

Five minutes later, Gavin and I were driving up the long avenue to the Mosgiel Road, and Jeanie, with her head to her stable, was evidently determined to leave Deepwater behind her as quickly as possible.

IV

In the solitude of my study I soon discovered that Tammas was right. The vision that Jesus gave to John on the Isle that is called Patmos was, above everything else, a great missionary vision. The seer forgot the tiny rock, riddled with its mines, on which he lay, and saw this splendid city which he was to help in building—the City Foursquare. Its magnitude—the magnitude revealed in Tammas' notebook—rebukes our intellectual narrowness and theological littleness and denominational exclusiveness! It is glowing, grand, glorious! One's blood tingles at the very thought of it! Neither in prose nor in poem is there anything that can compare with it!

I found that Tammas was right, too, in saying that *the twelve gates* are the key to the meaning of the vision. As I glance at the map I see that, in a peculiar way, the world divides itself up from Patmos as the apple does from the core. To the *north* are the great modern empires; to the *south* the vigorous young colonial dependencies; to the *east* the peoples whose stories are hoary with antiquity; to the *west*, the alert, aggressive Occidental nations.

Three gates to the *East*! The eastern gates look out upon Persia, Arabia, and the Orient. What memories of magicians and astrologers; of Ali Baba; of Sinbad the Sailor; what hoards of graceful romance and quaint old Eastern legend rush to mind as we think of those dreamy Eastern peoples! As they were in the

beginning, so they are and ever shall be. The East is a panorama of colour; of strange, flowing costumes; of ancient and changeless customs. The East is drowsy, conservative, antiquated. And the City Foursquare flings open three of its gates to that sleepy old world. Let all our missionaries in India, in China, and among the ancient Oriental peoples, take fresh heart!

Three gates to the *West*! There is room in the City Foursquare for everything that is up-to-date, everything that is wide-awake, everything that is restless and impatient of stagnation. The City Foursquare throws open its great gates to the people of later civilizations—the people of the motor-car, the aeroplane, and the wireless telegram. It is like a tonic to think of those two worlds—the patient Orient and the pushful Occident—meeting and mingling as they press through eastern and western gates into the City Foursquare!

Three gates to the *North*! The City Foursquare offers its spacious hospitalities to the people of the Motherland and of the mighty nations round about her!

Three gates to the *South*! We who spend our lives beneath the Southern Cross like to think of that. There is a place for us—the younger peoples, the nations of to-morrow—in the City Foursquare!

V

I preached that missionary sermon to my Mosgiel people, but Tammas did not live to hear it. A month or two after the incidents that I have here recorded, he slipped quietly away. His mind wandered slightly at the last. 'My *pencil*!' he said; and, to humour him, they placed it in his hand. 'My *notebook*!' and they laid it on that pillow near his head. 'My *reed*!' he demanded; and they were puzzled. It was only afterwards that they remembered: '*he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs*.' Gavin did not long survive him. A few months after the preaching of that missionary sermon, without a second's warning or sign of feebleness, he suddenly left us. And to-day, sitting here at my desk, I like to think that those rugged but valiant comrades of my earliest ministry are re-united, and re-united amidst the sanctities and splendours of *the City Foursquare*.

Chapter 8

A FRUITLESS DEPUTATION

From *Mushrooms on the Moor*

It was in New Zealand, and I was attending my first Conference. I had only a month or two earlier entered the Christian ministry. I dreaded the Assembly of my grave and reverend seniors. With becoming modesty, I stole quietly into the hall and occupied a back seat. From this welcome seclusion, however, I was rudely summoned to receive the right hand of fellowship from the President. Then I once more plunged into the outer darkness of oblivion and obscurity. Here I remained until once again I was electrified at the sound of my own name. It seemed that the sorrows of dissension had overtaken a tiny church in a remote bush district. One of the oldest and most revered members, the father of a very large family and the leader of the little brotherhood, had intimated his intention of withdrawing from fellowship and of joining another denomination. This formidable secession had thrown the little congregation into helpless confusion, and an appeal was made to the courts of the denomination. The letter was read; and the secretary stated briefly and succinctly the facts of the situation. And then, to my amazement, he closed by moving that Mr. William Forbury and myself be appointed a deputation to visit the district, to advise the church, and to report to the Conference. Mr. Forbury, he explained, was a father in Israel. His grey hairs commanded reverence; whilst his ripe experience and sound judgement would be invaluable to the small and troubled community. So far, so good. His reasoning seemed irresistible. But he went on to say that he had included my name because I was an

absolute stranger. I knew nothing of the internal disputes that had rent the church. My very freshness would give me a position of impartiality that older men could not claim. Moreover, he argued, the visit to a bush congregation, and the insight into its peculiar difficulties, would be a useful experience for me. I felt that I could not decently decline; but I confidently expected that the proposal would be challenged and probably rejected. To my astonishment, however, it was seconded and carried. And nothing remained but to arrange with Mr. Forbury the date of our delegation.

The day came, and we set out. It took the train just four hours to convey us to the lonely station from which we emerged upon a wilderness of green bush and a maze of muddy tracks. Mr. Forbury had visited the district frequently, and knew it well. We called upon several settlers in the course of the afternoon, taking dinner with one, and afternoon tea with another. And then we proceeded to the home of the seceder. The place seemed alive with young people. The house swarmed with children.

'How are you, John?' inquired my companion.

'Ah, William, glad to see you; how are you?'

They made an interesting study, these two old men. Their forms were bent with long years of hard and honourable toil. Their faces were rugged and weatherbeaten, wrinkled with age, and furrowed with care. They had come out together from the Homeland years and years ago. They had borne each other's burdens, and shared each other's confidences, through all the days of their pilgrimage. Their thoughts of each other were mingled with all the memories of their courtships, their weddings, and their earlier struggles. A thousand tender and sacred associations were interwoven, in the mind of each, with the name of the other. When fortune had smiled, they had delighted in each other's prosperity. In times of shadow, each had hastened to the other's side. They had walked together, talked together, laughed together, wept together, and—very, very often—prayed together. They had been as David and Jonathan, and the soul of the one was knit to the soul of the other. Hundreds of times, before the one had come to settle in this new district, they had walked to the house of God in company. And now a matter of doctrine had intervened. And, with such men, a matter of doctrine is a matter of conscience. And a matter of conscience is the most stubborn of all obstacles to overcome. I looked into their stern, expressive faces, and I saw that they were no triflers. A fad had no

charm for either of them. They looked into each other's faces, and each read the truth. The breach was irreparable.

We sat in the great farm kitchen until tea-time. I felt it was no business of mine to broach the affairs that had brought us. Several times I thought Mr. Forbury was about to touch the matter. But each time it was adroitly avoided, and the conversation swerved off in another direction. Once or twice I felt half inclined to precipitate a discussion. Indeed, I was in the act of doing so when our hostess brought in the tea. A snowy cloth, home-made scones, delicious oatcake, abundance of cream—how tempting it all was! And how unattractive ecclesiastical controversy in comparison! We sat there in the sun. Of everything, that is to say, save one thing only. And there brooded heavily over our spirits the consciousness that we were avoiding the one and only subject on which we were all really and deeply thinking.

After tea came family worship. I was invited to conduct it, and did so. After reading a psalm from the old farm Bible, we all kneeled together, the flickering flames of the great log-fire flinging strange shadows on the whitened wall and rafters as we rose and bowed ourselves. I caught myself attempting, even in prayer, to make obscure but fitting reference to the special circumstances that had brought us together. But the reticence of my companion was contagious. It was like a bridle on my tongue. The sadness of it all haunted me, and paralysed my speech; and I swerved off again at every threatened allusion. We sat on for a while, they on either side of the roomy fireplace, and I between them, whilst the good woman and her daughters washed up the tea-things. The clatter of the dishes, and the babel of many voices, made it impossible for us to speak freely on the subject nearest our hearts. At length we rose to go, and I noticed, on the part of my two aged companions, a peculiar reluctance to separate. Each longed, yet dreaded, to speak. There was evidently so much to be said, and yet speech seemed so hopeless.

At last our friend said that he would walk a few steps with us. We said good-bye to the great household and set off into the night.

I shall never forget that walk! It was a clear, frosty evening. The moonlight was radiant. Every twig was tipped with silver. The smallest object could be seen distinctly. I watched the rabbits as they popped timidly in and out of the great gorse hedgerows. A hare went

scurrying across the field. I felt all at once that I was an intruder. What right had I to be in the company of these two aged brethren in the very crisis of their lifelong friendship? No Conference on earth could vest me with authority to invade this holy ground! I made an excuse, and hurried on, walking some distance in front of them. But the night was so still that, even at that distance, had a word been uttered I must have heard it. I could hear the clatter of hoofs on the hard road two miles ahead. I could hear the dogs barking at a farmhouse twice as far away. I could hear a rabbit squealing in a trap on the fringe of the bush far behind us. But not a word did I hear. For none was uttered. Side by side they walked on and on in perfect silence. I once paused and allowed them to approach. They were crying like children. Stern old Puritans! They were built of the stuff that martyrs are made of. Either would have died a hundred deaths rather than have been false to conscience, or to truth, or to the other. Either would have died a hundred deaths to save the other from one. Neither could be coaxed or cowed into betraying one jot or tittle of his heart's best treasure. And each knew, whilst he trembled for himself, that all this was true of the other as well. Side by side they walked for miles in that pale and silvery moonlight. Not one word was spoken. Grief had paralysed their vocal powers; and their eyes were streaming with another eloquence. They wrung each other's hands at length, and parted without even saying good-night!

At the next Conference it was the junior member of the deputation who presented the report. He simply stated that the delegation had visited the district without having been able to reconcile the differences that had arisen in the little congregation. The Assembly formally adopted the report, and the deputation was thanked for its services. It seemed a very futile business. And yet one member of that deputation has always felt that life was strangely enriched by the happenings of that memorable night. It puts iron into the blood to spend an hour with men to whom the claim of conscience is supreme, and who love truth with so deathless an affection that the purest and noblest of other loves cannot dethrone it.

Chapter 9

CRUSTY

From *The Crystal Pointers*

I

When I saw Crusty for the first time, I thought him the most picturesque figure it had ever been my lot to meet. It was a delightful afternoon in early summer. The mistress of the manse and I had been driving for nearly an hour along a road that differed in no essential respect from the paddocks on either side of it. The grass over which we were driving was just as green, and the tussocks as numerous, as on the other side of the barbed-wire fences. We had to crawl along at a snail's pace in order to give Jeanie a chance of keeping her feet out of the rabbit's holes. Faint wheel-marks on the grass were the only indication that others, similarly situated, had passed this way before us. Travelling under such conditions, every furlong seeming a mile, we felt that we were going a long way without getting anywhere. The country ahead of us appeared one vast solitude.

'Are you sure that we are on the right road?' my companion inquired.

As a matter of fact I enjoyed no such confidence. On the day of their wedding Ned and Maggie Sutherland, in begging us to visit them, had carefully described to me the exact spot in which their new nest had been built. I conceived but a hazy idea as to its

whereabouts. As soon as we lost sight of Mosgiel, crossed the ridge, left the main road, and plunged into the unmade track that winds among the foothills at the back of Saddle Hill, I became painfully uncertain. Presently, however, we came upon a belt of bush, and heard, to our infinite relief, the thwack, thwack of an axe.

Five minutes later, an extraordinary apparition confronted us. A gigantic figure, at least six feet six in height and broad in proportion, stood facing us in the centre of the track. His face was bronzed; he wore a long, black beard; his immense and well-formed limbs gave an irresistible impression of titanic strength. His head was bare; his blue jumper, thrown open, exposed his massive and sinewy chest; his hammer, knives, and foot-rule were stuck into his belt. The moment he caught sight of us he turned quickly to his work. As we drove up, he was placing an iron jack under a log that was as thick as he was tall. It seemed incredible that one man should be able to handle, lift, and split such monstrous masses of timber. In the years that followed I often stood and watched him: he seemed to handle the biggest trees in the bush as easily as an ordinary man handles small logs in a wood-shed.

'Excuse me,' I called, 'but could you tell me the way to Ned Sutherland's place?' The air was perfumed with the odour of the newly-cut wood: the track on which we had reined up was carpeted with bark and chips: Crusty proceeded to adjust his jack as composedly as if there were nobody within miles of him. I waited until, the instrument being in position, he rose: I then repeated my question.

'We are looking,' I explained, in a slightly louder voice, 'for Ned Sutherland's place. Do you happen to know if we are on the right road?' Still no answer: Crusty went on with his work without even deigning to glance at us. My companion hazarded the conjecture that he might be deaf. But a deaf man is quick to *see* things. A deaf man would have stepped forward as soon as we drew rein; and, seeing my lips move, would have told us of his infirmity, putting his hand to his ear the while. Moreover, since the safety of an axeman's life and limbs must often depend on his hearing every creak and groan that the timber gives, it was difficult to imagine that a deaf man would expose himself to such risks. I repeated my question a third time, with no better result: Crusty never even lifted his eyes from his work. I therefore flickered the reins on Jeanie's back and we proceeded.

Half an hour later we were enjoying the afternoon tea with Maggie and Ned. To our surprise we found that they were expecting us.

'Through the trees,' Maggie explained, 'we can just see the crest of the hill, and we happened to catch sight of the buggy before you went into the hollow. We said you'd be here in an hour or so.'

We told them of our adventure in the bush and of the fruitlessness of our inquiries.

'Oh, that was old Crusty,' cried Ned, laughing boisterously. 'We had lots of fun with him until we got to understand. The trouble was,' he added, turning directly to me, 'that you were not alone. The first time I met him was when I was building the shanty here.' He looked proudly round his trim little home as he said it. 'I was coming whistling along the track one day, when all of a sudden, I met Crusty. He was pushing a wheel-barrow containing his tools and paraphernalia. I spoke to him and he stopped. We had quite a long chat. He told me of the contract he had accepted for splitting so many tons of posts and rails; and he pointed out to me the trees from which he intended to get them. I remember how babyish I felt as I looked up to him, whilst he talked down to me. What a tremendous fellow he is!'

Maggie handed her husband a second cup of tea, as an encouragement to him to go on with his story. He did.

'The second time I came upon him,' he said, 'was about a month after the wedding, and Maggie was with me. He was sawing away at a huge log, and I took Maggie across to him. I thought that *she* would be interested and that *he* might like to explain everything to her. But, my word, we got a cold reception! He never even looked at us. I spoke, but I might as well have addressed the log he was sawing. We came away in disgust. Crusty won't speak to a woman, nor to a man if he has a woman with him. Maggie's little niece was here the other week, spending a day or two with us. She had a camera with her, and took it into her head that she would like to take Crusty's photograph. He ignored her as she approached, and then, perceiving her intention, he trampled off into the bush and concealed himself until she was gone. He'll have nothing to do with girls or women at any price: he evidently thinks they're a bad lot. Perhaps,' he added, with a mischievous glance at Maggie, 'perhaps he knows them better than we do.' Maggie boxed his ears and passed him the cake.

'Where does he live?' I inquired.

'Oh, he lives—if you can call it living—in a little humpy away down the gully,' replied Ned. 'It's a tumble-down old place—a single room without even a window: I supposed he gets as much light as he wants through the cracks and the open door. He goes up to Rowan's store at Saddle Hill once a week for candles, tinned meats, and general supplies. As soon as they see him coming they have to scurry Mrs. Rowan and the girls out of the way double quick. If he catches sight of any of the women folk behind the counter, or if there are women in the shop, he strides out on the instant and marches on to Sandy Laughlin's store at Mosgiel. Sandy is a bachelor, and Crusty knows that he will have trouble there.'

As the clock struck five, Ned and I strolled off to get the buggy ready for the return journey, and we were soon on the crest of the hill looking down upon Mosgiel. In the years that followed I had many long talks with Crusty. Everything that I wanted to know about woodcraft and bushmanship he willingly told me; but as soon as I got to closer grips, probed beneath the surface of things, and touched the secret springs of his own life, he shut up like an oyster and was as silent as the sphinx.

II

Two things precipitated the change that overtook Crusty. The first was an arrival: the second was an accident. When the New Zealand Government undertook the formidable task of constructing a railway line through the rugged and mountainous region known as the Otago Central, Mosgiel became for a time the head-quarters of the gangs of men engaged upon the work. Scores of new faces were seen about the township. Among these was a man named Dick Fleming, a wild, reckless fellow, who drank much and talked more. He was comparatively new to the country, having come from the exhausted diggings of New South Wales. He was never tired of telling more or less authentic stories of his adventurous career on the goldfields. One summer evening he was standing with a group of kindred spirits, just outside the door of O'Kane's Hotel, when he suddenly caught sight of Crusty's immense form passing John Havelock's store immediately opposite. On seeing him, Dick

became immoderately excited.

'Hey, Andy!' he yelled, at the top of his voice.

Crusty paused involuntarily, looked across, glowered fiercely at Dick, and then strode on.

'Why, that's old Andy Donovan!' Dick went on, addressing his boon companions. 'Nobody could mistake him: he was the biggest chap on the diggings, and the best. When the gold petered out, he went down Madderfield way and took up with the prettiest girl in the district. To hear him talk of her you'd have thought that the sun rose when Mary opened her eyes in the morning, and set when she closed them at night. But she jilted him: vanished the night before the wedding: and about a month afterwards he saw, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the account of her wedding to a young farmer at Myrtle Vale. My word, didn't Andy cut up rough! He swore he'd never speak to a woman as long as he lived, and, up to the time I saw him last, he never did.'

This street-corner revelation soon became public property. Mosgiel has always been curious about the taciturn giant up in the woods. The new development reached my ears through our butcher-boy, who knew of my interest in Crusty. I sought an early interview with Dick Fleming, and extracted from him the fullest particulars that he was able to impart. On many points he was a trifle hazy, but, fortunately for my purpose, he was sure of Mary's name, and could recall within a month or so, the date of the wedding that never took place.

Armed with this information, I sent a note to Ned, asking him to call at the manse next he visited the township. On Friday morning I heard his 'coo-ee' at the gate. He couldn't leave the cart, he said, because he had the two youngsters with him: he was to pick up Maggie at the station.

'By scissors,' he exclaimed, as soon as I gave him the news, 'we'll get to the bottom of this! There's an explanation somewhere: a woman like that wouldn't leave old Crusty in the lurch and marry another fellow just for fun. Either she wasn't the woman he took her to be, or there's a mistake somewhere. We'll find out. Maggie has a brother in a bank in Sydney; we'll ask him to do a little ferreting; it ought not to be very hard work.'

Maggie agreed, and the letter was written that very night. Then the unexpected happened.

III

Ten days later Ned was again at the manse.

'You'll never guess what's happened,' he said. 'Poor old Crusty broke his leg up in the bush! In getting out of the way of a falling tree, he stumbled over a stone and a thick branch struck him. There was nowhere else to take him, so they brought him to our place. It's mighty awkward, for he won't let Maggie go near him. He'd tear off the splints if he knew that, whilst he was lying unconscious, Maggie practiced first-aid on him. The doctor has been twice since; but I have to take him his meals and do everything for him. It's a terrible tie.'

I promised to visit the invalid, and, two days later, did so. I tried hard to get him to talk about New South Wales, but with small success. He merely admitted having lived there.

'Ah, well,' I said, in taking leave of him, 'I'll come again in a week or two; and, if I can pick up a few Sydney papers, I'll bring them: they'll remind you of old times.'

By the time that I paid that next visit, Crusty was able to hobble about on an enormous pair of crutches. By that time, too, a letter and a bundle of newspapers had arrived from Sydney. Ned brought these down to the manse almost as soon as he had read them. He was very excited about it. We talked the matter over and it was agreed that I should take them up to Crusty next day.

We were sitting in the sun, just outside the door of Ned's cottage. Crusty's broken leg reposed upon a chair placed in front of him, and his crutches lay on the ground near by.

'Well, Crusty,' I said, 'I promised to bring you some New South Wales papers, and here they are! You'll find all sorts of things in them. I was reading last night in this one—the *Western Advertiser*—of the discovery, in an old quarry at Madderfield, of the remains of a girl who had been missing for years. It seems that she disappeared mysteriously on the night before her wedding-day. It's supposed that she went out late that night to post a letter, took a short cut back past the top of the quarry, missed her footing, and fell in.'

Crusty was trembling in every nerve. He leaned forward eagerly and asked the girl's name.

'Her name,' I replied, 'was Mary Chambers.'

Crusty moaned. 'No,' he said at length, 'it can't be! Mary Chambers was married at Myrtle Vale a month afterwards.'

'I think not, Crusty,' I replied. 'There's a bit about that further down.' I turned the paper and read it to him. '*Several of the residents at Madderfield*,' it says, '*were under the impression that Mary Chambers went to Myrtle Vale and was married in that district some weeks afterwards. We learn on inquiry, however, that the Mary Chambers who was married at Myrtle Vale was in no way connected with the Mary Chambers whose tragic death it is to-day our painful duty to record*.' I rose, laid the paper on my chair, and quietly left him. It was no time to talk.

A few days later, Maggie took him his afternoon tea, and he raised no protest. His terrible reserve slowly melted. Within a few months he was at the manse, and once or twice, on special occasions, he even dropped into a back seat at church.

'It's a sore, sore thing,' he said to me one day; 'it's a sore, sore thing to misunderstand and misjudge. It isn't the one that's misjudged that suffers, it's the one that holds in his heart a hard and bitter thought. It makes *him* hard and bitter. You all call me Crusty, and I richly deserve it. I shall always be Crusty here, but, please God, I won't be Crusty for ever and ever.'

And, as we watched him soften and sweeten with the passing of years, we could quite easily believe it.

Chapter 11

PINK CARNATIONS

From *The Three Half-Moons*

I

A Mosgiel wedding was a very amateurish affair; but we always took our funerals seriously. The sturdy old Scotmen who, in my time, formed the backbone of the community, would have been scandalized at the idea of a motor funeral. In those days, the vehicles were drawn by horses that could be trusted to observe an unhurried decorum, and, at the rear, most of the mourners walked. A funeral was the event of the day; nobody dreamed of dashing away from business in order to put in a decent appearance and then dashing back again. All right-minded residents divided the day, as the minister divided his sermons, into three parts. They spent the *first* part of the day getting ready for the funeral; they spent the *second* part of the day at the funeral; and they spent the *third* part in returning from the funeral and getting back into ordinary ways again.

At the cemetery itself, nobody thought of moving from the grave until the sexton had filled in the earth, patted into form the shapely mound, and arranged the floral tributes tastefully upon it. And, even then, only the more casual members of the company departed. Others lingered, chatting in an undertone concerning the virtues of their old friend or paying respectful visits to the other graves near by.

It was on the occasion of my third funeral at Mosgiel that

I noticed the pink carnations in the lonely grave. It was away in a quiet corner, under the gloomy shade of a tall fir tree, and I should never have noticed it but for the lure of the lovely flowers. I stepped across and read the plain little headstone—

JESSIE GLENCAIRN,
Born March 31, 1824
Died October 3, 1862

So she had been dead for more than thirty years; yet somebody still brought flowers to her grave! As far as I could discover, she had no relatives in Mosgiel: there were no people of her name on the Plain in my time: and the old residents could remember none. There is something extremely pathetic about the way in which solitary women drift into young colonial settlements, nobody knowing whence and nobody asking why. Jessie Glencairn is to be the heroine of this little screed of mine: yet I can offer no description of her. Pretty or plain; tall or short; slim or buxom; flaxen, raven or auburn; I do not know. All that I know is what the pink carnations told me.

And even the pink carnations would long ago have faded from my memory but for their quiet insistence. I saw them again, several times. It was generally early in April or early in October—the dates on the headstone furnishing the solution of this part of the mystery. My curiosity thoroughly aroused, I mentioned the matter to the grave-digger. He had not even noticed the attention that somebody was paying to Jessie Glencairn's grave! Yet, in all probability, the thing had been going on for years!

II

We were sitting beside the dining-room fire, Ronald Shand and I, discussing the arrangements for the Saddle Hill soirée: anniversary celebrations were invariably called soirées in those days. Saddle Hill was a branch or off-shoot of the Mosgiel church; and Ronald, a young fellow of boundless energy and devotion, acted as its secretary, treasurer, and general factotum.

'There isn't much left to fix up,' Ronald remarked. 'The date fixes itself: we must have the Wednesday when the moon is full: people won't come out in the dark: that makes it Wednesday, March 30. You've agreed to preside: Mr. Broadbanks had promised to speak: what about the music?'

We had no great difficulty about the music. The programme was quickly completed. The night came: the moon played her part bravely: and, to Ronald's infinite relief, the soirée was an unqualified success. And by no means the least enjoyable part of the evening was the walk home in the sparkling moonlight. It was in the course of that walk that a strange thing happened.

The Riccarton Hall, in which the soirée was held, is on the main south road. Not far from the hall, a lane breaks away from the road, winds down past the cemetery, past the East Taieri school, past the railway station, into Mosgiel. We were a large and happy party, and, at that time of night, we scarcely expected to meet anyone on the road. Just as we turned into the lane however, we met Groggy Douglas. I fancied that old man shambled by in an awkward shame-faced sort of way; but I attributed it to nervousness in finding himself the cynosure of so many pair of eyes.

'He looked as if he'd been drinking,' Ronald remarked, as soon as Groggy was out of earshot.

'That's not likely,' replied his father, who knew the history of most people on the Plain; 'he was a hard drinker at one time; that's how he got his nickname; but it's many a long year now since he meddled with anything of the kind.'

My concern was now awakened as well as my curiosity. Groggy certainly behaved strangely as he passed us: the time of night coincided with the closing of the hotel: it seemed to me that somebody ought to look into the matter with a view to saving Groggy from relapse; and, if somebody, why not I? It chanced that, as we passed the schoolhouse, I caught sight of Hughie Rowan, the butcher's son, saying a protracted good-night to Aggie Turnbull, the schoolmaster's niece, at the gate. I did not disturb the sweet sadness of their leave-taking; but I noted the fact; and, next day, I sought out Hughie in the township. I asked him whether, whilst standing at the gate with Aggie, he had seen anything of Gregory Douglas. He had seen nothing. Moreover, he volunteered the statement that, if Groggy had passed the gate within the twenty minutes that preceded our appearance, he must have seen him. Hughie's positive

testimony set my mind at rest concerning Groggy's sobriety, but it awoke a fresh suspicion. The only place between the spot at which we met Groggy and the spot at which we disturbed the felicity of the sweethearts was—the cemetery! To the cemetery I hastened, and found, as I half expected to find, that the grave in the corner was again adorned with pink carnations. I glanced at the headstone: it was Jessie Glencairn's birthday!

Before returning to the township, I looked in on Groggy Douglas. He was out in the garden at the back, and I went round to him. I said nothing about our meeting of the previous night: I said nothing about the flowers on the lonely grave: but I noticed clumps of carnations all round the garden—clumps from which the full-blown blossoms had been recently picked. I let it go at that: I felt that I had no right to probe his secrets: I merely resolved to cultivate Groggy's closer acquaintance.

It must have been a couple of years before Groggy opened his heart to me. I was careful to call on the third of October—the other date on the headstone—and I mentioned that, in passing, I had looked into the cemetery and admired the pink carnations on Jessie Glencairn's grave. The old man started as though I had charged him with a crime, rose awkwardly, excused himself and left the room. He returned a moment later and resumed his seat near the window. I had resolved to say no more about the carnations unless he did.

'Aye,' he exclaimed meditatively, 'aye, she was the only woman I ever loved; and it's a kind of a blasphemy to say that I loved her. For she was as far above me as the heaven's above the earth. I was a terrible drunkard until I met her; but, explain it as ye may, from the day I looked straight into Jessie's eyes, I never troubled the drink any more. I knew from the first that I had no hope of winning her: it wasn't for the likes o' me to make love to the likes o' her. Everybody called me Groggy; and, even when I gave up drinking, they all said that I should soon break out again worse than ever. And so I worshipped her quiet-like. Sometimes I fancied that her heart was bespoke; and, although I'd have bitten my tongue through with envy, I'd have liked to see her married to a real man. I don't suppose she ever guessed how I felt. I gave her flowers sometimes—she was very fond of pink carnations—and she gave me a book or two. I remember once meeting her on a train and walking home with her. I told her that everybody was saying that I might have one of my drinking bouts any time. She gave me a look

that I'll never forget to my dying day, and said she was certain that I never would. And whenever, all these years, the thirst has come back on me like a burning, raging fever, I've seemed to see her with that look on her face and those words on her lips, and I've felt that I fair hated the stuff. It's been a fierce fight at times, but I knew I'd be safe as long as I felt the same towards *her*. That's one reason why I never forget the pink carnations!' He passed his sleeve across his face, and, a few moments later, I pressed his hand and took my leave. But as, in repassing the cemetery, I caught another glimpse of the pink carnations, I involuntarily raised my hat to them.

III

That, I fancied, was the end of it. I forgot that a lovely life never ends. My oversight in this respect was rebuked six years afterwards. It was a Monday, and I was spending the day with John Broadbanks at Silverstream. I had reached the Manse in time for lunch: we had enjoyed a good chat and a hearty laugh or two at the table; and then, the meal finished, he drew a paper from his pocket.

'I have here,' he exclaimed, 'a thing, and a very pretty thing, and what will you give me for this very pretty thing?'

I put out my hand. 'Oh, no, you don't!' he cried, laughingly; 'we'll take these deck-chairs on the lawn and I'll tell you all about it!' We were soon lounging in our favourite retreat near the cypress.

'Tell me,' he said, becoming suddenly grave, 'what was the name of the lady whom you told me—the lady of the pink carnations?' I told him.

'Ah, I thought so!' he continued. 'Well, quite by accident I've hit upon a new twist in the story. You know old Jamie McBride of Whare Flat?'

'I've driven over there once or twice with you on Monday afternoons,' I reminded him, 'and have waited outside with Brownie whilst you went in. Once, I think, the old man hobbled out to the gate with you as you left.'

'Ah, well,' John resumed, 'he died a fortnight ago. He was one of the best. He was of the old school, good as gold and true as steel. He was an elder of the kirk for over thirty years. The farmers swore by him. Whenever a proposal was introduced into the session,

all eyes turned to Jamie. If he approved, they carried it; if he shook his head, the thing was doomed. He was a great man with the bairns, was Jamie. You remember we always had the Sunday-School picnic in his paddock; he insisted upon it: and he spent days and days devising some fresh surprise for the children every year. There were a good many tears when Jamie dropped off, I can tell you!'

I expressed my sorrow—and perplexity. 'He must have been a great soul,' I observed, 'but I don't quite see where the pink carnations come in!'

