FRANK W. BOREHAM

A PASTOR WITH HIS PEOPLE

Compiled by MIKE FOCHT

Frank W. Boreham—A Pastor With His People
by Frank W. Boreham, compiled by Mike Focht

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I would like to recognize the saintly people of Calvary Chapel of Philadelphia. Without your support, prayer, and faithful service in my life, this book would not exist. Please read in these pages your pastor's humble gratitude.

- Pastor Mike Focht

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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

A STORY OF CROSS PURPOSES

From *Wisps of Wildfire*

I have a suggestion to make. There dwell upon the face of this planet a handful of people who have exhibited a certain amount of genius in writing other men's lives. But they have none of them done as well as they might do—and for obvious reasons; they have written the lives of the wrong people. They have focused all their attention, and spent all their strength, on famous people; and, as they themselves discovered to their cost, the lives of famous people can seldom be made interesting. The biographer is embarrassed at the start. He feels that his story is already stale. It is like telling a fairy-tale to children who have heard it a dozen times before, and who only listen so attentively to its thirteenth recital in the frantic hope that it will this time take an unexpected turn. But the biography of your celebrity can take no unexpected turn. The writer is tyrannized by truth. Moreover, he feels that his readers know his hero almost as well as he does. He is afraid to tell you how the great man looked; what he ate; what he wore; and what were his most characteristic peculiarities. These, he thinks, are familiar to everybody; and so, forsaking the personalities that are perennially interesting, he loses himself in a fog of philosophical reflection and abstract generalization. The biographies of nonentities are invariably more fascinating. If I see in a shop window the life of a man of whom I never before heard, I always open negotiations with the bookseller on the spot. The biographer of such a man feels that he must make his hero live before you; he is careful to indulge in the most vivid

and minute particulars; no item of description is considered too trivial; and thus, little by little, a living and satisfying portrait is made to appear upon the canvas. The man who writes the life of a celebrity is paralyzed by his hero's fame; the man who writes the life of a nonentity has all the secrets up his sleeve. The stars in their courses are fighting in his favor.

But my suggestion! Let one of our really brilliant biographers put on his hat tomorrow morning; let him step out into the street; let him stop, as politely as possible, the first person that he happens to meet; and let him break to that astonished individual the sensational news that he is about to write his—or her—biography. It does not matter in the least who the person is. It may be a millionaire or it may be an organ-grinder; or, for that matter, it may be the millionaire's mastiff or the organ-grinder's monkey. Jack London has written a masterly biography of a wolf; the mastiff and the monkey ought not, therefore, to prove impossible. But, leaving wolves and mastiffs and monkeys out of our reckoning, I am convinced that a book, written by a skilful hand, on the lines I have suggested, would prove of really absorbing interest. There is no drama like the drama of reality. The man whose biography was not worth writing has never yet been born. Let it but be written with candor, with simplicity, with honesty—the struggle tellingly recorded and the secret soul laid bare—and any such volume would hold the reader spellbound from the first page to the last.

And, after all, every life has its purple patches, its hours of wild romance, its golden dreams, its heartbreak, and its bloodshed. I often think of Mosgiel—the little Scottish settlement in New Zealand in which I spent the first twelve years of my ministerial life. In describing a secluded English hamlet, fifty miles from London, Mark Rutherford says that 'it might be supposed that there was no romance in the little village of Cowfold. There could not be a greater mistake. The Garden of Eden; the murder of Cain; the Deluge; the salvation of Noah; the exodus from Egypt; David and Bathsheba, with the murder of Uriah; the Assyrian invasion; the Incarnation; the Atonement and the Resurrection from the Dead—all these happened in Cowfold, and were, perhaps, more interesting there because they could be studied in detail, and the records were authentic.' I know that this was true of Mosgiel. I was led to these

reflections by consulting my birthday book. Against today's date I find the name of Gilbert Thomas. And I can never recall the familiar face of Gilbert Thomas without recalling also a set of circumstances that, if embodied in a novel, would be scouted as wildly improbable. Yet this narrative will be read by many who are intimate with all the facts. And, in all human probability, stranger things happen every day and perish forgotten for want of a chronicler.

I was sitting, one sunny October morning, on the broad verandah of my Mosgiel manse. The mountains hemmed me in on every side. October, in these latitudes, is the loveliest month of the whole year. The first delicious breath of summer is in the air; the gardens are aglow with spring flowers; the bush around is waking up; and on every bough the birds are busy. Far across the plain before me, the farmers were hard at work in anticipation of a wealthy season. I was just becoming absorbed in my book when the gate swung open, and Gilbert Thomas came down the gravel path. He was a Sunday-school teacher, and held several offices of responsibility in connection with the Church. After commenting on the beauty of the morning and the promise of the fields, he told me that he was in a good deal of perplexity, and asked if I had time to listen to his story. I brought out a second arm-chair and bade him proceed. And this is what he told me.

'I was born in England,' he began, 'and was one of a large family. I was the first to leave the old home. I married and came out to New Zealand. But, as the years went on, one member of the family after another followed my example. One went to South Africa, one to Canada, one to Western Australia, until at last the old folks were left by themselves. Then I received the news that my father had died, and my mother remained alone. The brother who had settled in South Africa urged her to leave England and make her home with him. He was doing well and had plenty of room for her. At length she consented, and sailed for Cape Town. After a year or two, my brother contracted a fever and suddenly died. I have never heard of my mother since. That was years ago. I have tried in every possible way to trace her; but in vain. And now I am beginning to feel that it is my duty to go to South Africa and search for her. What do you think?'

I allowed the bees in the garden and the birds in the

hedgerow to have things to themselves for a few minutes while I sat in silence. I found it difficult to advise him. I reminded him at last that he was not a wealthy man, that he had a wife and young children dependent upon his labor, and that their claim must be considered. I produced an atlas, and pointed out that South Africa is an enormous territory, and that the chances of finding an obscure individual there were, to say the least of it, remote. I said, too, that the recent war—the Boer war of 1900—had brought about a condition of general unsettlement and dislocation which would make his difficult task still more baffling. And I suggested that it was extremely probable, especially in view of her silence, that his mother was either dead or had married again, and that, in the latter case, her new and unknown name might prove a fatal obstacle to his search. I emphasized all these points, not without considerable reluctance. It seemed ill to become a Christian minister to dissuade a man from so laudable a pilgrimage as to that which he proposed. A mother is a mother. And so I made it clear that while I had felt it right to lay before him the stupendous difficulties that confronted him, I was by no means certain that he ought not to go. I urged him to make quite sure that he had exhausted all other means of discovering his mother's whereabouts; to satisfy himself that he could afford, while prosecuting his great search, to provide for his wife and children; and then to see me again.

He thanked me and left. A few months later, when the plain was golden with harvest and the first suspicion of frost was in the air, he came again. He had established fresh communications and made more exhaustive inquiries; but all had proved fruitless. He felt that he could never rest so long as his mother's fate, or her happiness, were uncertain. He had the previous evening discussed the matter for the last time with his wife, and they had agreed that it was best that he should go. There was, therefore, nothing further to be said.

We held a social at the church to bid him farewell, and a modest presentation was made. The next day he was to leave. Mosgiel is about ten miles from Dunedin, the port of his departure, and a number of us resolved to accompany him to the ship. The *Mararoa* put to sea at about four o'clock in the afternoon. As the huge liner glided majestically down the channel, we stood on the

wharf—his wife and children, with some thirty or forty friends—and waved to him until his handkerchief was no longer discernible. Then, with that sensation of depression which is peculiar to the departure of the 'outward bound,' we sadly and silently retraced our steps to the station. It was almost dusk when we left the train at Mosgiel and walked in a straggling procession along the station road towards our several homes. We had not gone far when I noticed an elderly lady, clothed in black, a stranger in the district, evidently embarrassed and perplexed. I approached her, and asked if I could be of any assistance.

'Do you know where Gilbert Thomas lives?' she asked.

'I know his home, but I am afraid you will not find him there.'

'You don't mean that he's dead?' she inquired anxiously.

'No indeed,' I answered, ashamed of the ambiguity of my former reply, 'but he has left this very afternoon on a long voyage, and, as a matter of fact, my friends and I have just been to see him off.'

'A long voyage!' she almost screamed; 'a long voyage! Why, wherever has he gone?'

'He has sailed for South Africa to search for his mother,' I explained to her; 'he has not heard from her for many years.'

She became deadly pale and seized my hand. 'Gone to South Africa to search for his mother!' she cried. 'Why, I am his mother! I have arrived this very day from South Africa to look for him!'

It would still have been possible, had we climbed the hill, to have seen the great ship passing down the coast. But it would have been a tantalizing experience and nothing would have been gained. By this time the wife of the unhappy voyager had joined us, and had grasped the extraordinary development of the situation. We went together to the post office to send cablegrams to ports of call, in hope of intercepting him. Wireless was then unknown. And then they went home together in the twilight, the lonely wife and the long-lost mother, to comfort each other as best they could until the wanderer's return.

How did it all end? How should it all end? The trouble about the present method of writing biographies is that they are

bound to end well. The biographers only write about successful men. One of the beauties of my suggestion is that the man whom the biographer happens to meet as he steps out on to the public thoroughfare may be a failure—a deadbeat, a gaol-bird, or a tramp. In that case the volume will be all the more exciting. We badly need a few biographies with bad endings. Our libraries—public and private—are woefully short in that department of literature. And it is a very interesting and very profitable department. Failures are tragically instructive.

This story of mine ends badly. Gilbert Thomas and his mother were disappointed in each other. Neither of them had made allowance for the years, and the changes that come with the years. They had grown away from each other. She had lived a rough, discordant life in an up-country mining town in the Transvaal; she had acquired a taste for drink and for pleasures of the coarser kind. He, on the other hand, had come under gentler and more gracious influences, had joined the Church, and had taken an active and honorable part in several Christian enterprises. Poor Gilbert! For six months he struggled bravely with his sorrow and did his utmost to reconcile his mother to the atmosphere of his home. But it was useless. She announced her intention of returning to South Africa; and, not long after, he found himself standing where we had stood before, waving to the ship that bore his mother from him. He never saw or heard of her again.

I suppose that my story shows, if it shows anything, that the dearest and sweetest relationships of life have one peculiarity in common with the most ordinary things. They go to pieces unless kept in constant repair. Neglect spells destruction. I am apt to think that, while we change and grow, the rest of the world stands still; I may alter but everybody else remains the same. We forget that the friend from whom we parted years and years ago has, like ourselves, grown older. There is but One upon whose eternal youth the treacherous years make no impression; there is but One with whose likeness, when we awake after the dream of Time, we shall be perfectly satisfied. And, unless we keep that friendship in repair, we may even find that as the years have run their sluggish course, we have drifted away from Him.

Chapter 2

JANET

From *The Silver Shadow*

Old Janet Davidson—it took me a minute or two to recall the surname: we always just called her Janet—had been a widow for many a long year, and the task of raising her large family had proved just about as much as she could manage. They were always golden hours in which I strolled across the fields from the Mosgiel manse to sit with her for awhile when her rheumatism was worse than usual or her cough more than ordinarily troublesome. And often, on such occasions, she would lift the veil that concealed the past and let me peer into some phases of her long, brave, patient struggle to keep the wolf from the door. And yet nobody who knew Janet at all well, or who had even seen her face, would have suspected that she was aware of a wolf's existence. She dwelt in a crazy old weather-board cottage, lying a long way back from the road. In the days of their courtship Alec and she had walked proudly up this road one summer's evening—it was all fields then—and had selected the quarter-acre section on which they were to build their nest.

'We'll put oor bit cottage right awa' back,' Alec had said, 'and then, if things go weel wi' us, we may be able to put up a fine place in front some day!'

But it was not to be. During the twelve years of Janet's happy wedded life seven children came stealing into her heart and home. The cottage had to be twice enlarged. And then, one terrible day, the very thought of which brought to Janet's face a shadow, like the shadow of a cloud sweeping across an unlit cornfield, Alec was smitten down. In the heyday of their happiness, in the prime of

his lusty manhood, he was taken from her; and poor Janet was left to maintain the desperate struggle alone. During the 'sair years,' as she called them, she worked half-time in the woolen mills, leaving the younger children with a neighbor. And you should have seen her garden! That strip of land between the cottage and the road was a picture all the year round. What Janet did not know about the succession of crops was not worth knowing. Occasionally one of Alec's old mates would look in on Saturday afternoon and do the hard digging for her; but Janet did all the rest. Very rarely could you see an inch of soil lying idle; she worked it for all it was worth. Later on, of course, the boys shared the burden with her. She lived in the cottage to the last. I am not sure that she would have left it even if fortune had poured its favors into her lap. But no such alternatives presented themselves, and, although it is years ago, I recall distinctly the sadness that overcame me as I walked behind her coffin up the long straight path from the porch to the front gate over the site of that grander home of which she and Alec had so often dreamed.

It was one evening in the early winter that she first opened her heart to me. I had been visiting among the farms all the afternoon, and was making my way back across the fields in the dusk. I had not intended calling on Janet; but I saw her standing in the porch, taking off her apron and sunbonnet, and I did not like to pass. Her sorrow was then some years old; the elder children were at work; her youngest boy was eleven; and the worst of her struggle was over. She told me that she had just come out to fasten the shutters.

'Ah yes,' I said, perhaps with an unconscious tinge of sadness in my voice, 'the sunshine doesn't last long now, Janet. The sun goes down over the back of the mountain, and the day comes to an end.'

'An end!' she exclaimed, and her face was illumined by one of her radiant smiles. 'An end! Why, my best time comes after I have put up the shutters. The sunshine is all in the evening. I light the lamp and make up the fire and, one by one, Jessie and Mary and the boys come home. And we have tea, and all their tongues seem to be going at once; they chatter about the things they have seen and the things they have heard: and whilst we wash up the dishes the girls laugh and the boys argue; and then we settle down for the

evening.'

'And how do you spend it?' I inquired. She was quiet for a moment, and the old shadow swept her face. 'Would you like me to tell you a secret?' she asked. I said that I should.

'Well, you see,' she went on, 'it was like this. When my poor Alec left me, I had all the children on my hands, and there was still a mortgage on this wee bit place of ours; and I saw that I should have to work hard and be very careful. And yet I remembered a talk that Alec and I had together when Jessie, the first baby, was born. He was sitting beside my bed with the wee lassie in his arms.' Janet's voice faltered for a moment, and I pretended to be interested in a passer-by. Then she collected herself and went on with her story.

'"Well," he said to me as he sat there looking into Jessie's wee face, "I didn't have much fun myself when I was a boy. It was fetching and carrying from early morning until late at night, and I always got more kicks than ha'pence. I've heard some folks say that what was good enough for them is good enough for their children; but I should like my bairns to look back upon their childhood with pleasanter thoughts than come to me when I look back on mine."

'"That's strange, Alec," I said, "for before you came into the room I was lying here looking at the wee mite and thinking what a happy girlhood mine was. I am afraid they spoilt me. I had all that heart could wish. It seems like a beautiful dream. And I was thinking that I would do all that a mother can do to make our baby's childhood as happy as mine was. It would be lovely to think that in years to come she would look back upon her girlish days as I look back on mine, and bless us as I bless my father and mother."

'And in that very room'—her eye strayed pensively towards an inner door—'we promised each other that we would give our children just the happiest, merriest childhood that any parents could contrive. We did our best,' Janet went on, 'and then, when we had got all our children round us—'

'Yes,' I said, 'I know.'

She paused for a moment, and then continued her story.

'Well,' she said, 'when that happened, I thought my burden was greater than I could bear. I supposed it was wicked, but I was angry with God for being so hard on us when we were both of us doing our best. And I could not bear to think that now we should

all have to be screwing and scraping, and that our dreams could never come true. I threw myself on the bed and had a good cry. And, as I lay there, a strange idea came back to me. Once more I let my memory wander back to the days of my own girlhood. How happy I was! Expense was never considered where my pleasure was concerned. And yet when I came to recall the things that were most pleasant to look back upon, I was astonished to find that so few of them were pleasures that had cost money. How I used to love to run out into the fields and hear the lark singing in the blue sky far above me, and the grasshopper chirping in the grass at my feet! How I delighted in watching the changes that the seasons brought—the hawthorn in the lane, all clothed in a single night with a soft suspicion of green! Then there were the fields all gay with clover or with cowslips; the grassy banks twinkling with primroses and violets; the copses carpeted with bluebells; the dazzling glitter of the buttercups; the sight of the rabbit under the gorse and the squirrel up in the beech-tree; the swaying of the corn beneath the caress of the wind, and the flashing of the red, red poppies as the ears bent to and fro. My happiest memories of girlhood were of walks, sometimes with father, sometimes with mother, sometimes with both, and sometimes all by myself, midst such scenes as these, wandering along the lanes, climbing the hills or poking about in the forest. And I saw, as I lay there sobbing, that, without any burden of expense, I could teach my bairns to love all such things and enjoy them, and to store their minds with memories as happy as those their mother cherished.'

'Yes, but Janet,' I expostulated, 'you can't do this on winter evenings. You told me, you know, that your best time came after you have put up the shutters.'

'Oh, to be sure, to be sure; how I do run on! Well, I saw that other people took their children out of an evening to concerts and entertainments and the like, just as, once upon a time, my mother and father took me. And yet, when I came to look back upon the winter evenings of my girlhood, it was not the evenings that I spent at the entertainments, but the evenings that I spent by the fireside, that I recalled with the greatest pleasure. Curled up in the armchair, or sprawling on the rug, whilst mother read a book or father told a story, those were my golden hours. And so I got into the way, even

before Alec died, of reading to the children or telling them a story before putting them to bed. But after Alec was taken I took more pains with it. I could not bear to think that my lads and lasses might go off by themselves of an evening in search of the pleasures I could not afford to give them.'

It flashed upon me as she spoke that I scarcely ever met any of the Davidsons on the street after dark.

'Of course,' she went on, 'I had to begin by telling them nursery rhymes and fairy-tales—"Jack and the Beanstalk," "Cinderella," "The Babes in the Wood," and all that kind of thing; and, later on, Jessie would tell these same stories to the little ones whilst I cleared away the tea. And then, after the dishes were all put away, and the little ones were in bed, we got out the book. We began with Christie's Old Organ and A Peep Behind the Scenes. After that we read Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, The Swiss Family Robinson, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and Captain Cook's Voyages. It's just wonderful the number of books we get through, and the fun we have.'

She glanced at the rows of old volumes that rested, like honored pensioners, on a neat but evidently home-made set of bookshelves.

'At one time I used to do all the reading, but then, in those days, I bought the book. We used to make a sixpenny book last us a month. But when the elder children grew bigger, we made a new rule. They took it in turns to buy the book; and the buyer had the privilege of selecting and the task of reading it. The boys brought home most of Ballantyne's stories; and the girls generally chose one of Dickens's or Scott's. Of course, they're getting big now—Jessie's twenty-two and Davie's eighteen—and we read now chiefly for the younger ones; but I notice that even Davie hurries down the township for anything he wants so as to be back in time for the reading. You would never believe the fun we've all had together. I remember how we laughed over Topsy and Mr. Pickwick and how we cried over Uncle Tom and Little Nell. Oh, yes, my sunshine all comes in the evening, after the shutters are fastened and the lamp lit! But here's Davie now!'

I turned to greet him, and, a minute or two later, bade them farewell and finished my walk across the fields to the manse.

Janet was not old when she died, although her long widowhood, her trying cough, and her severe rheumatism made us think of her as venerable. She breathed her last, mourned by all her bairns, in the very bed beside which Alec sat with the baby in his arms. Several of the children had married by this time, and nothing pleased Janet more than to romp with her grandchildren. Donald came to see me after the funeral. Donald was her youngest boy. 'Well, Donald,' I said, 'it's a great thing to have had such a mother!'

'My word it is!' he replied. 'With next to nothing to come and go upon she made up her mind to give us all a good time, and, goodness knows, she did it! If ever a lot of children were happier than we were, I should like to have known them!'

But I could see that this was not the business that had brought him.

'I want to join the church,' he said, after a pause. 'Mother always led us in family worship every night after reading, and she always prayed that we might all be members of the church and adorn our membership by lives lived in the fear of God. I'm the only one whose name is not on the church roll. I've been thinking about it a lot lately, and I promised my mother last week I'd join.'

He did; and in the work and worship of that church, and in the organizations and activities of that little town, there were very few movements in which one or other of the Davidsons did not play a prominent and honorable part.

Chapter 3

PEGGY

From *Shadows on the Wall*

Hamish McLeod was a bundle of astonishments. The first thing about him that surprised me was that, although he always brought a horse to church, I never saw him ride it. He lived on a farm at the back of Saddle Hill, about four miles from Mosgiel. His was a striking figure. If you had once looked full into his stern Puritanical face, you would never, to your dying day, forget it. His deep-set grey eyes, which seemed to be crouching in the recesses of their dark cavernous sockets and hiding behind a heavy growth of shaggy eyebrows, looked you through and through. His forehead was massive and wrinkled; his white beard reached almost to his waist and completed the impression of patriarchal severity.

Everybody on the road was familiar with the tall gaunt form of Hamish. Winter and summer, in all sorts of weather, you would see the old man trudging along the mountain road on Sunday mornings. He came and went with the regularity and punctuality of an automaton. A goods train passed through the district on its way to Dunedin on Sunday mornings, and the stationmaster at Fairfield once told me that if Hamish vanished round the shoulder of the hill before the train emerged from the Wingatui tunnel, he knew that the train was late. Hamish never hurried and he never dawdled. He called nowhere on the road: he spoke to nobody he met. He just jogged along, his shoulders slightly bent, his face to the ground, his thoughts, to all appearances, far, far away. In his right hand he carried a small stick that was supposed to represent his riding-whip;

in his left—always behind him—he clutched the reins by which he led his old bay mare. Exactly at five minutes to eleven he always entered the church gate and led Trixie to the stable. I often stood at the vestry door and greeted him, but, save for a nod and a murmur, I received no reply. As he passed out of church I often shook his hand; but I never lured him into conversation. I attributed it at first to shyness that some people feel, or the reticence that they assume, in the presence of ministers; but I soon found that Hamish treated everybody else in the same way. I could find nobody in whom he had ever confided; and I used to fancy that even Trixie, as he led her to and from her stall, eyed him as though he were something of a mystery.

The second surprise awaited me when, in the course of my pastoral visitation, I approached Hamish's door. I had always understood that there was a Mrs. McLeod. In driving along the road to the farm, I had tried (with the usual success) to conjure up the image of this good lady, and had speculated upon the kind of welcome that I should receive at her hands. As she had never once accompanied her husband to church, I could scarcely hope for a particularly sympathetic reception. But then again, it occurred to me, she might be an invalid or have some other excellent reason for not making the tedious journey with Hamish. This theory sprang from my mind and entered my soul with all the force of a stinging rebuke. To be sure! How dull-witted I had been! I was ashamed of my lack of imagination. I was yet unmarried in those days: a woman's sagacious insight and unerring intuition would have saved me from such stupidity. The frail wife on the out-of-the-way farm supplied the missing equation and went a long way towards clearing up the mystery. It explained at once both the loneliness and the taciturnity of the old man. And to think that I—their minister—had, during the ten months that I had spent in Mosgiel, never taken the trouble to visit the suffering woman, not shown to her burdened and careworn husband any sign of sympathy! Even as the homestead came into my view—a splash of snowy whiteness flecking the infinite expanse of green—I seemed to see the poor creature hobbling painfully about the kitchen, or perhaps I should find her stretched upon a couch in an adjoining bedroom. I did not relish the prospect of meeting her. Even though, pitying my clumsy mannish ways, she uttered

no word reflecting on my thoughtlessness and neglect, her sad eyes would look reproachfully up at me, filling my soul with bitterness and confusion. But by this time I had reached the big white gate and had fastened my pony to the post that stood close by.

The surprise came as I walked up the path, past a hive of bees, through the neat little garden plat, to the front door. For, out through the open window there floated to me the clear sweet trill of a girl's voice:

And she's a' the world to me;
And for bonnie Annie Laurie
I'd lay me doon an' dee

I paused for a moment, listening. How could I help it? Moreover, I was bewildered. Here was another factor in the situation of which my sluggish imagination had failed to warn me. The song stopped abruptly when I knocked, and, in five seconds, the doorway encased as bonny a specimen of Australian womanhood as any man need wish to see. She was tall and strapping and plump, of ruddy face and laughing eyes, the picture of perfect health and abounding vigor. Her nut-brown hair peeped saucily out from beneath the folds of a pink sun-bonnet. Her sleeves were rolled up to her elbows; she wore a big blue overall; and in her hand she held a duster. There she stood, surrounded by the ivy that, clambering over the doorway, reached down long straggling arms that seemed straggling to touch her.

'Is Mr. McLeod home?' I asked apologetically, for I had not quite forgiven myself for breaking the current of her song.

'I think he's about somewhere,' she replied, in a voice in which the music still lingered. 'What name shall I say?'

I told her. A look of surprise mantled her face, and then, I thought, a mischievous twinkle crept into those deep blue eyes of hers. Showing me to a chair, she vanished in quest of Hamish. As soon as she had gone the house had an empty feeling. By what strange law do we sense a presence in a dark room or feel that a house contains nobody except ourselves? As soon as I was left alone in the room, I felt instinctively but indubitably that the sick wife was a myth, a nonentity, a mere frolic of my fancy. No such

person existed. But, on the other hand, somebody else existed of whom my wayward fancy had given me no inkling. Who was the girl in the pink sunbonnet? I was still wrestling with this tantalizing problem when my conjectures were disturbed by a heavy tread at the back door, and, after a scraping of boots and one or two other preliminaries—undertaken, I suspect, by the order of the girl in the sunbonnet—Hamish entered the room.