'Bless my soul,' John laughed, 'it would never do for me to start writing stories: I should leave out the purple patches! Well, I've been going through Jamie's papers.'

In the days of which I write, it was a tradition—as rigidly observed as the Sabbath itself—that, if a man died having no immediate relatives and no specific instructions, his papers were not to be touched until the minister had been through them.

'And among the papers,' John went on, 'I found this,' fingering the faded document that he had produced at the table. 'And the funny thing is that it's a love-letter. We always treated Jamie as an incorrigible bachelor who had never stroked a woman's hair in his life. We used to twit him about it: perhaps the silly jests hurt. At any rate, among his papers, I found this letter: he had kept it for nearly forty years; and oddly enough, it's from your lady of the pink carnations—Jessie Glencairn!'

He handed it to me and lapsed into silence as I reverently opened it and proceeded to read. It was written in a clear, sensible, girlish hand:

'My dearest Jamie,' it read, 'it breaks my heart to tell you that we must cherish our sweet dreams no longer. The doctor examined me this morning and says that my case is quite hopeless. One lung is gone and the other is seriously affected. Consumption, as you know, is a terrible scourge on the Plain, and it has marked me for one of its early victims. It would be wicked for us to marry; so it will be best for us to see each other as little as possible. You are a good man, Jamie; they will make you an elder of the Kirk and all the people of the Plain will look up to you. I shall be proud, even on my death-bed, to think that you loved me and would have made me your wife. How I should have lived for you and clung to you! It is hard to think that you will someday love another woman, and marry her, and be the father of her children. Yet you deserve to be happy,

Jamie, and I would not have it otherwise. I shall go down to my grave praying that the best things in life may be always yours; and, if the dead can bless the living, I shall breathe constant benedictions on you and those who are dear to you. God bless and comfort us both, my own brave laddie: He will make it all clear some day.'

I asked John if, among Jamie's papers, there was anything else relating to Jessie Glencairn.

'No,' he replied, 'unless a receipted account from a stonemason for a headstone, dated February 12, 1863, has anything to do with it.'

IV

I waited for my opportunity before telling Groggy Douglas of this new development. Indeed, I resolved not to tell him at all. But he somehow sensed the fact that I knew more than he did, and he pressed me for my secret. He was a very old man by this time—nearly eighty—and was subject to acute attacks of bronchitis.

One beautiful autumn afternoon, however, he looked round his garden and inspected the forest of carnations. It seemed to suggest an idea. Mustering all his strength he gathered an armful and set out down the lane toward the cemetery. There he divided them into two great bunches, laying one on the lonely grave in the corner, and the other on the newly-made mound of Jamie McBride. Six months later he himself lay there.

I have often thought of it since. It is a luxury to be living in a world in which it is possible for a girl to die of consumption in the thirties and yet to go on sweetening and brightening the lives of two lonely men until, still blessing her memory, each of them, full of years and honour, goes down to his quiet grave like a shock of corn full ripe.

Chapter 12

YOU NEVER CAN TELL

From *The Drums of Dawn*

We were passing through deep waters—John Broadbanks and I. In gloomy silence we sauntered side by side across the open fields behind the Mosgiel manse, the genial sunshine, the fragrance of the hawthorn and the blithe song of a lark seeming to mock the sadness of our spirits. For mutual friends—Clive Hislop, the fair-haired, light-hearted young minister of Papatanui—was under a cloud; and its somber shadow seemed to fall athwart our lives as well. Andrew Duncannon, the man who had laid the charge against Clive, was a man of good standing in the township, a member of the congregation, esteemed and respected by everybody. He had nothing to gain by leveling so serious an accusation against his minister, no ulterior end to compass, no axe of any sort to grind. Indeed, it seemed a genuine grief to him to be driven by his conscience to play so tragic and uncongenial a part. And certainly the evidence against our unhappy comrade was as black as black could be.

Having crossed the paddocks, we struck down the lane towards Kirkland's farm and returned to the manse by way of Saddle Hill. We were delighted to find that Lilian Broadbanks, who had come over to Mosgiel on a shopping expedition, had sensed the whereabouts of her wayward husband and had dropped in to tea. The ladies—perhaps because they knew less than we did—were disinclined to take the trouble seriously. The chatter over the tea-cups concerned itself with more cheerful themes; and, by the time the meal was over, we were really a very happy party.

Whilst our wives attended to the ceremony of washing-up

in the adjoining kitchen, John and I stretched our legs before the fire. And then the old subject rushed back upon us, but rushed back suffused with the brighter spirit generated by the tea and talk.

'You know,' John observed, leaning forward in his characteristic way, and giving the fire a gentle poke, 'a man may be as innocent as an archangel and yet appear as guilty as a gaolbird!'

'Yes, I know,' I replied, 'and yet, in things like this, everybody somehow feels that, where there's smoke, there's fire!'

'Things like what?' John answered, a trifle testily.

'Well,' I stammered, reluctant to hint at such sinister possibilities in connection with poor Clive Hislop, 'things like—drink—and women.'

'Don't be silly,' exclaimed John, derisively, springing to his feet in his enthusiasm, and standing with his back to the fire looking down upon me. 'Why, man alive,' he cried, 'those are the very things about which it is most easy to jump to false conclusions. I've had experience,' he added, with an air of absolute conviction, '*I've had experience and I know!*'

At that moment the ladies returned to the room; and, after providing themselves with knitting and fancy-work, joined us at the fireside. In view of the possible delicacy of his theme, I half expected John to change his subject, but he was like a hound on the scent and went bounding on.

'I was just saying,' he explained, turning, with a courteous smile, to the mistress of the manse, 'I was just saying that a man may be perfectly innocent and yet look horribly guilty. I've been in that position myself—twice! Only, unlike poor Clive Hislop, I was never caught!'

'Oh, indeed,' interrupted Lilian, archly, 'this is very interesting, sir! Pray go on! Let us have the whole story of your misdemeanors. Open confession you know!'

'Well,' continued John, turning towards me, 'you speak of things connected with women—and drink! We'll take the matter of women first!'

'I think I'd better leave!' remarked Lilian, playfully, but John was too much in earnest to notice her jest.

'I shall never forget,' he went on, 'the night of my adventure with Bella Murgatroyd. It was the monthly Consecration Meeting of the Christian Endeavor Society. Bella was convener of the Look-out Committee. She is a nice, quiet girl, good as gold, not very strong,

but almost painfully intense. I suppose she was about twenty-two at that time. She was tremendously in earnest and had a fine influence on all our young people. I married her, three or four years ago, to Dan Wilkinson, and they have a nice little farm down at Otakia. Well, in those days, Bella had terrible fits of depression, and one of the worst of them seized her on the day of which I am speaking. She came to the Consecration Meeting with her face pale and drawn, and I could see by her eyes that she had been crying. After the meeting she asked if I had a few minutes to spare. I showed her into the vestry: I wished afterwards that I had taken her to the manse. She had got it into her head that she had committed the unpardonable sin, and nothing that I could say would comfort her. She soon began to weep violently, almost hysterically; and then nearly fainted. As soon as she was once more mistress of herself, I suggested that she had better go home, and promised to call and discuss the matter further the next day. By this time the church was, of course, deserted, and I could hear nobody about. I thought that the open air would restore Bella's composure, and I walked with her to the gate.

'She was still sobbing, however; and I could not bring myself to leave her to find her way along that dark and lonely road alone. So I walked on beside her. Perhaps it would have been better had I hardened my heart and left her. For my presence led her to reopen her troubles; she broke into a fresh passion of tears; her steps became unsteady; and I really believe she would have fallen but for my support. To get her home, I had to put my arm round her and take almost all her weight. I've never heard the episode mentioned from that day to this. She never reverted to it; perhaps never gave it a thought. As it happened, we met nobody on the road; and, if we had, the night was so pitchblack that they could have passed without recognizing us. But it might just as easily have been a moonlit night! And we might have met any one of a half-a-dozen people who would have gloried in telling the tale with all sorts of salacious embellishments and abominable insinuations. Isn't that so?'

John was too much in earnest to permit our treating the matter flippantly. We acknowledged by nods, murmurs, or silent glances the justice of his contention, and he resumed the thread of his recital.

'Then again, you talk about drink! Well, I've been drunk!' he exclaimed, almost fiercely.

'John!' cried his wife, looking horror-stricken.

'I have!' he reiterated. 'And you know that I have! It was when old Sandy Gordon of Gleneagles took ill and sent for me. Gleneagles is one of a group of farms tucked away in the western corner of the Plain, each a mile or two from its nearest neighbour. To visit any one of them by itself takes the biggest part of the day, but, when you're over there, it doesn't take so very long to complete the entire circuit. So, taking Harry Swift with me, partly for company and partly to look after the buggy, we set out soon after daylight next morning.

'We made a point of visiting Gleneagles first: I had a quiet half-hour with Sandy and left about eleven. Reaching the Craigendoran homestead at a quarter to twelve, the Kennedys pressed us to stay to dinner. But their dinner hour was one o'clock: we couldn't afford the time: so we assembled the household for worship and drove on. At half past one we pulled up at the big white gate at Drumearn and the Bevans came out to welcome us. They, good people, had enjoyed lunch at twelve; and it never occurred to them that we might not have had anything since breakfast!

'As bad luck would have it, we missed our tea in exactly the same way. We arrived at Bonniedon at half past four and found that they were taking their tea at six; we reached Benormond at half past six and found that they had taken tea at five!'

'If you'd had the sense you were born with,' interposed Lilian, 'you'd have told them that you were starving, and they'd have been delighted to get you to!' But John ignored the interruption and went on with his tale.

'Well,' he resumed, 'we got back as far as Strathnegie, our last call, just as dusk was falling. I left Harry with the buggy in the road, telling him that I should be back in a minute. We had tasted neither food nor drink since daylight and were famished. Ned Gould, the head of the Strathnegie household, had gone into Mosgiel to attend a council meeting, but his wife extended a royal welcome.

'"Come in," she cried, "I'm real proud to see ye! Ye must have a bit o' cake and a drop o' home-made wine!"

'I assured her that we were hurrying home and could not stay a minute: I had only called to inquire about Donald, their boy, who had recently left to take a position in Sydney. But the good woman would take no denial. The cloth was spread in a trice and the cake and the wine were before me.

‘“It’ll do ye no harm,” she assured me in her motherly way, “it’s jest dandelion wine that I’ve made with my own hands: take as much as ye will!”

‘It was certainly very nice; and, as soon as I finished it, she filled the tumbler again. Partly moved by a ferocious appetite, and partly by sheer thoughtlessness, I allowed myself to enjoy the second glass. And then the trouble began. The pictures began to dance around the walls: I could see enough Mrs. Gouds to make up quite a respectable congregation: and my hat seemed to be chasing the cat round the floor. How I excused myself I haven’t the least idea! How I climbed that hill to the buggy I shall never know! The path seemed to be curling itself up like a length of ribbon and going madly over my head!’

‘“Harry,” I muttered, when at length I reached him, “drive me straight to the manse! If anybody wants to stop and speak, take no notice of him! Get me home!”

‘When at length I arrived at the manse door, I could no more find the latchkey than fly; and, if I could have found it, I couldn’t have used it! I left poor Harry without so much as a *Thank you* or a *Good-night!* I rang the bell at the door. Lilian herself answered it.’

He glanced across at her and she smiled responsively at the memory of it.

‘“Thank God I’m home!” I exclaimed, as I staggered into the hall; “Lilian, I’m drunk!” And, throwing myself on the couch, I never stirred until I felt better!

‘But Lilian was the only person—with the possible exceptions of Harry and Mrs. Gould—who knew anything about it at all. And if either Harry or Mrs. Gould noticed which way the wind was blowing, they had the good sense and the kindly charity to keep their secret inviolate. But it might have been very different. If, for any reason, Harry had driven on home by himself instead of waiting for me at the Strathnegie gate, a score of tongues would have been wagging within twenty-four hours! For I was the President of the Temperance Alliance in those days!

‘And so, you see,’ he concluded, turning to me, ‘it doesn’t follow that, even in relation to such things as you mentioned, a man is in the least degree guilty, however black the evidence may be against him!’

His optimism was amply vindicated. Lilian and he spent that night at the Mosgiel manse. And before they left next day we

received a telegram from Papatanui. It read: --

'*Case of mistaken identity. Duncannon full of apologies. Real culprit made complete confession. Hislop's people delighted.*'

Before he left for Silverstream, John undertook another stroll with me across the fields; and it was wonderful how different, under the altered conditions, the sunshine and the song of the lark now seemed.

Chapter 14

'WHISTLING JIGS TO MILESTONES'

From *Rubble and Roseleaves*

I

Blueberry Creek! Blueberry Creek! Where in the world was Blueberry Creek? It was all very well for the Conference to resolve—in the easy and airy fashion that is so charmingly characteristic of Conferences—that John Broadbanks and I should be appointed '*to visit and report upon the affairs of the congregation at Blueberry Creek*'; but how on earth were we to get there? On that point, the Conference, in its wisdom, had given no directions: it had not even condescended to take so mundane a detail into its consideration. A fearful and wonderful thing is a Conference! A Conference is capable of ordering an inquiry into the state of the inhabitants of Mars; and it would appoint its commissioners without giving a thought to the ways and means by which they were to proceed to the scene of their investigations. It was altogether beneath the dignity of that august body to reflect that Blueberry Creek is near to the Other End of Nowhere as any man need wish to go; that it is many miles from a railway station or a decent road; and that the only approach to it is by means of a grassy track that, winding in and out among the great brown hills, is, during a large part of the year, impassable. The only indication of the track's existence consisted of a suspicion of wheelmarks among the tussock.

When, at the close of the session, we met on the steps outside

the hall, John and I stared at each other in lugubrious bewilderment. Then, seeing as he never failed to do, the humour of the situation, he burst into peals of laughter.

'Blueberry Creek!' he roared, as though the very name were a joke, 'and how are we to get to Blueberry Creek?'

Still, whilst we admired the complacent audacity with which the Conference had saddled us with the responsibility of finding—or making—a road to Blueberry Creek, *we* felt, as *it* felt, that somebody ought to go. Allan Gillespie, a young minister, who for seven years, had done excellent work there, had resigned without any apparent reason. The people, whose confidence, esteem and affection he had completely won, were depressed and disheartened; and the work stood in imminent peril. John used to say that, if you leave a problem long enough, it will solve itself. The way in which the problem of getting to Blueberry Creek solved itself certainly seemed to vindicate his philosophy.

'I've been making inquiries,' said Mr. Alexander Mitchell, a man of few words but of great practical sagacity, as he met me in the porch on the last day of the Conference, 'I've been making inquiries about that appointment of yours, I find that a motor has been through to Blueberry. If *one* can do it, *another* can. I have a sturdy little car that will get there if it is possible for four wheels to do it. My business will take me as far as Crannington next week, so that I shall then be two-thirds of the way to Blueberry. If you and Mr. Broadbanks care to accompany me, we will do our best to get through. I expect we shall have a rough passage, but I'm willing to take all the risks if you are.'

Truth to tell, the project was very much to our taste. In order that we might make an early start on Tuesday, we arranged that John should spend Monday night as our guest at Mosgiel. He came, and we both awoke next morning on the best of terms with ourselves. Civilization was quickly left behind. We followed the road as far as Crannington; had lunch there; and then plunged into the hills. For the next few hours Mr. Mitchell's motor—whose sturdiness he had by no means exaggerated—was crashing its way through scrub and fern; clambering over rocky boulders; gliding down precipitous gradients; edging its course along shelves cut in the hillside; and splashing through the stream whose tortuous folds awaited us in every hollow. At about five o'clock we emerged upon a great plain covered with tussock; we made out a cluster of cottages in

the distance; and we knew that, at last, we had come to Blueberry Creek.

'Why, here is Allan!' exclaimed John, as he pointed to a solitary horseman who, dashing along a track that intersected ours, was evidently hurrying to join us.

We were soon at the manse. Allan was not married; his mother kept house for him. 'My father died of consumption,' he used to say, 'and so did my grandfather: I must make sure that I am a *citizen* of this planet, and not merely a *visitor*, before I let any pretty girl make eyes at me!'

Our mission was quite unavailing. John and I had a long talk with Allan after tea.

'No,' he said at last, rising from his chair, and pacing the room under the stress of strong emotion. His shock of fair wavy hair fell about his forehead when he was excited, and he brushed it back impatiently with his hand. His pale blue eyes burned at such times as though a fire were blazing behind them. 'No; I feel that I am *whistling jigs to milestones*! I am preaching to people, who, whilst they are very good to me, make no response of any kind to my message. They see to it that Mother and I want for nothing; they bring us all kinds of little dainties from the farms and stations; they share with us whatever's going as the seasons come round; and they welcome me into their homes as though I really belonged to them. They are a great church people, too; they attend the services magnificently, although they have to come long distances along bad roads in all sorts of weather. They even compliment me on my sermons, just as a sleeper, roused at midnight by the alarm of fire, might, without rising, praise the dramatic ability of the friend who had awakened him. I've stood it as long as I can,' he cried, his lip quivering and his face pale with passion, 'and now I must give it up. You needn't try to find me another church; I have no wish to repeat the experience. I shall preach my last sermon on Sunday week, and I have chosen my theme. I shall preach,' he said, coming right up to us and transfixing us with eyes whose glowing fervour seemed to scorch us, 'I shall preach on the *Unpardonable Sin*! I shall preach as gently and as persuasively, but as powerfully, as I know how. But *that* will be my subject. For the Unpardonable Sin is to tamper with your oracle, to be disloyal to your vision, to play fast and loose with the truth!'

II

Allan had an appointment that evening. Mr. Mitchell, exhausted by his long drive, retired early. John and I excused ourselves and set off for a walk across the plain. For awhile we journeyed in silence, enjoying the sunset, the song of the birds, and the evening air. Allan's words, too, had taken a strong hold upon us.

'There's a lot in what he says,' John remarked at length, 'especially in his exposition of the Unpardonable Sin. Strangely enough, I was looking into the subject only a few days ago. The popular interpretation is, of course, absurd upon the face of it. You remember George Borrow's story of Peter Williams. Peter, as a boy of seven, came upon the passage about the Unpardonable Sin, and took it into his head that he could dispose of religion for the rest of his life by the simple process of committing that deadly transgression. Arising from his bed one night, he went out into the open air, had a good look at the stars, and then, stretching himself upon the ground and supporting his face with his hands, the little idiot poured out such a hideous torrent of blasphemy as, he believed, would destroy his soul for ever. For years the memory of that solemn act of spiritual self-destruction darkened all his days and haunted all his nights. He tormented himself, as Bunyan did, with the conviction that he had committed the sin for which there is no forgiveness. It ended as it did with Bunyan, and it always does. Chrysostom says that it is notorious that men who imagine that they have committed the sin against the Holy Ghost invariably become Christians and lead exemplary lives.'

We came at that moment to the banks of the creek; the waters were sparkling in the moonlight; we instinctively seated ourselves among the fern.

'Allan's interpretation,' John went on, 'is much nearer the mark. The words were addressed in the first instance to men who declared that Christ cast out devils by the prince of the devils. The thing is ridiculous; it is a contradiction in terms. Why should the prince of the devils occupy himself with casting out devils? The men who said such a thing were simply talking for the sake of talking. They were putting no brain into it. They were stultifying reason; and the man who stultifies his reason is darkening his own windows. He

is, as Allan put it, tampering with his oracle; he is playing fast and loose with the truth. A fellow may behave in the same way towards his conscience or towards any other means of moral or spiritual illumination. As soon as he does that kind of thing, he shuts the door in his own face; he puts himself beyond the possibility of salvation. And, when I was dipping into the matter at Silverstream a few nights since, I came to the conclusion that the passage about the Unpardonable Sin simply means this: the men who, in the old Galilean days, distorted the evidence of the miracles and rejected the testimony of the Son of Man, were guilty of a serious offence: but it was a venial offence: for, after all, it was not easy to realize that a Nazarene peasant was the Son of God. But those to whom the fullness of the Gospel has come, and upon whom the light of the ages has shone, how shall they be made the recipients of the divine grace if they deliberately block every channel by which that grace may approach them? If they stultify their reasons and harden their hearts; if, as Allan says, they tamper with their oracles and play fast and loose with the truth, what hope is there for them? I am sorry to see poor old Allan taking the apathy of his congregation so much to heart: but most of us would make better ministers if we took it to heart a little more.'

We discussed the matter for an hour or so, our conversation punctuated by the splashing of the trout in the creek; and then, feeling that it was getting chilly, we rose and walked back to the manse. Allan, to our surprise, was already there.

'Now look,' he said, as he seated himself in his armchair, and began to poke the fire, 'you two men have come up here to talk me out of my decision; and I'm delighted to see you. But tell me this. A few years ago nobody could talk about the things of which I speak every Sunday without moving people to deep emotion. I have been reading the records of Wesley and Whitefield and Spurgeon. Why, bless me, it was nothing for those men to see a whole audience bathed in tears. Whitefield would have the Kingswood miners crying like babies. Why do I never see any evidence of deep feeling? That's what I want to know. You may say that it's because I don't preach as Wesley and Whitefield and Spurgeon preached. I thought until lately that *that* was the explanation. But I've given up that theory: it won't work. Livingstone has a story about old Baba, a native chief, who bore the most excruciating torture without the flicker of an eyelid or the contraction of a muscle. Yet, when

Livingstone read to him the story of the crucifixion, he was melted to tears. No flights of rhetoric, mark you! Just the reading of the New Testament, without note or comment! Now I've read that same story to my people; and who was much affected by it? Then look at Spurgeon! Why, Spurgeon, anxious to test the acoustic properties of his new Tabernacle, entered the pulpit, believing the building to be empty, and exclaimed, '*Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world*!' A workman, concealed among the empty pews, heard the words, listened, heard them repeated, and was profoundly stirred by them. He laid down his tools, sought an interview with Spurgeon, and was led into a life of useful and happy service. No sermon, mark you; just a text! Why, *I've* quoted that same text scores of times, and who came to me inquiring the way of salvation? I shall say all this in my farewell sermon. I shall say it as kindly as I can, for the people have been wonderfully good to me; but it is my duty to say it. And I'm going to recite a few verses of poetry. Would you like to hear them? I haven't memorized them yet. I only came upon them yesterday.'

He slipped off to another room and returned with a volume of poems by Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Opening it, he read to us some verses entitled *The Two Sunsets*. They tell how a young fellow, of pure heart and simple ways, saw a sunset and heard a song. As the sinking sun filled the western sky with crimson and gold—

He looked, and as he looked, the sight,
Sent from his soul through breast and brain
Such intense joy, it hurt like pain.
His heart seemed bursting with delight.

So near the unknown seemed, so close
He might have grasped it with his hand.
He felt his inmost soul expand
As sunlight will expand a rose.

And after the story of the sunset we have the story of the song:

One day he heard a singing strain—
A human voice, in bird-like trills,
He paused, and little rapture-rills

Went trickling downward through each vein

And then the years went by. Queen Folly held her sway. She fed his flesh and drugged his mind; he trailed his glory in the mire. And, after a long interval, he revisited his boyhood's home, beheld another sunset, and heard another song:

The clouds made day a gorgeous bed;
He saw the splendour of the sky
With *unmoved heart* and *stolid eye;*
He only knew the West was red.

He saw the sunset that once filled him with ecstasy; but he saw it '*with unmoved heart and stolid eye*'! He heard the song that once sounded to him like the voice of angels, and '*it struck him simply as a noise*!'

'*That's* the Unpardonable Sin!' exclaimed Allan, gathering fervour as he proceeded. He sprang from his chair and stood facing us, his back to the fire. '*That's* the Unpardonable Sin! Miss Wilcox as good as says so. Listen!

O! worst of punishments, that brings
A blunting of all finer sense,
A loss of feelings keen, intense,
And dulls us to the higher things.

O! shape more hideous and more dread,
Than Vengeance takes in Creed-taught minds,
This certain doom that blunts and blinds,
And strikes the holiest feelings dead!

This vehement recital brought on a violent fit of coughing and he left the room. When he returned we made no attempt to reply to him. We felt that the case did not lend itself to argument. We fondly wished that we could have retained him for the ministry. His burning passion would have glorified any pulpit. But what could we say?

We were astir early next morning. Mr. Mitchell was up soon after dawn getting the car ready for the road. After breakfast, John led us all in family worship. Very graciously and very feelingly he

committed the young minister to the divine guidance and care. He specially pleaded that the closing days of his ministry might be a season in which rich fruit should be gathered and lasting impressions made. 'And,' he continued, 'may the tears that he sheds as he takes farewell of his people soften his heart towards them and wash from his eyes the vision of their indifference. And may he be astonished in the Great Day at the abundant response which their hearts have made to the Word that he has preached among them.' Half an hour later we were again speeding towards the hills, Allan and his mother waving to us from the gate.

III

Allan was as good as his word; after leaving Blueberry he never preached again. 'I must have a rest for a month or two,' he said. 'I saved a little money at Blueberry, and I can afford to take life easily for awhile and think things over.' The next that I heard of him was in a letter, which, some years later, I received from John Broadbanks. 'Poor old Allan Gillespie has gone,' he told me. 'His lungs went all to pieces after he left Blueberry; the tonic air of the hills kept him alive up there. He went to the Mount Stewart Sanatorium; but it was too late. He died there three weeks later. I always felt that his fervent spirit made too heavy a demand upon so frail a frame. His mother was much touched by the letters she received from Blueberry. Crowds of young people wrote to say that they could never forget the things that, in public and in private, Allan had said to them; they owed everything, some of them added, to his intense and devoted ministry. It looks as if they were not so irresponsive as they seemed.'

I suspect that this is usually so. People are not so adamantine as they like to look. Still, John and I will always feel that Allan taught us to take our work a little more seriously. Whenever we are tempted to lower our ideals, or to settle down complacently to things as they are, his great eyes—so full of solicitude and passion—seem to pierce our very souls and sting us to concern.

Chapter 15

A WEDDING IN THE WILDS

From *Shadows on the Wall*

He was a perfect stranger, but as I watched him pass the study window I felt certain of two things. I knew that he had come from the country, and I knew that he wished to be married. Had I been asked to state my reasons for either of these convictions I should have found the task too difficult for me. Yet is it not invariably true that the things of which we are most certain are the very things that we find incapable of demonstration? And so I opened the door to my visitor with no doubt in my mind as to his circumstances or as to his business. In neither respect was I mistaken. Everything about him convinced me that my second conjecture, at any rate, was above suspicion. His peculiar willingness to converse awkwardly on any imaginable subject—save only the one that had brought him to the manse—placed that matter beyond all possible question. I determined to assist him.

'You wish me to help you?' I suggested.

'Yes,' he answered, in an embarrassed and hesitating fashion. I saw that I must go the whole way.

'Do I understand that you are about to be married?' I hazarded.

His look of inexpressible relief told me that he regarded me in the light of a friend and a benefactor. His chains were broken. I took down my register in a businesslike way, and plied him for particulars. Having gratified the insatiable inquisitiveness of the official documents concerning Thomas Mackenzie, bachelor, and

Caroline Inglis, spinster, I returned the papers to the shelf and asked my visitor how I was to reach the scene of the wedding.

'Well,' he replied, 'it's a bit difficult. You'll have to take the express to Balclutha. There you'll find a local train waiting on the branch line. Take it as far as it goes. At the terminus at Owaka you will find a spring-cart waiting for you. And somebody will be ready, at each stage of the journey, to take you on.'

What could be more simple? I cheerfully assured him that the happy day should find me on the spot; and he departed.

That happy day arrived, and I faced my journey with a light heart. The light heart left me, however, when I entered the second train. For there I found an old resident of the district who, on learning of my destination, seriously doubted the possibility of getting there and back in one day! My brow instantly clouded. But, on stepping from the train at the terminus, I was saluted by two young gentlemen in suits of faultless black, wearing ties of immaculate white, and gaily adorned with buttonholes of a distinctly festive kind. They conducted me to a spring-cart which, despite the most diligent scraping and scrubbing, had stubbornly refused to appear jaunty or gay. We drove for miles through scenery of enchanting loveliness. The blood-red rata and the snowy layer-blossom mingled gracefully with the pendant fuchsia and the tangling convolvulus. The vast hillsides were gloriously draped in the most wealthy profusion of green. It was a perfect riot of radiant forestry. On we drove through the dense bush solitudes, the rabbits scurrying off to the right and left, whilst the tuis and the bell-birds flooded the valleys with their wild and liquid melodies. At last we came to the river and drew rein.

'What now?' I inquired, in perplexity.

'Oh, there's the boat,' my driver casually remarked, and pointed to a dinghy tied to a stump at the water's edge. There could be no doubt as to his meaning; so, whilst my companions unyoked and tethered the horse, I sauntered down to the stream. What a journey followed! Not a sound but the plash of the oars and the song of the birds! The great over-arching trees, perfectly mirrored in the tranquil depths of the stream, produced an effect that was like fairyland. The boat seemed to be suspended in mid-air, the circle of verdure enveloping us above and below. After an hour of such delightful voyaging my companions suddenly ran the boat ashore.

'And now—?' I inquired.

'Now we must take to the bush!'

Into the bush we accordingly plunged. Under normal conditions it would have been a most delightful walk; but I did not enjoy it. For by this time three haunting apprehensions began to torture me. In the first place, I knew that, to be legal, the marriage ceremony must be concluded by four o'clock, and my watch warned me that that hour was fast approaching. In the second place, the memory of my breakfast was becoming less and less satisfying. But the third terror was the worst. For the prospects of my return journey were suggesting possibilities that became every moment more alarming. I could understand that motives of his own might lead my eager bridegroom to arrange, with the most beautiful accuracy, all these interesting connexions at the various stages of my *outward* trip. But I caught myself wondering whether the same admirable precision would characterize my *second* journey. Moreover, it was perfectly certain that if, at that moment, I had turned my face towards home, I should have been too late for the last train that night! The nearest telegraph office was miles and miles away, and I thought of a lonely watcher at the manse!