The first five minutes were marked by a series of awkward silences and senseless snippets of conversation. We exchanged commonplaces about the weather, about the crops, and about the conditions of life in New Zealand. This led, naturally enough, to our talking of the Mother Country—the dear Homeland across the seas from which we had both come. I may have blurted out the secret connected with the voyage across those self-same seas of another emigrant who was so soon to arrive and fill my life with sunshine. At any rate, whatever it was, something must have stirred a tender memory in the withered heart of Hamish, loosening his usually silent tongue.

I have lived under the shadow of the mountains. I have seen the beetling crags that crown their summits buried for months beneath their shining coat of snow. The whole stupendous mass is frigid, icy, adamantine. Not one trickling rill descends the bushy slopes. Then, in the spring, there comes a sudden foretaste of the coming summertime. The snow melts; the mountain torrents are swollen; through every gorge and glen the waters come streaming down. As we sat there talking of Home, and as my confidences reminded him of love, of hope, and of the roseate dreams that brides and bridegrooms cherish, a breath of spring swept into the old man's heart, and, before he knew what he was doing, he was telling me his story. He, too, had come alone from the Motherland; and Jessie, in whose portrait, as he showed it to me, I could trace the outline of the girl in the sunbonnet, had followed him about two years later. They were a little late in starting life under such new conditions. Boyhood and girlhood lay some distance behind them. After Jessie had plighted him her troth, Hamish had worked hard at his Ayrshire farm, but fortune had studiously avoided him. Jessie had waited patiently for the nest that he had promised to build; but her youth had slipped away whilst she lingered. At last, in

desperation, Hamish had emigrated; he soon made a home among the great silent hills; and Jessie came to him. They were married on the very day of her arrival. But their joy was short-lived. They spent one golden year together, luxuriating during most of that time, not only in the bliss for which they had waited so long, and which they had found at last, but in the still more wondrous rapture that, they knew, a little child would bring. And as the time drew near for that little child to open to them the gates of heaven, they themselves grew childlike in the rippling ecstasy of their gladness. At length the great day came; the little child opened the gates of heaven, but not the heaven of which they had so fondly dreamed. For Jessie went in, and Hamish was left weeping outside the gate, a little child clasped in his trembling arms.

All this Hamish told me in his own blunt way, his face twitching convulsively from time to time as he struggled to repress the emotion that he could not bear to show. But he had not yet reached the climax of his grief. He paused for a moment, and, as I saw something glisten on his cheek, I thought of the mountain torrents that in springtime come pouring down the rugged cliffs. His voice was fairly broken now.

'And Peggy's a warlding,' he cried. 'She hasna' the fear o' God in her heart; she doesna' lo'e the kirk; she gangs her ain gait.'

It is little that a minister can say under such circumstances. I mumbled a few commonplaces; and, after some conversation on more general themes, we went out into the yard to get some water for my pony. As Hamish opened the door that led into the kitchen, I saw the merest suspicion of a skirt vanish round the other doorpost. When we reached the farmyard no sign of Peggy was to be seen. Had she overheard, I wondered, her father's passionate outburst? A few minutes later I saw her in the kitchen. Hamish asked me to go with him up to the orchard to gather some apples to take back with me; but I excused myself, allowed him to go alone, and went into the kitchen to Peggy. She was so placed that, without being positively rude, she could not very well avoid me.

'Have you read this, Miss McLeod?' I asked, taking from my coat pocket an edition of Great Expectations. It bore on the cover a somewhat highly-colored picture of Miss Havisham in her faded wedding-dress.

'Is it a novel?' she asked, as she glanced at the picture.

'Yes,' I answered, 'but a very good one. I have just finished it, and, if you care to read it, you are very welcome. It occurred to me that you are rather out of the way of the bookshops up here.'

'I am sorry,' she replied, 'but father does not like me to read novels; and, looking again at the picture, I am sure he would object to that one.'

I urged her to take it, promising to report my conduct to her father on his return from the orchard, and to take back the book if he still objected.

Hamish shook his head dubiously, but did not absolutely veto the loan, so I left the book in Peggy's keeping. When she returned it I lent her another. This went on until I was happily installed in the Manse, and I then felt that the time was ripe for a bolder policy. As I was walking up the main Mosgiel street one afternoon I saw Peggy driving home in a springcart. She had evidently been taking eggs to the store and butter to the factory. I stepped out into the roadway.

'Peggy,' I said, 'we are having a little party at the Manse on Monday night, and we particularly want you to come and sing.'

'Oh,' she laughed, 'but I don't know any sacred pieces.'

'No; but we want you to sing Annie Laurie.'

She laughed; and I eventually persuaded her to come. On the question of singing she would not, however, commit herself. She came to the Manse that Monday evening. Elsie Hammond and she struck up a friendship which—although they are both married and dwell many miles apart—continues unbroken to this day; and, towards the close of the evening she sang Annie Laurie.

Hamish was very skeptical about all this. He could never satisfy himself that I had been ordained to lend novels to Peggy, or to encourage her in singing her 'wardly sangs.' I noticed, however, that he very frequently brought a big bag of his rosiest apples, or a basket of his choicest eggs, to the Manse on his way down to the church.

One other thing I noticed. About this time Hamish lost his reputation for regular habits. Sometimes he came trudging along the road leading Trixie as of old. But quite often he came seated in the springcart, Peggy holding the reins. And, on these occasions, Peggy sat beside him in the church.

At about this time I was given the opportunity of visiting England. During my absence Athol Sidwell, of Balclutha—a young minister who had recently been ordained—occupied my pulpit for a good many Sundays. During his term as locum tenens he wrote to me from time to time, giving me all the news concerning my people. One morning as I was stirring at breakfast in the old home at Tunbridge Wells, a letter arrived bearing the Mosgiel postmark. It was from Sidwell, and was full of chatty details concerning men and things. 'You will be sorry to hear,' he said, 'that, whilst Miss McLeod was riding over the hills on Tuesday, Trixie put her foot into a rabbit-hole and fell. Miss McLeod's leg was broken, but she is doing well. I have visited her twice, and she asks to be remembered to you.' I anxiously awaited his next letter, due three weeks afterwards. It came, and contained excellent news. 'Peggy McLeod is practically well again,' he said. 'She has been telling me of the talks that she has had with you, and has quite made up her mind, on your return, to join the church.' This was the best news that reached me whilst in England.

Peggy was as good as her word. It was a very happy day, both for Hamish and me, when I received her into the membership of the church. That was in 1903. I left New Zealand for Tasmania in 1906. During those three years Sidwell often preached at Mosgiel, and always made a point of visiting the farm over the hills. Some years after my settlement at Hobart, I revisited New Zealand. As I was stepping ashore, I was handed a telegram from Sidwell, imploring me to break my journey at Balclutha. Happily, I was able to do so. Imagine my astonishment when Peggy—evidently mistress of the manse—answered the door! She laughed as she drew me in. Hamish had sold the farm and was living with them. As we sat round the fire that evening Peggy went over to the piano and sang Annie Laurie. Then, coiling herself up on the hearthrug, she rested her head, with its shock of nut-brown hair, on her father's knee. The old man bent forward and kissed her.

'Aye,' he said, looking across at me, 'they say over at the kirk that she's the best meenister's wife in the country, although,' he added, contemplatively, 'she does sing such warldly sangs.'

But the strains of Annie Laurie had reached other ears than ours. A shrill little scream proceeded from the room overhead, and

Peggy bounded upstairs to soothe the alarms of a tinier Hamish.

Chapter 4

MARJORIE

From *The Uttermost Star*

Marjorie is ninety-two, although you would never suspect it. Her hair is as black as it was when, more than seventy years ago, her tall young lover first stroked it. Marjorie is English—as English as English can be. The fact stares you in the face as soon as you put your hand to the latch of her gate. For the little front garden is the condensed essence of England. It is as English as the garden of a Kentish cottage. You inhale the scent-laden English air as you walk down the path to Marjorie's door. You drink in the fragrance of the roses and the carnations and the gillyflowers, the musk and mignonette; and then, as you pause for a moment in the porch, awaiting the opening of the door, the soft petals of the honeysuckle brush against your face. They must all be flowers of rich perfume to be of any use to Marjorie now, for Marjorie is blind. I had been in conversation with her for some time before I realized that the eyes that seemed to look so wistfully into mine were unable to convey any impression to her alert and hungry mind. Her sightless eyes and the slight stoop at the shoulders are the only indications that she gives you of her heavy burden of years. She cannot see the pictures on the wall, representing the scenes of her childhood—the village street with its comfortable inn and its odd medley of stores; the thickly wooded lane in which she so often found nuts and buttercups; and the village green with its rustic seats and shady grove of oaks. She cannot see these pictures now; but she says that the scenes all come back to her, as clearly as if she had visited them yesterday, when

she sits out in the porch, luxuriating in the fragrance of the flowers, listening to the droning of the bees, and enjoying the song of the thrush who sings to her from his perch in the lilac by the side of the house.

Even if I, like Marjorie, live to be ninety-two, I shall never forget that first visit that I paid her. It came about very simply. 'I wish,' said a gentleman, as he left the service on Sunday morning, 'I wish you could find time to call on my old mother. She would appreciate it.' He gave me the address, and I set out the very next day, little dreaming that so very ordinary a mission was destined to bring into my life so wealthy an enrichment. Very abruptly sometimes life's casual ministries unlock for us the gates of gold. We turn a bend in a dusty road, and catch a glimpse of Paradise. We reach unexpectedly the brow of a hill, and obtain a vision of infinity. So was it with me that day.

As I sat in the cozy little parlor awaiting the old lady's entrance, I expected that I should have to make the conversation, and I wondered how I could best secure that it should serve some profitable end. I smile now at the ignorance that led me into such a line of cogitation. I had not then met Marjorie. When she entered the room, the conversation made itself. I had simply nothing to do with it. I came to minister; but I found myself being ministered to.

Not for a moment do I suggest that Marjorie was what Bunyan would call a brisk talker on matters of religion. She was far too reverent and far too modest for that. I mean rather that she had something really great to say, and she said it really greatly. Hers was the grand style, glorified by transparent sincerity. Her speech was dignified and stately, whilst her voice was tremulous with deep emotion. There was a majesty about her very diction. She employed phrases that are never now heard, and that are only to be found in the mellow pages of a schoolbook that is never now read. Outside a second-hand bookshop you may often see a box into which the desperate dealer has thrown all his rubbish, offering it to an unappreciative public at a nominal price of a penny a volume. To turn over this ill-assorted collection of literary flotsam and jetsam is as interesting and pathetic as the wander through the casual ward of a workhouse. No two cases are alike, yet all have come to this! Here in the box is a Spanish grammar, badly torn; there, too, is the

second part of a three-volume novel. Like Euclid's ideal circle, it is without beginning and without ending. Yonder is the guide-book to a long-forgotten exhibition. Such a higgledy-piggledy box! But if you delve a little more deeply, you will be sure to come upon some old volumes of eighteenth-century sermons. The leather backs are badly broken, and the leaves are yellow with age. But if you will sacrifice the necessary penny and go to the trouble of carrying one of these old volumes home, you will find the very vocabulary to which I listened as I sat that day in Marjorie's pretty little parlor. Yet, as this dead language fell from Marjorie's lips, it came to life again! It was full of energy and vigor; it was instinct with spiritual significance and with holy passion. It throbbed and quivered and glowed and flashed. It was as if some ancestral castle that had stood deserted and gloomy for a century had been suddenly inhabited, and was now ablaze with light and vibrant with shouts and laughter. The antique phrases simply sparkled with vitality as they tripped from her tongue. It was, as I say, a great story greatly told. Marjorie had been buffeted in a long, stern struggle; she had known heart-break and agony and tears; yet her memory remained at ninety-two absolutely unclouded, and her lip retained its power of forceful utterance. And sitting there in her cozy parlor, whilst the breath of the garden came pouring in through the open window, did Marjorie unfold to me the treasures of her rich experience.

'Ah yes,' she replied, with a smile, when I made some reference to the remarkable length of her pilgrimage, 'I was only a girl when I entered into the sweetness of religion.' The phrase, illumined by that bright though sightless smile, and interrupted by the accents so full of feeling, fastened upon my memory at once. 'The sweetness of religion.' 'I was only a girl when I entered into the sweetness of religion!' And then she went on to tell me of the rapture of her first faith. Seventy-five years earlier, religion had come into her life like a great burst of song. Amidst the sunshine of an English summertime, whilst the fields were redolent of clover and of new-mown hay, her girlish soul had sought and found the Savior. Instantly the whole world had stood transfigured. Her tongue seemed to catch fire as she told me of the radiant experiences of those never-to-be-forgotten days. I saw, as I listened, that the soul has a rhetoric of its own, an eloquence with which no acquired

oratory can compare. She told of the joy that she found in her own secret communion with the Lord, sometimes in the quietude of her little room—the room with the projecting lattice window from which she loved to watch the mists rising from the hollow as the sun came over the hills; sometimes down among the alders along the banks of the stream, sitting so still that the rabbits would scurry up and down the green banks without taking the slightest notice of her; sometimes in long, delicious rambles across the open park, rambles in which she was only disturbed by the swish of a frightened pheasant or the tramp of fallow deer; and sometimes amidst the leafy seclusion of the primrose woods. And often, at sunset, when Dapple and Brownie had been milked, and the tea-things put away, she would take her knitting and saunter down the dusty old road. And, as one by one, the stars peeped out, and the nightingale called from the woods in the valley, and glowworms shone in the grass under the hedge, and a bat flapped and fluttered in its queer flight round her head, it seemed as the miracle of Emmaus were repeated, and Jesus came and walked with her.

She spoke of wonders that, under such conditions, broke upon her spirit like a light from heaven. Her Bible became a new book to her; and an unspeakable glory fell upon the village sanctuary, the dearest spot on earth to her in those days of long. A wave of happy recollection swept over her as she told of the walks along the lanes and across the fields, in the company of a group of kindred spirits, to attend those simple but memorable services. The path led through a tossing sea of harebells and cowslips; the lane was redolent of hawthorn and sweet-briar. As they made their way to the church that peeped shyly through the foliage of the clump of elms on the hill, the solemn monotone of its insistent bell mingled with the chatter of the finches in the hedges and the blither note of the lark high up in the blue. Marjorie's blind eyes almost shone as she recalled, and, with flowing tongue, recounted all these precious and beautiful memories. 'I was only a girl,' she said, 'when I entered into the sweetness of religion!'

'But,' I interjected, 'you speak of the sweetness of religion as though it were a thing of long ago. Do you mean that it became exhausted? Did that happy phase of Christian experience fade away?'

A cloud passed over her face like the shadow that, on a summer's afternoon, will sometimes float over the corn.

'Oh, well, you know,' she replied, after a thoughtful pause, 'the tone of one's life changes with the years. I left my girlhood behind me. I married; children came to our home in quick succession; life became a battle rather than a frolic; and sometimes the struggle was almost grim. Then trouble fell thick and fast upon me. In one dreadful week I buried two of my boys, one on the Tuesday and the other on the Friday. Then, last of all, my husband, the soul of my soul, the best man I have ever known, was snatched rudely from my side.'

Marjorie hid her face for a moment in her hands. At last my impatience compelled me to break the silence.

'And do you mean,' I inquired, 'do you mean that, under the stress of all this sorrow, you lost the sweetness of religion?'

'Well,' she replied thoughtfully, 'under such conditions you would scarcely speak of sweetness. I would rather say that, during those sterner years, I entered into the power of religion.'

A ring, almost of triumph, came into her voice.

'Yes,' she said, 'in those years I entered into the power of religion. Only once did my faith really stagger. It was on the night of that second funeral—that second funeral within a single week! I was kneeling in my own room on the spot on which I had knelt, morning and evening, through all the years. But I could not pray. I felt that God had failed and forsaken me. My shrine was empty, and I burst into tears. And then, all at once, a Hand seemed laid gently upon my shoulder and a Voice sounded in my ear. "Am I a man that should lie?" it said. I was startled. I felt chastened and rebuked. I had treated Him as though He were no wiser than I, and as though He had broken His word. Then, through all my tears, I prayed as I have never been able to pray before. A great peace soothed my broken spirit. I was ashamed of my distrust. It was the only time my faith had wavered. No; I should not speak of sweetness as I recall those years of bitter sorrow and sore struggle. In those days I entered into the power of religion!'

'But now look, Marjorie,' I pleaded, 'you tell me that, as a girl, you entered into the sweetness of religion, and that, in the graver years that followed, you entered into the power of religion.

But your girlhood and your struggle have both passed now, and here you are in this quiet little cottage looking back across the intervening years at those far-away periods. Would you say that you now enjoy the sweetness or the power?'

Her face shone; it was almost seraphic. Her whole being became suddenly animated and luminous. She reached out her hands towards me as though she held something in each of them.

'I have them both!' she cried in a perfect transport of delight. 'I have them both! The sweetness that I knew in my English girlhood has come back to me in the days of my old age; and the power that came to me in the years of trial and loss has never since forsaken me. I have them both; oh, bless His holy Name, I have them both!'

It was too much for her. Overcome by the rush of recollection and the tempest of exultant emotion, she sank back in her chair and lapsed into silence.

'Why Marjorie,' I said, 'you have given me the very thing I wanted. As I walked along the road I was wondering what I should preach about on Sunday. But I know now. I shall preach on those words from the swan-song of Moses in which the old leader, in laying down his charge, bears grateful witness to God's goodness to Israel. "He made him," he says, "to suck honey out of the rock." I was reading in a book of travel only yesterday that in the Orient the wild bees store their honey in the crevices among the cliffs, and on a hot day you may see it trickling down the face of the granite in shining streams of sweetness! As a girl you say, you entered into the sweetness of religion. As a girl, girl-like, you gave little thought to the rock itself, but you loved to taste the sweetness of the honey. You entered into the sweetness of religion! But, as a woman, in the turmoil and tussle of life, buffeted and storm-beaten, you forgot the honey that oozed from the cracks and fissures, and were glad to feel the massive strength of the rock itself beneath your feet. You entered into the power of religion! And now, the fury of the storm all overpast, you tell me that you still rest upon the great rock, rejoicing in its firmness; and, as in your earlier days, you once more enjoy the honey that exudes from its recesses. You enjoy both the strength and the sweetness; you have them both! "With honey out of the rock have I satisfied thee!" I shall certainly preach on that text

on Sunday!'

And I did.

Chapter 5

A HARVEST OF LIGHT

From *The Fiery Crags*

A great man for his Bible was Angus Sutherland. I well remember the satisfaction and relief with which I saw the well-worn volume lying beside his bed on the memorable occasion that rushes back upon my mind today. Saddle Hill, the miniature mountain that kept sentry over the little town of Mosgiel, was riddled with coal-mines; and Angus worked in one of them. At least, he worked in one of them until that dreadful day on which the collapse of a shaft suddenly overwhelmed him and his in dire calamity. Angus's cottage was close to the manse, and, as it happened, I saw him as he left home on the morning of the disaster. He had a cheery word concerning the service which we had attended together the night before; and then he jumped on his bicycle and rode away. How little I dreamed that he was mounting that bicycle of his for the last time! He was brought home that afternoon so mangled and broken that, had there been many sufferers in a similar plight, the task of identification would have been difficult. Fortunately, he was the only victim. In the course of a day or two, he recovered consciousness; in a few weeks the gashes softened into scars; in a couple of months the last of the bandages was removed from his fractured limbs; but, as the doctors had told us on the day of the disaster, his spine was injured beyond possibility of recovery. It was some days after the accident before I was allowed to see him, and those days of waiting were days of anxiety and suspense. I wondered how my old friend's faith

was standing the strain. He had a wife and seven children dependent upon his earnings at the mine; he had always enjoyed the most perfect health; he was now being subjected to a test such as he had never known before.

The open Bible beside the bed set my mind at rest at once. He was, of course, unable to handle it himself; but its presence seemed to indicate that it was in frequent requisition. Angus was very weak, and I was determined not to stay. I whispered a few words; led him very briefly to the Throne of Grace; pressed gently one of the uninjured fingers that peeped out of the all-enfolding bandages; and turned to leave. But Angus would not allow it.

'I want you,' he said faintly, 'to read to me…the ninety-seventh Psalm… It's been a mighty comfort these days.'

I turned to the Psalm, and, softly, began to read. As I read the opening verses I saw, or thought I saw, the special significance that they held for Angus.

'The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice. Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne.'

I was delighted that, in the day of his calamity, the heart of Angus had offered its hospitality to so noble a consolation. I imagined that I had read all that he wished to hear, and paused. But from among the bandages his muffled voice bade me continue.

'Further on,' he murmured, 'further on!'

I read on until I came to the words: Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart; and again I heard a murmur from the bed.

'That's it,' he exclaimed gratefully, 'that's it!'

He attempted to explain, but I had promised not to tire him. I therefore left him, telling him that we would have a talk about the words another day. On the way home I thought of a white tombstone in the pretty Laleham churchyard—a tombstone on which that text about the light and the gladness is inscribed. It is the stone that marks the resting place of Matthew Arnold.

* * *

I told Angus that we would talk about the text another day; and

we did. He was out on the veranda by this time, propped up with pillows on a couch. He was teaching a young blackbird to trust him, and had coaxed it to perch at the head of his lounge. It flew away as I approached, and watched us jealously from the leafy green seclusion of the pear-tree.

'You ministers,' Angus said, 'think too much about your sermons. It isn't always the sermon that does the most good. Many a time I've been helped and uplifted by the reading of the Word. That's how it was the week of the accident. At the church, one day, you read the ninety-seventh Psalm—do you remember? And those words about the light and the gladness stuck to me. Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart. I was saying them to myself that morning, as I rode off on my bike. And, since I've been lying here, they've come back to me in a new sense. Light is sown! There comes a time when the farmer has no seed; and he has nothing to show for the seed that he has scattered so freely on the soil. It has all gone. He seems to have lost it. But, if you tell him that he has lost it, he will laugh at you. "It's gone," he will say, "but it will be back, and come back multiplied a hundredfold. For it isn't dead and buried; it's alive and sown!" That's the point; it's sown! And so it is with the light and the gladness after the accident, I couldn't see either. There seemed to be no light and no gladness anywhere. I was like the farmer looking at the empty shelves that had contained the bags of seed. It was all gone. "But never mind," I said to myself, "it's sown!" "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart." It will all come back again, and come back multiplied a hundredfold! One of these days you'll be preaching on that text. I don't know what the expositors and commentators say about it; but that's what it means. 'It means that when you can't see light or gladness anywhere, it's because it's sown; it's gone to be multiplied; it's taken away for a little while that it may come back in waving fields of golden corn. I tell you, that text has been a power of comfort to me since I was brought home that day on the stretcher!'

I have preached on the text since, several times. I have not troubled the expositors and commentators. I am convinced that none of them can elucidate the passage with more spiritual discernment, with more exegetical accuracy, or with more practical helpfulness

than did Angus Sutherland that day.

* * *

'Light is sown!' Until Angus expounded the passage to me, I vaguely felt the terms to be incongruous. How could light be sown? Today I blush for my obtuseness. I see now that all the light that shines upon my path is light that has been sown for me. Angus was at work in the coal-mine when the accident occurred. And what was the coal at which he was toiling but light that had been sown? Long before the eyes of black men or of white men had surveyed that New Zealand hill-side, old primeval forests had gathered up the sunshine of the silent centuries and had fallen, hugging it to their breasts. Not a single ray was wasted. The sun was not squandering his light; he was sowing it. The ancients recognized that. Virgil speaks of Aurora as rising from a saffron bed to sow the earth with dewy light. Lucretius pictures the sun sowing the fields with light. And our own John Milton, blind as he was, saw this. He describes the rosy Morn, rising from an eastern clime, to sow the earth with Orient pearl. For ages and ages, on that lonely hill-side, the sun was sowing. And, on the days that preceded the disaster, Angus Sutherland was harvesting. He was garnering a crop of light. Every lump of coal, as it gives off its gas and its flame and its heat, is simply yielding up the horded treasure of bygone ages. 'Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe!' says the prophet. Angus Sutherland was obeying the prophetic injunction, except that, instead of using a sickle, he was using a pick. He was harvesting light. The farmer tastes the joy of harvest once a year, and is at the mercy of the weather; the miner experiences the joy of harvest all the year round and sunshine and storm are all alike to him.

* * *

It was the things that I had read rather than the things that I had said that comforted the soul of Angus in the day of his calamity. That is the beauty of the Bible.

I have passed a farm in the winter-time. The barns were crammed with the harvest store; but the fields were barren and

cheerless. I have passed the farm in the spring-time; and have noticed on the fields the first suspicion of green. I have passed the farm in the summer; and have admired the wealth of ripening corn. I have passed again in the autumn: the barns were empty, but the fields were a blaze of gold. As the need increased, the supply developed. All of which is an allegory.

There was time when Angus Sutherland looked at his Bible and saw nothing there. His life was like the overflowing barns; and the pages that he idly turned were like the barren fields of winter. There was a time when he vaguely felt the need of something infinite. A mysterious hunger awoke within his heart. And then, turning to his Bible, he realized that there was life and movement—and miracle—there. It was like noticing in the wintry fields the sheen of tender green. And, as the issues of life took to themselves added clearness, his Bible grew upon him. He saw, as I saw in the summer fields, the promise of a bounteous supply. And in the day of his calamity, when all his barns stood empty and his soul was an aching void, his Bible was like a cornfield in harvest-time, and it yielded up its treasure in unstinted abundance.

* * *

Angus Sutherland was never quite the same again. He was a feebler man, but a better one. His back was always bent, and he leaned heavily upon a stick; but he was able to earn his living and do a good deal of useful work. Nobody was more welcome at the bedside of the sick. He knew how to point from the empty barns to the golden fields. He could beautifully tell our Mosgiel sufferers of the light that is sown.

He was fonder than ever of his Bible. I often ran across him of an evening, and it was never very far from him. He was still living when I left for Hobart. I received, some years afterwards, a letter from my successor telling me that Angus had forever laid aside his stick.

'I was with him to the last,' his minister wrote, 'and it was a wonderful experience. It was an inspiration to see the delight that he found, amidst his sufferings, in the texts that he quoted. As he recited one passage after another, his face simply shone. I preached

his funeral sermon last Sunday evening from the words: "It shall come to pass that at evening time it shall be light." I told the people how,

'As he drew nearer to finish his race,
Like a fine setting sun, he looked richer in grace,
And gave a sure hope at the end of his days
Of rising in brighter array.

'If the words were true of anybody they were true of him.' 'Like a fine setting sun'—it was the full glory of his noonday faith revealing itself in the glow of that noble sunset!

'His face simply shone!'—it was the light that had been sown in his heart—the light that never was on sea or shore—springing up and irradiating his features at last.

'Light at eventide!'—the light that is sown is never buried. It reappears—renewed and multiplied—when it is most needed. When darkness wraps the soul about on every side, and all life's lamps are paling, the light that is sown reveals itself in a radiant harvest of brightness.

Chapter 6

A TANGLED SKEIN

From *Wisps of Wildfire*

My fingers have often itched to set down the story of Mary Creighton, just as she told it to me that day under the apple tree, but, until now, my pen has been chained. A newspaper that came last week, however, contains the announcements which have effectually brushed away the scruples that I cherished.

Mary Creighton was not her real name: her real name was much prettier, or she made it seem so to me. None of the names that I shall mention are real names. Mary herself was, for years, an inscrutable mystery to me. She was to everybody. Indeed, until that lovely afternoon she made her great confession, I never understood her and I never met anybody who did. A very general feeling prevailed in Mosgiel that, away back in the unforgotten years of Mary's life, a tragedy was buried somewhere; but nobody knew its nature. Innumerable guesses were made: but they were all contradictory, and, therefore, unsatisfactory. No theory squared with all the facts. And so it came to pass that the little township gave it up. Mary came to be regarded as a riddle that everybody had asked, but of which nobody knew the answer.

Mary lived by herself in a cottage on the hillside. From her door, which invariably stood open, she commanded a fine view of the entire plain and its encircling hills.

'You should be here in the early morning,' she said to me one afternoon, as we stood together outside the door, admiring this

extensive prospect, 'it's a wonderful sight. Old Blanche Bradshaw, who lives just round the ridge, often tells me that when she saw it first, fifty years ago, the Plain was a lake, and there was deep water where the farms now stand. And the ghost of the old lake comes back every night. When I open my door of a morning, I can see neither trees nor homesteads. The white mist lies all along the Plain, just like a sheet of water, and it looks for all the world as if Blanche's old lake had come back again.'

Mary was not a member of the church. She would not hear of it. Whenever I broached the matter she immediately changed the subject and left me mystified. The guessers were agreed in saying that Mary and her husband were living separately: I quickly came to the conclusion that they were right: yet why they should be separated I could not for the life of me imagine. As far as I could see, they were as fond of each other as a pair of lovers.

'You'll often be going to town?' she asked one day, soon after my settlement as Mosgiel; and I told her that I usually spent Mondays in Dunedin.

'Well,' she went on, 'would it be out of your way to drop in, every now and again, at a house in Queen Street and ask for Robert Creighton? You needn't stay; but just pass the time of day, and see how he looks, and be sure and let me know if you think he wants anything.'

Mary often called in at the Manse, generally on a Tuesday. She never asked if I had seen Robert the day before; but I could see that she was on tenterhooks until, being alone together, I broached the subject. Sometimes she would bring a little parcel—warm socks of a muffler or a pair of knitted gloves—for me to take next time I went; and occasionally she would call early on Monday morning with a little packet of cakes or scones or a jelly. There was never a specific message, however: I was never entrusted with a note or a letter: I was never requested to ask him anything.

When first I called on Robert he was extremely uncommunicative. I told him that a lady at Mosgiel had asked me to call on him. He smiled—sadly, I thought—told me that he was well, and gave me to understand by his manner that there was no more to be said. The room in which he lived was small but cozy; and I

noticed a portrait of Mary—taken, perhaps, twenty years earlier—hanging on the wall. After a while his tongue loosened a little. When he was convinced of my trustworthiness, he began to ask after Mary. Was she well? Did I think that she was quite equal to all the work of the cottage? And once, after some years, he asked with a moistening of the eyes, Was she ageing? He, too, occasionally entrusted me with parcels—generally books and papers—but in his case, as in hers, there was never a note, a letter, a message, or a direct inquiry. This went on for years. I watched them growing gradually older, growing perceptibly feebler, and growing all the while in tender solicitude for each other.

* * *

Robert was the first to go. He died very suddenly. I had called, as usual, on the Monday. He seemed well, and asked more questions than usual, particularly in regard to Mary's appearance. Was she as upright as ever? Did she look careworn or unhappy? Was her hair very white? Did it seem a struggle for her to climb the hill to the cottage? He started to ask another. I fancied that he wished to inquire whether Mary seemed lonely; but his voice caught and he turned it off into some meaningless remark about the weather. As I left, he slipped a sovereign into my hand and begged me to get any little thing that would comfort or brighten her. On the Thursday I received a telegram from his landlady. I caught the next train, but he was dead before I could reach him. He left a will bequeathing everything to Mary; and he told his landlady to ask me to bury him.

Poor Mary was disconsolate. I never saw grief quite like hers. To begin with, it was so exclusively hers. Nobody else knew of it: nobody could offer sympathy: nobody suspected that the gentle little lady on the hillside was overwhelmed in anguish so terrible. And, to make things worse, she was so helpless. She could do nothing. There is a melancholy consolation in being permitted to perform or superintend the last sad offices that we render to the dead: but even this poor comfort was denied to her. She could only sit in her cottage and weep apart. Others were doing—and doing without emotion—what it should have been her sad privilege to do; it was after the first storm of her grief had spent itself, after

the first bitterness had passed, that she suddenly found it in her heart to unburden her secret. The outburst of confidence was quite spontaneous: I had no idea that she was about to tell me her story: and I fancied that she herself was surprised at finding herself breaking the silence of the years. It was a beautiful afternoon in the late spring-time; the apple trees in front of the cottage were a mass of blossoms: and, on a seat that stood between two of the finest of them, we sat talking.

'It all happened in the early days,' she said. 'We were young and silly and wicked; and we did dreadful things without knowing how dreadful they were. Robert and I came out from the Old Country with our parents in the days of the gold rush in Australia. Everybody was talking about the diggings. Robert's father and my father were both having hard times: and they decided to try their luck. Robert and I had known each other as children: we had attended the same school: everybody regarded us as sweethearts. On the ship we were thrown a good deal together; and although we were never formally engaged, it was understood that we were to marry as soon as the exigencies of our new life rendered such a settlement possible.

'All went well until we reached Australia. Then we had to part. Robert's mother, my mother, and I stayed in Sydney, whilst our fathers and Robert went on to the diggings. Then the trouble began. Robert was young and eager, and he caught the gold fever in its worst form. He seldom came to Sydney to see me, and, even when he did, he seemed to be thinking far more of his gold than of me. I was very lonely: I used to count the days to his coming, and perhaps I did not make sufficient allowance for the excitement of his new life. In Sydney I got to know Philip Bryce. He was open-hearted and full of fun; he was unselfish and courteous; and to me he was exceedingly attentive and kind. But it was purely a casual friendship until I took it into my head that Robert had grown tired of me. Then, perhaps, I gave Philip more encouragement than I should have done. I fancy that I had some vague notion of winning Robert back to me by making him jealous of Philip. At any rate, when Robert came again, talking nothing but gold, gold, gold, I talked nothing but Philip, Philip, Philip. But my wickedness met with its just reward. My stupid words had a diametrically opposite effect to that for which I had hoped. Robert lost all patience with me. He rose

in anger; told me that I could have Philip if I wanted him; and, to my horror, went off mumbling something about Maggie.

'Maggie! Who was Maggie? Maggie, I learned later, was the daughter of John Marchant, who kept the Digger's Rest. The Digger's Rest was not, in the ordinary sense, a hotel; it was a store, a shelter, and a place in which diggers of the better class might spend an evening, reading, writing, or at games. John Marchant looked after the business side of the place and took charge of any gold that successful diggers cared to entrust to his custody, whilst Mrs. Marchant and Maggie attended to the housework. Maggie was a pretty girl, tall, ripe-figured, of bright complexion and auburn hair. I did not sleep that night. It had never occurred to me that my silly prattle about Philip might have this effect. Robert told me afterwards that he had never given serious thought to Maggie until that night. When I arose next morning, Robert was gone. Three months later I heard that he and Maggie were married. I was proud. I felt that I had been spurned, insulted, degraded: I determined that he should see how little I cared. Within four months of Robert's marriage to Maggie, I was married to Philip!'

* * *

'It was a miserable business. Philip and I had little or nothing in common; and we soon found each other's society very tame. In spite of me, my heart was hungry, and I am afraid that I never really set myself to make Philip happy. To make matters worse, Robert and Maggie, not knowing of our whereabouts, came and settled in the same suburb. The gold rush was over, and Robert had obtained employment in the city. At first we thought of leaving the district, or, at least, of ignoring them; but we were both bored and wretched, and any new interest seemed attractive. Moreover, I saw Robert pass the window several times without his knowledge, and I thought that he bore a great burden. His face was heavy and sad and, I fancied, regretful. Perhaps we ought to have acted on our first impulse and moved away without their knowing of our presence there. Perhaps the very hunger of my heart should have warned me. All my soul was crying out for Robert and I thought that his was crying out for me. We let the weeks go by: we met, as if it was inevitable that we

should: and we spent many of our evenings at each other's homes.

'The position—always bad—quickly became intolerable. Philip saw the truth: how could he help it? Maggie saw the truth; how could she help it? And, to complicate matters still further, Philip and Maggie were drawn to each other. They seemed made for each other. Maggie had the gaiety and sparkle for which Philip pined: I was like a millstone round his neck. Philip had all the qualities that appealed to Maggie. So there we were! The very reasons that should have kept us all apart drew us all together. We were always at their home or they at ours. And the more we met them, and they us, the more hideous our unhappiness became.'

Mary paused for a moment in her story, and nervously brushed away the apple-petals that had fallen on her lap. When she was mistress of herself once more, she continued:

'It was Philip who brought things to a head. Poor Philip! He deserved to be happy, and I was ashamed of the misery I had brought him. He was always dashing and impulsive, and, one evening, without saying a word to me, he went off by himself. He returned about supper-time.

'"Look here, Mary," he said, as soon as he sat down, "we can't go on like this. We've all done wrong—except Maggie. I've been round and had a talk with Robert. We've agreed, if you and Maggie are willing, to part. Maggie and I will go back to the Old Country. Robert says that, if you consent, he will go with you to New Zealand. We shall start life afresh, with a better chance of being happy."

'It was wrong, very wrong,' Mary continued, 'but I agreed. Philip and Maggie went back to England; settled down near Manchester, prospered in business, were very happy, and had several children. One of the boys recently came out and went on to a sheep station in Taranaki. Robert and I were happy, too, in a way. We went farming; we made money quickly and were very comfortable. No children came to our home; but we were very fond of each other—very fond—to the last.' Mary paused and brushed her eyes with her apron.

'But you know,' she went on, 'in these districts the church is the center of everything. At first Robert and I hesitated about attending church. We felt that we should like to; all our traditions

pointed that way. And we felt that we ought to. Moreover, our consistent absence without giving a reason would cause comment and demand explanation. And yet—what of our secret?

'We decided to go: we never joined: never attended Communion; and, although Robert was highly respected, and was constantly urged to accept office, he never did so. Then we began to ask ourselves why. As the church became more and more dear to us, our consciences troubled us increasingly. We were everything to each other; we would rather die than part; and yet— It grew upon us that our relationship was a defiance of all the laws of man and God. The fact that it excluded us from life's most sacred things made us feel how wrong it was. We were like the lepers, who, outside the city walls, cried continually: "Unclean! Unclean!"

'Yet what could we do? To confess our guilt would be to shatter the happiness of Maggie and Philip, to dishonor their names and to cast a slur upon their children. We decided—God alone knows what it cost us!—to right the wrong, so far as it was in our power to do so, by separating. We sold the farm; Robert went to live in town; at my request he bought me this cottage; and we pledged ourselves never to meet again. It was a sore, sore parting…' She again hid her face in her apron. There was a long pause. When she looked up there was a light in her countenance that I shall never forget. She seemed suddenly transfigured.

'Perhaps,' she said, turning full upon me, 'perhaps it will all be put right when we meet again. But I wanted you to know. You will understand now why I never joined the church. And sometimes, when you are talking to the young men and maidens in your congregation, you will be able to tell them that because in all the wide, wide world, there is nothing so beautiful as love. It is a bitter, bitter thing to tamper with it when it comes. If only Robert and I had been true to our love from the first—!'

Poor Mary! The sun was getting low, so I took her arm and walked with her into the cottage. She grew rapidly feebler and, within the year, followed Robert into the land where all life's tangles are unraveled. And, in arranging for her funeral, I took care that, in death at least, he and she were not divided.

Chapter 7

A VERY GALLANT LADY

From *The Drums of Dawn*

It was wonderful how suddenly they vanished from among us, those sturdy pioneers! When I settled at Mosgiel, one could scarcely walk down the street without meeting some of the original settlers, good old men and women who had come out to New Zealand on the very first ships. When I left Mosgiel twelve years later, their names were all woven into the romance of history. As though the rugged heroes of that gallant little army had heard a muster-call from some invisible bugler, they set out on a still more glorious adventure of migration.

As soon as we realized that these veterans had left us, we experienced those pangs of remorse inevitably associated with such conditions. The questions we might have asked! The information we might have gleaned! If only I had taken each of these greybeards aside and coaxed him into revealing the secrets of his stirring pilgrimage! As it is, I have but a mere handful of such memories, one of which comes rushing back upon my mind today.

'She's fast asleep!'

It seemed incredible. The hearse was standing at the gate: the house was crowded with mourners, decently attired in black; everything was ready for the service about to be conducted in the capacious parlor. Just beside the minister's table one armchair remained unoccupied—the chair that was being reverently reserved for the stricken widow. A kindly and intimate neighbor tiptoed out of the room and ascended the stairs, thinking by her companionship

to fortify the principal mourner for her terrible ordeal. In the darkened chamber the assembled guests waited on in solemn silence, expecting at any moment the entrance of the two women. At length the neighbor returned alone, and communicated to those nearest to the door the whisper that quickly passed around the room.

'She's fast asleep!'

After the long strain of the sickness, the final shock of the death, and the necessity of personally superintending the arrangements for the burial, she had gone to her room to dress of the exacting ceremony. Feeling utterly exhausted, and knowing that there was an abundance of time, she had, as she subsequently explained, thrown herself upon the bed, partly to solace herself with the indulgence of a quiet cry and partly to enjoy a few minutes of complete rest. And so it came to pass that, when the crucial hour arrived, she lay there soundly sleeping! Nobody had the heart to disturb her; she slumbered well into the afternoon; the funeral was very late; and dusk was falling when we eventually turned homeward from the graveside.

This happened at the burial of Donald Ramsay. Donald and Mary Ramsay were among the most honored of New Zealand's pioneers. As I have explained in the chapter entitled Her Second Husband, the southernmost provinces of that young land were founded and colonized by the Free Church of Scotland. The first two emigrant ships sent out were the John Wycliffe and the Philip Laing. Mary Dundas, a demure little lassie, of quiet ways, serious countenance and wide wondering eyes, was with her parents on the Philip Laing. To the end of her life Mary loved to tell the story of that long adventurous voyage, a voyage that monopolized a hundred and thirty-nine of her childhood's days. What visions she conjured up for the strange and savage land for which she had left the familiar Ayrshire farm, the solemn old kirk, and the friends of auld lang syne! It was on a Saturday morning that she caught her first glimpse of New Zealand. In tangled and matted luxuriance the bush covered the massive hills right down the water's edge. And Mary never forgot the thrill that ran through the ship when, on rounding a jagged bluff projecting into the harbor, she caught sight of the John Wycliffe—last to sail but first to arrive—lying serenely in the bay. What frantic waving and excited cheering from the decks of both

ships! Next morning the pioneers from the two vessels gathered on that lonely shore and united in an act of solemn worship.

Dr. Thomas Burns, a nephew of the poet, had accompanied the party in order to found the first church in the new land. He lost no time in doing so; and, to this day, the Presbyterian Church of Otago dates it origin from that gathering at which, with fervent hearts, the pioneers prayed that they might find grace, in the uttermost ends of the earth, to build up a strong young nation in the fear of God.

A week was spent in providing themselves with temporary shelter and in making arrangements for permanent settlement, some near the coast and some further inland. Mary's father decided to take his chance in the interior, and arranged to set out on the following Monday on their rough pilgrimage over the thickly-wooded hills. Sunday, as it happened, was Easter Sunday—April 23, 1848—and Mary was pleased that, before plunging into the wilderness and leaving such privileges, perhaps forever, she would be able to join just once more in the familiar psalms and hymns of Easter-day.

As that rugged congregation waited for Dr. Burns to take his place at the improvised pulpit, Mary caught sight of a face that strangely interested her. It was the face of a lad, a few years older than herself, who hovered shyly on the outskirts of the hushed assembly. He belonged neither to the John Wycliffe nor the Philip Laing. When the service began, and that great company of Scottish worshippers joined in slow and solemn praise, the mystification on the boy's face was a curious thing to see. Mary could not help watching his surprise and bewilderment. She learned afterwards that he had come from one of the whaling stations along the coast. He had seen the white sails of the ships, and had, during the week, fallen in with two or three of the pioneers who, moved by the spirit of exploration, had wandered further afield than the rest.

At that memorable Easter service, Dr. Burns took for his text the aspiration of Paul: *That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.*

To know Him! 'You will soon be scattered,' said the preacher, 'and some of you will find yourselves in circumstances of most oppressive solitude; but, with such a Companion, the most isolated need never feel lonely or forsaken!'

To know the power of His resurrection! With such reserves

of strength, Dr. Burns pointed out, the weakest might become omnipotent, the most timid might become supremely brave. It was, he reasoned, the translation of history into experience. Think of the power that was exhibited in the resurrection of the Savior! To that power each individual life might be harnessed! In each separate experience the wonder of that matchless miracle might be daily repeated!

Mary was profoundly impressed, for, truth to tell, her young heart was failing her, as were the hearts of many of the party. They were beginning to realize and visualize the privations that awaited them. The message of that Easter morning awoke new courage in their drooping spirits: it braced them for the coming ordeal: it put iron into their blood. Mary hated to reproach herself with cowardice. Bravery had always been her cherished ideal of noble womanhood. Her grandfather, who came to see her off at Greenock, had fought in one of the Scottish regiments at Waterloo. She had often fingered his medals admiringly, and had vowed that, though only a girl, she too would be strong and valiant and fearless. And, as she sailed the lonely seas to a still more lonely land, she felt that circumstances were providing her with a theatre on which such martial qualities might be displayed to excellent advantage. Confronted by the stern realities of her new life, however, her girlish courage had slowly ebbed; but the tonic vigor of this Easter message had stirred it to fresh life and splendor.

The boy lurking on the edge of the crowd was also impressed. In his case the seed fell upon fallow, and therefore fruitful soil. But, partly owing to his difficulty in deciphering the preacher's stormy Doric, and partly owing to his pitiful ignorance of those exalted themes with which he dealt, the effect in his case was somewhat blurred and hazy. Still, a deep impression was made; and, years afterwards, he often recalled it with thankfulness.

In strolling along the beach that Easter-Sunday afternoon, gathering shells of dainty patterns never seen in Scotland, Mary came upon Mr. James Blackie, the schoolmaster, resting with his book among the rocks. Having come from the old land on the Philip Laing to lay the foundations of education in the new settlement, he had become very friendly with Mary. He had held classes on deck; she had attended as a pupil when he was giving the more advanced

lessons, and as a teacher and helper when he was engaged with the younger children. Meeting the good man so opportunely that sunny afternoon, Mary told him of the thoughts that the morning service had awakened.

'Do you think,' she asked, as she concluded her recital, 'do you think that sufficient power will always be given to enable one to be brave and unafraid, whatever happens?'

'Why, Mary,' replied the schoolmaster, 'I, too, have been thinking over this morning's sermon. There's no doubt, Dr. Burns gave us just the word that we all wanted. And it's true, Mary; that's the beauty of it, it's true! There's power for each of us to do the work we've come to do—the power of His resurrection! I've just received letters telling of the conversion of Maru, one of the most commanding and most dreaded of the Maori chiefs. When the first missionaries arrived in this country, Maru would have nothing to do with them. But the gracious bearing and kindly demeanor of the Rev. Charles Creed, a Methodist missionary, having attracted the old warrior's attention, he resolved to attend a service and listen to what the good man had to say. He crept in at the back and sat in a corner where nobody could see him. Mr. Creed preached on the words: Christ, the power of God, and showed, by quoting the most picturesque of the Maori traditions, that Jesus, the power of God, fulfilled all the deepest yearnings of the native heart. From his place of concealment in the corner, Maru cried out Koe a! Koe a! Koe a! (Yes! Yes! Yes!). From that time, these letters tell me, his whole soul over-flowed with the love and power of his Lord. He is a pattern of all the Christian graces, and, through his influence and instrumentality, Koraka, Haereroa, and other fierce cannibal chiefs, have been led into the Savior's service. But the thought that captivated the soul of Maru was the thought that so appealed to you and I, Mary! It was the thought that all the power of Christ, all the power displayed in His resurrection, is available to the soul that will appropriate and employ it. We shall all need that power in the days to come: and I suppose it is the consciousness that we shall need it that has made this morning's message so impressive.'

Mary did not realize then how heavily she would have to draw upon that power in the days that lay before her. It was a hard, rough life that Mary and her parents found waiting for them away

inland—a hard rough life in a hard rough land. It is impossible now, as Mr. Vincent Pylee has truly said, 'it is impossible now to conceive of the absolute solitariness which in those days pervaded and enveloped the interior of Otago—the solemn loneliness of its mountains; the ineffable sadness of its valleys; the utter dreariness of its plains. The traveler saw before him a continuous and apparently interminable expanse of mountain peaks which bounded and encompassed that horizon in every direction, piercing the blue ether, all clad in dazzling snows. The only sound that greeted the ear from dawn to dusk was melancholy wailing of the wind among the tussocks.' A few years after their settlement, Mary's father was crushed and killed by a falling tree: and the mother, after a brave attempt, with Mary's help, to work the farm, married the owner of a neighboring property. Hearing of these developments outback, the Gibsons—a family who, on the Philip Laing, had been particularly attracted to Mary—invited her to come to the little town that had now sprung up at the original landing-place and stay for awhile with them. They were astonished at the change in her. The demure Ayrshire lassie with the grace wondering eyes had ripened into a tall, sprightly young woman, of comely form, pretty face, high complexion and a wealth of bright brown hair.

After the cramping isolation of the lonely farm, Mary reveled in the society of the little town and longed to settle there. Would it be possible, she wondered, to obtain a position in Dunedin and earn her own living? She had heard that assistance—domestic and general—was very difficult to get. The Gibsons advised her to interview Mr. Erskine, of Erskine and Duff, the drapers: the firm was said to be short-handed: they might be glad of Mary's help.

'I'm sorry, lassie,' explained Mr. Erskine, 'but the only work that we could give ye would be work that ye mightna care to do—tidying up the shop, scrubbing the floors and cleaning the windows. We wouldna ask ye to clean the outside of the windows—I've got a young man who would look after that—but ye'd have to clean the inside. Now ye wouldna care for such work, would ye?'

Mary expressed her willingness to undertake the duties and the matter was soon arranged. Late on summer's evening, her work completed, Mary was leaving Erskine and Duff's by the side entrance just as a tall, sturdy young fellow approached it. For a

moment the newcomer stood abashed in the presence of so much loveliness. Mary recognized at once, in spite of the changes that the years had wrought, the boy from the whaling station who had hovered on the fringe of the congregation on that memorable Easter Sunday.

'Are you,' he asked at length, 'are you the young woman who cleans the inside of the windows?'

'I am,' Mary confessed; 'are you the young man who cleans the outside of the windows?'

'To be sure!' he replied; and then, after an awkward pause, 'when do you clean the inside of the windows?'

Womanlike, Mary evaded his question by asking another. 'When do you clean the outside of the windows?' she inquired.

'I should like to clean the outside of the windows when you clean the inside!' he declared.

So began the courtship of Mary Dundas and Donald Ramsay—a courtship that, rich in simple sweetness and practical sanity, led to a long and happy wedded life. They soon decided that the town was not for them. They went back to the great grim hills and the silent sullen bush. Twice, during those years of solitary struggle, little children died in Mary's arms with no doctor to see them, no nurse to tend them, and no minister to bury them. Donald made the coffins, dug the graves, and, standing bareheaded—a lonely figure amidst the vastness of the forest primeval—repeated aloud, at Mary's request, the twenty-third psalm and the Lord's Prayer.

It was a gallant struggle—a struggle that called for just as much fortitude and bravery as her grandfather had displayed in the Duke's campaigns. That grizzled old veteran would have been unconsciously proud of her, albeit he could never have fathomed the sublime secret of her serene courage. She never faltered and never complained. Perhaps the stern discipline of those strenuous and exacting years accounted for the perfect composure that she displayed when the culminating calamity thundered down upon her. It was just like her, disdaining the hysteria that grief excites in feebler souls, to drop off to sleep in the hour of her terrible bereavement. It was not that her soul was insensitive: it was that she was so perfectly mistress of herself. It was not that she lacked natural emotion: it was

that her faith was so much mightier than her feelings. Those only would condemn her who had failed to penetrate the inmost secret of her life. On that first Easter in the new land she entered, in some subtle but extremely vital way, into a real and personal experience of the power of her Lord's resurrection; and, through all the tests and trials that followed, this sublime consciousness of unlimited strength kept her mind composed, her face radiant, and her spirit magnificently triumphant.