Suddenly we burst upon a homestead surrounded by tents and marquees; it might easily have been mistaken for a military encampment. Everything was in readiness. There were scores of guests. The bride's mother explained apologetically that it was the first wedding that had ever been celebrated in the vicinity, and that some of the settlers had travelled from immense distances to witness it. I was taken into the great farm kitchen. It had been decorated with gum-leaves. A little table, surmounted by a Bible, stood at the far end. The people crowded in, and, on that summer's afternoon, the atmosphere quickly became suffocating. I suggested to the lady of the house that the ceremony should take place in the open air. The two companions of my travel volunteered to help me select a spot. In three minutes we found a place that Nature seemed to have specially designed for us. A narrow track led to a great circular clearing in the bush. In the centre stood an immense flat stump which made an ideal reading-desk. The guests repaired thither at once. The idyllic scene is indelibly photographed upon my memory. The deep blue sky overhead; the infinite varieties and shades of green on every hand thrown into the gorgeous relief by the gloomy recesses of the virgin forest behind; the splashes of brilliant colour provided by the blossoms of the flowering shrubs—all this made up a setting which the white dresses of the girls brought to the most satisfying

completion. It was a picture of bewitching loveliness. And when the bride—a girl of eighteen—came down the track leaning on her brother's arm, the wayward breezes toying with her veil, an effect was produced in which any artist would have found an inspiration.

The ceremony over, and the register duly signed, we adjourned to the large marquee for 'breakfast.' I was still thinking of that other breakfast that seemed so long ago! Yet, now that I was again seated at a table, I was bereft of appetite. The minister at a country wedding is expected to superintend everything. In arranging for other people's speeches, and in the preparation of my own, I lost all inclination to eat. I awoke, when it was too late to repair the omission, to a realization of the fact that the wedding breakfast had consisted, for me, of a couple of creampuffs! Having discharged that last of my responsibilities, I sought an interview with the bridegroom. I confided to him my apprehensions concerning the return journey, and found scant comfort in his bland assurance that he had never thought of that! He conferred with his bride. Later on he took me aside, and, pledging me to the most sacred confidence, whispered that the bride and he were 'going away' at nine o'clock. Instead of going by the river, they would drive through the bush to the nearest station—a journey that would occupy about two hours—and catch a late train to Balclutha, arriving there shortly after midnight. There would be no way by which I could continue my way to Mosgiel; but if I cared to accompany them to that point, they would be glad to take me. Seeing no other way of reaching home, I reluctantly accepted. The bridegroom warned me again that the hour of departure was a profound secret. I was on no account to divulge it. A most ingenious code of signals was arranged by which I might know when to slip out. In due time the signal was given, and, leaving the company, I staggered out into the dark. The best man directed me to the car. Bride and bridegroom were seated in front. I was to ride behind. I felt very much ashamed of myself for thus intruding on their privacy. But what could I do? It was a weird drive. I suppose the horse could see a track, but to me it seemed as though we were thridding the intricacies of the forest primaeval. After journeying for some miles, I became aware that our pace was slackening. My companions were indulging in a good deal of whispering. Glancing over my shoulder, I caught sight of a little hut in front of us. It would have been invisible but for the light streaming from door and window. After further debate between

those in front, we pulled up and the bride alighted. She was quickly swallowed up in the darkness. As soon as her form had vanished, the bridegroom turned to me and explained.

'Many years ago,' he said, 'her father and mother quarreled and separated. Since then, the father has lived in the hut here, and has held no communication with any members of the family. Carrie can only just remember him. This is the first wedding in the family. Carrie knew that there would not have been a light in the hut at this time of night in the ordinary way, and she felt that she could not pass it.'

Even as he spoke, I saw, against the lighted doorway, the form of the bride approaching it; I saw the father rise to meet her; I saw the two, for one brief moment, in each other's arms. I doubt if anything was said; I heard no murmur of voices. The man came with her to the cart, helped her in; and shook the bridegroom's hand. I doubt if he saw me; the lamp over the wheel was shining full upon his face. But, by that same light, I saw the glint of moisture on the cheeks of both father and daughter. As we drove on, our poor little bride gave way to violent sobbing. And, until we were out of sight and sound, a burly form stood framed in the lighted doorway.

We reached the station just as the train steamed in. I assisted my bride and bridegroom into one carriage, and selected for myself another farther along the train. Here I found my companion of the morning, who expressed his surprise that I had succeeded in completing my journey. At Balclutha, whilst the bridegroom was attending to the luggage, I walked along to take farewell of the bride. I could see that, although her eyes were bright again, the tragedy of her mother's wedded life had cast a shadow on her own.

'If you are ever in our part of the country,' she said, 'you will come and see our home, won't you?'

'I most certainly shall,' I replied, 'although,' I added, looking full into her face, 'there is only one piece of furniture that I am particularly anxious to see in it!'

'Whatever's that?' she asked.

'An altar!' I replied.

'Carrie,' I continued, 'you're only a girl, and you have all your life before you. Take my advice, and, when you and Tom find yourselves alone to-night, kneel down together even though you only say, *"O Lord, keep us true to each other and to Thee!*" Do it every day! You will be surprised at the way in which it will

straighten and soften and sweeten everything!'

Tom came up to claim his bride, and I bade him good-night.

'Carrie and I have been talking secrets,' I said, 'but she'll tell you what I said if you ask her.'

That was the last I saw of them, the last I ever expect to see of them in this world. I found that a goods train was passing through Balclutha at about three in the morning. I obtained permission to travel in the guard's van, and reached home in time for breakfast. I had been absent exactly twenty-four hours, having subsisted during that period on a couple of creampuffs and a plentiful variety of experiences.

This all happened nearly five-and-twenty years ago. The other evening I was travelling on the Sydney express. The train stops for refreshments at Seymour. As I rose from the table and stepped out on the platform, a young girl approached and addressed me by name. She was a trim little figure of medium height, with rosy cheeks, twinkling eyes, and a wealth of jet-black hair. She wore a close-fitting dress of navy blue, and a cosy fur hung loosely about her shoulders.

'I am afraid,' I said, 'that you have the advantage of me.'

'Oh, I dare say,' she laughed. 'I come to church sometimes with Don Carstairs. I'm Carrie Mackenzie. You married my father and mother in the bush in New Zealand years ago. Do you remember?'

'Perfectly,' I replied.

'Mother often told us,' she went on, 'of what you said to her on her wedding night about the furniture. She took your advice; and, when I left New Zealand two years ago to come to Melbourne, she made me promise that, if ever I got married here, I would ask you to perform the ceremony; and,' she added with a blush, as the bell rang and dashed off to her compartment, 'Don and I are coming along some evening to see you about it!'

Chapter 16

AN IRRITATING SAINT

From *When The Swans Fly High*

I never heard John Broadbanks laugh as he laughed that morning. I had been taking part in a service at Silverstream overnight, and had accepted an invitation to sleep at the Manse. When I awoke, the room was flooded with sunshine, whilst the song of the birds in the great trees near my window was almost deafening. It happened to be John's birthday, and we sat longer than usual over breakfast in honour of the festive occasion. All at once we were startled by a loud 'coo-ee' from a boy on horseback at the gate.

'It's Rex Murgatroyd,' exclaimed John, going to the window, 'I expect he's been over to Mosgiel for something or other and has brought back the mail. I'll run and see!'

He returned a few minutes later holding in one hand a book, and in the other the brown paper wrappings from which he had taken it, laughing the while as even he had seldom laughed before.

'It's from dear old David Thompson of Glenloaming,' he explained, handing the book to his wife; and then, turning to me, he added: 'I'm really afraid that we'll have to do something about David; he's breaking all bounds!'

I did not at the moment see the cause of such boisterous merriment, nor did I perceive anything in the immediate circumstances to prompt so grave an observation. But I knew all about David Thompson, and, in common with John Broadbanks, had suffered unspeakable things at his hands.

David Thompson was minister of the parish of Glenloaming, a few miles down the plain. We all loved him, although there were

times when the very thought of him brought our hearts to the will of murder. He was one of the gentlest, one of the quietest, one of the saintliest little men whom I have ever met. His intense piety shone in his countenance: you could not listen to him for five minutes without feeling that here, at least, was a man who, the soul of sincerity, meant every word that he said. There was a yearning persuasiveness about his simple, natural eloquence. He drew you to him at sight, and, the more you saw of him, the more you loved and trusted him. Angered by some extraordinary behavior of his, arising from his peculiar weakness, I have approached him with thunder and lightning in my soul, my heart hot with indignation, my lips breathing out threatening and slaughter against him. But one glimpse of his face has slain the savage within me; and, by the time I grasped his hand and caught the wooing accents of his soft and soothing voice, I was ready to forgive him everything!

And that is saying a good deal, for, in truth, there was much to forgive. Whether it was his misfortune or his fault, David Thompson was the most forgetful and absent-minded creature of whom I ever heard or read. I hesitate to set down his amazing achievements in that connexion lest I seem to be putting too great a strain on the credulity of my readers. Yet there are those still living on the Taieri Plain who could tell of experiences in connexion with him that would put my own to shame.

'We shall have to do something about David,' exclaimed John Broadbanks that morning, as soon as the storm of his laughter had subsided, 'he's breaking all bounds!'

'Why, what's gone wrong now?' I inquired.

'Well,' he explained, breaking into a fresh fit of mirth, 'about six months ago he rode over here in great distress. He particularly wanted to consult Sir W. M. Ramsay's *Paul the Traveller* on some point with which he proposed to deal. Could I lend it to him? It chanced that I bought a copy at Driver's less than a week before. It was lying, brand new, on my desk. I handed it to him; he put it in his bag, and went off over-flowing with delighted gratitude. That was the last that I saw of the book until this morning, and, this morning, it has come back to me with this inscription on the fly-leaf:

'To my dear friend,
John Broadbanks,
With affectionate greetings from
David Thompson.'

John broke into a fresh peal of laughter.

'If,' he went on, 'if his oddities went no farther than spasms like this, we could grin and bear it—perhaps even enjoy it. But he does the most outlandish things and puts all sorts of people to no end of trouble. A few weeks back, for example, he came over to Silverstream on the Friday morning. He had a dreadful headache: could not possibly study: would I preach for him on Sunday morning at Glenloaming so that he might preach an old sermon here at Silverstream? Of course I consented. "But," I added, "you'll have to send over for me! Brownie is very lame, so I'm more or less of a prisoner!" He assured me that there would be no difficulty about transport; and we left it at that.

'On the Sunday morning I got ready in a good time, and surely enough, a little before ten, Gerald Blackie drove up to the gate. I took my seat beside him; we wrapped the rugs about us; and were just turning the bend of the road near Kirkland's farm when we met Clive Sutherland in his buggy. He pulled up and saluted us.

'"I'm on my way to fetch you," he cried. "Mr. Thompson asked me to drive you over to Glenloaming!"

'"That's odd," muttered Gerald, sitting beside me, "he certainly came round on Friday afternoon and begged me to do!"

'We drove on, Clive falling in behind us. We had scarcely got as far as Blagdon's barn when we caught sight of Joe Findlay driving towards us. He, too, reigned up and expostulated in precisely the same terms. To make a long story short, we soon had a procession of five gigs, spring-carts, and buggies heading towards Glenloaming with but one minister between them! Happily for his peace of mind, David had driven to Silverstream by another road, so that he did not meet our ponderous and imposing cavalcade. But, when I tackled him with it on the Monday, he solemnly assured me—and it was impossible to doubt his word—that he had not the slightest recollection of having asked more than one. Indeed, he could not distinctly remember asking even one, and had caught himself wondering, on his way over to Silverstream, whether he had really arranged the matter at all!' Again, John's laughter woke all the echoes in the Manse.

'Oh, I know,' I replied, sympathetically, 'I have suffered, too. Why, a month or two ago, he called at the Mosgiel Manse, almost in tears. He always knew, he said, as he wrung my hand, where to turn when in real trouble. It seemed that something

necessitated his presence in Dunedin on the Thursday evening, and Thursday was the night on which he regularly conducted a cottage prayer-meeting in the big farm-kitchen at Benledi. Would I conduct that meeting instead? As a matter of fact, I had myself planned to be in Dunedin that night; but, as you know, it is very difficult to harden your heart against David's pathetic entreaties: so I promised. Thursday turned out to be a dreadful night: it rained in torrents: only five people outside the Benledi household turned up at the meeting. And of those five, four were ministers—Allan, Inglis, Ferguson, and I! And when we tackled him with it afterwards, he pleaded, in abject contrition, that he had no idea that he had asked more than one of us, although, as in your case, he could not be sure which of us it was that he had asked!'

This conversation took place in the early years of David Thompson's ministry at Glenloaming. Later on, as he became better known, stories of his astonishing exploits were told, with mingled amusement and affection, round every fireside on the Plain. I was chatting one day with old Angus Wedderspoon of Whare Flat. I forget what led to the introduction of David Thompson's name. But, once it was mentioned, Angus became another man. His rugged old face beamed. There was laughter on his lips, but his eyes were suffused with tenderness: his smiles and tears reminded me of the mingled sunshine and shower of an early summer's day.

'A penny for your thoughts!' I said.

'Ay, ay,' he mused—and perhaps I had better translate his rich Doric—'thoughts of Mr. Thompson are aye worth the bawbie. He's a strange, strange child, is Mr. Thompson. The other morning he called at the homestead, and, as he came tapping at the door, the girls wondered how he had got there. He had no horse, and yet he did not look like a man who had tramped many miles along dusty roads. "Have you walked all the way?" Jeanie asked. A puzzled look came into the wee man's face; he turned his back upon her, looking along the road by which he had come; and seeming to be lost in thought. "No," he said at last, "I haven't walked; I'm sure I was driving when I set out; I can't think what's become of the pony!" Alec undertook to run back and see if he could discover any trace of the missing vehicle. And, sure enough, down there by the haystacks, where the big white gate crosses the road, he had left his buggy to look after itself. He had evidently got out to open the gate; had, absentmindedly shut the gate in the poor beast's face;

and, forgetting all about it, had come the rest of the way on foot!' The eyes of old Angus moistened again as he finished the story: he was hugely diverted by the idiosyncrasies of the little minister: yet, for all that, he would have laid down his own life for him.

Whilst my pen has been careering over these sheets, two minor experiences of my own have come back to me.

(1) We were holding our anniversary soiree at Mosgiel. The church was crowded, for no man missed the soiree unless his home happened to be on fire and no substitute could be deputed to extinguish the flames. The meeting having been opened and a couple of anthems rendered by the choir, I rose to read a number of apologies. Among others was one from David Thompson, explaining that, owing to an important appointment on another part of the Plain, he was sorrowfully compelled to absent himself. As I read this grave little document I was interrupted by boisterous laughter on the part of the congregation. Thinking that I must have perpetrated some ridiculous slip of the tongue, I turned to those behind me to inquire the reason for the people's mirth. And then I noticed David Thompson making his way across the back of the platform towards a vacant chair. I turned to him, shook hands, and explained the unseemly hilarity of the meeting. 'I can't understand it,' he muttered, looking in bewilderment at his own letter. 'I always intended to be here: I wouldn't miss it for anything,' and then, *sotto voce*, he added reflectively: 'I wonder what that important appointment was!'

(2) Walking through the township one afternoon, I suddenly caught sight of David Thompson emerging from John Havelock's store and making his way towards his buggy at the kerb. I hurried towards him. 'I'm glad I saw you,' I said, 'for I want you to help me.' In his graciously characteristic way he expressed his delight that such an opportunity had presented itself. 'Well,' I explained, 'I'm going away to Auckland next week to attend a conference: I wonder if you could conduct my week-night service on *November 13*?' He assured me that he would be grateful to be entrusted with such a duty. 'Are you quite sure,' I asked, a trifle ungenerously, 'that you'll remember this promise when *November 13* comes?' 'Oh, yes,' he exclaimed, confidently, 'I'll put it down in my diary here and now, and my sister, who examines my diary every day, will keep me up to it!' Poor sister! I knew that she had her hands very full. She once told me, how, on a certain day at half-past two, she

had reminded her brother that he had a wedding at three o'clock, and sent him up to dress. At ten minutes to three, the bridegroom having arrived, she rushed upstairs to see what had become of the minister. He was in bed and fast asleep! If, however, the sister daily examined the diary, there seemed some hope that the promise for *November 13* might be redeemed; so I left it at that. Three days later I received from him a most urgent request. 'Our pre-Communion service,' he wrote, 'is to be held on *November 13*. I am praying that it may be a gracious spiritual experience in the lives of all our people, and especially in the lives of those who are approaching the table for the first time, and am most anxious that you should preach the special sermon. You will, won't you?' *On November 13*!

Poor little David Thompson! It is too bad to revive these memories, for he has long since left all his frailties behind him. In all my years on the Plain I never saw a funeral like his. I doubt whether, on the day of the Glenloaming Show, there were more vehicles tied up round the showground than I saw on the sides of the road near the Manse on the day on which we buried him. The most unlikely people were there. There was a group of jockeys from the Wingatui racecourse, one of whom told me of the interest that the little minister always took in them and their welfare. Some of the most notorious characters on the Plain—men who had never darkened a church door for years—were at the funeral. I saw a suspicion of tears that day in eyes that I had never thought capable of such weakness. The entire community gathered to do honour to his memory and to show the depth of that secret affection in which it had always held him. Everybody pitied him: everybody, at some time or other, had been very angry with him: but, for all that, everybody loved him.

As he lay dying, his earliest religious experiences rushed back upon his mind with extraordinary vividness and power. Memory seemed to be atoning for past lapses. He described the church in Edinburgh in which he had first found the Saviour. The date, the occasion, the minister, the hymns, the sermon, the text, the particular shaft that pierced his soul—he recalled it all. It was during the soft singing of *Just as I am* that he had yielded his life to the Lord. As he neared his end he repeated the lovely verses again and again, a look of indescribable ecstasy shining in his face. 'There—are—some—things—that—even—the—little—minister—of—Glenloaming—cannot—forget!' he murmured brokenly, with a smile, penitent but beautiful, that was like a gleam of the glory into which he was

passing, a smile that will haunt my memory till I clasp his hand again.

Chapter 17

THE MAJESTY OF GOD

From *I Forgot to Say*

Striking inland from Mosgiel, my old home in New Zealand, the traveler penetrates a district known at the Otago Central—a district in which he is confronted by some of the wildest and most forbidding scenery on the face of the earth. It really looks as if a giant, in a towering rage, had dashed to pieces a huge range of mountains, and had stalked sullenly away, leaving his confused welter of wreckage as the awful monument of his insensate wrath. Every landscape is a wilderness of splintered peaks, jagged summits, scarped crags, and beetling cliffs. The entire territory is weird, desolate, precipitous, and grand. But far up in the interior, beyond this awe-inspiring panorama of shattered splendour, a beautiful and fertile plain nestles among the frowning mountains like a green oasis in some vast Eastern desert.

This fertile and picturesque plain, besides being dotted with comfortable-looking farms, and with fields covered with crops and cattle, boasted a little town with its street of shops, its clusters of houses, its banks, its offices, its hotels and its churches. Once a day, in my time, a diminutive train—imbued, like all small things, with the spirit of adventure—set out from Mosgiel to thread its way through this perilous expanse of broken country to the town of the upper plain. At times it really seemed as if the engine had entangled itself in a rocky cul-de-sac from which there was no possibility of escape. And, just as you had abandoned all hope of its extricating itself from the perilous plight into which it had so recklessly

plunged, it suddenly dived into a tunnel that you had failed to notice and emerged from the smoky darkness of the abyss only to confront a still more desperate situation on the other side.

On our way to address an anniversary soirée at Middlemarch—the town on the higher plain—John Broadbanks and I had only taken our seats in this audacious little train when there entered the compartment old Dr. Macmaster, a pioneer minister held in great honour throughout the province. The three of us soon settled down to conversation, and, after we had exhausted the weather, the local gossip, and the headlines of the morning paper, I asked John if he had selected his theme for the coming Sunday.

'Oh, by the way,' he observed, appearing to ignore my inquiry, 'what was that story you told at Silverstream the other night? Lilian gave me the drift of it. Something about a seventeenth-century merchant who visited Scotland on business and was converted there? Do you remember?'

'Oh, yes,' I replied. 'You mean the thing I quoted from Wodrow, the story of the man who, on returning to London from Edinburgh, said that he brought great news. His friends pressed him for particulars. He then told them that, whilst in the north, he went to St. Andrews, where he heard a sweet and stately looking man, Robert Blair by name, who showed him the Majesty of God; he then heard a little fair man, Samuel Rutherford by name, who showed him the Loveliness of Christ; and, before leaving, he heard a well-favoured proper old man, David Dickson by name, who showed him all his heart. Was that the story?'

'Splendid! That was it!' exclaimed John with more enthusiasm that my recital seemed to warrant. 'He heard Robert Blair preach on the Majesty of God! That was the foundation of it all. But for that sermon on the Majesty of God, Rutherford's portrayal of the Loveliness of Christ would have made no appeal to him; and certainly Dickson's discourse on the intricacies of the human heart would never have awakened his interest. The story has set me thinking. Indeed, that aspect of it has taken such possession of my mind that no other subject is possible for next Sunday. I feel like a bird pluming its wings for a magnificent flight. I mean to attempt a sermon on the Majesty of God, and I want all the help that you and Dr. Macmaster can give me. For, although the theme has laid such a violent hold upon me, I scarcely know how to deal with it. Ever since Lilian told me your story, I have caught myself

wondering whether, in our preaching, we lay enough stress on the thought of God—God Himself: do you catch my meaning?'

'I am sure you are right,' interposed the old doctor, feelingly, 'and, after all, the preaching of God, is an integral, almost a primary, part of our commission, isn't it? Paul, you remember, tells Timothy that he was ordained to proclaim that there is one God and one Mediator. *One God*, mark you! And don't you think that there is a hint of the same idea in Paul's constant references to "the gospel of God"? The gospel of *God*, you notice! I sometimes fancy that the man whose spiritual pilgrimage has led him to an unwavering conviction that there is one God is not very far from the kingdom of heaven. If I had my ministry over again, I would talk more about God; I would indeed. Not about His works or His ways, His power or His bounty. But about His very, very self—His omnipresence, His omniscience, His omnipotence, His unutterable goodness, His ineffable holiness, His splendour, His glory, His beauty, His love. For if I could make men very sure of God, they would very soon cry out for a Mediator who would reconcile them to Him.'

'I am glad to hear you talk like that, doctor,' replied John, thoughtfully. 'Your judgement, with your long experience behind it, is very valuable. But my immediate purpose is to preach on the *Majesty of God*. The word strikes me as being singularly noteworthy. Not so much the greatness of God, nor the power, nor the splendour, nor the glory; but the *Majesty*. It impresses me as being a kingly word, a regal word, a word that savours of palaces and accessions and coronations, of thrones and crowns and scepters. His Eternal Majesty, Almighty God! You follow?'

We nodded sympathetically, but, feeling that he had much more upon his mind, we said nothing to check or deflect the current of his thought.

'I have a feeling,' he continued, 'that such preaching would make a profound appeal. Depend upon it, that royal word—the *Majesty* of God—is, in men's ears, a singularly melodious word. In their inmost hearts, men like to feel that God is Sovereign, Absolute, Supreme—King of Kings and Lord of Lords. However blatantly we may plume ourselves on our passion for democracy, you have but to cast your eye over the nations in order to discover that, in reality, men dearly love a lord. They trick themselves, by a subtle process of intellectual jugglery, into thinking that they revel in ruling. But it is all nonsense. Every careful student of human

nature knows that they revel in *being ruled*. The orator at the street corner who promises to distribute crowns and scepters broadcast does not know what he is talking about, nor does he know the men to whom he is talking. Men do not want crowns and scepters. They long to be wisely led and firmly governed. And, this being so, their ears will detect a noble music in the gospel that I propose to preach, the gospel of the Majesty of God.'

The guard came through the train, examining tickets, but the interruption was only momentary.

'I know,' John continued, after a brief silence, 'I know that, nowadays, we hand everything over to Cabinets, Commissions, Councils and Committees. Such things are all very well in their way: they serve quite a useful purpose—in minor matters. But only in *minor* matters. In *major* matters the committee collapses ignominiously and the individual ruler comes to his own.

'Committees!' John exclaimed, almost with scorn. 'Could a committee have arranged the creation of the Universe? Could a committee have drawn up the Ten Commandments? Could a committee have drafted the manuscript of the Bible? Could a committee have devised a scheme of human redemption? Could a committee have pronounced the word of absolution to a guilty soul? And who would like to think that the stupendous issues of the Day of Judgement would be in the hands of a Committee or a jury—even a Committee or jury of archangels?

'No, no,' John insisted—he was now thoroughly aroused and his argument was flowing in full spate—'one Sovereign Voice, the Voice of the One invested with absolute and eternal authority, must say: "Let there be light—and life—and land—and sea—and stars!" whilst these things leap into being at His word. One majestic Voice must say: "Thou shalt!..." and "Thou shall not!..." One Voice, and only one, must express itself in the inspired page. One Voice alone can say: "This is my Beloved Son… Thy sins are forgiven thee!" That Voice, and that Voice only, will pronounce the fateful verdicts of the last great Day. And who would have it otherwise?'

John sat back in his corner and seemed to have said his say. His attention appeared to be riveted on a few sheep that had found a precarious grazing-ground on a narrow shelf of rock jutting out from a cliff a hundred yards away.

'Well,' I ventured, when once more he glanced my way, 'you certainly have a most imposing theme. It almost takes one's

breath away. I can see that the people at Silverstream are likely to enjoy a wonderfully helpful and impressive service. Perhaps,' I added, with some hesitation, 'perhaps it leaves something to be desired on the practical side. What do you think? I can imagine a few folk in your congregation hungering for sympathy, for comfort, for encouragement. They have been having a rough passage during the week and they will come to Silverstream on Sunday with sore and wistful hearts. Is there any danger of their being disappointed?'

'Not a bit!' replied John, a ring of triumphant confidence entering into his tone. 'Not a bit! A sermon on the Majesty of God is the very sermon they most need. It will fit them like a glove. For see what it means! God is just. And if, being just, He is clothed with majesty, then it follows that Justice is on the Throne and nothing can happen to any of these people that His immaculate justice does not approve. God is wise; and if God, being wise, is in supreme authority, then Wisdom wears the eternal crown and all things are dominated by its infallible dictates. And, best of all, God is love; and, if He be also vested with absolute and illimitable power, then everything, celestial and terrestrial, is in the hands of a love that is lord of all. If God be the Blessed and Only Potentate, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, then these tried and troubled souls may walk with restful hearts amidst the inscrutable mysteries of this life and await with unruffled confidence the august unfoldings of the life to come.'

Neither Dr. Macmaster nor I had another word to say. It would have been an impertinence. It was clear that John had been arrested by a great theme that he would greatly handle. Nor was I surprised a few days later when, on meeting a group of the Silverstream people on the street, they told me that the service on that Sunday morning had been one of unusual impressiveness, and that their minister had unfolded the Majesty of God with such freshness, insight, and grace that he had brought awe to their hearts, light to their minds, tears to their eyes, and courage to their downcast spirits.

Chapter 18

THE IRON DUCHESS

From *The Ivory Spires*

She was one of the sweetest, gentlest, queenliest little old ladies whom it has been my good fortune to meet, and, as long as I live, I shall bless the memory of the wild adventure that led me to her door. It was in the course of a holiday plunge into the inaccessible interior of New Zealand. Although that romantic and arduous journey was made many years ago, I still start in my sleep when my dreams take me back to the weird and terrifying scenery that then scowled us out of countenance. For days we made our way through scarped and shattered territory that looked for all the world as if it had been the playground—or the battleground—of an army of earthquakes. In a towering rage, the Titans of antiquity seemed to have spent an eon or two in pelting each other with snow-capped mountains: the splintered fragments of the broken ranges littered all those darksome plains. Without a moment's warning, we would find ourselves on the edge of a precipice, gazing hundreds of feet sheer down at the forests immediately below, as one gazes from the top of Beachy Head or from the heights of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales. A few hours later we would come upon a yawning fissure running right across the land, and, peering into the impenetrable blackness of the abyss, would hear the muffled roar of a torrent in the nethermost depths of the chasm. Much of that land had never been pressed by human feet before. The bleached skeletons of wild things lay plentifully about us—things that had died out there in the solitudes where nothing had meddled with their bones. Then, after several days of such uncanny gipsying, we came upon the marks of

wheels, and, following their track through bracken and tussock, we at length caught sight of a big white homestead far up on the side of the hill. The panorama that unrolled itself from that veranda almost took one's breath away. To the north, you glimpse the blue, blue waters of Lake Wanaka, with Mount Aspiring keeping guard over the sheet of sapphire at its feet; in the south, the eternal snows of Mount Earnslaw glitter dazzlingly in the sparkling sunshine; whilst other peaks, scarcely less imposing, frown majestically down on you from every point of the compass.

It was on that spacious veranda that I first saw the Iron Duchess. With a little gray shawl thrown lightly over her white head and slightly-drooping shoulders, she was moving slowly up and down, her footfall being so soft that you rather sensed than heard it. To this outlandish spot she had come with her young husband as a girl; and here, without a single break, she had remained ever since. Not once, in all those years, had she slept under any other roof. Since she left Scotland, she had never seen a railway train. And never, after leaving the emigrant ship, did her eyes again rest upon the sea. Up here in the wilds, with her husband for doctor and nurse, she had brought eight children into the world, the eldest of whom was now master of the homestead. The second, who died in infancy, sleeps under the big rata down in the hollow; and often, on Sunday afternoons, especially when the beautiful tree was a blaze of gorgeous crimson, the little Duchess would saunter down the slope and sit with her Bible on the massive granite boulder that marks the sacred spot. In those pensive moments she would live again through that dark hour in which her tall young husband, leaving her and their firstborn up on the house, had carried the tiny body to this pretty bower for lonely but reverent burial. Twenty years later, the father himself was laid to rest beneath the rata, and, thenceforth, the Sunday afternoon pilgrimage became invested with still more poignant significance. Yet, with all this, her rough life had not roughened her. There was about her old-world charm, a magnetic winsomeness, a quaint, instinctive courtliness that rendered her extremely captivating.

'Why do you call her the Iron Duchess?' I asked her daughter-in-law.

'Well, doesn't she look like a duchess?' she replied, answering one question by asking another. I could not glance at the trim little figure enthroned in her big chair at the other end of

the veranda, her pretty silver ringlets falling coquettishly about her shoulders, without recognizing the justice of the claim.

'Yes,' I conceded, 'but why the *Iron* Duchess?'

'Why,' she retorted, again capping question with question, 'why do you call the Duke of Wellington the *Iron* Duke?'

I confessed that the analogy baffled me. Between the grizzled victor of Waterloo on the one hand, and the little old lady with the soft voice, the silken touch, and the silent footfall on the other, I could see no parallel at all. The two personalities, so far from appearing similar, seemed to present a vivid and dramatic contrast.

'Oh, you don't know her,' laughed my companion. 'Granny has a will like a steel girder; you could no more bend it than you could fly; it is absolutely inflexible. I suppose her hard life up here has helped to develop such tenacity; but, however that may be, I have never known a will as strong as hers. Fortunately for us, she possesses a very tender heart, a particularly sensitive conscience, and a wonderfully sound judgement; she does not make up her mind to do a thing until she is convinced that it is the kind and right and wise course; but, once she has seen her way, the stars in their courses could not hinder her. She can will herself to sleep; and she's gone on the instant. She can will herself to wake up; and she'll open her eyes precisely at the time appointed. She can will to remember a thing, and it will flash upon her just when she commanded; she can will to forget, and she'll leave her troubles behind her and behave as though they never had existed. She can even will her pains away. On the day of Amy's wedding, she was mad with ear-ache; a horrid abscess had developed and was at its most excruciating phase; but she went right through the day laughing as merrily, singing as blithely and smiling as sweetly as on any day of her life. She has often willed herself well when she was really ill. I suppose that she could never have lived the sort of life that must have been hers in the early days—before the children were old enough to help her—unless she had developed some faculty of the kind. But anyhow, there it is!' I murmured an expression of my wonder and admiration.

'Yes,' she continued, 'and, in some mysterious way, it is all a part of her religion. Her faith is as simple and as sweet as the faith of a little child. She lives, as the old Scottish ministers say, "far ben." She really seems, in her own secret fellowship with God, to discover His will about everything; His will becomes her will; and

that explains its strength. She knows, when she is very tired, that it is her Father's will that she should sleep; so it becomes *her* will that she should sleep; and, leaning back upon her cushions, off she goes! I wish I could live as near to God as Granny does. Her favourite text is the one about dwelling in the secret place and abiding under the shadow. She certainly does. That is why, with all her iron will, she is never tyrannical, never despotic, never over-bearing. I have never known her to lose her temper for a moment. There is nothing of the termagant, the virago, or the shrew about her. And yet, in her own lovely way, she rules us all like a queen. And in her kingdom there are no rebels or mutineers. For she's a dear, and we are all tremendously proud of her. So now you know why we all speak of her as the Iron Duchess!'

When I left the homestead next day, I had no hope or expectation of ever again seeing, or even hearing of, my dainty little peeress. Having gathered the entire household for worship, I thanked them for their open-hearted hospitality; kissed the old lady's hand as I took leave of her at the top of the steps; and was rewarded with a smile that I have carried in my heart ever since. We met one day; we parted the next; in the nature of things our paths could never again cross; I therefore assumed that this was the end, as well as the beginning, of my captivating adventure.

But you never can tell. Thirty years passed. I was once more in the Never-never Country—this time in the wilds of Queensland. Hour after hour, our car had been making its way between hedges of tobacco-bush, groves of mango trees, and a riot of forestry that was lit up by the gorgeous hues of the bougainvillea, the flame-tree, the lantana, the poinsettia, and the crimson corals. Every now and then we startled a mob of kangaroos or a flock of parrots, whilst, all the way, the country was dotted with orange-groves, vineyards, sugar-plantations, and fields in which the pineapple, the banana, the pawpaw, the rosella, the breadfruit, the custard-apple, and other tropical fruits, luxuriated in extraordinary variety and profusion. After a long stretch of thickly-wooded country in which we saw no sign of settlement or civilization, we paused for lunch on a grassy clearing under a giant gum.

We had scarcely finished our rough-and-ready meal when, to our surprise, we heard the sound of hoofs, and a small boy, in a blue jumper and a wide-awake hat, came galloping out of the bush on his pony. He was evidently agitated.

'Excuse me,' he exclaimed, politely, dismounting and leading the pony towards me, 'but Father had an accident this morning and hurt his leg—perhaps broke it. Mother has done her best; but, when she caught sight of the smoke of your fire, she asked me to ride along and see if it was anybody who knew anything of ambulance work, or anything like that.'

He led us for about a mile and a half along a track that, but for him, we should never have noticed, at the end of which we came on a well-built little cottage perched on a steep hillside, commanding a magnificent view of a really wonderful valley. The quality that made it wonderful was the fact that, whilst every vestige of the primeval forest had been removed, all the slopes were clothed with beautifully-arranged and well-kept plantations of pawpaw, banana, and pineapple. Scarcely a weed was to be seen. Every inch of soil testified to the pride in which its owner cherished it.

Having assured ourselves that the injured leg was not broken, and that everything that could be done had already been done by more skillful hands than ours, we complimented our new acquaintances on the amazing efficiency evidenced on their estate.

'Oh, that's nothing to do with me,' laughed the wife, with evident pride in her husband's achievement. 'When Hal came back from the War, he somehow couldn't endure city life, so he took up this selection. The whole valley was virgin bush. He brought a tent for a home and set to work to clear the land. After awhile he put up a hut which is now his tool-shed. And, later on, he built the cottage and…'

'And sent for you?' I suggested. She smiled assent.

They had three children, of whom the boy on the pony was the eldest. Neither of the three had ever been to school; yet I have met few youngsters better educated. Their tuition had been by correspondence—a boon that Australian Governments confer on the children of the outback—and, of course, their parents had helped. And in beauty of speech, courtesy of manners, and grace of behaviour they were perfect models.

In glancing inquisitively round the room in which we took afternoon-tea, I noticed pictures of Mount Earnslaw and Milford Sound.

'You have some connexion with New Zealand?' I hazarded.

And then it all came out! Our hostess was the grand-daughter of the Iron Duchess! This magic spring having been

touched, the flood-gates of confidence swung open. We forgot that we were strangers. Even the wounded leg was relegated to oblivion. I told of my adventure of thirty years before and she told of all that had happened in the intervening period.

'In one important respect you have the advantage of me,' she said, 'for I never actually saw the Duchess, although Mother was never tired of telling us about her. I suppose you heard of Granny's death?' I assured her that no news of the old lady's passing had reached me.

'Well,' she began, 'having been there, you will understand that it was almost impossible for her children, once they had left home, to return to the old roof. It was so terribly un-get-at-able. For that reason, none of her grandchildren ever saw her. And, since the various members of her family were widely-scattered over the Dominion and the Commonwealth—some of them a thousand miles apart—they seldom or never saw each other. But it was decided to hold a domestic reunion on Granny's ninetieth birthday. The six children who had left the old home were to return to it for that great day. Mother had the greatest distance to travel—over three thousand miles—and was due to arrive on the Friday evening; the birthday was on a Saturday.

'On Friday morning, Granny said that she was very, very tired—terribly tired—she even hesitated as to whether or not she would rise. Auntie stared in bewilderment; never once in all the years had the Iron Duchess kept her bed. But perhaps, Auntie reasoned, the excitement of so many home-comings had overtaxed the old lady's strength; an hour or two's extra rest would probably restore her.

'"What time will Cathie be here?" she inquired later, in reference to Mother's arrival.

'"She'll be here at nine o'clock to-night, dearie," Auntie replied, soothingly.

'"Nine o'clock to-night," the Duchess repeated, a little sadly, "it's a long, long time: I don't know if I can wait until then!"

'They were not quite clear as to her meaning; but they did all that they could to rally and cheer her. She rose at about ten, crept softly out to the veranda and asked for her knitting. She let it lie untouched upon her lap, however, and was content to sit listening to the chatter of her children, and, they fancied, listening also to voices that they did not hear.

‘“Nine o’clock!” she murmured, softly, from time to time; “nine o’clock! It’s a long, long time!”

‘“Bring me a cup of tea, dear,” she said to her eldest daughter in the late afternoon, “there’s nothing like a good cup of tea! I fancy that a cup of tea will help me to hold out!” And, although they had enjoyed afternoon-tea only an hour before, the cup was brought.

‘“Nine o’clock!” she said again, apparently speaking to herself, “it’s a long while to wait! But I must try to manage it!”

‘During the evening she seemed more completely herself and asked several questions about the grandchildren whom she could never hope to see, and then rambled back into the old days when her own lads and lasses were around her.

‘At last nine o’clock came, and, very shortly afterwards, Mother arrived. Granny rose to receive her, twined her thin little arms about Mother’s neck and kissed her fondly. Then, for a few minutes, she resumed her seat in the corner.

‘“And now, children,” she presently exclaimed, “I’m going to bed. I’m so tired—so very, *very* tired!”

‘An hour later, the group at the fireside broke up. Auntie went as usual into Granny’s room to see that the candle was out and that everything was right for the night. The first thing that impressed her was the intense and unnatural quiet. She turned anxiously to the bed; and there lay Granny, just like a beautiful recumbent statue! She had evidently fallen asleep and slipped away almost immediately. She had set herself with that iron will of hers to wait for Mother; and, as soon as Mother had come, she just let herself go!

‘On the Saturday—her ninetieth birthday—they laid her to rest under the rata. By this time a road had been opened to Ruahine, and, strictly speaking, she should have been interred in the little cemetery there. But, in the circumstances, the authorities waived their objections to burials on private property; and so she sleeps where she would have loved to sleep. And they say that, when the rata is in bloom, and the graves strewn with the brilliant petals, few burying-places could look more lovely.’

As she concluded her recital, we noticed with a start that the sun was low enough to peep in under the veranda; so, taking a hurried leave, we made our way back to the car, and were soon speeding merrily along the road towards Brisbane. We felt like men who had struck unexpected treasure. I thought when I set out that morning that the day would probably bring me experiences that

would hang new pictures in the galleries of memory; but I little dreamed that it would add yet another glowing chapter to the gallant records of the New Zealand pioneers.

Chapter 19

ROMANCE

From *My Pilgrimage*

The first threads that a man fingers in the course of his ministry have an astonishing way of weaving themselves into the fabric of his entire life. It is forty-five years since I settled at Mosgiel; it is more than thirty-three since I left it; yet I meet Mosgiel in some form or other every day of my life. Let me illustrate my meaning.

After two months on the Taieri Plain I found myself kneeling beside my first convert. She was a girl of about eighteen who had never until then associated herself with that or any other congregation. Arrested by something that I had said on the Sunday, she had come to assure me of her earnest desire to follow Christ. She told me her story with deep emotion but with a clear undertone of robust conviction: she made me feel that her reason as well as her heart had been captured.

When, at the next meeting of those grave old officers of mine, I submitted the girl's name as a candidate for membership, there was much lifting of eyebrows and shaking of heads. They all knew her, or knew of her, but not in connection with any religious propensities. She had earned in the township a reputation of gaiety, vivacity, frivolity. Her sudden craving for Christian fellowship represented an entirely new development and one that must be treated, if not with suspicion, at least with caution. I pleaded in vain that I had witnessed her tears, listened to her contrite confession, and heard the agonized cry of her inmost heart. It was of no avail. In their zeal for the honor of the church, these stalwarts felt that they

could take no risks. The candidate must be submitted to a probation of three months.

She not only survived the ordeal; she came through with flying colors. Long before the three months had passed, her bearing and behavior had convinced everybody of her sincerity. At the first Communion service after the expiration of her probationary period, she was most warmly welcomed to the fellowship of the church, and, all through the years of my ministry, she adorned her profession by a life of beautiful consistency and rare consecration.

This, of course, was many years ago. But, quite recently, I chanced to attend a service at which a young lady was set apart for missionary service in India. All who knew her bore witness to the fine devotion and outstanding gifts that she was bringing to her Indian ministry. And, as I listened, I discovered with an indescribable thrill that the outgoing missionary was the daughter of that first Mosgiel convert!

Few things have impressed me more, in the course of the years, than this element of fruitfulness in Christian service. Every word uttered and every deed done has, as the first chapter of Genesis would say, *its seed in itself*; and, although its germination and fructification and multiplication may be difficult to trace, the processes are sure.

There rushes back to mind, as I pursue this line of reflection, a night on which I was compelled to return from Dunedin to Mosgiel by the late train—the terrible train that left town at eleven twenty. Cooling my heels on the bleak and deserted platform, I felt depressed and miserable. When at length the train started, I found myself sharing with one companion a long compartment, with doors at either extremity and seats along the sides, capable of accommodating fifty people. He sat at one end and I at the other. I expect that I looked to him as woebegone and disconsolate as he looked to me. The train rumbled on through the night. The light was too dim to permit of reading; the jolting was too violent to permit of sleeping; and I was just about to record a solemn vow never to again accept city engagements when a curious line of thought captivated me.

'Here I am,' I said to myself, 'on this out-of-the-way New Zealand railway at the dead of night! I can't read: I can't rest: I can do nothing: but I can talk! And there, huddled up in that far corner of the selfsame compartment, is another belated unfortunate who

can neither read nor sleep, and who, quite possibly, might like to beguile the time with conversation.'

And then it flashed upon me, not only that I *could* do it, but that I *should* do it.

'We two,' I continued, resuming my comfortless soliloquy, 'we two have been thrown together for an hour or more in this outlandish way, in this outlandish place, at this outlandish time. We have never seen each other before. We shall never see each other again until we meet on the Day of Judgment. What right have I to let him go his way as though our tracks had never crossed? Is the glorious message that, on Sundays, I deliver to my people, intended exclusively for *them*? And is it only to be delivered on *Sundays*?'

The burden of the responsibility grew more and more heavy. I could no longer resist the impulse that burned within me. The train stopped for lengthy shunting operations at Burnside. I stepped out on to the platform and walked up and down for a few moments, inhaling the fresh mountain air. I pulled myself together. I wanted to have all my wits about me and to be at my best. The engine shrieked; and, on returning to the compartment, I was careful to re-enter it by the door near which my companion was sitting. I took the seat immediately facing him. I then saw that he was quite a young fellow, probably a farmer's son. We soon struck up a pleasant conversation, and then, having created an atmosphere, I expressed the hope that we were fellow-travellers on life's greater journey.

'It's strange that you should ask me that,' he said. 'I've been thinking a lot about such things lately.'

We became so engrossed in our conversation that the train had been standing a minute or so at Mosgiel before we realized that we had reached our destination. I found that our ways took us in a diametrically opposite direction. He had a long walk ahead of him.

'Well,' I said, in taking farewell of him, 'you may see your way to a decision as you make your way along the road. If so, remember that you need no one to help you. Lift up your heart to the Savior; He will understand!'

We parted with a warm handclasp. Long before I reached the manse I was biting my lips at having omitted to take his name and address. But it was too late: he was gone.

Five years passed. One Monday morning I was seated in the train for Dunedin. The compartment was nearly full. Between Abbotsford and Burnside the door at one end of the carriage

opened, and a tall, dark man came through, handing each passenger a neat little pamphlet. He gave me a copy of *Safety, Certainty, and Enjoyment*. I looked up to thank him, and, as our eyes met, he recognized me.

'Why,' he exclaimed, 'you're the very man!'

I made room for him to sit beside me. I told him that his face seemed familiar, although I could not recall a previous meeting.

'Why,' he said, 'don't you remember that night in the train? You told me, if I saw my way to a decision, to lift up my heart to the Savior on the road. And I did. I've felt sorry ever since that I didn't ask who you were, so that I could come and tell you. But, as the light came to me through a railway journey, I have always tried to do as much good as possible when I have had occasion to travel. I can't speak to people as you spoke to me; but I always bring a packet of booklets with me.'

It was my turn to feel some emotion, but there was little time for sentiment. He suddenly prepared to leave me.

'You must excuse me,' he said, grasping my hand in farewell; 'we are nearly there; and there are two more carriages in front into which I have not been. Good-bye!'

And that was the last that I ever saw of him. But the memory of him has often cheered me with the conviction that many of our daily ministries, apparently futile, are really much more fruitful than they seem.

Another experience into which an element of romance entered concerns the visit to New Zealand of Dr. Harry Grattan Guinness. I had met Dr. Guinness in London, not as an evangelist, nor as a missionary, but as a cricketer. I had watched a match that his opponents must have won but for the fact that he opened the innings for his side and was still undefeated when the last wicket fell.

During Dr. Harry Grattan Guinness' mission in Dunedin, I was unable to attend any of the earlier meetings, but I saw that the series was to conclude with a couple of illustrated lectures, one on South America and the other on the Congo. I promised myself at least one of these; and, on the night of the South American lecture, I set off for the city. The lecture and the pictures far exceeded my anticipations. I was delighted and resolved to return on the morrow.

On my way to the station next evening, I chanced to meet the Mayor of our little municipality. To this hour I cannot tell why

I acted as I did; some strange impulse suddenly laid its hand upon me; and, before I realized what I was doing, I was pressing him to accompany me! He was the last man on earth whom you would think of inviting to a missionary lecture.

'You ought to come, sir,' I was saying. 'I went last night, and did not mean to go again; but the lecture was simply splendid and the pictures were magnificent. I am sure you would enjoy it.'

To my astonishment, he accepted my invitation, and, side by side, we made our way to the station. I spent most of the time in the train wondering by what strange impulse I had asked His Worship to join me. That riddle was still unread when we reached the theater. It was filling fast. Surveying the crowd, we noticed a couple of vacant seats about half-way up the area and slipped into them.

As on the previous evening, the lecture was most interesting, whilst the pictures were among the best of the kind that I have ever seen. For all practical purposes we had left New Zealand miles behind and were in the wilds of Central Africa. An occasional side-glance at my companion told me that he was as interested as I was. Then, suddenly, a change came over the spirit of our dream.

'I propose to now show you,' said the lecturer, 'the photographs of some of the men who have laid down their lives on the Congo.'

I was afraid that this purely missionary aspect of African life would possess less interest for my friend, and I was prepared for yawns and other indications of boredom. The colored pictures of African scenery gave place to the portrait of a fine young fellow in the prime of early manhood. To my utter amazement, my companion almost sprang from his seat, grasped the back of the chair in front of him, and stared at the screen with strained and terrible intensity.

'It's my boy!' he cried, loudly enough to be heard some distance away. 'It's my boy! That's my boy!'

I naturally supposed that he had been affected by some curious similarity of appearance. Fortunately, his agitation had not been noticed from the platform, and the lecturer went on.

'This,' he said, 'is a young fellow named—, who came to us as an engineer to superintend the construction of our mission steamer…' The name was the name of the Mayor!

'It's my boy!' he cried, overcome now by uncontrollable emotion. 'It's my boy, my poor boy!'

Neither of us had eyes or ears for anything that followed. The Mayor sat beside me, his face buried in his hands, swaying from side to side in silent agony. Every now and again he would start up and I had the greatest difficulty in restraining him from rushing to the platform to ask more about his dead son. Sitting there beside him, it came back to me that he had once told me of a boy who ran away from home and went to London. 'We were too angry at the time to answer his letters,' he had said, 'and so, after awhile, he gave up writing, and we lost all trace of him.' When the vast crowd melted away that night, I took my companion to the lecturer's room and introduced them to each other. The identity of the fallen missionary was established beyond all doubt, and Dr. Grattan Guinness arranged to come out to Mosgiel and spend the next day with the Mayor and his wife, which he did.

Chapter 20

THE UNDERSTUDY

From *A Witch's Brewing*

Amidst scenes of extraordinary enthusiasm, a very popular musical comedy reached its final performance at one of our great Melbourne theatres on Saturday night. The phenomenal run of this play has established a record for Australia; but it is not this fact that attracts me as I approach my desk this morning. I am impressed, rather, by the circumstance that, in congratulating the actors and actresses on their triumph, the newspapers emphasize one particularly interesting circumstance. The principal actress, it seems, had an understudy whose duty it was to hold herself in readiness to take the name-part in the play at a moment's notice. For more than a year, however, the leading lady took her place at every performance—afternoons and evenings. A few minutes before the time arrived for each presentation of the play, the understudy visited the theatre. 'Is Miss Bennett quite all right?' she inquired with monotonous regularity, and, with equally monotonous regularity, it was assured that her assistance would not be required. This, in itself, was remarkable; but this was not all.

For, after *Rose Marie* had run its hectic course for more than twelve months, the leading lady suddenly failed. On the arrival of the understudy at the stage door, she was told to dress at once for the principal part; and, to the surprise and delight of the entire cast, she romped through the performance with such ease and verve and skill that very few people in the crowded building suspected that the principal role was being taken, not by the leading lady herself, but

by Marie Bremmer, the understudy!

This struck me as being very notable—creditable alike to the principal actress and to her understudy—and when, early last evening, my genial friend, Mr. Gordon Crisp, dropped in for a chat, I casually mentioned the fact to him. Mr. Crisp is an outstanding figure in the commercial life of the city; and, as soon as I introduced the theme, he gave it a turn for which I was quite unprepared.

'Splendid!' he exclaimed, slapping his knee in an ecstasy of enthusiasm. 'Splendid! That's the doctrine I've been preaching for years, but I can get nobody to pay much heed to it!'

Too blind at the moment to discern anything in this theatrical record that could reasonably be denominated 'a doctrine,' I begged my ardent companion to be a little more explicit.

'Well,' he explained, removing the ashes from his cigar, 'it's one of the fundamental principles of the business world that a man should provide against all kinds of contingencies that must—or may—arise. Recognizing the devastation that may be wrought by fire, the loss that may be sustained through the depredations of a dishonest servant or the intrusion of a thief, men take out fire policies, fidelity policies, burglary policies, and what not? Why, even if we make a business trip in the car, we foresee the possibility of vexatious delay caused by a puncture on the road, and arm ourselves with a good spare wheel. And yet, although every man knows that he cannot possibly go on for ever, very few of us take the trouble to train younger men in the tasks and duties that we are at present performing!'

'Is it not possible,' I ventured to suggest, 'that self-interest has something to do with it? Men in high office—managers, secretaries and the like—may not unnaturally feel it a somewhat risky experiment to equip younger men to occupy their own positions. The directors of the company might argue that, if the younger man now knows all that his senior can teach him, in addition to all that his own observation has revealed to him, he is likely to make a more alert and vigorous and successful chief than the veteran who at present fills the post.'

'Well, there's that about it, of course,' my friend hesitatingly admitted, 'but in this world you never get anything without hazarding something. Risk is the essence of commercial enterprise. You can't make omelets without breaking eggs. It is conceivable that the directors of a company might penalize a manager or secretary

for building up the future prosperity of their concern. But it is at least equally possible that they might feel that a manager who had the foresight, the sagacity, the breadth of vision, and the largeness of mind to guard them against loss or embarrassment through his sudden death or ultimate retirement, was the kind of man with whose services they could not afford to dispose.'

At that moment the clock struck, and Mr. Crisp, recalling an engagement, rose to take his leave.

'I should like you to think about it,' he urged, as he extended his hand; 'it may give you an idea for an essay. Personally, I'm bound to say that I've found the discovery and training of understudies one of the most interesting parts of my work. You see,' he continued, leaning back against the mantelpiece with the air of a man who has found a congenial theme and is loath to drop it, 'you see, it does not follow that the highly-placed and highly-paid officials on a staff are the best men to succeed the present heads. Men often work their way up to lofty positions in a company's employment through sheer length of service or through the display of gifts that do not in themselves connote special administrative ability. If I remember rightly, it was said of Napoleon that a great part of his success was due to the quickness with which he discovered potential generals in drummer-boys and privates. In every big factory there are youths who, by no means brilliant in technique, and unlikely to win swift promotion along the lines of the ordinary routine, nevertheless display an ingenuity, an originality, and a sound commonsense that indicate the possession of rare executive ability. I assure you that I have found half the enjoyment of my business career in keeping a weather-eye always open for youngsters of this stamp, and in selecting from among them an understudy to take my place when the day comes for me to quit.'

My friend left me and went out into the night. But he had enriched me by his visit. For the rest of the evening my book lay neglected by my side: my mind was deep in this matter of understudies. I do not wonder now that my friend's face shone as he spoke of the joy that he had found in discovering, among younger men, potential understudies and successors. For, on reflection, I have come to see that his delight represents the gratification of one of the deepest and most passionate cravings of which humanity is capable. It is akin to a man's yearning for a child of his own body, to a woman's silent but ceaseless longing for motherhood.

All this reminds me, as so many things do, of my old friend, John Broadbanks of Silverstream. I had driven over from Mosgiel one bitterly cold night in July to see him concerning some evangelistic meetings that we were planning to hold across the Plain. He was not at home; and, whilst I awaited his return, Lilian entertained me beside a roaring fire. She was showing me some family portraits, and, among them, came upon a photograph of an elderly minister.

'That was old Mr. Snowfield,' she explained; 'has John ever told you about him?' I confessed that the name suggested no story to my mind.

'Perhaps not,' Lilian went on. 'Indeed, now that I come to think of it, he couldn't very well tell the story himself; so I suppose he said nothing about it, even to you. Mr. Snowfield was for many years the minister of the church in which John and I first met; a cultured, saintly, lovable little man. It was the supreme sorrow of his life that he had no son; the circumstance made him very gentle and very patient in dealing with the boys of the congregation. He loved them all, but he was particularly fond of John. As a small boy, John had a wonderful face: everybody noticed it. It reminded me at one stage of the seraph-faces that you see in medieval paintings; and, at a later stage, of the pictures of the boy Jesus in the midst of the doctors. It was an innocent, pretty, thoughtful face, with very large wondering eyes. Those eyes could twinkle with mischief at times, just as they still do; but you would never have suspected it if you had seen him listening to Mr. Snowfield in the church. When he discovered that I was spending a good deal of my time in John's company, Mr. Snowfield whispered laughingly: "I don't wonder that you have fallen in love with him: I fell in love with him myself, *long before you did*!" He said it with a quaint little chuckle: but I noticed that his eyes were shining suspiciously: and I knew that his heart was full. Not until after our marriage did I discover all that had passed between John and him. I see now that the sadness of having no son to succeed him in the ministry, and to inherit the wealth of wisdom that his ripe experience had taught him, weighed increasingly upon him as he felt himself growing older. All at once, he set his whole heart upon John. If only John would become a minister! John assures me that he never argued or pleaded; but he always led the conversation round to the theme that filled him with ceaseless longing. The glory of the ministry!

Its toil—but its reward! Its sorrows—but its compensations! Its drudgery—but is sacred triumphs! He abounded in stories of the manse—romantic stories, adventurous stories, stories full of pathos and grandeur. Every conversation tended to exalt the ministerial life as unspeakably beautiful, unselfish, and sublime. He lent John biographies of the most heroic and gracious ministers of earlier days, and lovingly discussed the volumes with him after he had read them. John has often told me how, at that stage, he shrank from the thought of the ministry and wished that the good old man would talk on more enticing themes. John had ambitions in a very different direction. Little by little, however, Mr. Snowfield gained his point. In spite of himself, John began to think wistfully of the ministry. I remember noticing the change in his attitude towards it. To Mr. Snowfield's great delight, he at length applied to college, and was, of course, accepted. It was then that the thing happened of which John seldom speaks. To Mr. Snowfield it was a most momentous period. He arranged, on the Sunday evening before John entered college, a solemn dedication service should be held in our little church. He preached a special sermon on *The Glory of the Ministry*. I forget the sermon—I was only a girl at the time—but I shall never forget the prayer. His heart seemed to be overflowing in gratitude and yearning. At the close of the service he slipped his arm through John's and led him to the vestry. "I really think," he said, as he bade John good-night, "I really think that this is the happiest night of my life!" And, to John's astonishment, the old gentleman drew John to him and tenderly, almost reverently, kissed him! "God bless you, my boy!" he said, as he turned away to hide his deep emotion.

'That night he told his daughter—his wife had died many years earlier—that he was happier than mortals ever deserved to be, perhaps also a little excited. "I cannot expect to sleep for some time," he added, "so, if I'm not down at my usual time, don't disturb me! He was *not* down at his usual time. When they entered his room, he seemed to be quietly sleeping, a smile of perfect serenity upon his upturned face. He was gone! John had always felt that, on that never-to-be-forgotten night, the mantle of the old prophet fell upon his young shoulders. And, when he and I are by ourselves, he often prays that he may be kept true to those ministerial ideals and traditions with which, in his boyhood's days, Mr. Snowfield stored his hungry mind and fired his eager soul.' There was a commotion in the hall, and John entered, putting an abrupt end to his wife's

recital.

Some evening I must return the call of my friend, Mr. Gordon Crisp, and tell him this story by way of amplifying and illustrating the excellent suggestion with which he so generously provided me.

Chapter 21

THE PASSING OF JOHN BROADBANKS

From *The Passing of John Broadbanks*

The population of the world seemed reduced that day to *one*. It was a Sunday, and one of the loveliest Sundays of the whole round year. The date is indelibly recorded. For years I have made a note of the exact day on which the elms around the house, having attired themselves in all the bravery of their new spring dresses, have curtained from me every object lying beyond themselves. During the winter they are diaphanous: I see the houses and the street as plainly as though the elms were not there. But spring-time makes them jealous, and they insist on my fastening my admiring gaze on them and on them alone. For three successive years the date has been the same. On the eleventh of September my eye has been able, at one or two places, to pierce the graceful drapery of the soft green foliage; but on September the twelfth it has been impossible.

This was the experience that greeted me on waking to the loveliness of that memorable Sunday morning. I was early at the window. The garden was bathed in the rich, luxurious sunshine. The air seemed quivering with the delicious trill of spring-time. The bees were already busy among the azaleas. The song of the birds alone broke the perfect Sabbatic quiet. A thrush was splitting his throat in a wattle over the way. A butterfly went dancing across the lawn and tracted his glorious wings in the ecstasy of being alive on such a golden morning. I felt that I, too, ought to be extremely happy; but honesty compelled me to confess to myself that I was *not*.

I had a vague feeling that something was wrong. It clung to me all through the day. I reminded myself a score of times that I was

well; that I had every cause for gladness and none for anxiety; but it was of no avail. People startled me by commenting on the beauty of the day. I replied with hesitation. I seemed to have registered an impression that the sky was overcast and gloomy; and it was only when the observations of my friends compelled me to review the position that I discovered that they were unquestionably right. The day was radiantly fair; yet its splendours were lost upon me. I was puzzled at my own confusion.

John Broadbanks met me everywhere that day. As I sat at the open window, listening to the thrush and admiring the butterfly, my mind flew back to Silverstream, and I conjured up the memory of a very similar morning that I had spent at the manse there with him. When, later on, I went to my desk to put the finishing touches to my pulpit preparation, my eye was arrested by the corner of a letter, written in his familiar hand, peeping out from under a huge pile of correspondence; and, although time was precious, some resistless impulse led me to withdraw it from the heap of papers and to peruse it afresh. There was nothing in it; just a frank and characteristic outpouring of his heart concerning all the places he had visited, the people he had met, the experiences he had encountered, and the books he had read. He gratified me by making numerous references to the walks and talks that we had enjoyed together in the old days. I restored the letter to the heap beside me and focused my attention to my sermon.