And, sitting by here today, I like to remember that when, five years later, the trumpets sounded for her from the other side, she went down into the valley with a smiling face, betraying not the slightest suspicion of apprehension of alarm. For Mary Ramsay knew her Lord; and she knew, by joyous and victorious experience, the power of His resurrection.

Chapter 8

THE LILAC SUNSHADE

From *The Drums of Dawn*

Old Mrs. Diamond loved to hear it said that the nicest girls in Mosgiel were all in her Sunday-afternoon Bible Class. Among those girls, and, indeed, in the town generally, Sheila Menzies was a universal favorite. Having come out of the Highlands of Scotland with her parents when she was quite a child, she charmed everybody with her pretty Highland ways and rich Highland accent. She herself was like a bit of the Highlands—sweet but sturdy. The blue of the lochs was in her eyes: the flush of the heather was in her cheeks. She was always trim and dainty, of brisk and sprightly movement; and, whilst none could be more grave on occasion than she, her laughter was an integral part of our Mosgiel music.

At this moment Sheila is in one of her somber moods. She is on her way home from Bible Class. She has made that journey hundreds of times before and could easily accomplish it with her eyes shut. And yet today, on reaching the clump of gums at which the paths fork, she is in sore perplexity. Shall she go by way of Kirkland's farm or by way of Blackie's corner? Never before has the choice of a path caused Sheila a moment's concern; never before, on reaching this point, has her heart given a single flutter. Circumstances, however, alter cases; and special circumstances have created Sheila's latest problem.

In a way, it really did not matter: there was no material difference in the length or easefulness or beauty of the two tracks. The point was that, if she took the road that led past Kirkland's

farm, she would have to pass Jack Forsyth's place. Now Jack, I must explain, was the secretary of our Christian Endeavour Society and the captain of the Mosgiel Cricket Club. Without intending to intrude upon her maidenly privacy, Jack had been invading a good many of Sheila's dreams of late; and, although she had no suspicion of anything of the kind, her pretty face and handsome figure had lent a new loveliness to quite a number of Jack's. Some subtle magnetism had drawn Sheila and Jack a good deal together. Indeed, to sum up the situation in a single sentence, things between them had gone so far that Sheila felt—and rightly felt—that, if she gave him any further encouragement, Jack might justly feel that she had irrevocably committed herself.

To make matters worse, Sheila had undergone an experience on the previous day that had proved particularly baffling to heart and mind and faith. On the Saturday afternoon a cricket match was played between Mosgiel Club under Jack's leadership and a strong team of city players from Dunedin. Moved by that local patriotism that is so marked a feature of small communities, everybody was desperately anxious that the local team should win. In company with several of the Bible Class girls, Sheila went—as did most of the townspeople—to see the fun. The contest proved more close and exciting than we had dared to hope. A quarter of an hour before the stumps were drawn and the position was that, with two wickets to fall, the city players needed seven runs to win. But the trouble was that their best bat—a man named Dennison, who had opened the innings and obtained from his own bat two-thirds of the score—was still at the wickets and was so maneuvering matters that the weaker batsmen at the tail-end of the team were getting scarcely any of the bowling. At this stage, however, with seven runs still needed, Dennison lost the strike, and the man at the other wicket had to face our left-hand bowler. Anxious to get a run in order to bring Dennison once more into play, he struck savagely at the ball, miss-hit it, and it soared to a terrific height above the head of mid-on, at which position Jack happened to be fielding. The excitement was intense: the whole match seemed for the moment to hang on the issue of that single catch. It was not an easy one to take, for the ball was spinning furiously in mid-air, and Jack was having to run under it with the ball coming over his shoulder.

It was only a matter of seconds, but to Sheila it seemed an eternity. 'If he catches it,' she said to herself, 'I'll let him see this evening that I care for him: if he misses it, I'll take it that it's not to be!' Whether Sheila was justified in submitting her destiny—and Jack's—to such a test is a question that need not now concern us. The thing that does concern us is that, with the ball falling towards Jack, she secretly invested the issue with fateful significance and breathlessly awaited the result.

Jack dropped the catch! Juggling with it for a second or two, he then let it slip through his hands to the ground. Observing out of the corner of his eye, however, that, whilst he fumbled with the ball, the batsmen were stealing a second run, he snatched it up, and, hurling it at lightning speed at the wicket, scattered the stumps, with Dennison, the champion, a yard outside his crease! The roar of the crowd was deafening. If Jack had taken the catch, the weaker batsman would have been out, and, in all probability, Dennison would quickly have scored the necessary runs. By dropping the catch, Jack had dismissed the sheet-anchor of the city team, and, since the remaining wicket fell in the same over, had won the match for Mosgiel!

Now how shall Sheila interpret this? It was as confusing as the stories she had read, in her schoolbooks, of the ancient oracles of Delphi, Dodona, Ammon, and the rest. She remembered how Croesus, after lavishing his munificence on the Delphian oracle, was assured that if, with his army, he crossed the Halys, he should destroy a great empire. Croesus assumed that the doomed empire was his enemy's: it turned out to be his own! Sheila found her oracle equally ambiguous. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, Jack dropped the catch. Literally interpreting her vow, she ought to drop him! But, by missing the catch, Jack had won the match, whereas, by taking it, he would have whelmed his team in defeat! Ought she to regard so brilliant an achievement as unpropitious? Ought she to construe it to his disadvantage? As she listened to the plaudits of the spectators, and watched Jack's teammates congratulating him upon his amazing feat, she felt that, like the oracles of Boeotia and Peloponnesus, her oracle had been guilty of equivocation.

This puzzling experience on the Saturday afternoon intensified Sheila's perplexity on her return from Bible Class on

Sunday. It was extremely awkward. If she went home Jack's way, Jack might reasonably imagine that she had chosen that road in order that she might see him and be seen by him. On the other hand, if she chose the opposite path, Jack might just as naturally regard it as a studied endeavor to avoid him. The position was desperately bewildering.

Confronted by this acute and distressing problem, Sheila remembered that, at Bible class that very afternoon, little Mrs. Diamond had talked about the Kindly Light; had read several passages from Dr. Rendel Harris's The Guiding Hand of God; and had quoted the thirty-second Psalm: I will guide thee with mine eye. And then they had sung as their closing hymn—

Precious promise God hath given
To the weary passer-by,
On the way from earth to heaven,
'I will guide thee with Mine eye.'

To put Mrs. Diamond's teaching to the test, Sheila decided to pray for guidance. But then, how would the answer come? How would she know, after having prayed, which path to take? No voice was likely to speak from the skies. She must again invent a code of signals, although her experience on the Saturday afternoon scarcely encouraged such a procedure. She reminded herself, however, that, on Saturday afternoon, she had not prayed for guidance: with the ball spinning high in the air there was no time for supplication: today her movements could be more deliberate. At first she thought of opening her Bible, closing her eyes, and putting her finger on a text. But she reflected that, when she was uncertain as to whether to spend her holidays at Taieri Mouth or Stewart Island, she had adopted that course, and the passage on which her finger rested was: Dan also and Javan occupied thy fairs: iron, cassia, and calamus were in the market. She was as wise as ever!

'I will pray that I may be guided to choose the right path,' she said to herself, 'and then I will take my lilac sunshade, stand it upright in the middle of the road, and let it drop. If it falls pointing to the right, I will go that way: if it points to the left, I will go by Kirkland's farm!'

With all the solemnity that a Grecian priest might display in bending over his tripod, or a soothsayer in consulting his crystal, Sheila proceeded with the ritual that she had herself devised. All at once, however, she was interrupted by a musical peal of soft and silvery laughter.

'What are you doing with your sunshade, Sheila?' asked a very familiar voice. Sheila turned, her cheeks crimson with confusion, and found herself looking full into the astonished and wrinkled face of little Mrs. Diamond. There was nobody on the face of the earth to whom Sheila would rather have opened her heart. Sheila thought Mrs. Diamond the sweetest, saintliest, and most sensible little old lady whom she had ever met. To be sure, she was old-fashioned—old-fashioned in her dress, old-fashioned in her speech, old-fashioned in her ways—but she was good as gold and Sheila knew it. Sheila had often thought that if, one of these days, she needed to tell somebody everything, asking that somebody for sympathy and counsel, she would rather go to little Mrs. Diamond than to anybody she knew. But, surprised in this way, and on a public thoroughfare, she was too confused and embarrassed to open up the secrets of her soul. At length, however, she regained command of her tongue.

'Oh Mrs. Diamond,' she exclaimed, 'you gave me such a fright! I had no idea that any one was within miles of me! You see, I was playing a little game with myself—just for fun! I was undecided as to the way by which I should walk home—Kirkland's way or round by Blackie's corner. So I said to myself that I would set up my lilac sunshade and let it drop. If it fell pointing in the direction of Kirkland's, I would go to the left; if it fell pointing towards Blackie's, I would go to the right!'

'I see dearie,' replied Mrs. Diamond, who, although she could not divine the whole of Sheila's secret, suspected that there was more in the little pantomime than appeared upon the surface, 'I see; but tell me, Sheila, why did you set up the sunshade three separate times?'

Here was a poser! Sheila had, of course, an explanation that was perfectly satisfactory to herself; but she was not all sure that she could convince little Mrs. Diamond of its soundness. Mrs. Diamond was simply overflowing with tenderness and sympathy

and understanding, especially to the girls of her Bible Class; but she had such a penetrating insight into girlish frailties and girlish foibles that Sheila feared lest a word too much should betray the whole secret.

'Well, you see, dear,' began Sheila, taking her teacher's arm, and setting off along the road that led to Mrs. Diamond's cottage, although it was not the road that led to Jack's way, 'you see, when I released the sunshade the first time my hand trembled so much that I felt sure that I give it a little push and made it fall as it did; and, the second time, it slipped out of my fingers just as I was leaving go. So I had to do it a third time, you see: it was only fair, wasn't it?'

Mrs. Diamond looked up and smiled knowingly. 'Of course it was only fair, dearie,' she said; 'but tell me, why did your hand tremble so terribly? Did it matter such a very great deal?'

Glancing towards her youthful companion, the old lady saw that poor Sheila's cheeks were once more aflame. Historians say that women are infinitely more merciless than men. The most terrible inquisitions and persecutions of history have been initiated, they point out, by women like Queen Isabella and Queen Mary. However that may be, I feel sure that, having brought Sheila to this state of mental torture, a man would have relented and spared her further blushes. But Mrs. Diamond steeled her gentle heart against anything in the shape of pity.

'And tell me, dearie,' she continued, giving a slight clasp of affectionate pressure to her young companion's arm, 'which way did the sunshade fall the first time—and the second—and the third?'

Poor Sheila felt that the enemy was over-running all the outworks of her citadel and that the garrison was being pressed to the verge of unconditional surrender. She vaguely resolved, however, to defer capitulation as long as possible.

'It pointed this way the first time!' she confessed, a little shamefacedly.

'And the second, dearie?'

'Well, the second time, when it slipped from my fingers, it fell this way again!'

'And the third time, Sheila?'

'Oh, the third time it fell pointing Kirkland's way!'

'And that's the way you would have gone, dear, if I hadn't

come along?' she inquired.

'Of course, Mrs. Diamond; the sunshade told me to!'

'And that was what you wanted the sunshade to say, wasn't it, dearie?' she asked, as they approached the arch of crimson roses over her own gate; 'now come in and make my tea for me and tell me why?'

Sheila was really not sorry. Tossing her gloves and sunshade on to the couch, she hurried off to see about the kettle, whilst Mrs. Diamond, in her tidy little bedroom, removed her bonnet and tippet, and laid them on the bed. The interlude gave Sheila ample time to compose her agitated mind and to dismiss her tell-tale blushes. Half an hour later, having enjoyed the tea, the thin slices of bread-and-butter and the watercress, Sheila opened all her heart to her old teacher. Mrs. Diamond took the young girl's hand and held it softly.

'Don't depend on silly old cricket-balls and sunshades,' she said, with a twinkle and a smile. 'God doesn't reveal His way by means of cricket-balls and sunshades! I used to have long talks with Mr. Doke—you remember the Rev. J.J. Doke, who used to preach at the church sometimes. He was fond of talking about God's wonderful ways of guiding us. And he used to say that God always chooses a simple and natural way. Mr. Doke had lived in Africa, you remember, and he loved to tell me of old Lumkile who, when as yet there seemed no sign of storm, would urge the Kaffirs to forsake their homes in the lowlands and seek the heights. "It is coming," he would cry, "the great flood is coming! I know it by the birds that fly!" He would point to a flock of cranes which just then were battling almost unsuccessfully against the wind. "I know it by the beasts of the Karoo!" and he would point to a herd of quaggas on the farther bank, making their way to the hills beyond. "I know it by all Nature: the ants, the spiders, the worms: they are all telling the same tale. Meerkats, muishonds, moseliaatkats—all the creatures of the wild are behaving in the same way." A duiker would pass like a shadow, followed by her fawn; and then a small woe-begone grey monkey would find its way to the step. Everything was on its way to the uplands and the summits and the treetops. "Lumkile has not lived his long life among this wild kindred without learning their language," he would exclaim. "The wide Karoo has never seen such desolation, since Reinhilda's day, as the great flood will bring!"

And, surely enough, the dreadful deluge came, and they alone were saved who had been wise enough to see the Guiding Hand!'

She bustled off to her book-case for an album in which she treasured a photograph of Mr. Doke, and, having shown it to Sheila, she resumed her story.

'Mr. Doke would have called your tricks with the cricket-ball and the lilac sunshade so much mumbo-jumbo,' she laughed. 'You may depend upon it, dearie, that, in some perfectly simple and natural way, God will make your course clear. You may find that you are too fond of Jack to be able to live without him, and you may discover that he feels just the same way about you! That would be much clearer guidance than cricket-balls and sunshades can give, wouldn't it?' she smiled.

'And of course, dearie,' she added, clasping Sheila's hand afresh, 'if you really want guidance, you must keep your eyes wide open—like Mr. Doke's Kaffirs. And, above all, you must keep your eyes on His: He guides us with His eye you know; you remember what we read this afternoon in class: As the eyes of a maiden are unto her mistress, so our eyes wait upon the Lord. Suppose we see Him now!'

And in the hush of that beautiful Sunday evening, with the old lady's withered arm thrown lightly around the young girl's shapely shoulders, they kneeled together at the arm-chair beside the hearth, and Mrs. Diamond prayed for the lovers with such earnestness and sympathy and conviction that Sheila herself caught the vision of the Kindly Light and left for ever the uncertain realm of elusive cricket-balls and lilac sunshades.

Chapter 9

JOHN HAVELOCK'S ESCAPE

From *The Silver Shadow*

I

John Havelock was a giant by nature, a gentleman by instinct, a Christian by the grace of God, and a grocer by profession. I lay stress, at the outset, upon this fourth dimension, because it is with John as a grocer that I am now principally concerned. John was a tremendous fellow. His huge form seems to tower up before me even as I write. I am not much short of six feet myself; but I felt a perfect pigmy when he was about. And he was usually about. For John was for twelve years one of my deacons, and no minister could have had a more staunch and faithful friend. When John first came to Mosgiel, he carried his entire stock-in-trade upon his big, broad back. Like a modern edition of Atlas bearing the earth upon his shoulders, John came over the hills supporting an enormous pack. Beneath the weight of which even his titanic frame almost staggered. He hawked his groceries from door to door. People liked his pluck and admired his enterprise—he was scarcely more than a boy in those days. He rapidly built up a connection. In a few months he was able to buy a pony and cart; then he opened a shop; and, within ten years, he owned the biggest store on the Taieri Plain. As a grocer, John was a phenomenal success; yet, oddly enough, John was not always content to be a grocer. During one brief phase of his eventful career he hankered after the ministry. And it is the story

of his escape from such a catastrophe that I have set out to record.

II

Some men are made to be ministers; some are not made to be ministers; some are made not to be ministers. John Havelock belonged to this third class. He was as honest as the day, and his transparent honesty was the secret of his success as a grocer, but was handicapped by defects that proclaimed to all who knew him his irremediable unfitness for the ministry. To begin with, he could not express himself. In ordinary conversation I have seen him waving his hands like signals of distress while he struggled vainly to think of the word he wanted. I have heard it said of some men that they speak as though they have swallowed a dictionary. John must certainly have swallowed his, for he could never find a word when he wanted it. He would hum and ha, stutter and gesticulate, pull all kinds of grimaces, and express astonishment at the obstinacy of the elusive phrase; but the truant word took no notice of his frantic behavior; it would never come.

Nor am I convinced that he possessed some of those deeper qualities that go to make up a really successful minister. He was too much of an idealist. He liked bad people, and would have laid down his life to save them. He liked good people, and would have gone to any trouble to serve them; but that was about all. He never realized that he was living in a world in which very few people are altogether bad or altogether good. Most people are half and half, and it is a minister's business to take people as he finds them and make the best he can of them. John could never do that. Had he become a minster, and had one member of his flock gone astray, John would have been like the good shepherd of the Gospels. He would have left everything, and would have gone out into the wilderness, and would have searched for that which was lost until he found it. And, when he had found it, he would have brought it back to the fold rejoicing. Such an experience would have been like a foretaste of heaven to John. And then again he would have reveled in the company of good people. But no very great proportion of a minister's life is

spent either with the sheep that go hopelessly astray or with the sheep that remain demurely in the fold. Each of the ninety and nine sheep which go not astray has some little sheepish obstinacies that have to be watched, and some little sheepish stupidities that have to be endured, and some little sheepish peculiarities that have to be studied; and John would have been all at sea in this realm of things. He loved bad men and good men, but he had no patience with anything betwixt and between. He was an idealist. In some ways he was too good to make a successful minister.

III

John often told me that story of his escape. He always told it to the accompaniment of a storm of laughter; but you could feel that tears were not far away. The lure of the pulpit arose very largely from John's unbounded admiration of the minister of his boyhood, the Rev. Alfred South. He regarded his old minister as the incarnation of all human nobleness; and the excellence of the man threw a new luster, in John's eyes, about his sacred calling. To be a minister seemed to John the very climax of human greatness, the loftiest altitude of moral grandeur. The very thought of it captivated his whole fancy. It haunted his waking imaginations and wove itself into his night-time dreams. The idea was for a long time purely impersonal. He did not connect himself with it in any way. It was just the abstract thought of being a minister, the sublimity of being a minister! But at length he found his own face creeping into the vision. At first he dismissed the thought with horror. He drove it away impatiently, as he would have brushed away a fly that threatened to settle on a sacred and beautiful picture. But it came back again and again in spite of him. At last his own face became part of the vision. He could not exclude it. And then he asked himself if he ought any longer to try to exclude it? Might not this be to him a solemn and imperative call? This was the struggle that was proceeding in his soul whilst his body was aching under the burden of the great pack that he bore so bravely over the hills. John had a conscience as tender as a baby's finger-tips. Climbing a

steep hill one day, he thought all the way up of Jonah. Jonah heard the call, and fled. John trembled lest he too should prove recreant to a divine commission. And all the way down the opposite slope, where the mountain range inclines to the plain below, he thought of Paul: 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.' He came into the town and began selling his groceries. But every shilling seemed to burn his pockets. He felt that he had heard a higher voice and flouted it. He had been commanded to forsake all and follow like the disciples of old, and yet here he was, hugging his pack and making his profits still!

IV

A fortnight later the position became intolerable and a crisis was precipitated. John could not sleep at night; he tossed to and fro in a fever of uncertainty and cruel doubt. And all day long his mind was focused upon his inner struggle rather than upon his groceries. He made mistakes; gave customers goods for which they had not asked, and returned them too much change. Twice in one day he was charged with being in love. He could not truthfully deny the soft impeachment, for it was perfectly true; and his affection of Kit only increased as anxiety to make no false step. She was a wise little woman. The prospect of being the mistress of a manse was as sweet to her as John's radiant dreams of the ministry were to him. But love had not blinded her eyes to his defects. She would rather see him a successful merchant and an honored citizen than see him a failure in the ministry. She, therefore, feigned indifference concerning the change at which he hinted, but spoke proudly of his present success in business, and of the good they would be able to do if, some day, fortune came their way. Yes, John was in love; but Kit was not to blame for the blunders that he made that day.

That night when John reached home, sick at heart and tired out, a letter awaited him. It was from the secretary of the church, asking him to conduct a cottage prayer-meeting at a certain home on the following Thursday evening. John seized a pen; scribbled off a reply, agreeing to conduct the service; and went out to post it. It was

a lovely night, mild and starlit. It was late, and there was not a soul about. John had not troubled to put on his hat, and he felt soothed by the cool breeze as it played caressingly with his hair. Suddenly, on the way back from the post, a strange impulse took possession of him. He lifted the panel and let himself into a field at the far end of which some cattle were huddled together. He threw himself on his knees on the grass and, turning his face to the skies, he prayed.

'O Lord,' he exclaimed passionately, 'wouldst Thou have me to be Thy minster? Show me Thy way, O Lord! If it be Thy will that I should take this step, grant me some token of Thy favor as I preach Thy Word on Thursday! Let it be seen that God is with me and that I do but speak in His holy name! And if not, O Lord—! If it be not Thy will that I should be one of Thy ministers, then, I entreat Thee, put me to confusion before all who shall attend! Let it be seen that Thou hast not called me! Pity Thy servant in his distress and vouchsafe to him the sign that he desires!'

John rose; some cool raindrops fell refreshingly upon his flushed face; he hurried home, threw himself into bed, and slept like a top.

V

'I shall never forget that Thursday night as long as I live,' John often said to me. 'I was determined that, if things went wrong, they should go wrong through no neglect of mine. I chose my text on the Sunday and spent every scrap of spare time preparing my address. I went over it again and again in the course of my rounds. I selected the hymns and practiced them most carefully with the lady who was to play the organ. I even arranged with the two men who were to lead us in prayer. I never made such careful preparation for a meeting in my life. Had I been commanded to preach before the King, I could not have attended more punctiliously to every detail. Half an hour before the time, I walked down to the house at which the meeting was to be held, and saw to it that the chairs, the table, the lights, and everything else were to my liking. Just after I had taken my place in the arm-chair at the table, Kit entered with her

mother and smiled meaningly and sympathetically.

'At eight o'clock the big room was comfortably filled, and I started to the tick. It seemed as though nothing could go wrong. The singing was hearty; the prayers were models of reverence and fervor; I read the Scripture amidst a silence that showed that no single listener was willing to miss one precious syllable of the sublime message. The extreme nervousness that had victimized me all day passed from me like a cloud, and I experienced a confidence and self-possession I had rarely known before. At length I announced the hymn that immediately preceded my address. During the singing of the last verse I bowed my head and inwardly repeated the vow that I had uttered under the trees. The people resumed their seats; I rose.

'At that moment there was a commotion in the hall outside. A late-comer had arrived. It turned out to be a bustling little old lady of genial face and ample figure who lived just across the road. I paused, waiting for things to settle themselves. There was a shuffling of chairs. A man on the right-hand side of the door was about to place his chair for her when he saw that a man on the left-hand side of the door was offering his. Each started to move his chair, and each withdrew it on discovering the action of the other. The old lady took it for granted that her chair was now placed and sat down! There was a thud; a score of piercing screams; and then, when it was clear that the good body was none the worse for her prostiation, a general burst of laughter. The old lady rose and scolded first the man on the right and then the man on the left; there were apologies and explanations; the company compared notes as to what each saw and heard and thought. There was more laughter after each narration, and the possibilities of restoring solemnity and resuming the meeting vanished into thin air. The carefully prepared address was never delivered; the prayer under the trees had been answered. When I said 'Good-night' to them all, they were laughing good-naturedly. On Kit's face I saw a look of wistful sadness. Kit saw the tragedy that underlay the comedy. Kit understood.'

VI

John assures me that he went home that night feeling neither discomfited nor ashamed. The issues to him were so momentous that the embarrassment of the situation did not affect him. The other afternoon I saw a naval signalman waving flags to a battleship out at sea. A little child was with me. He thought the flag-waving great fun. The officer on the battleship interpreted the message with grim seriousness. The people gathered that night saw things as my little boy saw the waving of the flags. To John the incident was pregnant with quite another significance. He was like the officer on the ship. He felt, he says, that a great load had been lifted from his shoulders. He threw himself into his business with a will. Nobody ever again accused him of being in love, although he and Kit were married the following year.

As I have said, he prospered phenomenally. Everything that he touched turned to gold. He made a fortune in no time. And it was just as well that he did. For, two years after his marriage, a baby-boy came to John's home. And, while the place was still ringing with his childish merriment, the little fellow went suddenly blind. Poor John and poor Kit! I was with them constantly in those days, and shall never forget their dumb but terrible anguish. Every morning they hurried to the bedside of their treasure, hoping against hope that the light had come back to Davie's eyes in the night. Then John made his great resolve. He determined to devote his life and fortune to the service of his blind boy. Mosgiel was a small place, and there were no institutions there at which he could receive special training. John sold out; and went away to live in retirement near a large School for the Blind nearly a thousand miles away. He spent every moment of his time and every penny of his income in making a man of Davie. And again the most extraordinary success attended him. Davie became one of the most brilliant scholars and one of the most accomplished citizens that the Dominion of New Zealand ever produced.