And then I found that, in reading the letter, I had not wasted time. For, somehow, I seemed to have caught John's spirit; I looked through his eyes at the theme with which I was about to deal; and, at the last moment, I introduced one or two ideas that would never have entered the sermon but for him. After the service, a lady who had been passing through deep waters thanked me for one of the suggestions that I had thrown out; and it was on the tip of my tongue to repudiate the credit and to attribute the idea to John Broadbanks.

On my way to church in the evening, I fancied, for the fraction of a second, that I saw him in the distance. I instantly rebuked my own stupidity; I reminded myself that *he* was in New Zealand and *I* in Australia, that we had not met for years and were not likely to meet for years to come; and, when the man whose form I had mistaken for *his* drew nearer, it seemed ridiculously unlike him. I only mention such a triviality in order to show how little it took that day to call my old friend most vividly and realistically to

my mind. I could see his stalwart figure everywhere: I could hear the accents of his voice as distinctly as though he had just spoken.

Before retiring for the night, I took from the drawer of my desk the carbon copies of my own letters to him. I read the top one—the latest. It had been posted about a fortnight. I wondered if he had yet received it. 'Perhaps,' I said, and the fancy pleased me, 'perhaps he is reading the original whilst I am glancing at the copy.' As I read on, I came upon a sentence or two that affected me more at that moment than at the time of writing. 'I suppose,' I had said, 'I suppose a man takes the path of safety when he follows the gleam, and certainly the rewards are always ample. Yet he has, at the same time, to pay a heavy penalty. I can never regret having accepted the call which, by bringing me away from New Zealand, tore you and me apart. But, when I recall the times that we spent together in the old days, I seem to have paid a heavy price for the new life that has opened to me. I often wish that we could sit down and have a good long talk about things. Yet, after all, I suppose we are here to *work*; there will be plenty of time for *talk* when it's all over.'

'*When it's all over*!' I replaced the portfolio in the drawer, shut down the desk, switched off the study light and went to bed. '*When it's all over*!' Those words from my own letter beat themselves through my brain as I threaded the misty borderland between waking and sleeping. The re-knitting of severed friendships, the renewal of old experiences, the gathering of life's broken threads *when it's all over*! In the drowsy haze that enfolded the semi-consciousness of that strange night, I fancied that John Broadbanks and I were seated together in the New Zealand bush. The old hill-side seemed wonderfully familiar, and the blue, blue sea spread out before us had not changed in the least. We were discussing the theme on which, an hour or two earlier, I had been preaching. John's remarks were as arresting, as luminous and as suggestive as ever. I felt a sense of exhilaration in his delightful company; and, soothed by that restful satisfaction, I fell fast asleep. So ended that strange September Sunday!

The cablegram arrived next day. On my way out, I had selected a cream rosebud for my buttonhole, and was just cutting it when I heard the click of the gate. I turned and greeted the telegraph boy. '*John died suddenly yesterday—Lilian*.' Was I surprised? I scarcely know. Was I sorry? I cannot say. There is a sense in which death—even the death that has long been expected and that has

crept upon on very gradually—is always a bewildering surprise. The sick man is alive one second and dead the next; and the change is so stupendous that we are never quite prepared for it. How much more astounding, then, must be a swift translation such as this! And yet, I was *not* surprised. The inexplicable experience of the day before—the strangely shadowed sunshine and the persistent emergence of John's personality at every turn—had prepared me for anything. Although he owed me no letter, it would have seemed the most natural thing in the world if, at breakfast-time, the postman had handed me an envelope bearing the Silverstream postmark; I should not have been unduly startled if John himself had suddenly walked in; and even the fatal cablegram did not come upon me like a bolt from the blue.

No, I was not surprised; and, in a way, I was not sorry. One cannot altogether account for his feelings at such a time. The thoughts that surge uninvited into one's mind are a law unto themselves. Somehow I dimly felt that John was nearer to me than he had been for many a long day. 'For years,' I said to myself, 'we have lived our lives a thousand miles apart. And now—.' I had no theory as to where he was. My ideas as to the conditions of life within the veil are of the haziest kind. I only felt that he had escaped from the tyrannies that had so doggedly separated us. It seemed utterly inconceivable that there could be a geographical bar between us any longer. I felt that he was near—nearer than he had been for years—nearer than he could possibly have been had he gone on living at Silverstream—and that indefinable, inexplicable sense of nearness obliterated most of my sorrow.

I grieved for Lilian; it would be difficult for *her* to feel that he was near as he had always been. And then there were his people. I knew how they would miss him. For more than thirty years he had been the central figure in their homes on every day of gladness and sorrow. Everybody loved John, and everybody felt that to love him was a luxury. The younger people could remember no other minister. The brides and bridegrooms of his later years were mere babies when he went to Silverstream; many of them, indeed, had been born after his advent. In matters of crops and cattle, the farmers had implicit confidence in his judgement. Few of them would have dared to buy a horse, or to send a lad to a school or a situation, in the teeth of his advice. When the course of true love failed to run smoothly, it was often his skilful fingers that straightened out

the awkward tangle. He was the trusted custodian of everybody's secrets. Silverstream was his only charge, and if, instead of dying in the fifties, he had lived to be ninety, he would have accepted no call that would have taken him from it.

'I believe in long pastorates,' he said to me one evening, as we sat together on the rocks at the Nuggets, watching the advancing tide swirling about our feet. 'A long pastorate gives an ordinary fellow a chance of doing a decent life-work. Now look at me! I'm no star preacher; I should never have set the Thames on fire along that line. If I move about—a year or two here and a year or two there—I shall never accomplish anything. But if I stay at Silverstream all my days, and do my best to affect each of my people's lives by the cumulative influence which only comes with the passage of years, I may yet do a work that will be equal in value to that of far more brilliant men. I have often noticed that a minister who spends his life in one place gets himself enthroned in the hearts of the people, even though nobody can remember a single sermon that he preached.'

John held true to that youthful ideal, and, as I slipped the cablegram into my pocket, I knew that the lamentations at Silverstream would prove that, in this respect as in so many others, his judgement was wonderfully sound.

There was another reason for the absence of sorrow. I do not know that I thought of it at the time; but I can see now that the very suddenness of John's translation pleased me. It seemed so exquisitely fitting. Lilian knew us both fairly well, and I fancy that some such thought moved her to include the word '*suddenly*' in the cable. She knew that it would gratify me to think of John as unchanged to the last. He was always so sturdy, so vigorous, so robust, that the intervention of a long and wasting sickness would have seemed like an alien element thrusting itself between us. I should have felt that he had entered a realm that seemed foreign to his own nature and to my knowledge of him. But that word reassured me: I was glad to think of John Broadbanks as the same old John Broadbanks to the very end.

'It all happened on Sunday morning,' Lilian said, in the letter that I received a fortnight later. 'As we sat at breakfast with the windows open to the lawn, Don Wylie came to say that his sister, Gladys, had taken a critical turn in the night, and they thought she was rapidly slipping away. All through her long sickness (she has been in consumption for years) John has been to see her once or

twice a week; she was very fond of him; and he could not bear to think that she might pass away without his seeing her again. How little we dreamed that he and she were both to go home on the same day, and that *he* was going to go first! He left the table; completed his preparations for the morning service; took his notes into the vestry in case he had not time to come to the manse on his return; and then set out for the Wylie's cottage. You will remember the place; you have described it in one of your books; you went to it once with John. He must have stayed longer than he intended, and, as a result, had to hurry back. The rush, added to the emotional strain of taking farewell of Gladys, as well as the anxiety as to whether he would be in time for the service, was too much for him. He was looking very pale, the officers say, when he arrived at the vestry. He just smiled; walked round to his big armchair; threw himself into it; and was gone. God had "laid His hand upon his heart and healed it forever."

'I cannot write as fully as I should like: you will understand; but I knew that John would have wished me to tell you everything. We all had such a happy time together on Saturday: Goldilocks was home; and as it happened, your letter arrived at dinner-time. John read bits of it aloud, especially the sentence in which you said that you would love to sit down and have a good long talk with him, but that there would be plenty of time for that *when it was all over*. John was very much struck with that remark; it was strange that you should have made it in that particular letter.

'John loved to dwell upon your friendship. He used to laugh and say that he would do something to offend you in order to prevent you from writing anything more about him. He thought you made far too much of him. People, he said, would be asking the way to Silverstream, and would be horrified to find that John Broadbanks was such a very ordinary mortal.

'Everybody—the ministers especially—wished that you could have conducted the funeral; but Mr. Sidwell, of Balclutha, who had known John for many years, was very kind. He referred to you and to your admiration and affection for John; and he quoted many beautiful tributes that he had heard paid to John's character. He described John as a minister who knew how to mind his own business. He never attacked or criticized others; he seldom meddled in matters outside of his own proper sphere; he did not hanker after office or prominence or publicity; he raised no dust. He dwelt among his own people; he made up his mind that it was his business in life

to be a good minister of Jesus Christ; and he was never so happy as when bringing the members of his congregation into closer touch with Him. You and I know how richly such words were deserved. John used to speak of himself as ordinary; but he was *not* ordinary. As you have said in your books, he could have secured great fame and wide popularity if he had courted it; but he deliberately chose the better, and the quieter, part.'

So ends the letter. And so, for the time being, ends my fellowship with John Broadbanks. A massive human, sharing to the full the interests, the excitements, and the emotions of his fellowmen, he dwelt in the secret place of the Most High and abode in the shadow of the Almighty. A prophet in his sensitiveness to the immanence of the Unseen; a prince in his magnet authority over individuals and assemblies, he walked with men and walked with God. He was above all else a good minister of Jesus Christ. For many long, long years to come his name will be cherished, like a fragrant and beautiful tradition, by those whose homes have been brightened, and whose loads have been lightened, by the tenderness, the chivalry, and the courage of his rich and noble ministry.

As I let Lilian's letter flutter from my hand to the desk, my mind swung to the words with which Charles Dickens closes the greatest of his stories. He makes David Copperfield refer to Agnes, the soul of his soul, as '*still near me, pointing upward*.' It is the finest expression known to me of the abiding influence of a valued friendship. When the first cream blossoms come to the rose-tree by the gate; when the bees are busy in the azaleas; when the elms have donned their impenetrable summer foliage; and when the thrush is calling, calling from the wattle over the way, I shall look with new eyes and listen with new ears. For the thrush will be telling me of John Broadbanks; he will be telling me that he is *still near me*; he will be telling me that he is *still near me, pointing upward*!

Chapter 22

SHADOWS

From *My Pilgrimage*

Those twelve years at Mosgiel were punctuated by poignant moments at the manse. A few months before our first child was born we arranged for a glorious holiday amidst the snow-capped summits and blue waters of the New Zealand lake country. One afternoon we landed from our boat for afternoon-tea on the shores of Lake Wakatipu. Although we carefully extinguished our picnic fire, a spark from it must first have blown into the dry grass of a near-by orchard. We were sued for heavy damages, spent most of our holiday in interviewing lawyers and witnesses, and, although the case was settled out of court, it swallowed up every penny that we possessed—money that we had dreamed of spending in much more romantic ways.

Then, after eighteen months of wedded felicity, a little girl crept into our home, destined herself to become the mistress of the manse. And, five years later, a sister was born to her. This, of course, was joy upon you. But, following each birth, the mother went down into the valley of the shadow and remained there for many dark and dreadful months. On one occasion, at least, all hope of recovery was abandoned. I shudder still as I recall a day—a few weeks after I had first known the bliss of parentage—on which the doctors, consulting in my study, bade me brace myself for a desolating bereavement. There was, they averred, no hope at all. On the following day—a Sunday—special supplications for my dear patient were offered in all the churches in the neighborhood, and, to my unutterable relief, those prayers were mercifully answered.

Mosgiel taught me, among other things, the futility of controversy. One pleasant recompense for the natural aloofness of the little town was the fact that busy people in the city found it an attractive retreat. Among those who occasionally honored our manse with a visit was a saintly old minister—a man of extraordinary vivacity and charm. Everybody loved him. His *father* was one of London's outstanding preachers a century ago; his *son* has since rendered heroic services to missionary enterprise in India; whilst he himself was, in his earlier days, one of Australia's most valiant pioneers. Away up in New South Wales and in Queensland I have met old men whose faces lit up and whose eyes moistened on learning that, in my Mosgiel days, I often drew this Greatheart to my fireside.

I can see him now; his slight and nimble figure; his restless, quickly-moving hands; his eager face with its white, pointed beard; his piercing eyes that caught fire under the excitement that he so frequently displayed. What tales he could tell! And with what eloquence and fervor he would tell them! He held us spellbound for hours at a time. Once engrossed in these romantic reminiscences, he was lost to all the world. The only interruption arose from the intensity of his own emotion. As he told of something that had deeply moved him in the rough-and-tumble days that he loved to recall, his voice would become husky; he would hesitate and pause; and then, rising, would pace the room for a moment, touching his eyes with his handkerchief.

'Forgive me,' he would say, as he resumed his seat. 'Very silly of me—an old man's weakness! But, as I was saying—' And away he would go once more.

None of our visitors were more welcome than he. We became deeply attached to him; loved to hear that he was coming; and, long after his departure, cherished the memory of his day.

But there came a fairly lengthy period during which no such felicity was ours. Sad to say, I mortally offended him. More than that, I wounded him—wounded him deeply. It was on this wise. We became involved in a newspaper controversy. On some social question, I had, in an official capacity, taken a course which he strongly disapproved. He wrote to the Press, vigorously protesting. So far, everything was in order. I had no reason to be ashamed of *my* action; he had no reason to be ashamed of *his*. I was perfectly entitled to follow the line that I had pursued; he was perfectly

entitled to utter his soul in protest. If the thing had begun and ended there, all would have been well.

Unfortunately for both of us, in inditing his protest, he marshaled facts and figures. Some of his statistics, it was easy to show, were wrong. The temptation was too much for me. In a weak moment I replied to his letter, exposing his blunder and pouring all my arrows through this gaping defect in his armor. He wrote again and again, dealing with the general question. To each epistle I replied, disdaining to touch the general question until he had confessed frankly that the figures on which he had founded his contention were false.

The silly thing fizzled out at last, of course, as all such silly things will. But I noticed that, when we met, my old friend treated me with frigid reserve, icily spurning my suggestion that he should return to his chair by our fireside.

I was naturally unhappy. And, being unhappy, the matter preyed upon my mind. The more I pondered it, the more clearly I saw the error of my ways. My official action was unexceptionable; the contention in my newspaper letters was unassailable; and yet—Who was *I* to write as I had done concerning *him*? I was but a stripling; he bore the honorable scars of long and valiant service; his grey hairs were literally a crown of glory; he had achieved, before I was born, exploits that I could never hope to equal. He had written to the paper on a subject on which he felt profoundly; it was a matter on which I had no deep conviction at all. He had poured his very soul into his letters; my smart replies were simply calculated to pillory him and to make him appear ridiculous.

The affair reached a crisis when I found myself preparing to visit England. I should be away the greater part of a year. Anything might happen to an old man during those months. I was unwilling to set sail with this wretched business upon my conscience. I therefore attended a meeting at which I knew that he would be present. The business concluded, I stepped across to him, took his arm and led him out on to the lawn. I told him frankly that, as to my original action, I had no regrets at all. But, I added, I had regrets—the most poignant and bitter regrets—at having written to the paper. 'You were perfectly entitled to your protest,' I said, 'and I should have let it go at that.' I asked his forgiveness; he seized my hand between his two; and, always a little emotional, he burst into tears.

Before we left for the Homeland, he came out and spent an

unforgettable evening at the manse. It was the most wonderful night that he ever gave us. It seemed as if he had kept all his choicest stories to the last. And when, after supper, I handed him the Bible, he read the One Hundred and Twenty-first Psalm and then led us in a prayer that seemed to enfold us like a benediction during the welter of wandering that followed.

It was the last we ever saw of him. When, returning to New Zealand, I found his place empty, I secretly vowed that I would never again allow myself to become entangled in public controversy. During the years, I have often listened to animated debates in which I longed to intervene, and have followed newspaper discussions into which my pen itched to plunge. Straining at the leash, I once or twice violated—in the spirit if not in the letter—my early pledge; but never once without feeling afterwards the pangs of shame and remorse.

Towards the close of 1905, a singular thing happened; the kind of thing that impresses you without your being able to account for the impression. It was a Saturday and I was pottering about in the garden. Suddenly the Angel of the House appeared with a newspaper in her hand.

'Did you notice,' she asked, 'that the church at Hobart in Tasmania has become vacant?'

I had noticed, in a casual way, that the minister of that congregation had resigned; but, as neither place nor people held any interest for me, I had attached no significance to the circumstance. I told my wife so.

'Do you know,' she replied, fastening upon me a gaze of more than her usual earnestness, 'do you know that I have a feeling that *you* will be called to Hobart and that we shall go!'

'But, my dear girl,' I remonstrated, 'I know nobody there, and nobody there knows me! How can you dream of such a thing?'

'I don't know,' she replied, calmly, 'but they'll call you and you'll go! *You see*?'

And, as usual, she was right.

Chapter 23

TRANSPLANTATION

From *My Pilgrimage*

Incredible as it must seem, the invitation to Hobart actually came. To this day I am blissfully ignorant of the circumstances that turned the eyes of the Tasmanian people in my direction. But, be that as it may, the call was extended to me and we were thus involved in a problem of first-class dimensions. Could we bring ourselves to leave Mosgiel, and not only to leave Mosgiel, but to leave New Zealand?

To tell the whole truth, we passed through a long-drawn-out Gethsemane during our last years in the Dominion; and I would do anything in my power to save any other young minister from so excruciating an ordeal. And yet—such is the gracious discipline of life—I learned so much from what I suffered in those days that I would not have missed the experience for all the gold of Mexico.

For the Tasmanian overture was not the first approach that had demanded careful thought. I had been invited to Oamaru, to Wanganui, to Caversham, to Nelson, and to one or two other churches. But, after talking the matter over with each other, we had agreed never to leave Mosgiel unless to take charge of a city church. I argued—may a veil of charity be thrown over my youthful conceit!—that, if I once accepted another church of about the Mosgiel size, I should come to be regarded as a man of that measure and no ampler opportunity would be likely to come my way.

In aspiring to a city church, I was thinking, of course, of the four New Zealand cities—Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin. In these I was well known, whilst, so far as I was aware,

my name had never been heard in any city outside the Dominion. During the later stages of my Mosgiel ministry, the pulpits of Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin each in turn fell vacant. In each case my name was introduced, discussed, submitted—and rejected. I felt no resentment. How could I? After all, I was merely the minister of a small country church, and it had become the established practice of the city churches to send to England for their ministers. I recognized at the time that a call to myself would have been a daring and hazardous experiment. Viewing the experience in the mellow perspective of the years, I am convinced that these churches were rightly guided in the decisions that they then reached. And I am no less certain that the discipline of disappointment did me a world of good. At the same time, the ordeal was a little embarrassing and disturbing, for my people at Mosgiel soon heard of the movements in the larger churches and, by questioning me, made my position extremely uncomfortable.

During the Wellington vacancy, I actually received a telegram from the Church Secretary informing me that a unanimous call was certain, telling me of the date of the meeting and asking me to be prepared with a prompt reply. I was at the post office when it opened on the morning following that meeting in Wellington. The fateful telegram arrived a few minutes later. It was to tell me that another issue had been unexpectedly introduced, and that, whatever happened, it was now extremely unlikely that I should be invited.

The city church in which we ourselves were most interested was, of course, the church in the city nearest us—the church at Hanover Street, Dunedin. During a prolonged interregnum, my name was three times introduced and the speeches made in the city overnight were discussed on the street corners of Mosgiel the next day. At last a vote was taken—by ballot and by post—as to whether the church should call me or send to England. We were, at the hour at which the votes were counted, spending our annual holiday at the Nuggets, a romantic little place on the wild Otago coast. The hour drew near that was to decide our destiny, for we both felt that, if Dunedin rejected me, we must either spend all our days in Mosgiel or else leave the land that we had learned to love. On the morning following the closing of the ballot, I walked four miles along the beach to the nearest post office. The telegram was there! With a trembling hand I tore it open. On a poll of some hundreds, the voting was almost equal—so nearly equal as to compel the officers

to drop both alternatives for the time being. We behaved, I blush to confess, like a pair of silly children. I began to feel like a much-handled and badly-soiled remnant on a bargain-counter. We spent the remainder of that holiday strolling amidst scenes of the most bewitching loveliness with tears in our eyes and fierce rebellion in our hearts. Yet, looking back upon it all, nothing on the horizon of the past stands out more clearly than the fact that, had our dreams been realized, and our desire granted, we should have missed the best all along the line. We can see now, as plainly as if it were written across the skies, that the opening of any of the doors that were then slammed in our faces would have spoiled everything. It would have represented, for us, an irretrievable disaster. Later on, each of the three churches that unconsciously humiliated me in those days did me the honor of approaching me concerning its pulpit. They were delightful people and I could have been perfectly happy with either of the three; but, by that time, I had found my life work; and a return to New Zealand was out of the question.

The unexpected call to Hobart presented an entirely new problem. For it involved, not only a severance from Mosgiel, but a departure from New Zealand. In all our married life we have never faced a question that occasioned us more anxiety than that one. On what principles can a man determine the line of the divine will at so critical a juncture?

I once heard Dr. A. T. Pierson advise the students never to leave one church for another unless they felt both a propelling and an attracting force at work. 'Do not go,' he said, 'unless you distinctly feel a hand pushing you out of your old sphere and distinctly see a finger beckoning you to the new one!' Was I conscious of these dual forces?

I was not tired of Mosgiel; I loved every stick and stone about the place and loved everybody living there. But, after twelve years, I was haunted by a conviction that I was saying very little that I had not said before. Was this feeling, which grew upon me every day, a propelling force such as Dr. Pierson had in mind?

I felt that it would be a wonderful refreshment to minister to a congregation to whom every syllable that I said was new. And it would be an infinite relief to escape the embarrassments that seemed incidental to continued residence in New Zealand. Did such allurements represent the beckoning finger? I could not be certain.

To add to our perplexity, there were two important factors

that seemed to bind us to Mosgiel.

The *first* was the fact that, on the very day on which I had received the call to Hobart, I had been elected, on a popular franchise, to the Licensing Committee. The election had caused considerable excitement; every person over the age of twenty-one had a vote and the poll had been heavy; I had announced that, if successful, I would cancel as many licenses as the law would permit; and, on this pledge, I had been returned. I felt that my departure from the country before I had completed the task for which I had been elected would represent a dereliction of duty, the betrayal of a public trust.

The *second* serious difficulty lay in the fact that, three years earlier, in 1903, the church had made it possible for us, with our two little girls, to visit the Homeland. In the goodness of their hearts they had granted us leave of absence for six months and had presented us with a substantial cheque towards the expenses of the tour. Would it be fair, after accepting so princely a gift at their hands, to lay down my charge?

The first of these obstacles was easily surmounted. The magistrate who presided over the Licensing Bench assured me that the Committee could sit within three months to decide upon the reduction of licenses. The matter in which I was vitally interested could therefore be settled before I resigned my seat.

The other matter was more baffling. If my call to Hobart had been public property, I could have consulted my officers on the point. But not a soul knew of it, and we thought it best to keep the secret to ourselves until our decision had been taken.

For reasons of their own, the officials at Hobart had asked me to let them have my decision not later than Saturday, March 24, and I had promised to respect their wishes in that matter. As that day drew nearer, the issues narrowed themselves down to one. Did the acceptance of the English trip commit me to a prolonged ministry at Mosgiel?

When that Saturday dawned, we were as far from finality as ever. The post office was closed at five o'clock in the afternoon and I was determined, come what might, to hand in my reply by then. In my confusion I recalled for my comfort a conversation that, during one of his visits to our manse, I had enjoyed with Mr. Doke. One lovely morning we were sitting together on the veranda, looking away across the golden plains to the purple and sunlit mountains, when I broached this very question: 'Can a man be quite sure,' I

asked, 'that in the hour of perplexity, he will be rightly led. Can he feel secure against a false step?' I shall never forget his reply. He sprang from his deck-chair and came earnestly towards me. 'I am certain of it,' he exclaimed, 'if he will but *give God time*! Remember *that* as long as you live,' he added entreatingly. '*Give God time*!'

That Saturday afternoon, to add to our distress, a visitor arrived. She stayed until half-past four.

'Come on,' I then said to my wife, 'put on your hat and we'll walk down to the post office. We must send the telegram by five o'clock, whatever happens.'

At five minutes to five we were standing together in the porch of the post office, desperately endeavoring to make up our minds. We were giving God time: would the guidance come? At three minutes to five, Gavin, the church secretary, rode up on a bicycle. He was obviously agitated.

'What do you think I heard in the city this morning?' he questioned eagerly. I assured him that I could form no idea.

'Well,' he replied, his news positively sizzling on his tongue, 'I heard that you have been called to Hobart!'

'It's true enough, Gavin,' I answered, 'but how can we consider such an invitation after your goodness in giving us a trip to England?'

'A trip to England!' he almost shouted. 'Man alive, didn't you earn your trip to England before you went? Why, you're nearly due for another!'

I begged him to excuse me a moment. The clerk at the counter was preparing to close the office. I handed in my telegram and rejoined Gavin, who insisted on taking us home to tea. At his house I wrote out my resignation, asking him to call the officers together at ten o'clock next morning. At the appointed hour they were all in their places. They had come to hear what I had to say: as a matter of fact, I said absolutely nothing: I did not even open the meeting with prayer. In my diary I find this entry: 'In the vestry I cried like a baby and wondered how on earth I should get through the day!' Utterance having failed me, I left the meeting, and Gavin said all that needed saying.

On Monday, June 25, 1906, we sailed on the *Waikare* from New Zealand, and on the Friday morning reached Hobart. All the officers of the church were at the pier to welcome us. I somewhat amused them by standing at the top of the gangway, greeting them

each by name, and introducing them to my wife and children. They insisted that the proceeding was uncanny until I reminded them that, among the documents sent for my information, was a group photograph at the foot of which the names were clearly indicated. In the pleasant atmosphere generated by this trivial incident there were forged a series of friendships that grew firmer and fonder as the years slipped by.

Chapter 24

CAMOUFLAGE

From *The Uttermost Star*

Camouflage is often a mistake. I shall never forget the night on which I said farewell to Mosgiel. The manse—our home through twelve long, happy years—was dismantled; the rooms were almost empty; the walls and floors were bare. The farewell-meeting was held. It was late when I reached home to sleep for the last time under the old roof. Just as I was turning into the gate a figure emerged from the hedge. It was a woman; a young woman who, through all my ministry, had regularly attended the services of the church. She was weeping bitterly. I led her into the empty manse; she sat upon one packing-case, and I upon another.

'Oh, I've been wicked, wicked, wicked!' she cried. 'I've come to church, and gone out again, and I've always pretended that I did not care. And when you spoke to me, I told you that I do not wish to be a Christian or to take any steps towards a holier life. And all the while my heart has been aching—almost breaking. When Communion nights came, and I saw other women remain to partake of it, I felt that I would give the light of my eyes to be able to sit at the Table with them; but I went out into the dark and laughed it off. And when, on other occasions, I saw other women helping in the work, I felt that I would give all I possessed to be helping too. But I went through it, and always said I did not care.' It was a great piece of camouflage; and bitterly did she repent it. We kneeled together on the bare boards, and whilst I prayed her heart uttered itself in sobs of deep contrition. And so I said farewell to my old home and

my old church, and she said farewell to her long, long camouflage! I like to think of that closing episode of my first ministry; and I delight in knowing that, whilst I have been laboring on other shores, she has remained among the most devoted and consistent members of the Mosgiel church.

Chapter 25

EVANGELISM

From *My Pilgrimage*

It was at Hobart that I settled—so far as my own behavior was concerned—one of the most heart-searching questions that I have ever faced. For at Hobart I found myself in a most intense evangelistic atmosphere; and, whilst that atmosphere was altogether congenial to me, it presented problems. For years I had been groping in a haze of uncertainty as to my own attitude towards evangelistic procedure and evangelistic methods. I had the spirit of an evangelist; I had the message of an evangelist; but I lacked the technique of an evangelist. From the day of my ordination to this day, the one passionate desire of my heart has been to lead my hearers to Christ. I have never entered a pulpit without feeling that, if only the people could catch a vision of the Savior, they would have no alternative but to lay their devotion at His feet. My soul has caught fire whenever I have exalted the Cross. I have never in my life been so perfectly happy as when preaching on such texts as *God so loved the world… Behold the Lamb of God…* or *The Son of Man is come to seek and to save that which was lost*. Such themes have captivated my entire being and I have reveled in bringing to their proclamation every faculty that I possess. Yet one thing seemed lacking.

I could never bring myself to follow my pulpit persuasion by any demand for a visible response from my congregations. I saw others hold after-meetings and invite inquirers, whilst all heads were bowed and all eyes closed, to rise to their feet or raise a hand. I had to confess to myself that, whilst this kind of thing was sometimes overdone, it was often done very tactfully and very

effectively. At Hobart it seemed to me that the spirit of the church was so favorable to the attainment of definite results by some such means that I marveled at my own incapacity to give the method a trial. Yet it was as if my lips were holden: I simply could not do it.

One Sunday night in August, 1908, an incident occurred that stirred all my emotions and compelled me to reconsider the whole question. I had preached to a crowded church on the text: *Benaiah the son of Jehoida slew a lion in a pit on a snowy day*. The point was, of course, that, even though a man is confronted by the worst of foes—*a lion*—in the worst of places—*a pit*—under the worst of conditions—*on a snowy day*—a magnificent victory is nevertheless possible. It struck me whilst I was preaching that the sermon was, perhaps, a trifle less appealing, from a strictly evangelistic point of view, than most of my Sunday evening utterances. But, for some inscrutable reason, a preacher can seldom gauge the effect of his words upon his hearers.

Having finished my sermon, I announced the closing hymn. During the singing of the second verse, a woman left her seat, slipped into the aisle on my right, and made her way with bowed head towards the pulpit. My first impression was that she was feeling unwell and was availing herself to the exit door in front of her. To my astonishment, however, she deliberately climbed the steps of the lower platform and knelt, in a passion of tears, at the pulpit stairs. I decided to do nothing in the matter until I had pronounced the benediction; but, during the last verse of the hymn, another woman approached from another part of the church, and knelt at the stairs on my left. Immediately at the close of the service, I led them both to the vestry: they both impressed me by their evident hunger for pardon and peace; and they both became devoted and consistent members of the church.

This event—joyous in itself—led me into a quagmire of perplexity. There were some, in whose judgement I had the most implicit confidence, who argued from it that, if I afforded members of the congregation an opportunity of making some outward response, we might witness similar scenes every Sunday night. I recognized the force of this contention; but I saw, too, that another interpretation could be placed upon the incident. For did it not prove that, even though no gesture is invited by the preacher, people who really desire to give an outward indication of their penitence and faith will find some opportunity of doing so?

In this uncertainty, I felt that, by stubbornly refusing to seek an immediate response, I might be grieving or even quenching the movements of the Holy Spirit. 'By persisting in my old course,' I said to myself, 'I may be losing some who might conceivably be won; whilst, by making the experiment, no great harm can possibly be done.' I did not see my way to apply the new method myself; I felt that, since the idea was secretly repugnant to me, it could scarcely be fruitful to my hands; but I had in my congregation a most excellent man who had all the gifts, the experience and the training required for such delicate work. Mr. V. W. Brame had, some years before, been an officer at the Salvation Army: he held an important commercial position in the city, but he retained undiminished his earlier passion for souls. I went to see him, explained my difficulty, and asked him, at the close of each evening service, to conduct an after-meeting. He did it as wisely and as well as it was possible for any man to do it; but we all felt that it was not a success, and, in the absence of its success, we found ourselves returning to our homes on Sunday evenings nursing a sense of defeat that we should never have known had no after-meeting been held. I therefore decided, once and for all, that no man can lay down laws for any other man. I realize the value in the hands of others of the methods that I have never seen my own way to adopt; yet I realize, too, that my own way was the right way *for me* and that it would have been an affectation on my part had I taken a line that, in the very soul of me, I felt to be out of character.

In the years that followed I only twice—twice in one day—departed from the rule I then adopted: and the story of those two exceptions stands as one of the highlights of my ministerial experience. It happened thus.

One Monday morning, a few years back, there came a ring at the front-door bell. Answering the door, I found myself looking into the face of a young minister for whom I had often preached. As soon as he was seated, he approached his business.

'We had a meeting of all the ministers in our suburb on Saturday night,' he explained, 'and, somehow, the conversation turned to our young people's Bible classes. In each church in the district there is a Bible-class; yet, strange to say, very few of the young men and women who attend these gatherings are members of the churches. The classes meet on Sunday afternoon. So we made up our minds, *next* Sunday afternoon, to get them all together in the

Methodist Church, to hold an earnest evangelistic service, and to appeal to them to commit themselves definitely to a life of Christian discipleship and service.'

'Splendid!' I replied enthusiastically. 'I am sure you are on right lines. I shall be eager to hear of your success!'

'Yes,' he continued with, I fancied, a faint tinge of embarrassment. 'But we are all agreed that *you* are the man to conduct it!'

I assured him that he was mistaken. 'You see,' I explained, 'I am already engaged to conduct services on Sunday morning and Sunday evening; and my doctor and my wife are very averse to my preaching more than twice on any one day. And then there's this: you want a man who knows how to make an appeal—a man who will ask these young people to raise a hand or step out to the front or something of that kind. That seems almost essential, doesn't it?'

He admitted that it did.

'Well,' I went on, 'the trouble is that I have never been able to do that sort of thing: it seems utterly foreign to me whenever I approach it. So be a good fellow and get somebody else!'

A cloud overspread his face: I wondered why. He paused a minute and then dropped a bombshell.

'I am sorry,' he faltered. 'I don't know how to tell you. I suppose we ought not to have done it; but we were so confident that you would accede to our request that we announced you yesterday in all the churches. If you insist on declining, we shall be in a very awkward position!'

I laughed. 'You have certainly put your foot in it,' I said, 'but, now that you have gone so far, I haven't the heart to put you to shame. I'll come; and I'll do my best to lead these young people to decision; but don't be disappointed if I ask for no open response.'

He had to be content with that. When I arrived on the Sunday afternoon, I found, not merely the eighty or ninety young people whom he had led me to expect, but an overflowing congregation. The ministers of all the churches were seated on the platform. The sense of interest and expectancy inspired me. I said and did all that I had planned to say and do until I approached the close of my address. Then a strange feeling took possession of my mind.

'These young people,' I said to myself, 'are ripe for decision. They are waiting for an opportunity of declaring themselves. These ministers and workers are hoping that I will afford them that

opportunity. And why not? Why not?'

By this time I had reached the closing sentences of my address. The feeling that an appeal should certainly be made had grown upon me as I proceeded. I therefore took my resolve. Having concluded my discourse, I closed the Bible, and turning afresh to the congregation, added:

'There are many of you, members of the Bible classes and others, who have never yet taken your stand as followers of Jesus Christ. I feel sure that you wish to do so. I urge you to a courageous and immediate decision. If any of you are prepared to yield yourselves to Christ, as your Savior and King, just rise in your places, and look straight at me, call out "I will!" and remain standing.'

On the instant about a dozen sprang to their feet and called 'I will!'

'I shall not prolong this appeal,' I continued. 'If there are others, let them rise at once.' A few more joined the number already on their feet.

'I shall now pronounce the benediction,' I said, 'and then those of you who are standing will please make your way to one or other of the ministers on the platform, handing in your names for church membership!'

The whole experience thrilled me through and through. In my exultation and excitement I repudiated and condemned the considered judgement of the years. The mistake that I had made! Think of what I had missed! I would repair the tragic blunder without delay! That evening I was advertised to preach at Footscray. On entering that pulpit I looked around my congregation with glowing anticipation. I would duplicate the triumph of the afternoon! I preached the selfsame sermon in the very selfsame way. I was careful to make the various points exactly as I had made them a few hours earlier. I reached the close: I made the appeal: I asked the people to stand and say 'I will!' Like an academy crowded with statues, they stared at me in stony silence.

I drove home from Footscray that night thinking thoughts that do lie too deep for tears. I had learned in the course of that memorable Sunday that the delicate mechanism of the spiritual realm is not operated by clockwork. There is no guarantee that a certain cause will, on two separate occasions, produce automatically the same results. *The wind bloweth where is listeth and thou hearest the*

sound thereof; and only those who are sensitive to the movements of those heavenly currents, and whose ears are attuned to those mysterious vibrations, can enter into the profound secret of celestial guidance and control.

Chapter 26

Married at Midnight

From *The Ivory Spires*

I can recall very few ministerial experiences that have moved me more deeply than that which I am about to record. As Dante accompanied Virgil through Purgatory and through Hell, so a minister is often called to escort his people—and especially his young people—through the abysses of mental and moral anguish upon which no other eyes are permitted to gaze. And, as Dante enriched all literature and all life by describing the awe-inspiring visions that startled him in the course of that terrific adventure, so a minister may sometimes add immeasurably to his usefulness by unfolding with fidelity and restraint the tortures and triumphs that he has been permitted to share.

I

Scanning my congregation one Sunday evening, I was impressed by the earnest and almost strained attention of a young lady in the far corner of the church. I did not know her name. I had only recently noticed that she was attending the services. She was a trim little thing in a neatly-fitting brown costume. She had a wonderful wealth of warm chestnut-coloured hair. She evidently knew it and skillfully arranged everything else to blend with its splendour. Sitting opposite her one day in a crowded tram, I counted ten different shades of brown about her neat attire. I resolved that, if

ever I became familiar with her, I would tease her about it—perhaps call her Miss Brown. Once or twice I managed to shake hands with her, and was strongly tempted to ask her name and address. But, as every angler knows, the best fish are easily frightened. I had lost young people before through seeming too eager to capture them; so I resolved to go warily. I took care to be somewhere near her at times at which it would have been easy for her to speak if she so desired: and I let it go at that.

I afterwards regretted my caution. I suddenly missed her. Sunday followed Sunday; I watched anxiously for her reappearance; every suspicion of brown caught my hungry eye on the instant; but, alas, there was no sign of her! I made such inquiries as were possible; but nobody seemed to know her. Indeed, so unostentatiously had she slipped in and out that very few of those to whom I spoke could recall the particular person to whom my questions were referred. That, as I then thought, was the complete history of 'Miss Brown' so far as we were concerned. She had come and gone without my discovering even her name. She was one of those who appear, nobody knowing whence, and who vanish, nobody knowing whither; and I never expected to look upon her shining hair again.

II

Two years passed. I was sitting in front of the fire late on Saturday night contemplating with mingled feelings of responsibility and delight the services of the coming day. My preparations were as complete as I could make them. Nothing remained but to enjoy a good night's rest in order that I might be at my best when the great day dawned. The rain was lashing at the windows and drumming on the roof; but, since the official forecast confidently promised a fine tomorrow, I listened with that soothing complacency with which loungers by a cosy fire invariably enjoy the murmur of the deluge outside. Suddenly I heard the sounds of wheels. I took it for granted that one of the neighbours had been caught in the rain and had taken shelter in a cab. To my utter amazement, however, the front-door bell rang. Everybody else having retired, I answered it myself.

A cab stood at the gate, and I found myself looking full into the face of a tall young fellow, who seemed, I thought, painfully

agitated. Could he see me for just a moment? I invited him in, hung his wet hat in the hall, and led him to the chair that I had myself occupied a moment earlier. And then, without any introductions or preliminaries, he asked a question that took my breath away.

'How long will it take to be married?' he demanded.

I explained that, as a rule, several days' notice was given in order to make the necessary arrangements and to comply with the formal requirements; the actual service, I added, occupied about half an hour. My quiet answer goaded him into a fury of impatience; and, before I had finished speaking he was on his feet remonstrating against my calm deliberation.

'But I want to be married now—at once—to-night,' he cried, almost fiercely; 'I've told the cab to wait! Oh, *do* come,' he pleaded, passionately, 'and come at once! You'll be sorry as long as you live if you don't!'

I saw that I was dealing with a most exceptional case. Begging him to control himself, I slipped into the study for the register and other official documents. In a few minutes the necessary questions had been asked and answered, the forms completed, and everything made ready for the ceremony. I had scarcely blotted the last line when he again rose, stepped into the hall, took down his hat, and moved towards the front door.

'We haven't a minute to lose,' he muttered, as we jumped into the cab, 'it will break her heart if the baby is born before we get there!'

III

As soon as I stood beside the bed, I saw that I had found at last my elusive little friend with the shining chestnut hair. Somehow she looked younger, perhaps because her long and beautiful tresses, neatly plaided, were now lying across the snowy pillow. There was no time for explanations. The unhappy girl was in the extremity of her distress—mental and physical. Biting her lip and clenching her hands, she turned her face first this way and then that, sometimes burying it in the pillow.

'Be as quick as you can!' said the doctor.

'*Wilt thou*…?' I asked her, as she moaned upon the bed. She

nodded eagerly, and the flickering ghost of a smile in her deep brown eyes told me that, even amidst her terrible ordeal, the ceremony was wonderfully comforting her.

'*Wilt thou*…?' I asked the tall young fellow standing on the other side of the bed.

'Sign here!' I said, placing the pen in her trembling hand. Bravely summoning all her energies for the task, she just managed to complete the signature, and then, exhausted, fell back with a sigh of infinite relief into the kindly arms of the nurse.

I was profoundly thankful that her part in the ceremony was finished. It took less than a minute to obtain the signature of the bridegroom and those of the doctor and the nurse, who served as witnesses. And then, heartily glad that the strange business was over, I tiptoed out of the apartment; and never in my life have I left a room in a more perfect confidence that everybody in it was enormously relieved at seeing the back of me!

The cab was waiting at the door, and, by its help, I regained the fireside in time to hear the clock on the mantelpiece strike twelve. Just for the sake of a moment's relaxation, and in order to compose my mind an hour earlier, I threw myself once more into the big armchair, and, extending my feet towards the dying embers, listened to the rain.

'What comedies and tragedies may come into a man's life,' I said to myself, 'between bedtime and bed!' And, feeling as if I had already dreamed a sad, pathetic dream, I shortly afterwards switched off the last of the lights and bade the world goodnight.

IV

I had asked the bridegroom to call for the certificate on Monday morning, and immediately after breakfast, he arrived.

'This was a most unusual happening,' I remarked; 'I have never known anything quite like it.'

'I suppose not,' he replied: 'but, if you can spare me the time, I should like to tell you how it all came about.'

Ensconced in the chair which he had occupied a few seconds on Saturday night, he quickly plunged into his story. Although embarrassed by his shame, he was evidently gratified at

having done all that could be done to right the grievous wrong that he had perpetuated.

'You see,' he began, hesitatingly, 'I came from the Emu River district a few years ago, and obtained an appointment in the office in which Dulcie was a typist. We were boarding in the same suburb; we went in and out of town each day by the same trains; it was natural that we should strike up a friendship. We neither of us had any of our own people in the city; and we drifted into the way of spending more time than was good for us in each other's society. Then, one night, on reaching my room, I awoke to the realization that I had committed a monstrous and terrible sin—a sin against my own good name, a sin against society, a sin against God, and, most of all, perhaps, a sin against her. What I endured that horrible and interminable night, nobody will ever know. I was mad with shame. I never undressed. I even thought of ending it all in the river, and only the recollection that such a murderous act would darken all *her* days kept me from doing so. I felt that I could not meet her, and, first thing in the morning, I telegraphed some sort of excuse to the office.

'And then an idea occurred to me. "This mood will not last," I said to myself. "If I go back to the office, and take up life again in the same old way, I shall soon feel differently. And, as soon as I feel normally, I shall be exposed to a temptation infinitely more terrible than any I have yet known. For it, in defiance of all the powerful restraints imposed by maidenly delicacy and natural reserve, I have been guilty of this abominable transgression, how can I be sure of myself now that all those providential and protective barriers are broken down?" I decided, for her sake and for my own, to go right away. I was utterly unworthy of her friendship and ought never to cross her path again. Nothing could erase the hideous stain that I had left upon her girlish spirit; but I could at least remove myself from her sight and secure for her that measure of protection. And so I left town that very day, leaving no trace as to my whereabouts.

'But away on the farm there, working under an assumed name, I could think of nothing and of nobody but her. I felt differently from anything that I had ever felt before. I somehow grew fonder of her every day. I knew that I really, purely, devotedly loved her. I wished that I could see her, even at a distance, and longed to hear that she was happy and well.

'And then, last Friday, I *did* hear. A fellow who once worked with me in the city called at the farm and recognized me.

In conversation with him, I mentioned Dulcie's name; I tried to do it as casually as possible; and he told me, with a leer and a chuckle for which I could have killed him, that she had left the office and left it in disgrace! I took the very next train to town; arrived late on Saturday night; and the rest you know!'

I called the young mother a week later. She looked radiantly pretty with her glorious hair streaming about her, and her baby at her breast.

'You have a great and sacred duty to perform,' I said, taking her hand, 'and you must dedicate to it your best powers of heart and mind. It is the most difficult task that will ever be required of you. You must learn to think rightly and to feel rightly about all this. Not on any account whatever must you let the faintest shadow of the things that have happened fall across your baby's life. All your thoughts of him must be sweet and pure and beautiful thoughts; and, whenever your heart warms to him, you must thank God for sending him to you. And you must think just as sweetly and purely and as beautifully of your husband and of your married life. John is extremely fond and extremely proud of you—ever so much fonder than when he went away. You must help each other to forget the past except so far as the memory of it keeps vividly before your minds the grace and wonder of the divine forgiveness, and except so far as it makes you feel very tenderly and very charitably to others who, in days to come, will need just such understanding and just such sympathy as you are specially fitted to offer them. You have sinned, of course, and sinned terribly; you would lose any respect you have for me if I belittled or minimized the enormity of your transgression. And yet which of us hasn't? Sex is life's most baffling problem and nobody ever solved it without making some egregious blunders. And who is to say that the sin that you and John have committed is a blacker offence in the sight of heaven than the sins of which the rest of us are guilty? The smouldering wretchedness of my selfishness and irritability may cause as much misery on earth and as much wrath in heaven as the flaming audacity of youthful passion. I do not know: nobody does. I only know that you must leave your dark experience behind you and thank God every day that *He* has cast it behind *Him*!'

At that moment her tall young husband entered the room and stood on the opposite side of the bed—just where he had stood on that never-to-be-forgotten Saturday night. I repeated something

of what I had been saying and then I suggested that we should kneel, he and I. And, having enjoyed no opportunity of praying with them at their clouded and hasty wedding, I committed my poor little bride and my penitent young bridegroom to the Great Father's care with as full a heart and with as serene a confidence as I had felt at any wedding at which I had ever presided.

V

I never admired anybody more than I admired them, when, a few weeks later, they came and took their places at church. Every Sunday thereafter, one or other or both of them were always there. He is to-day one of the most trusted officers of the church, held in universal honour and affection. And, to young people whose instincts and impulses have proved too tempestuous and rebellious, none have ever ministered more wisely, more helpfully, or more effectively than the couple whom I married on the memorable midnight.

Chapter 27

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

From *Cliffs of Opal*

My Dear Payson,—This morning's mail has brought me a letter from your father. He and I were fellow students more than fifty years ago. Then we went our separate ways, he to exercise his brave and fruitful ministry on one side of the planet, and I to do my best on the other. We have seldom met since; and, although he has often mentioned you in his letters, you and I have never seen each other's faces. But, in the letter that lies upon my desk, he tells me, with natural pride and still more natural joy, that you, his youngest child, having dedicated your life to the work of the ministry, are about to be ordained. Your father's references to yourself have deeply moved me, and it is in my heart to tell you of the thoughts that, since reading them, have swept into my mind.

I should love to feel that your ordination will always mean to you what mine has meant to me. I was ordained, as you possibly know, at Mosgiel in New Zealand. I have never shaken off the impressions made upon me on that unforgettable night. I had arrived the previous evening. As I stepped from the train in the moonlight, after my long, long journey from the other side of the world, the railway platform was crowded with the good souls who pitied my loneliness and were eager to dispel it by their affection and devotion.

The arrival of a new minister from the Old Country was, in those days, an event of the first magnitude. When I made my way to the ordination service that Friday evening, I found the church packed to its utmost capacity. People were stowed away in the

vestry and in the schoolroom, content to listen to the proceedings that they could not hope to see. Horses were tied up all round the yard and along the front of the church. Folk had driven in from all the farms and homesteads across the Plain. Great numbers of people had come out from the city by train. Everything conspired to impress the occasion indelibly upon my mind. I possess verbatim reports of the charges delivered to the congregation and myself, and they have always seemed to me a model of all that such solemn utterances should be; but no printed record can possibly explain the overwhelming impression made that night upon my own mind. I would give a great deal to secure that your ordination is made for you as impressive and as memorable.

If, in connexion with your induction, it were my great privilege to address a few words to you, I fancy that I should base them on a phrase that occurs twice in the prophecy of Ezekiel. *Their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel*. In the engine-room of a large factory I recently saw an enormous wheel revolving at an incredible speed; but, within it, I noticed another wheel revolving in a diametrically opposite direction. It set me thinking, and, in the process, Ezekiel's striking words came forcibly to my mind. *Their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel*.

One of the most momentous happenings of our own time was the meeting of Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt on a battleship in the most critical days of the Great War: the drafting of the Atlantic Charter, and the affirmation of the Four Freedoms—freedom from want; freedom from fear; freedom of speech and freedom of faith. But the really thrilling thing is that, within the compass of the Charter, with its mandates and obligations, all peoples—great and small—are emphatically declared to be absolutely free to devise their own forms of government, to elect their own rulers, and to invest those rulers with wide or narrow powers and prerogatives as may seem good to themselves. And so, within the *Ambit of Restraint* represented by the general principles of the Charter, you have the *Ambit of Restraint* represented by the rights of a sovereign people and by the sanctity of individual judgement—*a wheel in the midst of a wheel*.

Something very similar characterizes the life and work of a Christian minister. There is the larger wheel. He is involved, by the very nature of his sacred office, in certain imperative obligations. He must, for example, be able to create and communicate a spirit

of worship: he must be able to expound the Scriptures: and he must be able to evangelize those who are alienated from the kingdom of God. As a rule, these three imperatives, harmonizing naturally, will melt imperceptibly into each other. The minister who dwells in the secret place of the Most High and who abides under the shadow of the Almighty will, by every movement, glance, and gesture, make the people feel that they are in the immediate presence of the Most High. Such a man, unconsciously radiating so solemn and reverential an atmosphere, will instinctively magnify the Scriptures and infect his hearers with a love for the inspired page. And such a man, permeated with a consciousness of the divine presence, and exulting in the wealth of the divine Word, will, as a matter of course, be both passionate and persuasive in his appeals to those who are out of the way. The three imperatives co-ordinate. It was said of Jean Baptist Massillon, the greatest of French preachers, that his own sense of God filled each individual hearer with unspeakable awe. Louis the Fourteenth was terrified and yet magnetized by Massillon's inspired eloquence. Even in a thronged cathedral, the preacher had a way of securing for himself not one congregation of two thousand, but two thousand congregations of one.

'The dome has vanished,' he would exclaim dramatically, 'the ceiling had disappeared; nothing now intervenes between you and Almighty God! And see, the walls have evaporated and the great congregation has dispersed; you and I are left alone together! Just you and I!' And then, like a skilful surgeon alone with his patient, he would probe to the very depths of his hearer's secret being.

Louis the Magnificent used to say that he enjoyed hearing other preachers; he never enjoyed Massillon, for Massillon seemed to tear his very soul wide open; yet, if he had to select one preacher and hear him only, he would wish that one preacher to be Massillon.

But it is important that you should recognize that, within this great outer wheel of obligation, the smaller wheel of freedom may harmoniously revolve. Just as, within the positive ordinances of the Atlantic Charter, there is secured to each nation, however small, an ample sphere of liberty, so within the limits of the imperative obligations in which your call to the ministry involves liberty. Moreover, the success of your ministry will depend quite as much upon the use that you make of that liberty, as upon your loyalty to the major obligations. The inner wheel is just as important as the outer.

In respect of the general tone and character of your ministry, you are a free man. You possess the priceless gift of individuality, and you must express it in the most effective way that you can discover. Do not follow any course simply because other men adopt it. Be yourself. Dress as seems most natural and most fitting to your own case. Do not model your behavior upon any prevailing fashion. Show a reasonable respect for convention: if it be soundly based, follow it: but do not let it enslave or hamper you. In the preparation and delivery of your sermons, consider only the best possible way of conveying all that is in your own heart to the hearts of your hearers. If the method that you adopt happens to be the method that is generally adopted, all well and good: but if it differs in any respect from the usual procedure, do not let that circumstance embarrass you. I once went to hear a well-known Anglican preacher. The church was crowded. When the time came for the sermon, the good man announced his text, and then, to my surprise, descended the pulpit steps and delivered his discourse whilst walking up and down the aisle, turning, now this way and now that, as he addressed himself from time to time to particular sections of his large congregation. It struck me as singularly effective—*for him*. I could not do it. I imagine that very few preachers could. But, since it appealed to him as being the way in which he could best express himself, I admired his courage in adopting it.

Great preaching has three distinct values. It has *entertainment* value; it has *educational* value; and it has *evangelistic* value. I need not say that the first and the second are of value only so far as they lead to the third; yet, since they may so easily lead to the third, they have an inherent value of their own.

When I affirm that great preaching must have entertainment value, I do not, of course, mean that it must be amusing. Humour has its place in preaching as in everything else, yet there is no more pitiful spectacle under heaven than a preacher trying to be funny. Comedy is not the only kind of entertainment. For one actor or actress who has achieved fame as a comedian, a dozen have covered themselves with glory as interpreters of romance, adventure, or even tragedy. Nobody who has witnessed a performance of the *Medea* of Euripides, of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, or of Ibsen's *Ghosts* will doubt the entertainment value of tragedy. There come moments in which every person in the audience, gripped by the tense horror of the unfolding situation, forgets everybody and everything outside

the actual play.

But I am no more suggesting that the preacher should aim at becoming a tragedian that I am suggesting that he should aim at becoming a comedian. The thing that I *am* insisting upon is that, by every art at his command, he should capture and hold the attention of his hearers. It is not enough that he should say what it is his duty to say in the first words that happen to come. He must arrange his matter so attractively, and present it so effectively, that the most listless and languid will be compelled to follow him. There is no earthly reason why actors, barristers, or statesmen should state their cases more attractively, more convincingly, or, if you like, more entertainingly, than the preacher.

Somebody has said that of preachers there are three kinds. There is the preacher that you *can't* listen to; there is the preacher that you *can* listen to; and there is the preacher that you *can't help* listening to. In reality, the third is the only preacher of the three. The art of preaching is not so much the art of preaching as the art of compelling the congregation to listen to your message; and you can only be sure that they will listen if you make it worth their while to listen. And if you make it worth their while, it is because, in the best sense, your preaching has entertainment value. The master preachers—Jesus, Paul, Wesley, Whitefield, Spurgeon, Moody, and the rest—knew that they had something to say that was well worth saying. They then made it their business to say it in such a way that other people would find it well worth hearing. In the full flood of the oratory, you could have heard a pin drop. You forgot everything in your eagerness to catch every syllable.

You will never attract or arrest your hearers by an elaborate display of theology. The prominence of theology in a sermon suggests a slipshod preparation. Theology is what the ladies call a foundation garment: it imparts shapeliness and affords support to the drapery of your utterance without itself becoming visible. It is very noticeable that Jesus Himself seldom or never became theological. As Sir Edwin Arnold sings:

The simplest sights He met—
The Sower flinging seed on loam and rock;
The darnel in the wheat; the mustard tree
That hath its seed so little, and its boughs
Widespreading; and the wandering sheep; and nets

Shot in the wimpled waters,—drawing forth
Great fish and small:—these, and a hundred such,
Seen by us daily, never seen aright,
Were pictures for Him from the page of life,
Teaching by parable.

In his fine chapter on *Jesus as a Preacher*, Dr. James Stalker says that if, in the course of a lifetime, we have been fortunate enough to hear an orator of the first rank, we talk of it all our days; or if we can remember a preacher who first made religion real to us, his image is enshrined in our memory in a sacred niche. 'What then,' Dr. Stalker asks, 'must it have been to listen to Him who spake as never man spake? What must it have been to hear the Sermon on the Mount or the Parable of the Prodigal Son issuing, for the first time, fresh from the lips that uttered them?'

Preaching of this sublime quality had a distinct *entertainment* value; it forced men to pay attention. It had *educational* value; it filled the minds and hearts of people with thoughts and emotions that were startlingly and sensationally new to them. And, as an inevitable climax, it had *evangelistic* value. For, in fulfillment of the purpose that the preacher has secretly cherished through all his processes of preparation and delivery, it led his hearers to the feet of God.

Believe me, my dear Payson, when I say that my whole heart goes out to you at this critical moment of your career. I know with what profound emotion your father will attend your ordination. I should love to be among you. But, since that is impossible, I shall waft you a whole heartful of benedictions. May your ordination be to you all that mine was to me; and, from that tremendous hour to the very end of your pilgrimage, may your path be like the path of the just, shining more and more unto the perfect day!

Your father's old friend,
F. W. Boreham

Chapter 28

A BABY'S BURIAL

From *Ships of Pearl*

I

The mistress of the manse was, with some little assistance from the rest of the household, celebrating her birthday. As part of the festive programme, we had arranged an afternoon drive over the mountains, and were, indeed, just packing ourselves and our belongings into the car when the proceedings were suddenly interrupted. The behavior of a young woman, a hundred yards up the street, attracted our attention. She seemed at first to be on her way to some destination beyond our door. But, as she drew nearer, she paused. The commotion at the gate, and our preparations for immediate departure, seemed to embarrass her. She turned back, and then, in evident uncertainty, hesitated again, and, after loitering for a moment, came slowly on. Observing her confusion, I took a few steps towards her, a movement that evidently afforded her immense relief, for she immediately hurried forward to meet me.

'You won't know me,' she said, brokenly; 'but I've been to hear you; and now I'm in trouble; if you could see me for just a minute, I'll promise not to detain you.' She glanced meaningly at the waiting car. I led her to the study.

'I came to ask if you would bury my baby,' she exclaimed, as soon as she had taken a seat.

I immediately expressed my sympathy; but, although she herself was in tears, she would not allow me to proceed.

'No, no,' she protested, 'don't say you're sorry! You wouldn't be, if you knew everything. It's the best thing that could have happened—the very best.' She again hid her face in her handkerchief; and, thoroughly perplexed, I deemed it best to wait in silence until she could resume her story.

'You see,' she added at length, 'my boy was eighteen months old…. and,' she was groping after the easiest way of expressing it, 'and… his brain was a blank from his birth. He died in the asylum.' She sobbed afresh.

'You'll think from the way I'm behaving, that I'm broken-hearted,' she resumed, looking across at me, 'but really I'm not. I was never so thankful about anything in my life. It's such a mercy! But I mustn't keep you. Could you bury him to-morrow afternoon?'

I agreed and stepped across to the desk to make a note of the particulars. After dotting down the hour, the name of the cemetery, and other details, I looked across at her again.

'Let me see,' I said, 'Mrs.… ?'

'Crawford,' she replied and added her address.

She rose, repeating her apologies for having detained me, and expressing her relief at my having undertaken to serve her on the morrow. I escorted her to the gate, watched her on her way up the street, and then took my place in the car.

The outing was a complete success. The hills were at their best; the views that they commanded were wonderfully enchanting; we paused for tea in a ferny bower that seemed to have been specially laid out for our enjoyment; and we reached home in the early evening feeling that the lines had fallen unto us in pleasant places.

'The world is certainly a very charming place to live in!' philosophically observed one member of the party as we unpacked the car.

'Yes, Mother,' chimed in another, evidently bent on inflating the vanity of the guest of the day, 'and we should have missed quite a lot, shouldn't we, if *you'd* never come into it?'

But even amidst the beauteous scenery that continually broke upon our gaze, and amidst the sallies and witticisms of my happy companions, I never quite forgot the young mother who, at that very hour, was wading through such deep waters. Whenever, for a moment, I was left to myself, or whenever there was a lull in the babble of conversation, my mind swung back to the drawn face

into which I had looked just before setting out on our spin.

At such moments one problem continually presented itself, bringing in its train a certain measure of reproof. Why had *she*—the mother—come to arrange about the funeral? Such duties are usually undertaken by the father. And this led me to reproach myself with the fact that, partly because my return to the car was being impatiently awaited, I had stupidly forgotten to ask the woman about her husband. Perhaps she was a widow, having, on that account, still further claims upon my compassion. Or perhaps the husband was ill, and I—at such an hour—should have been ministering to him. Such heart-searching intensified my anxiety to see my little friend again.

II

Nor had I long to wait. We had scarcely risen from our evening meal when there came a ring at the front-door bell, and I was told that she was once more in the study. It turned out that, since we last saw each other, I had enjoyed no monopoly of self-reproaches.