The last time I saw John he was telling me proudly of Davie's triumphs. And then his mind harked back to the old days—the heavy pack, the golden dreams, and the never-to-be-forgotten

prayer-meeting. 'I can see now,' he said, in a voice in which gratitude mingled with a certain indefinable sadness, 'I can see now that I should have cut a very poor figure in the ministry. And besides,' he added reflectively, 'I should never have been able to make a man of Davie. It was a great escape!'

And Kit has often expressed the same sentiments in other words, although I have generally detected a moistening of the eye as she told the story.

Chapter 10

FOOTPRINTS IN THE SNOW

From *A Reel of Rainbow*

There could be no mistake about it, Mosgiel was in the grip of the blizzard. For more than a week the little township had been buried deep in snow, and the storm had as yet given no promise of abatement. Once or twice, during a momentary lull, we had been able to discern the outline of the ranges; they were wrapped, from peaks to foothills, in robes of blinding whiteness. When, in a wan, fitful, half-hearted kind of way, the sun for a second showed his face, the mountains were positively dazzling. And all across the plain, in every direction fields and farms, hedges and homesteads, were all folded in the same stainless mantle. Never before, in a residence of many years, had I seen the spirit of the Antarctic creep up and lay so firm a hold upon the place.

'It is scarcely worthwhile going along to the church tonight,' said the mistress of the manse when Wednesday evening came. 'Nobody will be there. It is an awful night. It isn't fit for a dog to be out.'

I agreed with her, but decided to take no risks. At half-past seven, although the storm was then at the climax of its fury, I set out into the night. And I was handsomely rewarded for my venture.

At the church I found a congregation of one; and that one was John Havelock. John, as I have explained in an earlier narrative, was a ponderous piece of humanity. He stood well over six feet in height; was an excellent officer of the church. Prospering in business, as he deserved to do, he had become the proud proprietor

of the largest store on the Plain. I could see at a glance, however, that this evening John was in no mood for a frolic. As I stepped into the porch, and shook the snow from my hat and coat, John greeted me dismally. I thought that, in all probability, he was depressed by the difficulty of carrying on his business under the climatic conditions that seemed so persistent. But I soon found that in harboring this conjecture I was doing him a grave injustice.

John had quite another trouble on his mind. For several years he had been assisted in the shop by a young fellow named Henry Swift. The Swifts were a large family; they were all connected to the church; Mr. Swift was a deacon; and Henry was himself a member. It was five years earlier, when Henry was a boy in John's Sunday-school class, that it had first occurred to John to take him into the shop. It was a masterful stroke, and I doubt if John saw all its advantages when he offered Henry the position. Everybody liked Henry, and his popularity grew with the years. John was gloomy and by no means magnetic. Henry was sprightly and cheerful; he had a good joke and a pleasant word for everybody; he was hail-fellow-well-met wherever he happened to be. Nothing was a trouble to him; he took infinite pains to satisfy and please every customer. He went out for orders, studied the people's whims and fancies, and did everything in his power to humor them. The business grew amazingly. John took good care that Henry enjoyed a liberal share of its prosperity; and for five years everything went well.

By this time Henry was twenty. It is a critical age, and his friends should have reflected upon its perils before plying his ears so constantly with reminders of this indispensability to John. They forgot that it was by John's untiring industry that the business had been established; they forgot that all its risks and responsibilities rested, in the last resort, upon his shoulders; they forgot that he had invested in it the savings of long, laborious years. They only remembered Henry's great popularity and John's great profits. Why was Henry content to spend his life in piling up John's fortune? Could he not see that crowds of people only came to the shop because they liked Henry and could count upon his consideration and courtesy? It was to Henry, so these people reasoned, that the customers brought their orders, not to John. It was with Henry that they desired to deal. Henry listened to these sooth sayings morning,

afternoon, and night. They became the commonplaces of every conversation. He would have been more than human if he had ultimately proved superior to such siren voices. He was not more than human.

As the constant dripping of the softest water will at last wear away the hardest stone, so these soft whisperings at length bore down all his finer feelings and deeper scruples. One Saturday, as they were closing the shop, John handed Henry his salary as usual. Henry said that he wished to speak to John for a minute or two. They walked into the office. Henry made demands upon John which John felt to be utterly unreasonable and unjust. In his own blunt and uncompromising fashion he scornfully rejected Henry's proposals. Henry instantly gave his old master a week's notice to leave his service, and announced his intention of setting up in business in a shop immediately opposite. A fortnight later Havelock's store stood on one side of the main road and Swift's stood facing it defiantly upon the other.

Things had been going on in this way for about three months when the snowstorm broke upon us all. The excitement created by the establishment of the new business had died down; but John was very worried about it still.

'It isn't so much the loss of business,' he said. 'That is scarcely worth talking about. But it gives a fellow a nasty feeling. There's the schism in the church and the scandal in the town. His father and I are both deacons; and almost everybody in the congregation is having to take sides, either with him or with me. I'm sorry, too, for him. He would never have dreamed of such things if people had let him alone. He's a very decent fellow, and was a great help to me. He'll find it harder than he thinks to run alone. He has nothing behind him. If I liked to cut prices and run things finely for a while, I could shut him up in no time. But I mean to give him a fair chance.'

We talked it over whilst we waited for the congregation that never came.

'I've a good mind to speak to Henry,' I said. 'I might be able to arrange for him to see you.'

But John was afraid that I should be regarded as his ambassador.

'Better leave it,' he said, as we parted at the gate and plunged into the snow-drifts along the opposite paths. 'I'll think it over and come up to the manse for a yarn!'

But Henry got there first! We were sitting at the fire next evening when the bell rang. Visitors had been few and far between since the snow came, and we looked at each other in surprise. Then I thought of John, and went to the door myself. To my astonishment, however, it was Henry. I took him into the study.

He began, as such visitors usually do, by pledging me to confidence, especially requesting that I should breathe no word to John of this visit to me.

'I'm afraid I've made a bad mistake,' he began, 'and I don't quite know how to put things right. I ought never to have set up in opposition to Mr. Havelock. But I was silly enough to listen to all that people said. And then he made me angry with him. I don't suppose he meant anything, but his awkward way of saying and doing things sometimes hurts even those who know him best. It came to a head suddenly; and, before I realized what I was doing, I found myself behind the counter of my own shop. But it's a silly game, anyway. It has made a lot of bad blood in the church; it has set half of the town by the ears; and, to make matters worse, there's nothing in it. I have been disappointed at every turn. The people who talked most have done the least to help me. The people who deal with me are the people who want long credit, which I can't afford to give. The expenses of running the business are far greater than I had anticipated. And I find myself badly handicapped when it comes to buying. I had taken it for granted that I could buy from the wholesale houses just as Mr. Havelock did. But then, I don't need his quantities, and I haven't his capital behind me, and that makes all the difference. If he liked, he could undersell me on almost everything, and still make bigger profits than I am doing. To make a long story short, I'm sick of the whole thing; but I can't see how to get out of it!'

It was a bitterly cold night. The study fire had been allowed to go out when I left the room at dinner-time; and I thought wistfully of the cozy fire I had left in the dining-room. Why not take Henry through? Happily, it occurred to me to go myself first and make sure the coast was clear. As I walked up the hall I was surprised

at hearing the murmur of voices; and, on opening the dining-room door, I found that John was occupying the chair I had forsaken. He had come across the fields to the back door, and I had thus had no intimation of his arrival. A woman's insight is a wonderful thing. As I entered the room somebody else slipped out, and by the time I re-entered the study a bright fire was burning there. Whilst it was being lit I leaned against the mantelpiece and talked to John, apologizing for the fact that I should be for a little while engaged.

'It's all right,' he said. 'I'm in no hurry, and this is very comfortable. When you're disengaged I want to have a word with you about the business we were discussing last night. I should like to get it fixed up, and I wouldn't mind losing money over it; but I still feel that our future relationships with each other could not rest on any permanently satisfactory basis if I go cap in hand to him. If I eat humble-pie now, I may have to eat it all the time. But don't let me keep you. Go back and attend to your visitor, and later on we'll try to find a way out!'

By this time the chair opposite him was again occupied; the ticking of the clock mingled with the clicking of knitting-needles; and I slipped back to the study.

I tried hard to persuade Henry to go to John and make a clean breast of it. But he could not screw up his courage to that pitch. He drew from his pocket a sheaf of papers showing his purchases, sales, assets, liabilities, and stock-in-hand. I offered to discuss the matter with John; but he said at once that that would never do. John would see in a twinkling that I had been asked to come. In the course of the evening I once or twice excused myself and went through to the other room. I dared not tell either that the other was in the house, and yet I knew their hearts well enough to perceive that nothing was more desirable than that they should meet. As the evening wore on, the embarrassment of the position grew upon me; and I began to wonder how it was going to end.

It ended, as such situations usually do, in a way that nobody could have foreseen. I was sitting with Henry in the study. John and the mistress of the manse were chatting by the dining-room fire, when suddenly, we were all startled by a terrific crash and a piercing scream. In a second we had all rushed pell-mell into the hall—the direction from whence these fearful sounds proceeded.

The mystery was soon explained. My footsteps in the hall, as I passed restlessly from one room to the other, had awakened one of the children. Creeping from her bed, she had set out upon a journey of investigation. The first object that captivated her fancy was the lamp in the hall. Climbing on to the seat of the hallstand, she had stretched out her hand to grasp it, had lost her balance, and had fallen, carrying the lamp with her!

For just a moment her terror and possible injuries absorbed all our thought. And then, as soon as she had been calmed and reassured, a much more delicate situation emerged. For here in the hall were both Henry and John! They first looked sheepishly at each other, and then turned to me for an explanation.

'Well,' I said, 'you two fellows have brought this on yourselves. You entrusted me with your confidences, and I have respected them, both in the letter and the spirit. Neither of you has the slightest idea as to what the other has said to me. Neither of you would have known, but for this accident, that I was in touch with the other. And now, in this unceremonious fashion, you have rushed uninvited out of the rooms in which I placed you into this hall! I can have nothing further to do with you! If it hadn't been for you, my wife and I would have spent a pleasant evening by the dining-room fire. Now that you have abused our hospitality in the unpardonable way, we shall go back to the dining-room fire together. No man can be expected to keep secrets, under such conditions. You will find a second fire burning in the study, and if you take my advice, you two will go in there for a while and make the most of each other's society. Go on!'

I have no idea as to what happened in that study. I only know that, when supper was taken in to them, they were poring over the papers that Henry had brought in his pocket. An hour later they came through and smilingly bade us good-night. Each shook my hand very warmly, and they set off side by side into the snow.

Next morning I saw them both hard at work carrying the stores across the road from the smaller shop to the larger one. And, before so very long, the name on the smaller shop front followed the stores. For reasons that I have outlined in John Havelock's Escape, John had soon after to sell out and devote all his time and energy to

Davie, his little blind boy. When that day came, he made it easy for Henry to become the proprietor of the business; and the name that had for a few weeks stood over the small shop on the one side of the road has now stood for many a long year over the larger store on the other.

Chapter 11

SANDY

From *The Other Side of the Hill*

Old Sandy McAlister was a perfect godsend to his minister; and, in his own peculiar way, he rendered the church most excellent service. Mosgiel is a scattered district, and Sandy lived some distance from the church. He was not strong; and his attendance depended to a large extent on the state of the weather and the condition of the roads. I confess that it took me a good while to fathom Sandy. He said very little; and somehow I came to think of him as a man with a secret. I was not far out, as this record will show. I knew Sandy for years before I discovered the hidden depths of sweetness and chivalry that his brusque and rugged exterior so cleverly concealed. That is one of the delights of a lengthy pastorate. It takes a long time to get to know some of the most loveable people. Had I left Mosgiel after three years, I should have cherished no amiable memory of Sandy. As it is, I stayed long enough to find him out; and he became one of my fastest and most confidential friends.

It was a queer little house in which Sandy lived all by himself. He had been a widower for many years; of children he had none. He had neither the means nor the inclination to engage a housekeeper; and he was too fond of his own little ways to seek board and residence with others. And so he lived alone in his little two-roomed cottage—his "but and ben," as he called it. The cottage lay back from the road with all the garden in front. Sandy was no aesthetic. He had a frugal mind. I can see now the tall rows of French-beans; the sprawling marrow plants; the tangle of potato

haulms; the beds of gigantic cabbages punctuated here and there by the headless stalks of those that had surrendered dear life for Sandy's sake. Sandy took inordinate pride in these departments of horticulture. I remember his taking me out by moonlight to admire a magnificent cauliflower; and, in the winter time, when the snow had buried his frozen garden, he would sit in his rocking-chair by the glowing fire and glance lovingly at the enormous vegetable marrows that reposed on a shelf nearby. Save for the roses that clambered over the porch, and a tall row of yellow sunflowers that flourished near the fence, Sandy devoted no attention to flowers.

Although he was frail, and a martyr to rheumatism, Sandy was rarely ill. Once or twice I visited him in his "ben"; but it was usually in the other room that he and I overhauled the universe. I always occupied the rocking-chair on these occasions. Not all the coaxing or cajolery in the world would persuade Sandy to take that chair when his minister was in the house. I tried once or twice to wheedle him into it, but I found him adamantine. "It wudna be recht!" he used to say; so I capitulated, and, ever afterwards, followed the line of least resistance and took the rocking-chair as a matter of course.

It was more than forty years since he left the Homeland; but he always had something to say about Scotland. The latest Hawick newspaper was never far from his chair, and it was from that geographical standpoint that he looked out upon the world. He was fond of history, although I sometimes fancied that his sense of proportion was slightly defective. To him, Waterloo was a mere skirmish in comparison with Bannockburn; whilst to the puny heroes of whom I sometimes talked so glibly, he would introduce Bruce and Wallace, like a pair of monstrous colossi, and all my idols were dwarfed and shamed out of countenance. It was good for me; it humbled my southern pride; it made me feel how jaundiced my English view of things had evidently become. And if, in an unguarded moment, I rashly referred to some mere lowland poet, that pale and sickly luminary was instantly extinguished by the dazzling effulgence of Burns!

I noticed as soon as I settled as Mosgiel that, although Sandy was frequently absent from the ordinary services. He was invariably in his place at the business meetings of the church. Even on bleak

wintry nights, when he had to fight his way along muddy roads through a perfect hurricane of rain or sleet, he was always there. I marveled at this, for Sandy was not fond of debate. He took his seat against the wall, and manifested only the most languid interest in all that was being said and done. Sometimes he did not even trouble to vote. It was some little time before I could lay my hand on any clue to the mystery. But one night Sandy actually spoke. I had introduced the names of several candidates for membership. In only one case was there the slightest hesitancy. Alan Fairmaid had been something of a scapegrace in the neighborhood. The change from the old life to the new was so sudden as to savor, in the judgment of some, of impetuosity. It was suggested that he should be subjected to a probationary period of three of four months. If, at the end of that time, he still ran well, receive him by all means. Owen Davids, a Welsh sailor, who had had experiences of his own, was on his feet in a moment.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "if Alan gets the idea into his head that we suspect him, it will do him a lot of harm. We've got to take a risk. If we receive him straight away, we run the risk that he may disappoint us and prove unworthy of our fellowship. If we receive the other candidates, but place him on probation, we may discourage him and turn him back to his old ways. In the first case we have our remedy; in the second, we have none. I move that all the candidates be approved."

It was the case of Paul and Barnabas over again. There was something to be said for taking Mark, and something to be said for leaving him. I admired those who were jealous for the honor of the church, and I admired those who trembled for the soul of Alan Fairmaid. At the critical moment, Sandy arose. I was amazed. I had no idea that he had it in him to make a speech.

"Mr. Chairman," he said, "there is no Communion Service for over a fortnight, so that even if we pass these names tonight they cannot be welcomed until then. I move that this meeting stand adjourned until this fortnight, and I shall make it my business to see Alan in the meantime."

The proposal was eagerly adopted. During the next fortnight Sandy and Alan were inseparable. Twice of an evening I strolled along the grassy road to the little cottage behind the French-beans

and the sunflowers, and on each occasion I found Alan in the chair opposite Sandy. And when the church assembled for its adjourned meeting, Sandy had such a glowing tale to tell of the times that Alan and he had spent together that the same was passed without the utterance of another word. All the candidates—Alan among them—were welcomed to fellowship that the Communion Service on the following Sunday evening; the fortnight's intercourse between Sandy and Alan ripened into a fast and lifelong friendship; and Alan adorned for many years the membership and service of Mosgiel church.

Sandy made that his life-work. He was the champion of all doubtful cases. It was not that he wished to oppose those who counseled caution. He recognized that their alarm in certain cases pointed to circumstances of special peril in the candidates—circumstances that naturally awakened such serious apprehension. And Sandy felt himself called to prevent a collapse. He therefore devoted his attention to those points at which a collapse was most to be feared. I remember strolling down to the cottage one evening and finding five of the younger members of the church sitting with him. One of the girls had brought him a lovely bunch of flowers, and had daintily arranged them on the table-center.

Sandy's big Bible was lying open near him. And I guessed that he had been making full use of his opportunity. As I glanced round the room at the faces lit up by the firelight, the first thing that struck me was that each of Sandy's guests had been the subject of the gravest misgiving when the name was first submitted to the church. And very possibly those sinister alarms would have been fully justified by subsequent events—if it had not been for Sandy. As it turned out, however, Sandy's protégés invariably proved our most loyal and most devoted workers.

The illness that took Sandy from us was not a long one. I was out visiting in the township one afternoon when, looking down the long straight road, I was surprised to see the doctor's gig standing at Sandy's gate. I was soon at his side; but he did not take his sickness seriously. Indeed, he was rather more talkative than usual. He was in a reminiscent mood.

'I've been thinking about auld times,' he said, as he took my hand. 'I've never told you how it came about that I first joined

the church. Go and get the rocking-chair, and put it beside the bed, and I'll tell ye all about it!'

I brought the rocking-chair from the 'but' to the 'ben,' placed it so that I sat facing him, and he went on with his story.

'Weel, ye ken,' he continued, lapsing, as he often did, into his native brogue, 'I was gey wild in my early days. But the guid Lord had mercy on Sandy, and I asked the meenister if I could join the kirk. He shook his head, and said that it would have to be considered very carefully. A few weeks afterwards he told me that I had been put on probation, and that if I did well my application would be again considered. It was like a wet blanket. I was wrong and wicked to think it; but I felt that they did not want me, and I went back to my auld companions and my auld life. It was ten years before I ever troubled the kirk again; and those ten years were the most wretched years that I ever spent. I never kneel down beside this auld bed without asking the good Lord to blot out the memory of those dreadful years. And now ye ken why I took a wee bit interest in Alan Fairmaid and the ither lads and lasses. I canna do much; but if I could save a single one of them from years like those ten years of mine I should feel that I had dune a guid day's work.'

It was the last talk I ever had with him. At his funeral I spoke for a few moments on The Glory of the Rearguard—that obscure detachment that follows the army, gathers up all the stragglers, and saves all those who would otherwise fall out. Sandy left nothing—he had lived on a little pension that lapsed with his death—but a few of his admirers erected a modest stone above his grave. And I noticed that, in raising that monument, Alan Fairmaid and the young people I met in Sandy's room were among the largest contributors.

Chapter 12

DICK SUNSHINE

From *Mushrooms on the Moor*

Dick Sunshine was not his real name; at least so they said. But the thing that they called his real name did not describe him a scrap; it seemed to abandon all attempt at description as hopelessly impossible; but when you called him Dick Sunshine it fitted him like a glove. That is the immense advantage that nicknames possess over real names. Of all real things, real names are the most unreal. There is no life in them. They stand for nothing; they express nothing; they reveal nothing. They bear no kind of relationship to the unfortunate individuals who are sentenced to wear them, like meaningless badges, for the term of their natural lies. But nicknames, on the other hand, sparkle and flash; they bring the man himself vividly and palpitatingly before you; and without more introduction or ado, you know him at once for what he is. That is the reason why we prefer to be called by our real names. We know in our secret souls that our nicknames are our true names, and that our real names are mere tags and badges; but we prefer the meaningless tag to the too candid truth. There are obvious disadvantages in being constantly spoken of as Mr. Grump, Mrs. Crosspatch, or Miss Spitfire; whereas Mr. Smith, Mrs. Robinson, or Miss Jones are much safer and more non-committal. But, for all that, the nicknames, depend upon it, are the true names. Nicknames reveal the man; real names conceal the man. And since, in the case of my present hero, I desire to reveal everything and to conceal nothing, it is obviously desirable to speak of him by his nickname, which is his true name, rather than by his

real name, which is a mere affectation and artificiality. He was always Dick Sunshine to me, and I noticed that the children always called him Dick Sunshine, and the children are not easily deceived. Besides, he was Dick Sunshine, so what is the use of beating about the bush?

Who was Dick Sunshine? It is difficult to say. He was partly a grocer and partly a consumptive. He spent half his time laughing, and half his time coughing. He only stopped laughing in order to cough; and he only stopped coughing in order to laugh. You could always tell which he was doing at any particular time by taking a glance at the shop. If the shop was open, you knew that Dick was behind the counter laughing. If it was closed, you knew that he was in bed coughing. A fine-looking fellow was Dick, or would have been if only his health had given him a chance. Fine wavy golden hair tossed in naïve disorder about his lofty forehead; and a small pointed golden beard set off a frank, cheery, open face. Somehow or other, there was a certain touch of chivalry about Dick, although it is not easy to say exactly how it made itself felt. It was a certain knightly bearing, perhaps, a haughty contempt for his own suffering, a rollicking bit resolute refusal of anything in the shape of pity. Coughing or laughing, there was always a roughish little twinkle in the corner of his eye, a kind of danger signal that kept you on constant guard lest his next sally should take you by surprise.

The church at North-East Valley has had its ups and downs, like most churches, but as long as Dick was its secretary it never had a gloomy church meeting. However grave or unexpected might be the crisis, he came up smiling, and greeted the unseen with a cheer. When things were going well, he always made the most of it, and drew attention to the encouraging features in the church's outlook. If things were so-so, he pointed out that they might have been a great deal worse, and that the church was putting up a brave fight against heavy odds. If anybody criticized the minister, Dick was on his feet in a minute. Could the minister do everything? Dick wanted to know. Was he solely responsible for the unsatisfactory conditions? Why, anybody who watches the minister can see that the poor man is doing his best, which, Dick slyly added, is more than can be said for some of us! And the ministers of North-East Valley used to tell me that when they themselves got down in the

dumps, Dick treated their collapse as a glorious joke. He would come down to the manse and laugh until he coughed, and cough until he could laugh again, and, by the time that he stopped laughing and coughing, the masses of his golden hair were tumbled about his high forehead like shocks of corn blown from the stocks by playful winds in harvest-time; and when he went home to finish his coughing, the manse was flooded with laughter and the sunshine that he had left behind him.

I was sitting one morning in my study at Mosgiel, when there came a ring at the front door bell. On answering it, I found myself standing face to face with Dick. He was laughing so violently that he could at first scarcely salute me. He followed me into the study, and assured me as he sank into a chair that it was the fun of the world. I asked him to explain the cause of his boisterous merriment.

'Had to give it up!' he gasped. 'The doctors told me that I should die in a week if I remained in the shop any longer. So I've left it to look after itself, and come away. No fun in dying in a week, you know!'

I admitted that there was something in that, and inquired what he was going to do now.

'That's the joke!' he roared, between laughter and coughing. 'I've come to stay with you.'

There was nothing for it but to let him take his time, so I patiently awaited further explanation. At length it came.

'Just as I was locking up the shop,' he said, presently, 'I heard that the temperance people wanted a lecturer and organizer to work this district. Except the lecturing, it will be all open-air work, so I applied for it, and got it!'

'But my dear fellow,' I remonstrated, 'I never knew that you could lecture. Why, outside the church meeting, you never made a speech in your life!'

'That's part of the joke!' he cried, going off again into a paroxysm of laughter. 'But I told them that you would help me at the first, and they appointed me on that condition. So this is to be my headquarters!'

His duties were to commence the following week, and we arranged that he should make his debut as a lecturer at a place

called Outram, about eight miles across country from Mosgiel. I promised to accompany him, and to fill up such time as he found it impossible or inconvenient to occupy. In the meantime he got to work with his visiting and organizing. The open air suited him, his health improved amazingly, and the Mosgiel manse simply rocked under the storms of his boisterous gaiety. Sometimes the shadow of the coming ordeal spread itself heavily over his spirit, and he came to the study with unwonted gravity to ask how this or that point in his maiden effort had better be approached. To prevent his anxiety under his head from becoming too much for his fragile frame, I lent him a book, and sent him out on to the sunlit verandah to read it. It chanced to be The Old Curiosity Shop. He had never read anything of Dickens, and it opened a new world to him. I have never seen anybody fall more completely under the spell of the magician. From the study I would hear him suddenly yell with laughter, and come rushing through the hall to read me some passage that had just captivated his fancy. Whenever he came stealing along like a thief, I knew it was to talk about the lecture; when he came like an incarnate thunderstorm, I knew it was about the book.

One passage in the famous story especially appealed to him. It was the part about Codlin and Short, the Punch and Judy men. In the middle of dinner, without the slightest provocation or warning, he would suddenly drop his knife and fork, throw himself back in his chair, slap his leg a sounding blow with his hand, and shriek out, 'Codlin's your friend, not Short,' and then go off into ecstasies of glee as he told the tale all over again.