'I have been very miserable,' she began. 'I came here this afternoon to tell you a much longer, and much sadder, story; but I knew that your friends were waiting for you in the car and I didn't like to keep you from them. So I only told you as much as seemed absolutely necessary; and, ever since, I have been wondering if you would have treated me so kindly had you known everything. It was scarcely fair to you to have told you one part without the other; and—I hope you will forgive me—even in the part that I *did* tell, I was not strictly truthful. I deceived you, and I have been biting my tongue about it ever since.' I endeavoured to put her at ease by assuring her of my conviction that any under-statement or over-statement of the case was inadvertent rather than deliberate; but she would not be comforted.

'No,' she insisted, 'I was wrong—very wrong indeed—and it will serve me right if, when you know all, you refuse to have anything further to do with me!'

'Well, now,' I said, thinking to help her by meeting her on her own ground, 'let us first of all straighten out that part of the story

which I already possess and then you can give me the part that you suppressed this afternoon. In what respect do you fancy that you have already deceived me?'

'Well,' she began, touching her eyes with her handkerchief, 'I really didn't mean to tell a lie. On the contrary, I came for the very purpose of telling the whole truth. But things took a turn that I had not expected; and, in my anxiety to release you as quickly as possible, I seriously misled you.'

'Exactly how?' I demanded.

'Do you remember,' she asked, 'that you went to your desk and noted down the time and place of the funeral? I fully expected you to inquire about the child's father; and I was quite prepared, when you did so, to confess everything. But you said nothing about it. You simply looked across the desk and said "Mrs….?" And I, taken completely by surprise, feebly filled in your blank with my own name.'

'And what was wrong with that?' I asked.

'Everything was wrong!' she answered. 'I'm not *Mrs.* at all. I'm not married. That was the part of the story that I meant to have told you, but didn't!'

She then repaired her previous omission by unfolding one of the saddest tales to which I have even lent my ears. Born in Hertfordshire, and left an orphan at fifteen, she joined a party of emigrant girls who were being brought out of Australia in response to the urgent demand for domestic servants. Feeling lonely in her new environment, she made a few friends hastily and unwisely, and she had suffered bitterly for her precipitancy in that respect. It was a long story and I could appreciate her reluctance to embark upon it in the afternoon, with the car waiting. It reached its tragic climax in the fact that she last saw the father of the child three months before its birth; she then lost all trace of him.

Having completed her pitiful recital, she scanned my face anxiously and was obviously relieved on discovering that she had not totally forfeited my sympathy.

I gave her confidence for confidence: I tried to make her feel that there was a very large place for her in the divine heart. I knelt with her in a Presence that seemed strangely to soothe and comfort her; and then I dismissed her with the assurance that I should be with her, without fail, next day. I can scarcely explain it even now, but her two-fold confession—the confession of her

grievous shame and the confession of her more venial deception—had deeply moved me, and I felt irresistibly drawn to her.

III

The next day was one of those days of torrential downpour that occasionally visit these latitudes. From early morning until late at night, without a moment's intermission, the rain descended in sheets. When I joined the funeral train, I found that the mother was really the only mourner, although a fellow-domestic, a Roman Catholic, had come with her for company. On arrival at the cemetery I discovered with regret that the grave was at the far extremity of a new section that had only just been set apart for burials. As a matter of fact, this was the first interment in it. I was sorry; there is a subtle sense of company even in groups of graves; and, in this particular case, I dreaded anything that even savoured of isolation. However, there was no help for it. The undertaker, bearing the little coffin in his arms, led us, in the driving rain, across what seemed an infinite expanse of rough and barren land to the tiny grave in the distance. The clay under our feet was soft and sticky; at every step we sank in the slush to our ankles. My umbrella afforded the two girls poor protection against the pitiless rain. At the graveside, the undertaker, having lowered the coffin, considerably seized the umbrella and tried to hold it over the three of us whilst I read the service.

I thought of the child—its vacant brain! I thought of the mother—her bitter shame! I thought of the father, heedless and indifferent, whose plight was probably the most desperate of the three! And yet, haunted by such gloomy thoughts, I read with unwavering confidence the deathless words of hope and immortality, and, in my prayer, committed the dead child with the most perfect assurance to the Saviour who, in this world and in every other, gathers little children about Him, because of such, as He was wont to say, is the kingdom of heaven. The outlook from that grave-foot was as bleak and cheerless as any outlook could possibly be. We looked across a vacant section of yellow mud; the rain lashed us mercilessly, turn the umbrella how we would; little streams of moisture trickled down our necks, and drippings from the umbrella pattered on my service-book. But what did it matter?

O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We forgot the outlook in the uplook: we lost all consciousness of the rain-soaked environment in our more intense consciousness of that radiant and eternal victory.

IV

Some little time ago I found myself sharing a compartment of railway train with an old Methodist minister. We were travelling through one of the most remote and sparsely-settled areas of this vast Commonwealth. My companion was Chairman of the District, he explained to me, and he was on a mission of encouragement and inspiration to all the ministers and home-missionaries under his supervision. When he came to a really large town he left the train in order to stay with the local minister and to address one or two services in the church. As soon as this happened, I, of course, lost him. But, during the day that we spent together, the trained stopped—sometimes for twenty minutes; sometimes for half an hour—at about a dozen small up-country settlements. At these places, the minister or missionary would be on the platform to meet the visitor, and the two good men would spend the waiting-time in close and fruitful conference.

The train was approaching one of these small townships when, to my surprise, my companion turned to me and invited me to accompany him to the platform.

'We have a young fellow working here,' he said, 'whom I should like you to meet. He has about as hard a row to hoe as any man could have. This district,'—he waved his hand towards the cluster of cottages and farmsteads that were just breaking upon our vision—'this district is utterly godless; Sunday is entirely given up to sport; nobody thinks of going to church; indeed, there are, strictly speaking, no churches for them to go to. Young Maclaren, whom you will meet in a minute, has to conduct his services in schools, barns, or in the open air, just as he finds opportunity. But he's a great chap; comes from one of our best families; has received a public-

school and university education; and has all his heart in his work. He's only twenty; but, as you'll see, he's one of God's best!'

I could easily believe it. The youth to whom I was introduced a few moments later possessed a magnetic personality, a fine presence, a cultured, though perfectly natural, style of speech and a soft pleasing voice. In answer to the questions of the elder minister, he made no attempt to conceal the failure of his efforts to attract the people to his services. I saw that my travelling-companion was about to offer this young colleague a few words of intimate counsel; and, knowing how precious their time must be, I quietly moved away. But my friend called me back and thus I was privileged to overhear the advice he tendered.

'Don't be disheartened,' he said. 'You've only been here nine months; it takes longer than that to make an impression. These people'—he again surveyed the scattered settlement—'these people are in no hurry to attend your services; but have patience. Watch them closely. They marry; they have babies; they fail; they succeed; they have joys and sorrows; they die. In these things lies your opportunity. Whenever you marry a couple, make them feel that you are as much interested in them as if you were a relative. When babies are born, show pleasure; memorize the child's name and take every opportunity of inquiring about it. Congratulate the people on everything good that comes their way; sympathize with them in their disappointments and losses. And, when death enters a home, let the bitterness of it pierce your very heart and make the people feel that their grief has brought tears to your eyes. The more you get into their lives, the more they'll attend your services.'

The whistle blew: we said goodbye to the young minister and returned to our seats. But the experience rushes back upon my mind as I sit here, recording the story of little Miss Crawford. For, from the day of that strange funeral, no member of my congregation attended the services more regularly, or served the Church more devotedly, than the quiet, little woman whose baby I buried in the rain.

Chapter 29

OUR INTERRUPTIONS

From *The Silver Shadow*

How often it happens that a thing only becomes the more impressive and the more effective by being interrupted! Some of the loveliest things in life issue from our interruptions. Indeed, we begin life with an interruption. A woman finds that she must cancel all her engagements; and for a while we see her face no more. Then she reappears, with a baby in her arms. They say that some women evade marriage and motherhood just because it would involve life in such troublesome interruptions. It is difficult to believe that women can be so blind. The women whose lives have been interrupted in this way have discovered what Samuel Morse discovered fifty years ago, that an interruption may be the most fruitful and vital thing in history.

An interruption, like a rhetorical pause, emphasizes a thing. I recall several utterances that I must have forgotten long ago but for the fact that they were interrupted. Let me mention three. I remember being present, many years ago, at a great prayer-meeting in London. A little old gentleman in the body of the hall rose to lead us to the Throne of Grace. His voice was clear as a bell; his diction was reverent and beautiful; he prayed like a man inspired. But all at once his voice became tremulous with emotion, and a moment later it failed him altogether. For a few seconds there was an intense and painful silence. Then the old gentleman strove bravely to resume his supplication. But after struggling with himself for a second or two, he shook his head sorrowfully. 'Take the meaning, Lord!' he managed to say, 'take the meaning!' and sat down. I am sure I

should have forgotten the meeting, the graceful petitions, and the gentle pleader but for the affecting interruption. The interruption lifted it out of the commonplace and lent it a distinction.

The other evening I was conducting a very special Communion Service. To me the occasion was full of sacred significance, for it marked the anniversary of my ordination. An old minister was present, whose long record of distinguished service lent to his grey hairs an added glory. I had asked him to deliver a short pre-communion address. He spoke, with evident delight, of the exquisite completeness of his Lord's redemption; and, having poured out his heart to us, he took a step backward as though to resume his seat. But an afterthought seized him; he retraced that single step; and once more took his place at the desk. 'For sixty years,' he said, with manifest emotion, 'for sixty years I have served this Saviour and do you think I have regretted it? Never once!' He resumed his seat, and I announced the next hymn, 'Rock of Ages, cleft for me'; and even as we sang,

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyelids close in death,
When I soar to realms unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!

He who had a moment before spoken of the glories of redemption passed serenely into the presence of his Redeemer. Each went his separate way, leaving the bread and wine untasted. The service from which we had expected so much had been strangely interrupted. And yet all those who were present felt that it had a beauty, a sacredness, a solemnity, of its own. But for the interruption how soon that gathering would have been forgotten! Now it lives in our memories for ever! We felt as Elisha must have felt when Elijah ascended in a whirlwind before his eyes. The service was perfectly complete, after all.

For the third of these experiences I go back to my Mosgiel days. I remember being asked to speak at a farewell-meeting. The retiring minister had held the charge for over fifty years. When his turn came to speak, he made three desperate efforts to master his emotion. But it was no good. After a few broken sentences he

each time collapsed; and his people felt that his silence was more eloquent than his speech could possibly have been. The best things we ever say are the things we never say.

Chapter 30

ARMADALE

From *My Pilgrimage*

Armadale—the scene of my third and final charge—is a suburb of Melbourne and a most attractive suburb at that. It is customary for a student, in leaving college, to outline in his farewell speech the kind of ministry that he hopes to exercise. In my own valedictory utterance, I said that I should like to go out to the ends of the earth, to hold three pastorates, and then to be in a position to preach, as I might be led, in all lands and among all denominations. I little thought that, in His limitless goodness, God would grant me so literally and so fully the realization of my dreams.

I had my three pastorates. And what pastorates! No man was ever more fortunate. I may be told that all my geese are swans; but, risking that taunt, I solemnly declare my conviction that Mosgiel was the most lovable and romantic country charge in which a young minister could have opened his career, that Hobart was the most delightful city pastorate to which any man could have been invited; and that, of all suburban churches, Armadale was easily the choicest and the best. When I published my *Bunch of Everlastings*—the first of the *Texts That Made History* series—I appended to it the following dedication: '*At the Feet of Those Three Elect Ladies, the Churches at Mosgiel, Hobart, and Armadale, I Desire, with the Deepest Affection and Respect, to lay this Bunch of Everlastings.*'

That inscription was penned twenty years ago; but the passage of those two decades had only deepened my devotion and

heightened my gratitude. If I were starting afresh, I should beg to be allowed to start at Mosgiel; if I were once more a young man of five and thirty, I should look longingly at Hobart; and if I were again a minister in the mid-forties, I should covet above everything else in the world, a call to the church at Armadale.

Armadale exactly suited me. During my later years at Hobart, I often revolted against the necessity of attending such a multitude of meetings. I felt it my duty, as the representative of a central church, to take part in every helpful movement in the city. I was on every committee and was invited to speak at all kinds of public gatherings. This was all to the good; and, in a way, I reveled in it. But, towards the end, I grudged the incessant drain upon my time and energy: I vowed that, if ever I left Hobart, it would be to assume a charge that would allow me to concentrate on preaching and writing. Armadale presented that coveted opportunity in a superlative degree. The church itself was so perfectly organized that I had no shadow of anxiety about details and arrangements; the weeknight guilds and societies ran themselves without any intervention on my part; and the minister was under no obligation to sit on any denominational committee, or join any extraneous organization, unless he himself actually desired to do so.

In writing this, it is in my heart to offer one modest word of personal testimony. My pilgrimage has taught me many things; but it has made nothing more clear than the fact that, from those who humbly seek the leadership of the Kindly Light, the divine guidance is never withheld. In the course of my life I have had to make some momentous decisions—momentous to me—but, looking back along the road, I can now see clearly that, at every crisis, I was rightly led. Whenever the road forked, I heard a voice saying: *'This is the way, walk ye in it!'*

I learned this lesson at the outset and it has been often reinforced. Let me interpolate a pair of instances—one from my earlier ministry and one from my later—to make clear my meaning. I remember sitting, late one snowy afternoon, in my Mosgiel study. I had been visiting and was very tired. Suddenly there came a ring at the bell. I answered the door myself. Flora Harris, of Saddle Hill, was desperately ill: could I go at once? The man who brought the message would drive me to the house, if I did not mind walking back or trusting to the chance of a lift. I looked at my watch: it was five o'clock: and I had a Bible-class at half-past seven. However,

I slipped on my coat and set out. Flora was very weak; she was to some extent under the influence of an opiate; and I had to wait some time before I could hold intelligent conversation with her.

It was half-past six when I left the house. Snow whitened all the ground. As I descended the hill that led to the main road I heard the clatter of hoofs and the rattle of wheels in the distance. It was a clear, frosty evening and I knew that the vehicle must be some distance away. It was evidently somebody driving towards Mosgiel. If only I could reach the main road before he passed, I should be spared a long and tiring walk; I should have time for a cup of tea before taking my class; and I should be fresh instead of weary when class-time came. I hurried and, in my simplicity, I lifted up my heart in prayer, asking that the driver of the approaching vehicle might catch sight of my hurrying form or hear my call. But, when I was within a hundred yards of the high road, the vehicle flashed by. I recognized it. It was Willie Brown's: he was alone: and, had he seen or heard me, he would gladly have driven me home. I felt vexed. Of what practical use is prayer? Guidance fails when it is most needed! I set out to walk home and, half a mile down the road, came upon the vehicle I had so narrowly missed. The horse was lying with a broken leg doubled under it: the buggy was completely wrecked: and Willie Brown was stretched out unconscious beside it. I hastened to the nearest house, sent a boy on a bicycle for the doctor, and eventually reached home in the doctor's gig in time for a cup of tea and for my class. With shame I reflected—and have many a time reflected since—that we are often guided when we least suspect it.

The story from my later ministry has to do with a certain Saturday on which a policeman came to the front door just before noon. A man under arrest at the Melbourne Gaol wished to see me at once. The constable gave me the man's name, but it conveyed nothing to me. My first impulse was to hurry away to the gaol; and, indeed, the policeman urged this course upon me. On the other hand, an appetizing dinner was almost ready, and the cricket match at which I had expected to spend the afternoon was at a particularly exciting stage.

As I pondered the situation in which I found myself, an irresistible conviction settled down upon me that I should be wise to have my dinner in peace, to attend the cricket match to which I had looked forward, and then go to the gaol in the evening. The

policeman protested that Saturday night would be the worst possible time at which to visit the Melbourne Gaol; but the feeling in my mind would not be shaken off. Let me say in self-defense that I can recall no other case in which I put apparently selfish considerations before the clamant call of duty. But my mind was fixed. I ate my dinner and made my way to the cricket ground. In the pavilion I sat beside a man with whom I had been acquainted many years before in Tasmania.

'I don't know why I've come here today,' he said. 'I've never been here before, and I take very little interest in cricket!'

To my utter amazement, in the course of casual conversation, he mentioned the name of the man in the Melbourne Gaol. I concealed my intense interest, but gently encouraged him to talk. In the course of half an hour I had all the facts of the case at my fingers' ends; and, when I went to the gaol that night, I was able to deal with the man in a way that, but for my experience in the afternoon, would have been impossible. Now, why was my old Tasmanian friend so strongly moved to visit that particular cricket ground that afternoon? And why was I made to feel so deeply that I must go to the cricket match before responding to the prisoner's call?

The pillar of cloud in the daytime and the pillar of fire in the night never fail. I have, in my time, received many calls to vacant pulpits, some of which occasioned my wife and myself the most anxious thought. Distrusting alike our own discernment and the judgement of others, we have earnestly sought a heavenly illumination of our enshrouded path. And today, viewing our former perplexities in grateful retrospect, we can see, as clearly as it is possible to see anything, that we were right in declining calls that we declined and right in accepting the invitations to Mosgiel, Hobart, and Armadale.

We had scarcely settled at Armadale when our last child was born. A few days before her birth we were so troubled about her chances of a propitious arrival and survival that I walked round to see the doctor. I told him of our anxiety. The whole period during which we had been expecting her had, I explained, been a period of ceaseless worry and disturbance. There had been my accident at Wedge Bay; the inevitable shock to my poor wife, who was with me when I fell and upon whom all the responsibilities of a trying situation devolved; the long illness that followed the accident—the

illness in which she, of necessity, had been chief nurse; then the month of mental torture precipitated by the call to Armadale; and finally the breaking up of the Hobart home, the wrench of ceaseless farewells, the sale of furniture, the sea voyage, the settlement among strangers, and the strain of house-hunting and refurnishing.

'What kind of a child can this be?' I asked Dr. Davies in alarm. With that fine sanity that he has always mingled with helpful sympathy and unfailing skill, he laughed his reassuring reply.

'The child will probably be the bonniest and healthiest that you have had!' he answered.

And so it turned out. Like the medieval saint, we can testify that we have had many and great troubles in our time, but *most of them never happened*! Thus our little family of five was completed. They are all living, and, to our great joy, each is happily occupied with some form of Christian service.

If, at Armadale, we gained a daughter, we also lost one. For there our eldest girl was married. I myself officiated at the wedding whilst her brother—a brave young knight of eight summers—gave the bride away. If the happy pair have nothing else in common, they at least share a common birthday. For the bride and her bridegroom—the Rev. Norman T. McDonald, a Presbyterian minister—were both born on the twenty-seventh of September, and on the twenty-seventh of September they were married. Their manse is now the home of our three little grand-daughters.

Chapter 31

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

From *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*

I

I was completely baffled, and had no hesitation in confessing it. How the situation had developed I could not imagine. Without the slightest justification, I had invaded a home whose occupants, never having attended my own church, were loyal and devoted Methodists. No harm was done, of course; and the people were most kind; but I was at a loss to explain to myself the circumstances that had led me to their door. I assured them that I had been expressly invited to call: they laughingly but emphatically denied it. The episode occurred in the early days of my ministry in Melbourne.

It happened in this way. Looking over my new congregation I realized that there must be many among them whose names did not appear on the register that had been handed to me. Before embarking on the formidable task of visiting the members and adherents, I felt that I ought to make sure that the list was complete. At each service, therefore, I requested those who would like me to call upon them to write out their names and addresses and to leave them with the officers at the church doors. As a consequence, I returned home each Sunday evening with my pockets stuffed with small scraps of paper on each of which an address was duly inscribed. In a casual kind of way, I would glance over them; but, in almost every case, they were utterly destitute of significance to me. Nothing is more vacuous or meaningless than a *name* until you have met the *person*.

The addresses were a little better. Elm Grove seemed to promise a shady avenue: High Street suggested shops and trams and crowds: but I recognized that these hazy impressions might be entirely false to fact. These slips of paper—envelopes, visiting-cards, loose leaves of pocket-books and the like—reminded me of so many lottery tickets. Some would turn out to be blanks: others would prove to be prizes. A certain proportion of these slips had, I knew, been indited under the impulse of sheer curiosity. There are people who treat a new minister as children treat a new toy. They play with him until the newness begins to wear off. And, by that time, there is another minister, brand-new, at the church round the corner. Then the minister who is no longer new sees these enthusiasts no more. On the other hand, I knew, from my Mosgiel and Hobart experiences, that some of these names would, in a few years' time, represent to me the names of my most staunch and treasured and intimate friends; and the very thought of it impelled me to treat each of these crumpled slips with reverential and affectionate regard.

In due course I settled down to business. The names and addresses on the slips were carefully added to the register: the entire collection was then classified and sorted into districts: and thus the way was cleared for a thorough and systematic visitation of my new constituency.

II

The day of which I am now thinking was beautifully fine, a day of bright sunshine tempered by a delicious breeze. On such days I invariably selected districts at a distance: it was convenient to keep the districts close at hand for wet days and hot days. I noticed that the register contained the names of four families residing in the Tennyson Avenue; and I therefore resolved to make Tennyson Avenue my objective for that luxurious afternoon. The walk across the park was a revelry in itself: and the homes to be visited were all within a stone's throw of each other. With a light heart, therefore, I set out; and, for awhile, my programme afforded me nothing but satisfaction and enjoyment.

The park was at its best, and I paused for a few minutes to watch a cricket match in progress on the oval. Then, passing out

through the big iron gate, I found myself facing Tennyson Avenue. The first, second, and third visits were quite simple. The people were old-established members of the congregation whose names had been on the Church register long before my arrival. I enjoyed discussing with them the story of their connexion with the Church. The *fourth* address, however, had been added to the register as a result of the receipt of a slip on which it was clearly inscribed; and, in accordance with my custom, I had taken the precaution of bringing the slip with me. Mayfield Lodge was the last house in Tennyson Avenue. Opening the front gate, I walked up the gravel path, admiring the well-kept lawns on either side and the rows of standard roses. On approaching the house, I noticed a bed on the veranda, occupied by a young fellow of about eighteen or nineteen.

'Excuse me,' I said, 'but is Mrs. Hosking at home?'

'Oh, yes,' he replied, in a light-hearted way, 'Mother's about somewhere: just ring the front-door bell and she'll soon be here!'

'I'm sorry to find you lying here,' I observed; 'nothing serious, I hope!'

'Oh, well,' he replied, 'I was silly enough to try to ride my bike with my hands in my pockets. A motor-car came suddenly out of a side street. I swerved to avoid it: lost control of my machine: and finished up with a broken thigh. The doctor thinks I'll be lucky if I'm about again before Christmas. But,' he added, abruptly changing the subject, 'have you come across the park?'

I told him that I had. 'I suppose,' he went on. 'you don't happen to know the scores at the cricket match on the oval?'

I gave them to him, and the figures threw him into a transport of delight. 'Good for the school!' he exclaimed. 'My! But I'd like to have been playing! And I *should* have been but for this wretched business; but I'll have to wait until next season now.'

We began talking cricket, and were thoroughly engrossed in that fascinating theme when the front door suddenly opened, and Mrs. Hosking, attracted by the sound of voices, came out to ascertain what was going on. I stepped forward to greet her. To my surprise, she showed no sign of recognition. I handed her my card.

'I think,' I said, by way of explanation, 'that you, or some members of your family, have been attending the services at the church, and have expressed a wish that I should call.' She looked

completely mystified.

'I don't see how that can be,' she replied reflectively. 'We are all members of the Methodist Church: my husband is circuit steward: and my daughters are Sunday-school teachers. I feel sure that none of us have been present at any of your services. There must be a mistake somewhere!'

'This is very strange,' I exclaimed, 'but see here!' I produced the slip and outlined the circumstances under which it came into my possession. Mrs. Hosing took the paper from me and examined it closely.

'It is certainly our name and address,' she remarked thoughtfully, 'yet it is not the handwriting of anybody here. It is very odd that anybody else should have asked you to visit us. But come inside!' she added, and proceeded to apologize for having kept me standing so long. I begged to be excused, however. It was getting late in the afternoon; and I felt slightly embarrassed by the turn that events had taken.

'I may look in again,' I remarked. 'I have promised to lend this young gentleman some books on cricket. I will call in with them one day soon, if I may. The books will help to shorten the hours that he spends lying here.' I shook hands cordially with my young friend on the bed, and Mrs. Hosking accompanied me to the gate.

'Poor Vic!' she exclaimed, in an undertone, as we stood together there. 'He's had a bad time, and I'm afraid he has a long way to go before he's out of the wood. I'm glad you chummed up to him about cricket. He's very keen. I'm sorry to say that, for two or three years, we have been unable to get him to go with us to the church. I scarcely know why. Something went wrong when he was quite a boy. Somebody upset him, and he never seemed to care for the church again. If you are able to bring any influence to bear upon him, we shall all be very glad.' I promised to call back with the cricket books within a week or two; and Mrs. Hosking returned to the bedside of her boy.

In recrossing the park I again paused at the oval and saw the end of the match. Having got into conversation with one of the players, I made him promise to run in at Mayfield Lodge on his way home and report the result to Vic. And, as I concluded my afternoon's outing, I pondered deeply on the problem that had so strangely presented itself. Why should some member of the

congregation, without consulting the Hoskings, have handed in their name and address to be added to my visiting-list? The thing seemed incomprehensible.

III

'Good-bye!' exclaimed the mistress of the manse, breaking abruptly into my study one morning, wearing her hat and coat.

'Are you going out?' I answered. 'Why, where are you off to?'

'I'm going to Tennyson Avenue,' she replied. 'Now, since you're so inquisitive, perhaps you'll tell me the best way of getting there!'

'Tennyson Avenue!' I exclaimed, in astonishment. 'What in the name of all that's mysterious is taking you to Tennyson Avenue?'

She opened her handbag, extracted a small white card, and read: '*Mrs. James Hosking, Mayfield lodge, Tennyson Avenue*.' I rose from my chair in utter bewilderment and surprise.

'But tell me,' I said, 'why are you going to see Mrs. Hosking in such a matter-of-fact and business-like way?'

'I'm going about some fowls,' she replied, amused at my unwonted fervour. 'You know that, when we left Hobart, I had to sell all my chooks, and I always intended, as soon as we were quite settled again, to buy a fresh stock.'

'But,' I interposed, 'why are you going to Mrs. Hosking? Mrs. Hosking is the lady with whom I had the extraordinary experience of which I told you. You remember I went there as a result of having received a slip with the name and address: yet Mrs. Hosking denied having been to the church at all. They are ardent Methodists.'

A sudden flash of illumination lit up my companion's features: she sank into the arm-chair that I had just vacated and burst into uncontrollable laughter.

'Oh, dear; oh, dear!' she cried, as soon as she was able to resume the conversation, 'I see how it all happened! Just after we arrived, I was speaking to Mrs. Grayson about my fowls, and she promised to send me the name and address of a lady who is a great expert in poultry matters and who would be able to advise and help

me. She must have written out Mrs. Hosking's name and address and given it to you; and you must have put it into your pocket with the names and addresses of people who desired visitation! Mrs. Grayson said yesterday, when she gave me this, that she thought that she had written it out for me before'—and again the speaker's voice was choked with laughter.

'If you'll wait while I put on my boots,' I said, 'I'll come with you. I'd give a good deal to see Mrs. Hosking's amusement as we elucidate the mystery. And I can talk cricket to Vic whilst you consult his mother about the fowls.' And, a quarter of an hour later, we were crossing the park together.

IV

I had already called twice at Mayfield Lodge. The *first* visit I have already described. On the *second* occasion I simply took Vic the cricket books. He welcomed them with unbound enthusiasm.

'I love cricket!' he exclaimed, his whole face lighting up with boyish eagerness. 'It's *the best thing in the world*; don't you think so?'

'It's certainly splendid,' I agreed, 'and I myself get a tremendous amount of enjoyment out of it. Perhaps, at one time, I, too, would have said that it was *the best thing in the world*. But you know, Vic, as life goes on, a man learns to distinguish between the *good* things and the *best*. If I thought that cricket was *the best thing in the world*, I should scarcely devote my life to the Christian ministry, should I?'

He hung his head. At the moment I was not quite clear as to whether the movement was attributable to a sense of shame or to the natural shyness which a boy invariably feels when religious matters are mentioned to him. However, Vic solved the problem for me.

'I've been thinking a lot about that since I've been lying here,' he said; and the remark led to one of the most delightful conversations that I have ever enjoyed with a youth of his age.

On the occasion of the *third* visit, things fell out as I had foreseen. Whilst the ladies went off to inspect the fowls, Vic and I chatted on the lawn. He was able by this time to walk with a stick.

'I'm taking your advice,' he said. 'I've told Dad that, as

soon as I can walk it, I'm going back to church with them. They're mighty pleased about it.'

A few months afterwards, I found myself taking tea with my friend, Mr. Weatherall, the Methodist minister.

'Oh, by the way,' he suddenly remarked, 'young Hosking often speaks to me about your visits to him. He's one of the most useful workers we have among the young people.'

And, oddly enough, I next day met Mrs. Hosking at the Library. She, too, had a good deal to say about Vic.

'It's taught me,' she said, 'that there are no such things as accidents. I thought that it was a pure accident that Vic broke his thigh, yet, although it worried us nearly to death at the time, we feel now it was the best thing that ever happened to him. And,' she added, with a pleasant smile, 'it was not by accident that the papers got mixed up in your pocket.'

Chapter 32

THE KINGFISHER

From *The Home of the Echoes*

Numbers of people drive up to the gates of heaven and turn away disillusioned and disappointed. They think that, after all, there is nothing there. I saw something of the kind happen only yesterday. Near this suburban home of mine is a long straight road that seems to run from world's end to world's end. Trudging homewards, along this road, with my back to the south, the other evening, a very curious and very suggestive train of reflection suddenly swept into my mind. It occurred to me that, twice or thrice, every week, I find myself tramping homewards along this great high-road, and always with my back to the south. Never once had my afternoon's visit taken me in a northern direction. This set me thinking. Are there, I said to myself, are there no thickly-settled residential areas away to the north like those with which I am so familiar to the south? And then again, I have often driven along the road in a southerly direction on my way to other suburbs. Does the road to the north lead to none? Why, in keeping my appointments in all parts of the city and its environs, have I never had occasion to turn my face that way? Such cogitations soon threw me into a fever of curiosity.