Well, Monday—the day of his opening lecture—came at last. During the day he was unusually quiet and taciturn, although, even in face of the grim test that awaited him, the Punch and Judy men haunted his memory and led to occasional subdued outbursts of fun. After tea we set out. It was a delicious evening. Few things are sweeter than the early evenings of early summer. The sunset is throwing long shadows across the fresh green grass, and the birds are busy in the boughs. Everything about us was clad in its softest and loveliest garb. We drove on between massive hedges of fragrant hawthorn, and up huge avenues of stately blue gum trees, scattering the rabbits before us. Then we caught sight of the river, and drove over the bridge into the quiet little town in which such unsuspected

adventures awaited us. Dick was pale and quiet; his sunshine was veiled in banks of cloud, and I found it difficult to rouse him. On arrival at the hall we found it crowded. I was naturally delighted; his pleasure was more restrained. Indeed, he confided to me, with a look that, for him, was positively lugubrious, that he would have been more gratified if the horrid place had been empty. However, there was nothing for it. Not a soul, except myself, knew that Dick was lecturing for the first time in his life; the chairman led us to the platform; and, after a brief introduction relative to the renown of the speakers, he called up Dick to address the townsfolk. As a maiden effort it was a triumph; his native good humor combined with careful preparation to produce a really excellent effect; and he sat down amidst a thunder of applause. I filled in an odd half-hour, and then the chairman nearly killed Dick at one blow.

'Would anybody in the audience care to ask either of the speakers a question?' he gravely inquired.

Poor Dick was the picture of abject dismay. This was a flank attack for which he was totally unprepared. An elderly gentleman, the body of the hall, rose slowly, adjusted his spectacles, and, with grave deliberation, announced that he wished to submit a question to the first speaker. Dick looked like a man whose death-warrant was about to be signed. The problem was duly enunciated, and it turned out to be a carefully planned and decidedly awkward one. I wondered how on earth poor Dick would face the music. He paused, as though considering his reply. Then a sudden light mantled his face. A wicked twinkle sparkled in his eye. He rose smartly, looked straight into the face of his questioner, and exclaimed confidently: 'Codlin's your friend, not Short!'

The audience was completely mystified. The answer had no more to do with the question than Dutch cheese has to do with the rings of Saturn. For a fraction of a second you could have heard a pin drop. I saw that the only way of saving the situation was by commencing to applaud, and I smote my hands together with a will, and laughed as I have rarely allowed myself to laugh in public. The sympathetic section of the audience followed suit. A general impression seemed to exist that, somehow, Dick had made a particularly clever point. The old gentleman who had asked the question was manifestly bewildered; he gazed helplessly round on

his cheering fellow citizens, and evidently regarded the answer as some recondite allusion of which it would never do to display his ignorance. He resumed his seat, discomfited and ashamed. When the applause and laughter had somewhat subsided, I rose and moved a vote of thanks to the chairman, which Dick seconded, though, I fancied, without much show of enthusiasm. Thus the meeting, which Dick never forgot, came to an eminently satisfactory end, although I heard privately long afterwards that, as the people took their homeward way along those country roads, many who had applauded vigorously inquired confidentially of their neighbors the exact bearing of the cryptic reply on the particular matter in hand.

If Dick lacked laughter on the way across the plains to the meeting, he amply atoned for the deficiency on the way home. How he roared, and yelled, and screamed in his glee!

'I had to say something,' he exclaimed. 'I hadn't the slightest idea what the old gentleman was talking about; and the only thing I could think of was the Punch and Judy!'

He laughed and coughed his way through that campaign. Everybody grew wonderfully fond of him, and looked eagerly for his coming. He did a world of good, and shamed scores of us out of the gloom in which we bore our slighter maladies. My mail from New Zealand tells me that, at last, his cough has proved too much for him, so he has given it up. But I like to fancy that, in the land where coughing is no more heard, Dick Sunshine is laughing still.

Chapter 13

A BIRD OF PARADISE

From *A Witch's Brewing*

I once told Stevie Renfrew that I believed he would die laughing, and surely enough he did! I never knew such a man to laugh. He laughed in season and out of season, and, the more sacred the theme, the more it seemed to excite his mirth. Yet his laughter never seemed incongruous or irreverent. Professor David Smith declares that, in spite of all that Carlyle has said on the subject, he himself regards laughter as 'a stupid gaucherie, symptomatic sometimes of vulgarity, sometimes of hysterics, and always of a lack of that self-control which is characteristic of a gentlemen.' I wish that Professor David Smith had known Stevie Renfrew. Stevie's soft delicious little laugh, to be likened rather to the jingling of silver bells than to a clap of thunder, would have moderated the Professor's severe verdict.

Stevie could enjoy a joke, but jokes were seldom the cause of his merriment. He would smile—a sweet, wise smile—over a funny story, but I never remember his roaring over such tales as some men do. But get him to tell of his spiritual pilgrimage, and you would hear little ripples of laughter that were as musical as the murmur of a woodland brook. When he told of his doubts and how they yielded to faith, of his fears and how they were falsified by fact, of his temptations and how he triumphed over them, of his troubles and how he surmounted them, his face would light up with a sort of celestial radiance and the pure joyousness of his soul would express itself in a subdued carillon of gentle laughter.

I remember a Sunday on which one of the officers of the Church, who was to have assisted at the Communion service, failed to appear. I resolved to ask Stevie to take his place. Solemn as seemed the occasion, Steve laughed his soft but merry little laugh. When he stopped laughing, however, I saw a tear glistening in his pale blue eye.

'To think,' he exclaimed, 'that Stevie Renfrew who, fifty years ago, nearly broke the hearts of his mother and his minister, should be asked to assist at the sacrament!' And he fell into his lovely little laugh once more!

Not long after this, he was seized of the sickness that proved to be his last. I set out at once to visit him. He greeted me cheerfully, and, although he knew perfectly well that he was seriously ill, his melodious laugh soon floated through the room.

'Oh, Stevie,' I exclaimed, 'you're incorrigible!'

'Yes,' he agreed, 'I'm a strange bird!'

'A bird!' I replied, in an attempt to match his mood, 'What kind of a bird are you, Stevie? A blackbird, or a bower-bird, or a bell-bird, or a lyre-bird, or a humming-bird, or a Bird of Paradise, or what?' His face took on that expression, so characteristic of him, in which the gravity and gaiety seemed oddly mingled.

'I hope very soon,' he said, 'to be a Bird of Paradise!' And, with tears in his eyes, he laughed again.

'You mustn't talk like that, Stevie,' I observed, 'but I really believe that, when your time does come, you'll die laughing.'

That casual remark evidently made an impression on him, for, the next day, he told me that he had been thinking a lot about it, and, perhaps, as a consequence, he had dreamed a strange dream.

'I thought,' he said, 'that I was in heaven, and everybody was laughing. Even the angels laughed. Many of the inhabitants were gathered in groups, talking together of their experiences on earth, and, as surely as the thought of the things that used to fill them with worry and apprehension, they laughed and laughed and laughed again!'

At the vivid recollection of his strange dream he himself, though very ill, yielded to the inevitable impulse. Feebly but joyously, he laughed in concert with the celestial laughers to whom

he had so recently listened. A moment later I left him, and heard his voice no more.

Towards the end, I understand, he looked up and asked: 'Am I dying?' They smiled assent.

'To think,' he murmured, 'that I was ever afraid of this!' And, with a pretty, pathetic little chuckle, he passed away.

Chapter 14

O'ER CRAG AND TORRENT

From *Rubble and Roseleaves*

I

Lexie Drummond had a place of her own in the hearts of the Mosgiel people. To begin with, she was lonely; and lonely folk have a remarkable way of exacting secret homage. Lexie worked at a loom in the woolen factory, and lived by herself in one of the factory cottages nearby. I wish you could have seen it. The door invariably stood open, even when Lexie was away at her work. Everything was faultlessly natty and clean. An enormous tabby cat, 'Matey,' purred on the mat, while a golden canary sang bravely from his cage in the creeper just outside the door. Lexie had a trim little garden, in which she grew lavender and mignonette, roses and carnations. Lexie's white carnations always took the prize at our local Flower Show. Lexie mothered Mosgiel. If anybody was in trouble, she would be sure to drop in; and, in cases of serious sickness, she would often stay the night. Some people would deny that Lexie was beautiful; yet she had a loveliness peculiar to herself. She was tall, finely-built, and wonderfully strong. When Roger Gunton, the heaviest man on the plain, was seized with sudden illness, Lexie alone could turn him from side to side, and he would allow nobody else to touch him. If her face lacked the vivacity and sparkle of more voluptuous beauties, it possessed, nevertheless, a quiet gravity, a serious winsomeness, that rendered it extremely

attractive. The furrows in her face, and the strands of grey in her hair, made her look older than she really was. Everybody knew Lexie's age; her name was a perpetual reminder of the number of her years. For, in an unguarded moment, she had once revealed the circumstance that she was born on the day on which the Princess of Wales—afterwards Queen Alexandra—was married, and she was named after the royal bride. Mosgiel never forgot personal details of that kind. In addition to all this, Mosgiel vaguely suspected that Lexie carried a secret in her breast. She came to Mosgiel only a few years before I did; and everybody felt that her previous history was involved in tantalizing mystery.

II

It was Friday night. In the dining-room at the Mosgiel manse we were enjoying a quiet evening by the fire. I was lounging in an armchair with a novel. I could afford to be restful, for, that week, I had but one sermon to prepare. On the approaching Sunday, the anniversary of the Sunday school was to be celebrated; in the morning John Broadbanks and I were exchanging pulpits in honor of the occasion; and, availing myself of a minister's immemorial prerogative, I had decided to preach an old sermon at Silverstream. All at once we were startled by the ringing of the front-door bell. It was the Sunday school superintendent.

'We are in an awful hole,' he exclaimed, after having discussed the weather, the health of our respective families, and a few other inevitable preliminaries. 'Lexie Drummond has been taken ill, and the doctor won't hear of her leaving the house for a week or two. She has been preparing the children for their part-songs, and has the whole programme at her fingers ends; I don't know how on earth we are going to manage without her.'

I promised to run down and see Lexie about it first thing in the morning; and did. Lexie was confined to her bed, and old Janet Davidson was nursing her. 'Matey' was curled up close to his mistress's feet, while the canary was singing blithely from his cage near the open window. I saw at a glance that Lexie had been

crying, and I attributed her grief to anxiety and disappointment in connection with the anniversary. She quickly undeceived me.

'You'll never notice that I'm not there,' she said, with a watery smile. 'The children know their parts thoroughly, and Bella Christie, who has been helping me, is as familiar with the programme as I am.'

I assured her that we should miss her sadly; but expressed my relief that everything had been so well arranged.

'And now, Lexie,' I said, as I took her hand in parting, 'you must worry no more about it; we will do our best to make it pass off well.'

'Oh,' she replied, quickly, recognizing in my words a reference to her tell-tale eyes, 'it wasn't the anniversary that I was worrying about; indeed, it was silly of me to cry at all!' And, to show how extremely silly it was, she broke, with womanish perversity, into a fresh outburst of tears.

'She has something she wants to tell you,' Janet interposed, 'but she doesn't like to.'

Lexie pretended to look vexed at the old lady's garrulity; but I fancied that I detected, behind the frown, a look of real relief.

'Some other time,' she said. 'Good-bye, I shall think of you all tomorrow!' Janet opened the door and I left her.

III

The anniversary passed off happily; Lexie was soon herself again; and, a fortnight later, I saw her in her old place at church. We knew that she would insist on taking her class in the afternoon; so, to save her the long walk home, we took her to the manse to dinner.

'Several of the teachers have been telling me of the address that you gave on the evening of the Sunday school anniversary,' she said, on our way to the manse. 'I wish you would let me see the manuscript.'

'I can do better than that,' I replied. 'The address was printed in yesterday's Taieri Advocate. I have several copies to spare if you care to have one.'

On arrival at the manse she insisted on going round the garden, and admiring the flowers, before composing herself on the sofa in the dining-room. I gave her the paper I had promised her, and hurried away to prepare for dinner. When I returned a few minutes later the paper was lying on the floor beside her, and she was crying as if her heart would break. By a supreme effort she regained her self-possession, promised to explain in the afternoon, and, in obedience to the summons, took her place at table.

During dinner I mentally reviewed the address which had so strangely reopened the fountains of her grief. It was the address which, under the title 'The Little Palace Beautiful,' appears in The Golden Milestone. It begins: 'There are only four children in the wide, wide world, and each of us is the parent of at least one of them.' The first of the four is The Little Child that Never Was. 'He is,' the address says, 'an exquisitely beautiful child. He is the child of all lonely men and lonely women, the child of their dreams and their fancies, the child that will never be born. He is the son of the solitary.' And the address goes on to quote from Ada Cambridge's Virgin Martyrs:

Every wild she-bird has nest and mate in the warm April weather,
But a captive woman, made for love, no mate, no nest, has she.
In the spring of young desire, young men and maids are wed together,
And the happy mothers flaunt their bliss for all the world to see;
Nature's sacramental feast for them—an empty board for me.
Time, that heals so many sorrows, keeps mine ever-freshly aching,
Though my face is growing furrowed and my brown hair turning white.
Still I mourn my irremediable loss, asleep or waking;
Still I hear my son's voice calling 'Mother' in the dead of night,
And am haunted by my girl's eyes that will never see the light.

As the address came back to me, I began to understand. I remembered what the gossips said about the mystery in Lexie's life. What was it, I wondered, that she meant to tell me after dinner?

IV

'You don't know me!' she cried passionately, when, once more, we found ourselves alone together. 'You treat me as if I were a good woman; you let me work at the church, and you bring me into your home; but you don't know me; really, really you don't! I have committed a great sin, a very great sin; and I am suffering for it; and others are suffering for it.' She paused, as if wondering how to begin her story, and then started afresh.

'I was brought up in the country,' she said, 'not far from Hokitui. My parents both died when I was a little girl; my guardians followed them a few years ago; so that now I am quite alone. At school I became very fond of Davie Bannerman, and he made no secret of his partiality for me. He used to bring me something—an apple or a cake or a picture or some sweets—every day. When I was nineteen we became engaged and were both very happy about it. Everybody in the Hokitui district loved Davie; he was handsome and good-natured; I used to think his laugh the grandest music I had ever heard. But I was proud, terribly proud. And, being proud, I was selfish. And, being selfish, I was jealous. Davie was good to everybody; yet I could not bear to see him paying attention to anybody but myself. He was a member of the Hokitui church, and used to spend a good deal of time there. I had no interest in such things in those days, and I was angry with him for neglecting me. But most of all was I jealous of Sadie McKay. Sadie was his cousin; she was one of the church girls; and I hated to think, when he was not with me, he was with her. Davie always took my scoldings merrily, and quickly coaxed me into a better mind. And I dare say that all would have gone well but for the accident that spoiled everything.

'Sadie was riding in from the farm one morning when, on the outskirts of Hokitui, she met a traction engine. Her horse bolted, and was soon out of control. As luck would have it, Davie was standing at a shop door near the township corner, and saw the horse galloping madly towards him. He rushed into the road and managed to check the animal before Sadie was thrown; but, in doing so, he was hurled to the ground, and the horse trod on his right arm, crushing it. He lay in the hospital for nearly two months; but I never

went near him. When he left the hospital he wrote to me. It was a pitiful scrawl, written with his left hand; his right was amputated. "I have had a heavy loss," he said, "and I do not know how I can manage without my arm; but now I must suffer a still heavier loss, and I do not know how I can live without you. But it would not be right for me to burden you, and you must find somebody else, Lexie, who can care for you better than I can." I returned the engagement ring, and that was the end of it. If he had lost his arm in any other way I could have endured life-long poverty with him; but to have lost his arm for Sadie!' She paused and seemed to be looking out of the window, but I knew that her story was not finished.

'A few months later I took a situation in Ashburton. There I met, at a party, a young Englishman—Horace Latchford—who took a fancy to me. He was visiting New Zealand for the sake of his health. He told me that he owned a large estate in Devonshire, and would make me a perfect queen. During his stay—a period of about four months—life was one long frolic. Six months later he sent for me to go to him; and I went. But my eyes were soon opened. There was no estate in Devonshire; Horace was often intoxicated when he came to see me; and, instead of getting married, I returned to New Zealand in disgust. I came to Mosgiel, partly because I knew that I could get good work in the factory, and partly because I knew that nobody here would know me. Since I returned from England, ten years ago, I have only met one person who knew me in the old days at Hokitui. I was spending a holiday at Moeraki, and she was staying at the same boarding-house. I did not tell her that I had settled at Mosgiel; but she told me that none of the Bannermans were now living at Hokitui. Davie, she said, was the first to leave. He went to one of the cities to learn a profession that did not imperatively demand the use of two hands.' She paused again, and I waited.

'When I came to Mosgiel,' she went on, 'I got in the way of coming to the church. I became deeply impressed, and you received me into membership. And, every day since, as I have done little things, and taken little duties, in connection with the work, I have come to understand Davie as I never understood him in the old days. I hated his fondness for the church. And, every day now, my sin seems to be more and more terrible. Just lately it has been with me night and day. And when I read your address my punishment

seemed greater than I could bear. I have prayed thousands of times that the dreadful tangle might be unraveled. I have not prayed selfishly; I could be perfectly contented if I only knew that Davie is happy, and that his faith in God and womanhood has not been shaken by my wickedness. We sang Lead, Kindly Light in church this morning. Do you think that God really guides us? Does He put us right even when we have done wrong? Will He straighten things out? I would give anything to be quite sure! I seem to be in a maze, and can find no way out of it!'

V

It seemed an infinite relief to Lexie to have told me her story. She was much more often at the manse after that; a new bond seemed to have sprung up between us. I fancied that there came into Lexie's face a deeper peace and a greater content. The peace was, however, rudely broken. About two years after Lexie had unburdened her soul to me, I opened the paper one morning and confronted a startling announcement. The personal paragraphs contained the statement that 'Mr. David Bannerman, the brilliant Auckland solicitor, has been appointed Lecturer in Common Law at the Otago University.' There followed a brief outline of the new professor's career which left no shadow of doubt as to his identity. I particularly noticed that there was no reference to his marriage. What, if anything, was to be done? The Otago University was in Dunedin, only ten miles from Mosgiel. Ought I to allow these two people to drift on, perhaps for years, eating their hearts out within a few miles of each other? Was it not due to Davie that he should know that Lexie was at Mosgiel? He might desire to seek her; or he might desire to avoid her; in either case the information would be of value. I stated the position in this way to Lexie, but she would not hear of my taking any action. After a while, however, she agreed to my writing, telling the professor-elect that I knew of her whereabouts. I added that she was universally loved and honored for her fine work in the church and in the district. I enclosed a copy of 'The Little Palace Beautiful,' and mentioned the fact that I had

once caught her weeping bitterly as she read it. It took four days for a mail from Mosgiel to reach Auckland. After a long talk with Lexie, I posted my letter on a Sunday evening. On Friday afternoon I received a reply-paid telegram: 'Wire lady's address immediately.'

The new professor was married three months after entering the duties of his chair at the University; and, when I last saw her, Lexie was enthroned in the center of a charming little circle. I received a letter from her yesterday—the letter that suggested this record. She tells me, with pardonable pride, that her eldest boy has matriculated and also joined the church.

'I am getting to be an old woman now,' she says, 'and I spend a lot of time in looking backward. Isn't it wonderful? It all came right after all! But for the accident, Davie would never have been a professor; and, if we had been married in the old days, I should only have been a drag and a hindrance. As it is, we have passed o'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent; but the Kindly Light that I once doubted has led us all the way!'

Chapter 15

A SAXON PRINCESS

From *The Three Half-Moons*

I

Who would have looked for a visitor on such a morning? A steady drizzle had been falling for hours. Clouds of white mist drifted across the Plain, entirely obscuring the surrounding hills. The path to the Manse was a quagmire of soft clay: everything looked sodden, muddy, cheerless. As I entered the study, glorified as it was by the blaze and crackle of a roaring fire, I congratulated myself on the prospect of an hour or two without a single interruption. I had scarcely settled down to work, however, when I was startled by the click of the gate, and, glancing up, saw Phyllis Nimmo making her way to the front door. Phyllis was one of our best workers in the church and one of the finest tennis players on the Taieri Plain. She was known on the courts as the Saxon Princess. She had an extraordinary wealth of the fairest possible hair; extremely pale blue eyes; and a tall, stately, athletic figure. On the edge of the verandah she divested herself of her muddy galoshes, and, stepping out to welcome her, I relieved her of her shining mackintosh and dripping umbrella.

'Why, Phyllis,' I exclaimed, leading her into the study, 'what in the world brings you out on such a morning?' I rather suspected that Phyllis enjoyed being abroad under such conditions.

'Well,' she laughed, brushing back her tumbled tresses with

her left hand, as she settled herself in the arm-chair opposite mine, 'I came to see you about a letter that I received this morning from Mr. Livingstone. Mr. Livingstone—Douglas, you know—is the Presbyterian Home Missionary at Dusty Point. He's very anxious that you should go up there and lecture in connection with his anniversary. He only settled there last year: it's his first charge; he's very anxious about it, and it would mean so much to him if you could manage to go. Do you think it's possible?'

'Well,' I replied, 'that depends a good deal upon the date. But before we go into that, Phyllis,' I demanded, 'tell me what business this is of yours. What have you to do with Mr. Livingstone, or Dusty Point, or Presbyterian Home Missions, or anything else?'

She blushed profusely, and I understood. 'Douglas and I have been great friends for years,' she explained, 'and he says that if you consent to go, he will come and arrange all particulars when he comes to town for the meetings of the Assembly.'

Having set Phyllis's mind at rest on the main issue, I expressed my pleasure that Douglas Livingstone was coming to town (solely, of course, to attend the meeting of the Presbyterian Assembly), and I added a pious hope that she herself would derive some pleasure and profit from the impressive debates of Assembly Week. Whereat, for some unaccountable reason, Phyllis blushed again; and, not long afterwards, plunged once more into the drizzle.

II

It was not to be, however. At least, it was not to be for a long time to come. In accordance with his promise, Douglas Livingstone called at the Manse during Assembly Week and completed arrangements for my visit to Dusty Point. By this time my interest was thoroughly aroused, and I was looking forward to the outing.

'You'll have no trouble at all,' Douglas assured me. 'You just take the train to Milton. I'll meet you there and drive you all the way.'

Just as the great day was approaching, however, the death of one of the officers of the little church necessitated the postponement

of the anniversary; the altered date was impossible to me, and I could only promise that I would fulfill my engagement the following year.

When the next anniversary came round, however, I was in England, so that more than two years intervened between Phyllis's call at the Manse on that drizzling morning and my actual visit to Dusty Point. By this time Phyllis and Douglas had been some time married, and I found comfort in the reflection that I should be compensated for the long delay by the gratification of seeing them cozily ensconced in their new home. But once more, as I shall show in due time, the fates were against me.

On the day of the anniversary, I caught the train that left Mosgiel at nine forty-two, and was at Milton an hour and a half later. There my responsibility ended. 'I'll meet you at Milton and drive you all the way.' Douglas had said; and I was content to leave it at that. It did not occur to me to inquire as to the distance from the station: it might be five miles, it might be fifty: it was no business of mine.

It was a day in a thousand—one of those sparkling summer days that sometimes surprise us in early spring. I remember seeing the first lambs of the season on a green hillside near the road. I admired their temerity in making so early an appearance and expressed the hope that they would not live to regret their haste. It was just the day for a long country drive, and we both enjoyed it to the full. After jogging along for an hour or two, Douglas pulled up by the side of the road and proceeded to prepare an al fresco meal. While the billy was coming to the boil, he took a hamper from under the seat of the spring-cart and produced a bountiful supply of cold chicken, scones, cakes, fruit, and I know not what other delicacies. Dusty Point, I said to myself, is evidently a long way: he does not expect to reach it for some time. Our lunch disposed of, we set out again. At four o'clock we called at a roomy and hospitable farmhouse and were regarded with afternoon-tea.

'If I were you,' Douglas whispered, as we entered the capacious kitchen, 'I'd make a meal of this. We're behind time; and I'm afraid you won't get anything else to eat until after the lecture. We've a good way to go yet.'

I took the hint and was grateful afterwards that he had given it. As dusk was falling, we began to ascend a long, tedious chain of

hills, and it was half-past seven before we eventually caught sight of the twinkling lights of Dusty Point. I was announced to lecture there at eight o'clock.

III

We arrived just in time. The school-house was crowded. Farmers had driven in from far and near. The place was in a buzz and a flutter. Young people, divided into knots, and groups, were chatting and laughing boisterously. Farmers—who seem to represent the one trade that has no trade secrets—were exchanging experiences concerning crops and cattle, while their wives, unwilling to be outdone by the husbands and children, had also found themes for engrossing conversation. Even the dogs, as they frisked about among the buggies and the tired horses, seemed excited at meeting each other again. The arrangement of the programme occupied some little time: there was an imposing array of vocal and instrumental items: and then it took a few minutes to persuade the people to take their seats. An anniversary service in the outback is one of those sublime events into which considerations of time do not enter. People who have not seen each other's faces for months have met at last: there are no trains to catch: why hurry? It was half-past eight before we got a start; and it was more than an hour later before I was called upon for my lecture. I suggested that I should abbreviate it, condensing an utterance that usually occupied an hour and a half into about three-quarters of an hour. But Douglas assured me, and with evident sincerity, that such a proceeding would sadly disappoint many who had come long distances to hear me: he begged me to delete no single word. The people listened to the end with amazing fortitude; and, if they felt the strain, the exhaustion was soon forgotten under the reviving influence of a coffee supper.

Douglas and I were the last to leave. He felt it his duty to say good-bye to all his people, and so it was some time after the meeting closed before we began to think seriously of our own departure.

'I've arranged,' he explained, when we were at length left

to ourselves, 'I've arranged to take you to the Todds's for the night. We had always looked forward to having you at the Manse; but, as I told you coming along, Phyllis is away in town: I am bachelorizing, and I think you'll be more comfortable at the farm. I've promised to stay the night, too; so we'll get along.'

The night was clear and frosty: the moon was well up: and we could hear in the distance the rattle of many wheels and the barking of many dogs. I had somehow taken it for granted that the Todds's farm would be back in the direction from which we had come; but I found that it was three miles farther on!

'I'm afraid you'll be late to bed tonight,' Douglas observed, as we jogged along the endless road, watching the rabbits scurrying hither and thither in the moonlight. 'An anniversary, you see, comes but once a year, and nobody feels inclined to hurry it through. But the Todds were among the first to leave; and I expect supper will be ready by the time we arrive.'

'Supper!' I protested, 'why, we've just had supper! How many more suppers are we expected to devour?'

I found that he was right. As I entered the enormous room, in which a sumptuous meal was spread, I tried not to notice that the big clock on the mantelpiece was just about to strike twelve. Two or three families who lived still farther along the road had broken the journey at the Todd farmhouse. It would save time, Mrs. Todd argued, a trifle casuistically, since they would be spared the trouble of getting supper at their own establishments. My plea—when a huge plate of chicken and ham was placed before me—that I had just had supper, was dismissed with contempt. A cup of coffee and a sandwich was no supper; and, besides, when had I had tea? Douglas had evidently been telling tales out of school, and my genial hostess was able to secure a dialectic triumph over me in consequence.

Despite their coffee and sandwiches at the schoolhouse, the farmers had noble appetites. We soon forgot our weariness, forgot the clock on the mantelpiece, forgot everything but the enjoyments of the moment. Story followed story: the place rang with peal after peal of boisterous laughter; and time had ceased to become a serious consideration. At length, one of the farmer's wives, a motherly body, remarked that I was looking dreadfully tired: the others took the hint and the party broke up.

IV

As soon as the guests had vanished, our candles were brought. Mrs. Todd showed us to our room. The two beds were in opposite corners. Everything looked wonderfully clean, restful, and inviting. A fire had evidently been burning for hours in the grate.

'Don't hurry up in the morning,' our hostess urged, considerately. 'We can have breakfast any time. Get up just when you feel like it.'

I thanked her. 'I'm afraid,' I added, 'that I shall have to rise fairly early to catch my train. What time,' I asked, turning to Douglas, 'shall we have to start?' A look of astonishment came to his sleepy eyes.

'What train do you want to catch?' he demanded anxiously.

'There is but one,' I replied. 'I have a wedding at Mosgiel tomorrow afternoon, and the only train that will get me there in time leaves Milton at eight-fifty.'

'Eight-fifty!' Douglas gasped, looking at the watch that he had been absentmindedly winding, and doing some feverish mental arithmetic; 'why, man, if you really must catch the eight-fifty, we'll have to start now!'

We looked wistfully at the snow-white beds, at the glowing embers, and at the other preparations for a long night's repose. But such luxuries were not for us.

Douglas, breathing no benedictions on the heads of my Mosgiel bride and bridegroom, went off to arrange with Mr. Todd for the loan of a horse that was less exhausted than his own; Mrs. Todd and her daughter set to work to pack his hamper with an appetizing breakfast, and, within an hour of suppertime, we were once more upon the road.

I suspect that, in the course of that long drive to Milton, we both nodded at times. There was little danger. The moon was so bright that every stick and stone cast a clear-cut shadow. The horse could not possibly mistake the road, and there was no likelihood of our meeting vehicles coming the other way. The greatest discomfort was the icy cold. I remember, on rising once to stretch my limbs, hearing my coat crackle crisply as I broke the frozen creases.

It was an eerie experience. I recall the sense of relief with which we saw a man with a lantern moving about the stables of a farm; the world seemed to have come to life again when we at length met a dray upon the road; and then, as the great red sun came creeping over the hills, we decided to give the horse a rest, light another gipsy-fire, and examine the contents of Mrs. Todd's hamper.

We had a quarter of an hour to spare when we drove up to the Milton station. The stationmaster, knowing that we must have spent the night in the spring-cart, greeted us with exclamation of surprise. Then he suddenly remembered something.

'Oh,' he remarked, turning to Douglas, 'there's a telegram for you! It came just as the office was closing last night. There was no way of sending it; and we understood that you'd be coming in today.' He went into the office and soon reappeared with the buff envelope in his hand. I watched Douglas's face anxiously as he tore it open.

'By Jove!' he murmured, excitedly, 'this is worth an all-night drive! I'm jolly glad you had to catch this train! It's a boy, and they're both doing well! We'll name the little beggar after you; you see if we don't!'

And, surely enough, they did! But, lest I should be exalted above measure by so marked a distinction, fate toned it down a little. The boy is never called by his real name. He inherited his mother's fair hair; and his schoolfellows, in the autocratic fashion peculiar to their species, ordained that his name should be Snowy. 'My Saxon Prince,' Douglas always calls him, with a thought of Phyllis's earlier sobriquet. Douglas is now that minister of an important city charge, greatly loved and greatly honored. I have spent some delightful hours in his manse. Phyllis is wonderfully proud of him, as she has every right to be. And whenever the conversation at table knows a lull, Snowy is sure to secure its revival by asking to be told once more the story of our long, long drive on the day of his nativity.

Chapter 16

NED LAVENDER

From *The Three Half Moons*

One of the advantages that a minister derives from a long sojourn in one place is the gratification of his legitimate curiosity. Mysteries that, had he folded his tent at the end of three or five or even seven years, would have remained mysteries, yield up their secrets in the course of a more lengthy stay.

I am led to these reflections through having found, in turning out an old drawer, a photo of Ned Lavender. A great fellow was Ned. When I settled at—, his was one of the first personalities to attract my attention. He seemed to spend his whole life in an atmosphere of merriment. Wherever you saw Ned, everybody in his company was laughing. He was a born comedian; the funny side of things appealed to him automatically and irresistibly; witticisms dropped from his lips as the natural overflow of a gay and exuberant spirit. Those who only saw him under such conditions, and were therefore driven to superficial judgment, may have summed him up as a clown, lacking seriousness and gravity. Happily, I was under no misapprehensions in that regard. For, to me, at any rate, he quickly revealed the other side of his character. I had only been a few weeks in the place when he called to see me.

'In work like yours,' he observed, 'there must be a lot of things that require attention of a purely mechanical kind—formal letters that need to be written; manuscript that needs to be copied; accounts that need to be paid or purchases to be made; appointments to be arranged by telephone; and all that sort of thing. It's work that

you wouldn't care to ask anybody to do for you; but I have stacks of time on my hands; and I shall be delighted to be entrusted with such commissions. If you want someone to run for six-penn'orth of stamps,' he added laughingly, 'don't hesitate to send for me!'

He was as good as his word; he cheerfully undertook scores of menial tasks, setting me free to concentrate on matters of graver moment. Two things, however, puzzled me.

The first was that a man of such education, attainments, and capacity, by no means old and by no means rich, should be at liberty to devote his time and talents to duties that seemed out of all proportion to the measure of his powers.

The second was that he was not a member of the church. He was present at every service, Sundays and weekdays. He was tremendously in earnest about the success of the church's work. After an evangelistic address, or a sermon that had particularly appealed to him, he would press my hand with eloquent fervor, while the moisture in his eyes would witness to the intensity of his emotion. Yet, when I examined the church register, I discovered with astonishment that Ned's name was not there. Nor would he undertake any task of a definitely religious character that would bring him into prominence or publicity. Outside the church, he was known as a singularly witty and gifted speaker. At concerts, and at entertainments for philanthropic purposes, I have heard him move a vote of thanks, or acknowledge one, in a speech of rare felicity and charm. Yet nothing on earth would induce him to attempt such a task in connection with the church; and when, on our way into the prayer-meeting one evening, I asked him if I might call upon him to lead us briefly to the Throne of Grace, his face blanched, his lip quivered, he insisted on my promising never again to make such a request; and then, turning sadly away, he walked home without attending the meeting for which he had come!

A few weeks later, in the course of a desultory and confidential chat with Evan Silverton, the church secretary, I guardedly hinted that Ned's personality and behavior were a constant bewilderment to me. 'He's one of the most devoted and useful men among us,' I added; 'I don't know how I should manage without him; yet, as far as I can see, he is not even a member of the church!'

'Poor old Ned!' sighed Evan, after a lengthy pause. 'The fact is—and I don't suppose he'd mind our telling you; indeed, I expect he takes it for granted that we've told you long ago—the fact is, he made one serious mistake, and he'll never get over it. He was cashier at McAlister & Waddell's; he evidently lost his head in a moment of financial pressure; in view of his long and excellent record, the firm refused to prosecute; but, of course, he forfeited his position and has never been the same man since. He has a genius for buying and selling land; and a few old business friends, rallying to his help, made it possible for him to earn a modest living in that way. It's about three years since he surprised us one morning by attending the church. Mr. Dugald McIntyre, the Scottish evangelist, was preaching, and took for his subject the story of Jeremiah's visit to the potter's house—the vessel that, marred in the making, was made by the potter all over again. It seemed to have a wonderful effect on poor old Ned. He's attended the services regularly ever since, and seems to derive infinite comfort from them. But he would never join the church. Just once we invited him to do so; but he shook his head so sadly and seemed so pained by the suggestion, that the invitation was never repeated. I don't know if I'm acting wisely in telling you all this: but, as you have so much to do with him, it seems right that you should know; and I really think that he himself would wish it.'

During the next few years, Ned and I were constantly together. We met in all sorts of society and under all sorts of conditions. Sometimes he was keeping the company in roars of boisterous laughter by his endless succession of quips, antics, and drolleries; sometimes he was discussing, with an interest and delight that, in him, were a kind of ecstasy, some passage of Scripture that had captivated his heart in his private devotions, or some phrase of a subject with which he had heard me dealing. In any other man, the two phases of life might have seemed incongruous. In him, the love of the ludicrous and the love of the serious were perfectly harmonious. His happiness and his holiness seemed the natural counterparts of each other. He passed from the ridiculous to the sublime, and from the sublime to the ridiculous, with the easy grace of a child who is perfectly at home in all the rooms of his father's

house.

He died very suddenly, and died at sea. The ship was so near port, however, that it was decided to embalm the body and bring it back for burial. The concourse at the graveside was an extraordinary testimony to the affection and confidence that, in spite of everything, Ned had inspired. Members of Parliament, aldermen and civic officials, professional men, magnates of the commercial world, as well as representatives of churches, charitable institutions, and philanthropic organizations, were all present to deplore a loss that was felt to be a real and poignant one. The floral tributes were astonishingly numerous and exquisitely beautiful. But one of the most striking was a glorious anchor of carnations. And, attached to the silk ribbons, was a small card bearing the inscription: FROM THE ONLY MAN LIVING WHO KNOWS THE WHOLE STORY. The relatives assured me that they had not the faintest idea as to the identity of the sender. It was delivered by a local florist; and, as far as I know, no attempt was made to violate the sender's evident desire for anonymity.

There, as I supposed, the matter ended. I never expected to hear more, either of the tragedy or of the triumph of Ned Lavender's career. I cherished his memory as the memory of a good man, a staunch friend, and an invariable helper, who had been doomed, through a terrible misdeed for which he could never forgive himself, to spend his life under a heavy cloud. That, I fancied, was the whole story.

But, some year afterwards, I was disillusioned. It was a hot summer's night. Lounging in the deck chairs on the lawn and the verandah, we were all enjoying ice creams and the evening paper when we were suddenly startled by the click of the gate. A tall lady of snow-white hair and stately carriage, neatly attired in a dark grey costume, stepped hesitantly up the path, and, as soon as I met her, apologized for disturbing us. Her accent subtly suggested great strength of character mingled with infinite gentleness and refinement. It was evidently a real grief for her to break up our restful party. I escorted her to the front room, switched on the lights, and lowered the blinds.

'You must forgive me for coming at this hour,' she began, 'but my husband is very ill. Indeed, Dr. Waters holds out no hope

at all. During the last week or so Tom has several times mentioned your name; and it occurred to me that it might do him a world of good if you could find time to call. We have never attended your church; indeed, my husband, though a good, earnest Christian man, has never gone to any church at all. I myself am a member of the Society of Friends; but he would never come with me to the meeting, and, when I offered to accompany him to your church, or to any other, he always declined—a little sadly, I thought. I have sometimes fancied—and the fancy has grown stronger of late—that, although our married life has been a wonderfully happy one, he has kept some secret from me. If it is so, I am sure that he has done it for my sake. But it seems to me that the secret—if secret there be—grows heavier with the years. I cannot help associating it with the pain that I evidently cause him when I suggest our going to church together. And—once more it may be fancy—I have thought a great deal of the secret—if secret there be—when I have heard of him talk of you and of your influence on some of his friends. You must excuse all this: it must sound very silly: but women have intuitions, you know, that they can never satisfactorily explain: and I should be so very grateful if you could call and see Tom during the next few days.'

I called, of course, next day. It was a charming home, the lawns and flower beds in perfect order and everything about the place showing signs of taste, daintiness, and care. My friend of the previous evening met me at the front door, showed me into a most charming drawing-room, adorned by handsome engravings and delicate little statuettes, and then went off to a bedroom near by to prepare her husband for my coming.

'This is really very good of you,' he exclaimed, as he stretched forth a hand to welcome me. Like his wife, he was of fine features and grey hair; but his face was drawn by sickness and, perhaps, by struggle. 'My wife told me this morning,' he went on, 'that she had mentioned my illness to you, although I cannot imagine what possessed her to do so. Still, I'm glad she did: the wonder is that, with all your own people to look after, you can spare time for a rank outsider like myself.'

He was one of those men with whom it is extremely difficult to get to close grips. Quiet, courteous, reserved; he gave me no

opening at all. I resolved that it would never do to force matters. I therefore brought the interview to an early and natural close, and promised, at his own invitation, to return in a day or two.

I did so; and, on this occasion, found the situation completely changed. For one thing he was very much worse; and, for another, he had evidently made up his mind to adopt a more confidential attitude.

'I first heard of you,' he said, 'from old Ned Lavender. He and I were great chums at one time; and, during the last few years of his life, he never met me on the street without stopping to tell me of something that you had said or done. He was a great soul, was Ned,' the sick man added feelingly; and then, to my utter astonishment, he stopped abruptly, turned his face to the wall, and I realized that he was sobbing like a child.

'You must forgive me,' he continued, facing me once more, 'it breaks my very heart to talk of Ned Lavender. But I have made up my mind to tell you my secret.' He composed himself in the bed with the air of one who confronts a piece of serious business.

'You buried Ned,' he went on, 'and I stood not far from you in the crowd at the graveside. You may possibly remember that, among the floral tributes, there was an anchor of carnations sent anonymously FROM THE ONLY MAN LIVING WHO KNOWS THE WHOLE STORY. I sent those flowers. And, before I die, I feel that I must unburden my mind of the story.' He pointed to a glass of water on the table beside his bed; and I helped him moisten his lips.

'Well,' he resumed, 'we both worked in the old days for McAlister & Waddell. We were thrown a good deal together and became fast chums. As a natural consequence, we moved in pretty much the same society and met each other of an evening at the homes of mutual friends. And, to make a long story short, we managed to fall in love with the same girl! I remember the night when, with all innocence in life, he began to rave to me about Hope Gladwyn. He had completely lost his head over her. Yet, in a sly and covert sort of way, I had been courting Hope for months. And she, with that perfect frankness which is half her charm, had made no secret of her feelings. She had encouraged me. The truth was soon apparent to both Ned and myself. She loved me, and had not given him a serious thought. When Ned first realized the truth, it was like

a dagger to his heart. He scarcely spoke for days: his face was ashen and drawn. I half expected him to drop my friendship; and he was evidently struggling with a temptation to do so; but, happily for me, he overcame the impulse and we remained good friends in spite of everything.

'Then came the tragedy. I got into serious financial troubles; in a distracted moment I borrowed money from the office; and, before I could return it, the defalcation was discovered. Several of us, including Ned and me, were suspended. And, while I was hourly expecting to be placed under arrest, I received a message from the office saying that I was to return at once; the culprit had confessed!

'It was Ned who had made the confession; and it turned out that, before leaving the office, he had deliberately shuffled the papers in such a way as to give verisimilitude to the story of his guilt.

'I was astounded, bewildered, dumbfounded! I could scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. I mooned about perfectly stupefied, for hours; and then, late at night, unable to think about sleep, I went down to Ned's place.

'"Yes," he said, "I took the blame; and, in a sense, I deserved it; for if I'd kept as tight a hold as I should have done on your cash and your accounts, it couldn't have happened. It's better as it is. I knew that, if you were found out, you would have been arrested, tried, and imprisoned. And what of Hope then? It would have killed her. It was for her sake that I did it, not for yours. I would gladly have lived for her or died for her. But it was not to be. So I will do this for her."' The patient paused in his recital, and I again touched his lips with the water.

'I think,' he went on after a while, 'I think Ned made one serious mistake. He meant it well; but he made me promise never to tell Hope. I've kept my word, although, God knows, it would have been a thousand times easier to have broken it. I fully made up my mind that, as soon as Ned returned from his trip—the trip from which he never returned—I would seek release from my pledge. For years the horrid thing has been gnawing like a worm at my vitals. After I'm gone you can tell her—I fancy she half suspects already—indeed, you can tell anybody you like. It's a comfort to me in dying to know that the truth will so soon be out. Ned would not

have objected to that. Somehow, I should dread to meet him in the other world unless I had done this much to put things straight.'

By this time he was thoroughly exhausted, but a look of infinite relief had crept into his tired eyes. I read a few verses, commended him to the love that never fails, and then, his eyes being closed, tiptoed my way from the room.

A week later I read the burial service beside his grave. And, immediately after pronouncing the benediction, I stepped across to a green mound, less than a hundred yards away, and, having paused a moment with bared head, laid a few flowers on my dead friend's grave in his dead friend's name.

Chapter 17

THE WHITE COCKATOO

From *The Fiery Crags*

If, a few years ago, you had walked out from Mosgiel, and had wandered among the foothills that flank the Taieri Plain, you would probably have come upon the modest little weather-board cottage in which Elspeth Dalrymple then lived. Your attention would have been called to the place by the screech of a white cockatoo perched on the T-shaped stand near the front door. 'Land ahoy!' he would cry in a shrill scream, 'land ahoy!' And when you stood staring in astonishment at his having greeted you in this remarkable salutation, he would follow it up with 'Sandwich Islands! Sandwich Islands!' These nautical and geographical observations seem to demand some explanation, as does the fact that, although as white as driven snow, the bird rejoiced in the name of Sandy. Let me attempt to elucidate these problems.

I

I should never have heard of Elspeth Dalrymple but for the mystery surrounding the fate of the steamship *Tireni*. The *Tireni* had simply vanished. She left Sydney on the Friday afternoon, and, in the ordinary course of things, should have landed her passengers in New Zealand on the following Tuesday. But Tuesday came, and Wednesday and Thursday and Friday, yet nothing was seen or heard

of her. All vessels crossing the Tasman Sea were ordered to keep a sharp look-out for the missing vessel. It was taken for granted that she had lost her propeller, or that, in some other way, her engines had failed her. Wireless communication was unheard of in those days; but we reminded ourselves that she was on a maritime highway; that steamers were crossing her tracks every day or two; that she was well provisioned; and that she was in charge of a skilful and experienced commander. Still, all these considerations notwithstanding, the uneasiness was sufficiently intense to keep the theme under constant discussion. The possibilities of the case were canvassed at every street-corner; and, on the arrival of a newspaper, we instinctively tore it open to see if anything had been heard of the *Tireni*. And when week succeeded week, and, one after another, the ships sent out in search returned gloomily to port, the most optimistic theorists shook their heads and the matter gradually dropped out of general notice. But it is when the world goes its way and forgets such things that those immediately affected feel the real heartbreak of it.

I had been spending Monday with John Broadbanks at Silverstream. We had enjoyed a delightful day together, and he had undertaken, according to his invariable companion, to drive me back to Mosgiel in the evening. But, just as he was harnessing Brownie, a messenger arrived from a farmhouse some miles up among the hills begging him to come without a moment's delay to a man who had been injured by a falling tree and whose condition was thought to be serious. John looked at me in perplexity.

'It's all right,' I said; 'you go at once. Don't worry about me. The walk will do me no harm. Ian Dicker drove me over here this morning; we've been lounging about in the study or beside the stream most of the day. It's time I had some exercise. The moon will be at the full, and I shall enjoy the stroll. And I shall probably get a lift part of the way.'

Strange how things happen. If I had driven home with John, we should have passed Rex Murgatroyd with a 'How-d'ye-do' and a wave of the hand. He was on horseback. As it was, meeting me in the moonlight, he dismounted for a chat.

'I'm feeling very sorry,' he said, 'for old Elspeth Dalrymple.

Her boy was a deck-hand on the *Tireni*, and she's in terrible trouble about it. As long as the search was going on, I used to drop in every day or two to cheer her up. But it isn't so easy now. If you're over that way, it would be a charity to look in and have a few words with her.'

I welcomed the suggestion, and, a few days later, found myself standing on Elspeth's doorstep. The cottage was neither pretty nor ugly; it was just commonplace. In a vague kind of way I was chilled by its lifelessness. There was no living thing about the place—no cow, no poultry, no cat, no dog, no bird, no pet of any sort. The garden gave the impression that its owner kept it tidy for the sake of keeping it tidy rather than for the sake of anything that she wished to grow. The dwelling struck me as singularly expressionless, and so did Elspeth. Her face seemed dull and stolid; she neither smiled nor frowned; her welcome was neither effusive nor repelling. In a cold, indifferent, mechanical sort of way, she invited me in, and I entered. There was no indication of grief, nor, indeed, emotion of any kind. A stoical calm seemed to pervade everything. On my way along the road I had taken it for granted that Elspeth would introduce the subject of her sorrow; but she gave me no help at all. At length I broke the ice, told her of my meeting with Rex Murgatroyd, and offered her my deepest sympathy. Even then there was no collapse. After sitting for a moment in stony silence, nervously wringing her hands, and perhaps struggling with feelings that she was too proud to display, she at length spoke. But, even then, she spoke with the air of one who expresses a casual opinion on a trifle in the newspaper rather than with the air of one who is affected by a deep and poignant sorrow.

'Aye,' she observed philosophically, 'I expect the ship got wrecked on the Sandwich Islands or some such place; I never hope to see the poor Athol again.'

'The Sandwich Islands!' I exclaimed in astonishment. 'But, my good woman, he was thousands of miles from the Sandwich Islands. There is no possible way in which the *Tireni* could have been wrecked there!'

'Ah, well,' she replied, in her frigid, philosophical way, 'they're all the same—all those foreign parts. If it wasn't one place,

'twas another; I don't see that it matters.'

The sentence was a revelation. It gave me a glimpse into the narrowness and emptiness of poor Elsepth's mind. I could not blame her. She had been reared outback, under the roughest possible conditions; education had been hopelessly beyond her reach. From snippets of conversations she had gathered that, beyond the land with which she was so familiar, there stretched a great blue sea, and that beyond the sea there lay a weird conglomeration of foreign parts. As to details, her mind was a blank, except that she had overheard some mention of one or two places, including the Sandwich Islands. If you had assured her that Chicago was the capital of Japan, or that Berlin was an island in the Atlantic, she would have muttered with indifference that it was very likely. Glancing round the cottage, I saw nothing in the shape of a book anywhere. The literature of the place consisted of one or two illustrated papers. Elspeth could read and write; but that was as far as her education took her. Through no fault of her own, her world had been a small world, and its limitations had made her small. Her soul was cramped. She had no outlook, no horizon, no interest in anything beyond the great silent hills among which her entire life had been spent.

II

Sorrow is a great awakener; so is joy. Elspeth was awakened by a hurricane of gladness. Having occasion to visit the Mosgiel post office one morning, I found a boy pasting a telegram to a board outside. It read: 'The *Matanui*, with a smaller vessel, believed to be the *Tireni*, in tow, has been sighted from Point Lofty.' My first impulse was to drive over to Wingatui to tell Elspeth. I reflected, however, that there was an element of uncertainty in the wording of the telegram; I had better wait until the good news was confirmed.

Shall I ever forget the excitement of that evening? It was four o'clock before I received an official assurance from the shipping company that the vessel being towed into port was actually the *Tireni*, and that she had been signaled: 'All hands safe.' I at once set out for Wingatui, intending to break the news to Elspeth as

simply as I could and to slip away as quickly as possible. There are joys and sorrows too sacred for invasion. I felt that I had no right to be present when Athol actually came in. I imagined that Elspeth would receive the wonderful intelligence with statuesque and characteristic calm; I should find myself free to leave the cottage within five minutes of my entrance; and Elspeth would be glad to have a little while to spruce things up and get everything ready for Athol's arrival.

But no man can foretell how, in any given set of circumstances, a woman will behave. As I drew near to the cottage I saw Elspeth approaching it from the opposite direction; she had been across to the store to make one or two purchases. The thought flashed through my mind that perhaps Dame Rumor had forestalled me; but one glimpse at her face convinced me that no inkling of the truth had reached her. A minute later she knew everything. There is no such thing as breaking the news to a woman; as soon as her instincts tell her that you know more than she does, she asks one point-blank question that tears the veil from all you wished to hide. Then came the astonishment. Elspeth looked at me with eyes that seemed to penetrate the deepest recesses of my being. Apparently satisfied with her scrutiny, she rose and passed out through the open door. Peeping through the window, I saw her standing at the gate, looking hungrily along the road. Arguing that the time had come for me to take my departure, I too, stepped towards the door. On the threshold, however, I met Elspeth hurrying back into the house. Her face was hidden in her hands. She threw herself into her chair, and, leaning her arms upon the table, abandoned herself to a violent tempest of tears. Her whole body was convulsed. And, even after the first passionate outburst had passed, she gave great sobs, every few seconds, just as a little child does who, after vehement grief, finds it difficult to recapture his regular breathing. I felt that I ought not to leave her in such a state of agitation. Every minute or two she went back to the gate, and once, as she re-entered the house, she looked at me with a wavering, flickering shadow of a smile, or with something so like a smile that I was startled by its strangeness. If a canary had suddenly poured forth his melody from the adjourning room, I could not have been more surprised. Half an hour later, Athol Dalrymple, a tall, athletic-looking fellow with black, curly

hair, strode into the room; the smiles gave way once more to tears; the tears brought back fresh smiles; and thus I left mother and son to their felicity.