'Curiosity,' a Portuguese proverb declares, 'is a woman's curse.' To extract the treasure concealed in a vase, your only course is to turn the vessel upside down. To extract the truth concealed in a proverb, it is necessary, as a rule, to pursue a similar policy. If the Portuguese affirm that curiosity is a woman's curse, you simply invert the epigram as you invert the vase, and out pours the truth! And the truth is that curiosity is not a curse at all, and that there is

nothing exclusively or peculiarly feminine about it. The world owes more than it can ever acknowledge to the instinct of curiosity; and so do I. It was curiosity that sent the great navigators across the vast and solitary seas; it was curiosity that led, after centuries of heroic but fruitless adventure, to the conquest of the poles; it was curiosity that drove the restless feet of our pathfinders and pioneers across the great continents that they unlocked and explored. It was curiosity that led James Watt to watch his kettle, and Benjamin Franklin to watch his kite. Curiosity is a curse, indeed, and a woman's curse, forsooth! What nonsense we pack into proverbs! And so here I traipsed wearily homewards along the great high-road, yet extending the hospitality of my heart to a truly noble guest. I threw open every chamber of my soul to Curiosity, the most bountiful and beneficent visitor that the human mind can entertain. What can there possibly be, I asked myself, along the road to the north? Why do I never turn my face to the north? I promised this honoured guest of mine that I would follow him upon a journey of investigation. And yesterday afternoon I kept my word.

To the north the houses were, as I had surmised, very few and very far between. They were for the most part palatial residences, standing in extensive grounds, with spacious lawns, magnificent conservatories, and winding carriage drives. These stately homes were, in several instances, separated from each other by vacant lands in which the virgin bush still luxuriated, in which big brown opossums and little grey squirrels frolicked unmolested, and in the wooded recesses of which we heard a jackass laughing. A few steps farther on, we heard the sound of wheels behind us and a motor-car dashed by. It vanished in the archway of trees ahead of us; but a few minutes later we met it returning, and we soon discovered why. Emerging from the thick-set avenue of dark firs that had temporarily concealed the car from our gaze, we came out upon open country; and there, just ahead of us, a wooden fence crossed the highway. It was a blind road! It led to nowhere! We understood why the people in the motor-car had so quickly returned. They had come to the gates of paradise and had turned back disappointed. They fancied there was nothing there. It is part of life's tremendous pathos that we hurry through it, forming, as we go, such hasty and cruel judgements.

We leaned for a moment against the fence inspecting the country beyond. There was a steep bank, and, down the bank, some

trees; but what lay beyond those trees we could not see. Again that noble guest who never accepts the hospitality of the heart without immeasurably enriching it took possession of my soul. I was in a torment of curiosity. What did those trees conceal? What did that valley hold? The hunger of my heart reflected itself in the wistfulness on the faces of my companions. The fence? What are mountains for but to be climbed? What are oceans for but to be sailed? What are rivers for but to be crossed? We clambered through the fence and descended the slope beyond it. And down in the valley we came out upon one of those idyllic scenes that one would go many a long mile to enjoy. A bend of the sinuous river wound round the foot of the hill. The great willows along the banks draped the tranquil waters in a fringe of exquisite green. The long flowing tresses of the trees dipped into the river, breaking its tranquil surface, revealing the flow of the tide, and imparting a sense of vivacity to water that might otherwise have appeared sluggish. Swallows darted hither and thither, describing graceful circles in the air around us, playing hide and seek amidst the drooping drapery of the willows, and skimming with amazing skill the surface of the water. Sometimes, greatly daring, they would just touch it as they passed, starting eddying circles as mementoes of their passage. We sat in perfect silence for awhile, resting after our walk, and drinking in the manifold beauties of this tranquil scene.

Then, suddenly, as though to bring its charms to the point of absolute perfection, a still more vivid splash of colour was added to the picture. We became conscious of a rustle of wings beside us, and then, on the branch of a wattle less than thirty feet away, there settled a most glorious kingfisher. The dazzling luster of his brilliantly blue plumage glittered in the soft light of the afternoon sun. He sat for a few minutes on the branch before us, and then, seeing something more attractive in the shining waters below, he darted down, and we watched him sweep along the course of the river and vanish round the bend of the stream. But, to complete our felicity, he came back again and resumed his vigil on the self-same bough. For a change, he faced us this time, so that we may admire his snow-white throat and the nut-brown feathers on his breast and head. The kingfisher imparted a touch of real distinction to the lovely glen. It was the finishing touch. As I have elsewhere pointed out, we humans are in love with life; and, no matter how fascinating or romantic a scene may be, it is never quite complete

unless, somewhere within its sweep, a living, breathing, sentient creature takes its place. We love life and cannot rest content without it. The kingfisher looked as though he knew it, and seemed loath to leave the bough. The sun, sinking behind the willows, withdrew the lustre from the gorgeous hues of his radiant breast. A moment later, feeling, perhaps that the glory had departed, he himself flew away; and we felt that it was time for us to go. We scrambled up the slope, and, in negotiating the fence at the top, felt sorry for the people in the motor-car. They had gone home to tell their friends that they had been to the end of the road and had found that there was nothing there! Nothing there! Just a fence and nothing more! I can see them sitting at dinner an hour or two later. The ladies are robed now in their beautiful evening gowns; the most exquisite gems flash and sparkle in their hair. The table, with its costly glass and glittering plate, its soft lights, and its delicately-tinted flowers, is a dream of luxurious splendor. And, over their fish, they repeat the story of their ridiculous adventure. They had been the dupes of a blind road! They had followed the long, straight highway for miles, only to find that it led to nowhere! I can hear their boisterous laughter as they tell of their fruitless spin. It was a blind road! It led to nowhere! There was nothing there! They came to a fence and had to turn! So true is it that numbers of people drive up to the gates of paradise and turn away disillusioned and disappointed. They fancy there is nothing there!

This was yesterday afternoon. In the evening I stumbled upon an experience of a very different kind. I had promised to lecture at an anniversary gathering in connexion with a church in one of the poorer suburbs. I was not quite sure as to the distance, and I reached the building long before the appointed time. I was greeted at the church door by a singularly unattractive piece of humanity. He was a tall, gaunt, elderly man, somewhat bent at the shoulders, bearded and wrinkled. In spite of the balmy evening, he was muffled up in a great-coat, which was obviously worn, not for comfort, but to conceal the clothes that it covered. He affected neither a collar nor a tie. There was something distinctly forbidding about him; he appeared gloomy and taciturn; his manner did not inspire confidence or encourage conversation. He shook my hand heartily but awkwardly; showed me the way to the vestry door; and seemed, I thought, relieved at dismissing me. Sitting alone in the vestry, it occurred to me that there must be more about his man than

met the eye. He was not paid to come; his presence at that early hour proved that he discharged his duties cheerfully and faithfully. I felt as I had felt when leaning against the fence at the end of the road. The fence was forbidding; so was this man's manner. Was I to behave towards this man as the people in the motor-car had behaved towards the end of the road? The valley beyond the fence had excited my curiosity; so did this man's character. I had conquered the fence and found the river, the willows, the swallows, and the kingfisher. Might I not again stand, all unconsciously, at the gates of paradise? Was I to turn away from this man, saying that there was nothing there? I felt ashamed of myself. It was the mote and the beam over again. What right had I to think hard thoughts of the people in the motor-car? I was acting now just as they had done then! Once more I resolved to climb the fence and investigate. I strolled round to the front door and found my friend still at the top of the steps.

'I have never been here before,' I said, 'as I shall be expected to refer presently to the work that you are doing here, I should like to be shown over the premises. Would you mind?'

I could see that I had touched him on a tender spot. There was very little to show me; but I could see that he was very fond and very proud of the place. I soon discovered, too, the main cause of his embarrassment when we first met.

'You must excuse me, sir,' he said, turning up the collar of his great-coat, 'but, you see, I have to go on duty at eleven o'clock. I work all night in the tramway tunnels under the streets, seeing that things are all ready for the cars to run in the morning. There's no time to go home and change, so I have to wear my working clothes to the meeting. I was half a mind not to come; but there are only two or three of us to keep the place going; the others are late getting home to tea, and can't be here as soon as I can; and I didn't like to think that you might come and find no one here to receive you.'

I told him that I thought it was very noble of him to come at all under such circumstances. I began to feel as I had in the afternoon, when the river and the willows first broke upon my view.

'Oh, don't say that, sir,' he pleaded, forgetting his earlier embarrassment and throwing off all reserve, 'don't say that! You see I was led to the Saviour here, over forty years ago. I wouldn't like to tell you what kind of man I was in those days. But I tell you it made all the difference. And when I think of what my home has been these forty years, and what the church has been to me these

forty years, I feel I can't keep away when there's something to be done!'

Half-an-hour later I was sitting next to the chairman, listening to the secretary's report. To my surprise, it contained an appreciative reference to my friend at the door. 'This church owes,' the secretary said, 'a debt that it can never repay, or even acknowledge, to Mr. Walter Price. Mr. Price is never absent from his place at the door on Sundays or week nights. Being on night duty, he spends his afternoons in visiting those who are sick or in trouble. He makes it his business to know every member of the congregation, and, but for his faithful and devoted service, steadfastly continued through so many years, it would have been impossible to maintain this work so long.'

Just as the meeting was closing, a piercing scream rang through the building, and a young fellow in an epileptic fit was carried out. I was startled; but I noticed that nobody else was.

'It was young Price,' the chairman explained to me as soon as the meeting had closed. 'He is terribly afflicted; and the slightest excitement brings on one of his attacks. The people here are accustomed to it. It's a great trouble to his father. The poor old man has a heavy cross to carry.'

A heavy cross to carry! And I had blamed him for seeming gloomy and taciturn! I so nearly turned away, as did the people in the motor-car, and said that there was nothing there!

As I passed through the schoolroom to the vestry to get my hat and coat, I saw the poor young sufferer reclining on a form, whilst another young fellow, evidently his brother, knelt beside him. In reply to my inquiries, the youth upon his knees assured me that his brother was almost himself again.

'I'm glad of that,' I said. 'I was talking to your father just now and feel very thankful to have met him.' He rose from his knees, his eyes sparkled, and his face glowed with enthusiasm.

'Then, sir,' he said, 'if you've been talking with my father, you've been talking to the best man living. My father's all gold, sir, that's what he is, all gold!'

Gold! Gold! All gold! I felt as I had felt when the kingfisher suddenly settled on the wattle and added a new glory to the glen.

These twin experiences have given me my text for Sunday. There is One, the prophet says, who, at first seeming, is *'as a root out of dry ground: He hath no form nor comeliness: and, when*

we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.' But they who turn from Him on that account are like the people in the motor-car. They make the mistake that I made when I saw gold and thought it granite. The people in the motor-car never saw the graceful willows, never saw the gently-flowing waters, never saw the sunlight glorify the lustrous plumage of the kingfisher. I very nearly missed a nugget of purest gold. So easy it is to drive up to the gates of heaven and to turn away disappointed, thinking there is nothing there. There are fewer blind roads than we suppose. God's universe is divided into two hemispheres, the physical and the spiritual; they are both of them littered with gold and swarming with kingfishers.

Chapter 33

FROM DOOR TO DOOR

From *Arrows of Desire*

It is nearly a quarter of a century since I relinquished my last charge—the church at Armadale—and, looking across that ever-widening chasm, one of the most pleasant and most satisfying of my memories is the memory of my pastoral visitation.

From the time at which, fresh from College, I settled at Mosgiel in New Zealand, early in 1895, to the day on which I bade a tearful farewell to my third and last congregation in 1928, I revelled in spending four afternoons each week in ringing people's front-door bells.

It is an entrancing occupation. I found it delightful and profitable. It is good *physically*: the outing and the exercise represent an invigorating refreshment sandwiched between the close application of the morning and the public engagements of the evening. It is good *mentally*. It keeps the mind in touch with reality, storing the memory with the throbbing romance of daily life. And it goes without saying that it is good *spiritually* both for minister and people.

During the first three years of each of my three pastorates, I systematically visited, once a year, every home connected with the congregation. On the third annual round, at each place, my wife was good enough to accompany me. Then, after the third year, I concentrated upon the *old* people, the *sick* people, and the *newcomers*. Every two or three years I would glance over the list of members and adherents to see if any were being neglected through this process of concentration; and, if so, I looked in on them. But,

if a minister conscientiously and diligently visits the three classes I have named, it is wonderful how few homes, for any length of time, are left out in the cold.

At Armadale, my wife and I acquired two habits that, in retrospect, afford us the greatest satisfaction. I confidently commend them to all ministers.

(1) We made it our custom to go to bed every day after lunch. I do not mean forty winks on a chair or a sofa. We undressed, went to bed, and, as a rule, slept soundly. It is an excellent thing to do, especially for those whose most exacting duties occupy the evening hours. It can easily be done. Lunch is over, say, at half-past one. Nobody wants to be visited until three. Why not make the most of this providential breathing-space?

(2) We set aside Thursday afternoons for an outing by our two selves. Every Thursday afternoon, for thirteen years, we set off, on rising from our siesta, for the Melbourne Botanical Gardens. We enjoyed the journey thither; we enjoyed exploring the Gardens and noting the growth of things from week to week; we enjoyed afternoon tea beside the lake; we enjoyed the return journey; and, best of all, we tremendously enjoyed each other's society. We kept Thursday evenings free from engagements so that we could abandon ourselves to this delightful excursion with perfectly restful minds.

This was on Thursdays. On Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays we rounded off our siesta with a cup of tea and then I—or, perhaps, both of us—set out for an afternoon's bell-ringing. I stress that cup of tea. It is vital. Apart from any reviving and stimulating virtue inherent in itself, it provides an excellent and unanswerable reason for declining a similar libation in the homes to be visited. And that is extremely important.

For the secret of the success of such a visit depends on the ability of the minister to keep the conversation under his own control. He will, of course, display intense interest in all that is told him concerning the family; how else can he furnish that intelligent and sympathetic help that it is his bounden duty to impart? But such intimate intercourse must not degenerate into mere chit-chat; and, once afternoon tea is served, it is very difficult to avert that calamity. I always found that a useful approach was an inquiry, on my first visit, as to how long my host or hostess had been connected with the church. This naturally led to a recital of the circumstances under which they joined. The story, always interesting in itself, inevitably

elicited some appetizing morsel of spiritual autobiography; and, once the interview has become enveloped in that atmosphere, the success of the visit is assured.

Having brought this phase of the adventure to a natural termination, a lull invariably ensues. During that pause, my hostess would invariably rise, asking me to excuse her. I rose, too, to arrest her movements and prevent her exit. I assured her that I had been served with afternoon tea before leaving home, and I suggested that, in view of the delightful conversation which we had just enjoyed, we should join in prayer for the various members of the family before parting.

Along these lines, I was usually able to pay from six to eight visits during the afternoon; and I seldom reviewed the experience at night without feeling that the time had been spent very pleasantly and very profitably.

It was at least profitable in one important respect. During the earlier years of my ministry, I found the week-night service a real problem. I always made it a rule to preach one old sermon and one new on each Sunday. I realized that the preparation of a sermon demands intense concentration. It is impossible to give that concentration to two subjects simultaneously. I therefore bent all my powers each week to a new theme, revising and repeating a previous utterance at the other service. But this left the week-night gathering unprovided for.

For a few years I prepared a little homily—sometimes new and sometimes old—for the people who came on Wednesday evenings. But I soon became afflicted with serious doubts as to the wisdom of, and the necessity for, this third utterance. Can any man assimilate three set sermons a week? As I looked round upon my weeknight congregation I realized that most of the faces were tired faces. Few of these folk were in the mood to follow a carefully-reasoned disquisition; their countenances only brightened when I employed some striking illustration or introduced a gleam of humour. I decided to drop the address altogether.

Instead, I kept my ears wide open, in the course of my afternoon excursions, for interesting stories of conversion, of answered prayer, or of some phase of spiritual experience. When a story of this kind was told me—and every minister listens to some such recital almost daily—I would say: 'My dear sir, you must tell that story on Wednesday evening!' Those who shrank from public

utterance, I coaxed into writing a letter that I could read at the meeting. As soon as the speaker had told his story, or the letter had been read, I would announce a hymn, remarking, as I did so, that I felt sure that others present had enjoyed a similar experience: if so, they must tell us about it after the hymn had been sung. Following this practice, we had some most delightful and profitable gatherings. It is always good for a man to unfold to others the work of God in his own soul, and it is always a means of grace to listen to such moving narratives.

My memories of those far-off days are not altogether mixed with elements of surprise and romance. I set off one afternoon on my customary mission. I knew exactly in which direction I was going, and had made a list of the homes at which I hoped to call. On my way to the tram I suddenly thought of a home in an entirely different direction. No visit to that home was due, and there was, so far as I know, no reason why my mind should turn that way. But as I drew nearer to the tramline the impression deepened, and, absurd as it seemed, I decided to abandon my programme and make my way to that home. To my astonishment, the door was answered by Dr. Player, a well-known Malvern practitioner, whom I had often met. 'Oh, thank God you've come!' he exclaimed. 'Mr. B— has just died very unexpectedly on my hands; Mrs. B— is ill in bed; and there's nobody else in the house and no telephone!'

All this makes up a memorable phase in one's ministerial life. I recall even now the emotion with which, before retiring at night, I would review the visits that I had paid during the afternoon. On his knees, a minister's mind is as prone to wander as any other man's. But the thought of those six or eight homes gave me something vivid and concrete and picturesque on which to focus my wayward fancy. And, bowed in the silence, I like to think that, in those six or eight homes, I myself was not being forgotten. There are few things that make a minister's heart more tender than the thought that he is loved and trusted and prayed for in homes to whose doorstep he has himself brought the Kingdom of God.

Chapter 34

MOSGIEL

From *The Home of the Echoes*

Five and twenty years ago to-night I arrived at Mosgiel after my long, long voyage from the other side of the world. The little place must always be to me a riot of memory. I have sometimes wondered whether, during the twelve years that I spent there, I missed any strange experience that might conceivably have come my way. In looking back across the past at that first ministry of mine, it really seems to me that, from being summoned to attend a shuddering felon on the gallows to being commissioned by a too-bashful lover with the responsibility of proposing to a blushing maid on his behalf, I tasted every pain and pleasure, sounded every deep and shallow, of the ministerial life.

It would, of course, be easy to place on record a few of these adventures; but they would, I am afraid, furnish lugubrious reading. Those sturdy folk to whom I ministered were of the severely Scottish type; they took their pleasures sadly; but everything that verged upon the sombre side of life they dealt with in the grand and lofty style. There is humour in those early experiences, although at a time I failed to notice it, but the humour is of the grim or gloomy kind. I had only been a few weeks in the place when I discovered that, on some subjects, these stern parishioners of mine had notions of their own. I was boarding in those days at an orchard about a mile from the township. A stranger in a strange land, very lonely and very homesick, I spent most of my time in preparing sermons and seeing visions. I put them in that order deliberately. I do not wish to

imply that between the dreams and the discourses, there existed any relationship at all. The prophets saw visions that led to their fiery proclamations; but I am neither a prophet nor the son of one, and my dreams did not help my discourses a scrap. The sermons, I have no doubt, were quite sublime; all youthful sermons are. But the dreams, at any rate, were exceedingly human. In William Morris's *King Arthur's Tomb*, the poet makes poor Guinevere confess that, when she went with her maids to sing mass in the chapel on the lawn, her visions were not helpful to her devotions.

And every morn I scarce could pray at all,
For Launcelot's red golden hair would play,
Instead of sunlight, on the painted wall,
Mingled with dreams of what the priest did say.

I can sympathize with her. My dreams were of pretty much the same kind. They were principally concerned with a very fine house and a very fair face. For, in those days, the Mosgiel manse was projected but not yet built; and she, its prospective mistress, was still in England, wooed but not yet won. Once, however, at dead of night, these delicious dreams were rudely disturbed. I was awakened, and brought back to reality, by a sharp, vigorous tapping at my window and the insistent repetition of my name. As soon as I could regain command of my wayward and drowsy faculties I stammered out an answer to the mysterious voice, and proceeded to strike a match.

'You're wanted at once at a kisting at 11 Factory Row!' the voice replied.

By this time I had lit a candle, wrapped something round me, and thrown open the window. But there was no one there! Save for the night wind sighing through the fruit-trees, everything was as quiet as the grave. Could the voice have been a part of the dream? The theory did not seem feasible; the two things would not fit into each other at all. As I peered out into the silent night, the words came back to me.

'Wanted at once! A kisting! Factory Row!'

There was nothing for it, so I arose, dressed, and slipped out into the darkness. It was just two o'clock in the morning—an unearthly hour to be abroad. The whole adventure seemed uncanny. Every sound startled me. A cow that had been standing against a

fence moved a few yards farther away; a horse lying in one of the paddocks suddenly rose and whinnied; a bird in the hedge flapped its wings; a cat scurried across the road. All things appeared to resent my intrusion upon their nocturnal stillness. What was I doing out among the fields at that amazing hour? They all wanted to know. And that was precisely what I also wished to know. A kisting! Wanted at once at a kisting! What on earth was a kisting? I took the word to pieces, analysed it, and examined it in the closest possible way, but to no purpose. What awaited me at 11 Factory Row, and what I was to do when I reached that address, I could not imagine. On his way to the house of feasting or the house of grief, a minister unconsciously attunes his spirit to the scene of gladness or the scene of sadness upon which he is about to burst, but such an exercise was impossible to me that night. My mind was in a tumult of uttermost bewilderment. I emerged from the fields upon the slumbering township, and, passing through the deserted streets, made my way to Factory Row. As I approached I could see that No. 11 was a scene of animation. A light shone from every window. The front door stood open, and, as I walked up the garden path, two of three familiar figures stepped out to meet me. I frankly confessed my perplexity, and they, good stalwart Scots, pitied my lowland ignorance and made things easy for me. A kist, they explained, is simply a chest, or, as we English would say, a coffin. Poor old Donald McCaig had died overnight; the undertaker had just brought the kist, and it was customary for the minister 'to read a wee bittie from the buik and pit up a prayer' when the body was reverently lifted into it. I attended many a kisting after that, but I shall never forget my first experience of the kind. As I walked back through the fields half an hour later the stars were shining. They may have been watching over me all the time, but, on the outward journey, I was too confused and bewildered to notice them. As I made my way back to my bed—and my dreams—I found myself pondering on the strangeness and significance of my mission. Wherever, the wide world over, the living and the dead mingle, men seem by some sure instinct to feel that the minister of the Most High should stand, as Aaron stood, between them.

In regard to the disposition of their temporal affairs, my Mosgiel folk had ideas of peculiarly their own. A kind of tradition obtained among them. The tradition consisted of two parts. In the first place they held strongly to the conviction that under no

circumstances should a will be made as long as there was the faintest glimmer of hope of the recovery of the testator; and, in the second place, they firmly believed that nobody but the minister should draw up that solemn and awful instrument. These tenets in the faith of my good people proved at times extremely embarrassing, and I tried to reason them into a better mind, but they only smiled at the strange ideas of their young English minister, and pursued the even tenor of their way. Once, when the provisions of the dying man were particularly intricate and complicated, my faith in my ability to accurately draft the will completely failed me. At my wits' ends, and under deep emotion, I rose from my chair, expressed to the relatives my grief at my own incapacity, tore the unfinished document into fragments, and implored them to let me go for a solicitor. They were extremely vexed. In course of time they forgave me, but the memory always served as a reminder of my lowland limitations. Now that the years have passed, and my declaration is unlikely to lead to awkward consequences, I may confess that, more than once, I was called to make out the wills of people whose consciousness, as their guided hands scratched a cross upon the foolscap, was, to put it mildly, only partial. I shiver still when I think of a certain bitterly cold night—there was snow on the ground—on which I was dragged from my bed to make Dugald Hunter's will. It was during our first year at the manse. I dressed as quickly as I could, slipped pen, ink, and paper into a bag, and set out across the fields. As I drew near to the cottage a woman came out on tiptoe with finger warningly upraised. Mr. Hunter had taken a turn for the better—he was inclined to sleep—perhaps I would give a 'cry roon' in the morning! In the morning, I learned with considerable satisfaction, Mr. Hunter was distinctly better, and the making of the will had therefore been indefinitely postponed!

The call to a condemned cell came from a prison a hundred miles away. I knew nothing of the horrid case but what I had seen in the newspapers, and it never occurred to me for an instant that I should be drawn into the vortex of its squalor. Returning one afternoon from a visit to a sick child at a distant farm, I found a letter in a large official envelope awaiting me. I tore it open curiously but casually. It was from the sheriff of the gaol. The wretched man lying under sentence of death had sought my help, and the authorities requested me to leave by the first train. The horror of it nearly froze my blood. I do not know how our first parents felt as they

exchanged the garden for the wilderness, but I know how I felt as I turned my back upon the fields and farms around my quiet manse, and prepared to plunge into this realm of sordid guilt and hideous tragedy. Happily the sentence was, at the last moment, commuted, and I was spared the terrible ordeal that, since opening the sheriff's letter, had haunted my imagination night and day.

This, however, was not strictly a memory of Mosgiel. The case was not a Mosgiel case, the people were not Mosgiel people. The nearest approach to anything of this grim kind at Mosgiel occurred on Christmas Day. On Christmas Eve I heard that Jamie Duncan had been found dead in his room. Later in the evening I heard that the jury had pronounced it a case of *felo-de-se*, and that the funeral was fixed for the afternoon of Christmas Day. In view of the terrible verdict, the relatives declined to follow the body to the grave, and the undertaker refused to lead the cortége through the main streets. On that glorious Christmas afternoon—the mid-summer sunshine bathing all the hills in splendour—I alone followed that coffin through the secluded byways of the township to the cemetery on the side of the hill; and, when I read the burial service at the graveside, the undertaker and the sexton were my only hearers. I remember that, as I bade him good-bye, the undertaker was good enough to wish me a merry Christmas, and, somehow, the words sounded strange.

It was on Christmas Day, too, that Seth Draper entrusted me with his delicate commission. Seth was a great man in every way. He was well over six feet in height and was broad and massive in proportion. He was a lonely man. For many years he had been the sole support of his aged mother and invalid sister. Seth was only a labourer; his earnings were not large; the sister involved him in doctors' bills and chemists' bills; and poor Seth felt that, with his hands so full, he must steel his heart against all thoughts of homemaking on his own account. He took no part in the social life of the church or the town, and most people thought him morose, reserved, and gloomy. He was most faithful, however, in his attendance at the week-night prayer-meeting. One evening, acting upon a sudden impulse, I asked him if he would lead us to the Throne of Grace. A moisture came to his eye. Did I think him worthy of *that*? Nay, but he could not do it if he would. And then, after a pause, would I give him a week to think about it?

It was a wonderful prayer that Seth offered the following

week. It seemed as though the very depths were broken up, and a brave, unselfish heart yielded its hidden treasure. Seth's great gift in this connexion became notorious, and they were memorable prayer-meetings in which he could be induced to take part. Seth's mother and sister passed away within a few weeks of each other. When I saw the door of his trim little cottage standing open of an evening, and learned that Seth was at home, I often sauntered across the fields for a chat. He was a skilful gardener, and liked to talk about his flowers. One summer evening, about the middle of December, I took the mistress of the manse with me on one of these informal calls. Pitying his loneliness, and seized by a sudden inspiration, she invited him to come across to the manse on Christmas Day and share our dinner with us. He seemed pleased, and readily agreed to come. But when the day arrived he appeared more taciturn than usual. He took little part in the conversation, and we were half sorry that we had brought to our board so dismal a guest. After dinner we lounged in the deck-chairs on the verandah, enjoying the sunshine and strawberries and cream. And then, when the mistress of the manse had withdrawn to attend to household matters, he found his tongue and startled me. Did I know Elsie Hammond? Of course I did! Elsie was one of the most devoted workers in the church. She had come to Mosgiel from an orphanage years before. She had lived a hard life in her younger days, and it had left its mark upon her. But she had been for years in service at the doctor's; they were very kind to her, and she had come to be regarded as an integral part of the establishment. Having no home of her own, she made a home of the church. Her whole heart was in it. Whenever something special needed to be done, we all turned instinctively to Elsie. Everybody loved her, and I believe that any of the girls in her class would have laid down their lives for her. Did I know Elsie? What a question! But why did he ask?

He told me. He was lonely. Since his mother and sister died, he had had nothing and no one to live for. And, somehow, he thought that Elsie was lonely, and he knew that she was good. He had never spoken to her, beyond mere formal words of greeting. He had never had anything to do with women-folk, and he didn't know how to start now. And, anyhow, in a little place like Mosgiel, it might look silly, and people would talk, and he would not for worlds make her uncomfortable.

I asked him if he had any reason to suppose that his

admiration for Elsie was reciprocated.

'No,' he said sadly, 'none at all. One Sunday afternoon, a month or two ago, I was coming up the road, looking over my shoulder, I saw Elsie coming a hundred yards or so behind me. She had another of the teachers with her. I had a scarlet nasturtium in my coat; I took it out and dropped it purposefully. I glanced back to see if she picked it up; but she only kicked it into the grass by the side of the path.'

The case certainly did not look promising; but at his urgent request I undertook to see Elsie and sound her on the subject. For a day or two I felt very perturbed, and wondered how on earth I should approach the delicate theme. But my worry, like most worries, was quite superfluous. My task was made wonderfully simple. On the following Sunday—the last day of the old year—Elsie dropped in after church. It was a perfect summer evening, and, after laying her Bible, her handbag, and her gloves on the dining-room table, she and the mistress of the manse sauntered off into the garden to look at the roses. I was tired after a heavy day, and threw myself for a moment on the couch. Absent-mindedly I reached out my hand and picked up Elsie's Bible. As I opened it, there fluttered from among its pages *a pressed nasturtium*! I saw my chance.

The ladies returned; one went off to get the supper, and I was left alone with the other. I at once asked her to tell me about the nasturtium in her Bible. Her utter confusion told me all that I wished to know.

'Elsie,' I said, seeing that she was unlikely to speak, 'Seth Draper dropped that flower; you kicked it into the grass by the side of the road, and then went back afterwards and picked it up and pressed it!'

She was amazed at discovering that I possessed the first half of the secret. To set her to her ease I had to tell her how the information came to me. I do not flatter myself that the attempt to put her at her ease was altogether a success. But, however that may be, Seth and Elsie were happily married a few months later. When I left Mosgiel they had quite a little family around them.

And so, sometimes telling of the love of a man and sometimes telling the love of God, I spent twelve happy years among these simple but sturdy souls, learning at their hands to be a minister of the everlasting gospel.

Boreham became the pastor at Mosgiel Baptist in New Zealand in 1896 at the age of 24. He pastored there for 12 years.

Hobart Baptist Tabernacle in Hobart, Tasmania.
Boreham pastored here for 10 years until 1916

Armadale Baptist in Melbourne.
Boreham served here for 12 years until 1928.