III

They were at church the following Sunday—a new experience for Elspeth. In general terms, I expressed the gratitude of their hearts. It happened to be a special service in connection with our enterprise in India, and one or two outgoing missionaries took part. Elspeth was profoundly interested. She had heard of India before, but had not the least idea as to its whereabouts. On the way home she asked Athol the most extraordinary questions, and he teased her unmercifully concerning her abysmal ignorance. On the Monday they were going to town to do some shopping.

'I want to buy a Bible, Athol,' she said; 'I'd like to read for myself some of the things they were talking about.'

'Yes,' Athol replied, with a laugh, 'and I'll buy you an atlas, too. And you'll have to take a little bit of Bible every day, and a little bit of atlas every day, just for the good of your health. It'll never do to have a sailor's mother wandering about the world under the impression that India is but one of the Sandwich Islands, you know!' And he burst into fresh laughter.

Strangely enough, Elspeth followed that playful prescription with literal and conscientious precision. Her Bible and her atlas became her constant companions. She read her Bible every day in the home, and, on striking some subject that awakened her curiosity or interest, she followed it up with the zest of a sleuth-hound. I grew accustomed to her rustling of the leaves in church; and sometimes, when the theme of our studies made some special appeal to her, she walked over from Wingatui to attend the Young People's Bible Class or the Teacher's Preparatory Meeting. When the events under consideration related to Egypt or Asia Minor or Assyria, she straightway turned to her atlas and puzzled out the path that history had taken. I well remember the avidity with which she traced, one after the other, Paul's missionary journeys.

For, in her mind, the two books stood directly related the one to the other. I really believe that she regarded the atlas as the inspired supplement to the Old and New Testaments. The Bible and the atlas come into her life together. What God had joined she would let no man put asunder. For Bible or for atlas she would have gone to the stake if needs be. When a lecturer came to Mosgiel—or to the city of Dunedin, ten miles distant—to tell of adventures with the big game of East Africa or of exploratory research in polar regions, Elspeth would fight her way through a hurricane in order to be present. And she would rise from a sickbed to struggle to a missionary meeting. And who could describe her delight when she heard that Dr. and Mrs. Hudson Taylor were coming to Mosgiel? Whenever I visited the cottage, I found a pile of missionary magazines lying near her chair, and, to the last, China's Millions was a special favorite. With the deepest interest and the most intelligent sympathy she would discuss the latest developments in the New Hebrides, in the Sudan, on the banks of the Amazon, and among the learned babus of Eastern Bengal.

As I lay down my pen, there rushes to my mind the picture of Elspeth as I saw her for the last time. On a glorious afternoon in the early summer I walked over to Wingatui. Elspeth's garden was a festival of color. Just before I arrived she had been attending to the pansies and the Iceland poppies. At the moment she was standing, her back towards me, talking to the cockatoo on the perch beside the door.

'Although he's as white as snow, Athol insisted on calling him Sandy,' she informed me. 'After the islands, you know!' she added, with a smile.

'I've a question I wanted to ask you,' she continued. 'Come inside!' We entered, and her Bible lay open on the table.

'I've been puzzling over these words,' she explained. 'They occur twice, once in Samuel and once in the Psalms: "Thy gentleness hath made me great." I don't quite see how gentleness can make one great.'

'Don't you?' I replied. 'Well, I advise you to mix a little biography with your geography, and you'll soon discover that every really great man attributes his greatness to somebody else's gentleness. There was a mother or a teacher or a lover or a wife at

the back of it. But let me tell you a story.' I said, leaning forward and looking into her face. 'Once upon a time I knew a lady whose outlook was so small, and whose world was so narrow, and whose life was so cramped, that she had no idea as to the whereabouts of the Sandwich Islands or of India. And all at once there came into her life a wonderful experience of the gentleness and love of God. And, as if by magic, her horizon widened immeasurably. And today she has the whole of the eastern hemisphere for her front garden, and the whole of the western hemisphere for her back garden, and she walks up and down among continents and archipelagos every hour of her life. Don't you think the story throws a little light upon the text?'

With a smile of ineffable sweetness—a smile that haunts me still—a smile of which she would have been utterly incapable in the old days—she acknowledged the justice of my reasoning. And, with the benediction of that smile still upon me, I took my last leave of her.

Chapter 18

OLD ETERNITY

From *The Home of the Echoes*

I

Old Eternity was a mystery—a fascinating but inscrutable mystery. What was his real name? Where did he come from? How did he live? And why had he taken up his abode in this outlandish place? These were the questions that stared me in the face when I first met him on that remote New Zealand hillside; and they were still unanswered when I looked on his quaint misshapen form for the last time.

It is many a long year since I was in that wild romantic country. I am told that the Piripiki Gorge is now a popular resort, with hotels, boarding-houses, and all the rest of it. Tourists throng to it from every town and city in the island. Steamers ply up and down the river daily with passengers and mails; and, from their decks, you see pleasure-boats, containing parties of happy picnickers, darting in and out of all the coves and gullies down the gorge. I shudder to think of it. I am wicked, I know. It is by just such sacrileges and desecrations that humanity comes to its own. It is all a mark of progress. The world is getting on! It is good that cities should spring up in the wilderness. But political economy is a poor balm for a sore heart. It brings me no comfort. When I revisit New Zealand, as I hope to do, nothing shall induce me to return to Piripiki Gorge. I could not bear it. For me its glory has forever departed.

When we first went there it was a vast, unbroken solitude. We had to arrange as best we could for the conveyance of our belongings and ourselves through that ten mile gorge to the mouth of the river. And what a waterway it was! I have seen nothing on earth like it. Far as the eye can reach in every direction the mountainous peaks lift their massive heads to the blue, blue skies. The great green slopes sometimes feather gently and gradually down to the river's brink, and sometimes fall with abrupt and precipitous suddenness to the water's edge. As the boat moves round point after point, new reaches of river open out before you, and you wonder which is the grander, the scene that you have just left behind you or the one that now unfolds itself to your enraptured gaze. The boat glides on, and you catch glimpses of range beyond range, in bewildering number and variety, every slope densely draped in a glorious tangle of magnificent forestry, and every graceful form and outline perfectly mirrored in the crystalline waters below. We spent a month each year in exploring this panoramic paradise. The wild things along the banks stared at us in curiosity and astonishment as our boat stole in and out among their leafy solitudes. We lived on what we shot; but in some of these fern-clad valleys the creatures were so tame that it seemed cruel to take advantage of their trustfulness. Why teach the pretty things to dread mankind? We christened each laughing creek and mossy island, and I was amused at discovering, in a guide-book recently sent me, that many of these beauty-spots retain the names our children then conferred. Nowadays each of these bays has a jetty and a boathouse. In some of them there are sawmills and workmen's cottages. But in our time the virgin form of Nature stood as it had stood since creation's earliest morning. We often went for days without meeting any other representatives of our own species. Just occasionally, however, the unexpected happened; or I should not now be writing about Old Eternity.

II

In the early part of the day we had rowed with a good tide about six miles up the gorge. We had landed, made a fire, cooked

and eaten our lunch, and spent a pleasant afternoon in exploring the valley. By this time the tide had turned, and we decided to drift homewards on the current, pausing for tea at an inlet a few miles farther down. In pursuance of this programme we were gliding noiselessly through the gorge, admiring the infinite riot of vegetation, when, all at once, a huge rabbit, white as snow, sprang onto a ledge of rock some distance up the slope, and, with his bright pink eyes, stared fixedly at us. Perhaps we ought to have spared him, but we knew that it would be dark by the time we reached camp. We knew, too, that the larder was empty. Let this excuse, as far as it may, the circumstance that, almost as soon as the splash of whiteness flecked the green, green hillside, the gorge shook and reverberated with the sound of a rifle. When the smoke cleared away there was still a suspicion of whiteness on the ledge, but it was limp and almost invisible. We pulled ashore; I jumped out and began to scramble up the bank. I had not gone more than fifty yards when, to my surprise, I came upon a track. Tossing the rabbit into the boat, I set out to investigate. I followed the track in its diagonal course athwart the slope, and, once over the ridge, came out on a patch of open country, partly under cultivation.

Among the trees in the distance I saw a thin, wavering column of smoke rising from a tiny wooden cabin. As I stood, surveying this garden in the wilderness, I heard the sound of footsteps approaching through the bush. Then, all at once, there emerged from the scrub the strangest piece of humanity that one need wish to see. He was so terribly bent that his back appeared to lie at right angles with his legs. When he confronted me, his neck seemed strained, as when as ordinary man looks up at the stars directly above him. There was, however, nothing repulsive about him. His eyes were soft and kindly; his long, white beard emphasized the benevolence of his countenance, and his frame, though so dreadfully bent, gave a subtle impression of latent vigor and manly strength. His step was heavy and firm. He had evidently been startled by the noise of the gun, and had hurried round the field to ascertain the cause. He looked at me, I thought, a little resentfully, returned my greeting with a nod, and moved silently away as though setting off for his hut. Feeling that I had no right to force my presence upon him, my first impulse was to let him go and make my own way back to the

boat. Fortunately, however, I resolved to give him another chance.

'I hope,' I said, 'I didn't startle you. I had no idea that anybody was living hereabouts.'

'Oh, no,' he said, 'it's a long time since I heard a gun so near, and I came to see what it meant.' His speech was slow and thick, as of one who rarely spoke.

I told him of the rabbit, and begged him to accept it. He declined, however, assuring me that he had no difficulty in trapping all that he required. He caught sight of a box of matches peeping from my waistcoat pocket, and seemed delighted when I handed it to him. I asked if I might come back another day and bring more. He hesitated for a moment, and then gave the permission that I sought. In leaving him, I felt like an explorer who has made a notable discovery. And so, indeed, I had. I had discovered Old Eternity.

III

This happened on the Wednesday. We passed White Rabbit Rock—as we called it—on the Thursday and the Friday. On each occasion I closely scrutinized the ridge, but could see no sign of my old friend. The thing seemed so fantastic and extraordinary that I even asked myself if it might not have been a dream. On the Saturday, however, I armed myself with a parcel containing a ball of string, a packet of matches, and a supply of fish-hooks, and again effected a landing. I found him this time in his cabin, but he was a different man! Every semblance of taciturnity and sullenness had left him. He was still shy and slow of speech, but genial, responsive, and apparently eager for friendship. In the hope that the confidence might be reciprocated, I told him about myself. But the fish did not rise to the bait. He seemed appreciative and interested; but he told me nothing! I glanced around for clues; but I found none. There were no photographs, no pictures, and only two books. One was a very well-worn Bible; the other, I afterwards discovered, was a textbook on botany. From each volume the flyleaf, which had probably contained a name, had been torn out.

After we had chatted awhile he rose and reached for his

hat. I took the hint and prepared to depart, but he would not hear of it. He insisted on my accompanying him in a tour of his estate. And then came the revelation. The things that he pointed out, and the tales he told! I fancied that he dwelt alone, but I found that he had millions of companions. He had made friends with all the trees and shrubs and plants and grasses that grew around the place. He knew their life-history, had watched them grow, and had gradually learned to love them. He handled the ferns and the mosses as though they were dear to him. One or two trees that were sickly or diseased he stroked so gently that you might have fancied that they were his children, and he told me of the treatment with which he was trying to heal and invigorate them. When we returned to the hut I noticed a number of bush pigeons in a tree nearby. I expected them to fly as we approached, but they did nothing of the kind. He called them and seemed to expect them to answer him. In this, however, he was disappointed.

'They're not quite sure about you,' he said. 'Go behind a tree and watch!'

I did so, and, surely enough, in a minute or two, the birds came fluttering down to him. At one moment three of them were perched on his poor horizontal back, while one, greatly daring, settled on his outstretched wrist and ate freely from his open hand.

'Come in!' he said, after the birds had flown.

I looked at my watch. He simultaneously consulted his. I noticed the letters 'C.P.' inscribed on the well-worn case. It was the only hint I ever received as to his name.

'Why, dear me,' I exclaimed, 'it's past six. I had no idea it was so late. How quickly the time has flown!'

'It always does,' he answered, with a laugh that was almost musical. 'It always does. I have learned many things since I came to live in the hills. And, among others, I have learned that time never drags when you are busy, or when you are happy, or when you are perfectly at your ease.'

A far-away look came into his eyes, and he seemed to forget me and speak only to himself.

'Time never drags when you are busy, or when you are happy, or when you are perfectly at your ease,' he repeated in the course of his soliloquy. And then, turning to me, he exclaimed

suddenly and with enthusiasm: 'Eternity won't seem long, you know, eternity won't seem long!'

I promised myself an hour's reflection on this suggestive outburst of his as I paddled back to the camp. I extended my hand to take farewell of him.

'But you haven't told me your name!' I said.

'No,' he replied, 'I have no name; at least, I have no need of a name up here!'

'Well,' I replied, 'if you don't tell me a name, I shall have to give you one. I must have a name of some kind in my mind to associate with you!'

'And what would you call me?' he inquired.

'I think,' I said, remembering the observation which formed the climax of his philosophy, 'I think I should call you Old Eternity!'

'Capital!' he replied, his eyes sparkling. 'Call me Old Eternity! For eternity won't seem long, you know; eternity won't seem long!'

IV

Like the names that the children gave to the bays, creeks, and inlets, the name stuck to him. He must have told people about it; for, in the years that followed, I met several shepherds and squatters among the hills who spoke of the hermit as Old Eternity.

The rest of my story is soon told. It consists of three incidents that may or may not elucidate the mystery of my old friend's lonely life. I will set them down in order.

(a) The first was a visit from John Broadbanks, the minister at Silverstream. He drove over to Mosgiel one evening just after dusk, and evidently had something of moment on his mind.

'I say,' he began, 'you know the old fellow you've sometimes talked about, the hermit up among the Piripiki hills—"Old Eternity" you call him? I'm afraid he's dead! I heard about it when I was visiting away down the Plain this afternoon. He was found dead in his cabin, and the doctor says that he must have passed away a day or two ago. The singular thing is that he had a horror of railways.

They say that he lived up there because he said he could never bear to hear or see a railway engine again. Now, strangely enough, the new railway to the mines was opened on Tuesday. The scream of the engine can be distinctly heard at Piripiki; the doctor thinks he died of heart failure; and the people down the Plain are saying that it was the railway that killed him. Strange, isn't it?'

(b) The following summer, in poking about the bush, I came upon a little God's-acre among the hills, in which there were four graves. Three of them were nameless; perhaps the monuments—such as they were—had been destroyed. But the fourth was comparatively new. At the head there stood a simple wooden cross; and, on the cross, roughly written, this inscription:

Here lies
OLD ETERNITY
(C.P.)
He lived here many years, and died suddenly on
September 17, 1899.

I stood there bare-headed for a moment. The bell-birds and the tuis were calling from the giant trees around, and, perhaps whimsically, I wondered whether, among the pigeons that flitted hither and thither among the branches, there were any of the birds that had feasted from the old man's hand.

(c) About three years afterwards, I noticed the following advertisement in one of the morning papers:

ANY PERSON possessing information as to the whereabouts of Professor COURTNEY PENNINGTON, who lost his wife and children, and was himself badly injured, in the great railway disaster at Taddington Junction, on March 3, 1871, is respectfully requested to communicate with Messrs. HEATH AND HAMPTON, Solicitors, 37 Great Compton Street, Liverpool. Professor PENNINGTON is believed to have left England shortly after his recovery from his injuries and has never since been heard of.

I forwarded to Messrs. Heath and Hampton the particulars that I have here set down, but I understand that, in a legal sense, the identity of my old friend among the hills was never conclusively

established. But what does it matter? The exercise of writing has brought his face once more vividly to mind. I see his eyes light up with enthusiasm as he lovingly handles the mosses and the ferns; I watch once more the pleasure that he feels in the confidence of the wild birds; and I hear again his chuckle as I present him with a name.

'Time never drags when you are busy,' he says, 'or when you are happy, or when you are perfectly at your ease. Eternity won't seem long, you know; eternity won't seem long!'

And again, with those words ringing in my ears and in my heart, I take my leave of him.

Chapter 19

TAD

From *I Forgot to Say*

Every mother is the daughter of her own son. This was particularly true of Nancy Gates. Nancy lived in a small wooden shack that stood away across the fields, about a mile and a half from the Mosgiel township. Her only companions were her father—an inveterate drunkard—and her boy. Her mother had died when she herself was a child: but for that tragedy things might have gone differently with Nancy. I always felt very sorry for her. She was tall and pretty and nicely spoken. In the old days she was one of the liveliest and most popular girls on the Plain. Her boy represented both her glory and her shame. After he came to the cottage, a settled seriousness—almost a settled seriousness—fastened upon Nancy.

Her very circumstances imprisoned her. The cottage was isolated; she had no neighbors; and, knowing that she was the theme of continual gossip and the butt of ugly jests, she visited the township as seldom as possible. There is in every community, however small, a moral aristocracy composed of those eminently superior persons whose delinquencies, issuing in no automatic self-exposure, have never been found out. These aristocrats found it difficult to express with sufficient vehemence of phraseology and with adequate refinement of gesture the intensity of their abhorrence of Nancy's offense.

All this shut her up to her boy. Oppressed by the painful consciousness that she had nothing to teach him, she vaguely felt

that he had much to teach her. As soon as Tad began to lisp his first broken syllables, she watched him with hungry, reverential eyes and hung upon his lips like an Oriental devotee straining to catch the eagerly awaited utterance of his oracle. In her loneliness and humiliation, she would sit, an hour at a time, gazing at Tad with extraordinary wistfulness. He was her meat and her medicine: he was father, husband, son in one: he was her all. If he failed her, there was nothing left for which to live; if that anchor dragged, she was lost; if that light blew out, she was doomed to lifelong darkness. But Nancy was confident that Tad would not fail her. Every day deepened the joy that she experienced in possessing him.

Tad was a strange boy. He looked strange. While in no way deficient or deformed, he gave an impression of oddity and quaintness. The impression was justified. Tad's mind was a realm of weird imaginings: his tongue abounded in unusual sayings: he did things that no other boy of his years would have thought of doing. As soon as he could open his lips intelligibly, he began to ask the oddest questions—questions to which neither Nancy nor anybody else could possibly have furnished satisfactory replies. He would squat, toad-like, on the hearthrug at his mother's feet, his elbows on his knees and his fists punched into his cheeks, lost in the profoundest contemplation: and she, allowing her needle to rest for a moment on her lap, would sit watching him with eyes so intent and so penetrating that her vision seemed to be piercing the outer skull and investigating the abstruse workings of his restless brain.

When the weather was kind, she loved to take him for walks, not to the township, for there, she fancied, all eyes were turned suspiciously and contemptuously upon him; but away into the bush, round the slopes of Saddle Hill and along the banks of the Silverstream. Since she had withdrawn from the haunts of her fellows, she herself had found infinite solace in cultivating the friendship of ferns, of flowers, and of those shy little creatures—furry and feathered—that dwelt in the leafy solitudes around the cottage. And when, Tad passing out of babyhood, she was able to take his hand and lead him into the fields and the woodlands, marking his childish wonder at the things that had acquired such beauty in her own eyes, her delights knew no bounds. In this new

occupation something of the joy of life came back to her. Tad's love for such things deepened immeasurably her reverence to him. She liked to fancy that, in these hillside and riverside explorations, she was forging a link that would hold them together in days when many influences would tend to tear them apart.

In the course of these sunny excursions and fireside communing, something often made a stab at Nancy's heart. She would catch her breath for a moment as though in pain. For she dreaded to think that, one day, Tad would have to go to school. Not that she was unwilling for him to learn; but she feared that, in entering a new life with new companions, she would be relegated to a subsidiary place in his interests and affections. And that, to a woman, spells Purgatory.

Her fears were only partly justified. He was, of course, never quite the same again. The baby-spirit had gone from him. Other authorities rivaled her authority. What the boys said, with whom he mixed, occasionally counted for more than what she said. And yet, of an evening, when his homework was done, the school atmosphere would fade into the background of his consciousness and he would be just his old self once more.

And then there were the weekends. Not Saturday so much, because on Saturday, Tad scampered off to play with the boys. But Sundays! How Nancy lived for her Sundays! And especially Sunday afternoons.

On Sunday afternoons he sloughed the schoolboy spirit altogether: they went the old walks: saw the old sights: laughed together over the happenings that, during their more constant and more intimate companionship, had amused them: and they would be all-in-all to each other once more. Nancy wondered if, even in heaven, there could be a sweeter felicity than came to her every Sunday.

Then a new crisis developed, shattering poor Nancy's bliss. It was a Friday afternoon, Nancy was standing in the doorway watching for Tad, her head full of rainbow-tinted visions of the long weekends ahead. All at once he appeared, running across the fields at top speed. He was out of breath when he approached her.

'Mum,' he cried, excitedly, 'I want to go to Sunday school:

all the other boys go to Sunday school: and Miss Grenfell told me to ask you if I may. They tell you about God, and the Bible, and all that. You'll let me, won't you, Mum? I want to!'

Nancy's heart stood still. Her blood seemed to freeze within her veins. It was not only the loss of her lovely Sunday afternoons. That was bad enough. But in no time she scented a new danger. She felt like some wild thing whose cub somebody was always threatening to snatch from her. She half wished that Tad could go through life without day school, without Sunday school, without anything of the kind. If only he could just be her Tad, as perfectly content with her as she was content with him! She recognized, of course, that such a state of things was ludicrously impossible; she laughed at herself for cherishing so grotesque a thought; and yet, in spite of all the remonstrances of her reason, her heart would speak; and this was what her heart insisted on saying.

Sunday school! That raised a new question. Would she like Tad to be religious? She was not sure. She herself had attended Sunday school for a few years and it had made no very favorable impression upon her. Frankly, it bored her. The only attraction that it held for her was the feminine delight of wearing a pretty frock and of meeting with other girls, also nicely attired. The droning of the teacher through an apparently interminable lesson represented an endurance test, a torture of insufferable tedium. She spent most of the time watching the clock. Surely it had stopped! The only thrill of the afternoon was when the bell sounded the death-knell of the whole thing. She was dying to get out into the open air, to walk and talk with Judy and Susie and all the other girls.

For Nancy was not religious: never had been: could not imagine that she ever would be. Religion was a kind of treadmill. Religion seemed such a dreary affair; religious people struck her as being so very stiff and staid and starchy; hearing sermons was like eating sawdust. The entire business was so pathetically out of touch with life: there was nothing in it to appeal to girls like her. The only occasion on which it had for a moment interested her was on a hot summer night, years ago, when, just for a bit of fun, she and Alice Sandford had attended a mission service held in a tent pitched in a field on the outskirts of Mosgiel. With tremendous earnestness the missioner had preached on the forgiveness of sins. *Thou wilt cast*

all their sins into the depths of the sea. 'He's made an end of them,' he cried, in a passion of ecstasy; 'they're under the blood—they're nailed to His Cross—they're hurled behind His back—they're in the depths of the sea.' He appealed to those who were willing to be forgiven to come forward and kneel at a form at his feet. Alice went forward at once, and she herself felt almost persuaded to follow her. There was, Nancy admitted to herself, something in the atmosphere of that gathering that brought religion down to earth, investing it with an air of reality. She was not surprised at Alice's action: it seemed natural, almost inevitable, in that fervid setting. But that was as far as it went. Save on that solitary occasion, religion had never appealed to her.

But Tad was not like that. Tad, she knew, would take everything seriously. The odd questions that he asked at the fireside and in the fields proved beyond the shadow of a doubt that he would be in his element where she had been like a fish out of water. He would probably shock the teacher by the pitiless bluntness and penetrating directions of his interrogations. Taking nothing for granted, he would want to know all about everything, and would regard the whole matter with the utmost gravity.

In a way, she wanted him to be religious. At least, she wanted him to be good, and, in spite of her own unhappy impressions, she instinctively felt that, all things being equal, religious people were more likely to be good than people with no religion at all. Her own bitter experience had convinced her that life, to be worth while, must be governed by some sort of principle. She saw now that the game has its rules. There are certain laws that, for one's own protection and for the protection of society, must be strictly obeyed. She had learned during recent years that the way of transgressors is hard: and she did not want Tad to make the same stern discovery in the same sad way. If he became religious, his religion would impose another barrier between him and herself; and yet if, by becoming religious, he could be spared such misery as she had known, she was willing, for his own good, that he should rise above her level, and, perhaps, look down upon her. And so, with a pang at her heart, Nancy told Tad that he might go to Sunday school.

Things turned out precisely as she had expected. The very absence of any religious instruction at home imparted an atmosphere

of novelty to the themes with which his teacher dealt. Constituted as he was, Tad found some of his first lessons positively sensational. It chanced that, on his second appearance at Sunday school, the appointed lesson had to do with the subject of Prayer. Tad listened breathlessly, his eyes riveted upon his teacher. He could scarcely believe that he correctly apprehended the drift of the statements that she was making. Once or twice he attempted an eager interrogation.

'Just a minute, Tad,' his teacher requested, 'and then you can ask as many questions as you like!'

'Do you mean,' Tad asked, when at length, with a 'Now, Tad!' his teacher turned smilingly to him, liberating his long-leashed tongue, 'do you mean that God can do anything?'

'Anything, Tad,' repeated the teacher; 'with God all things are possible. He can do anything!'

'And do you mean,' continued Tad, with the accent of a boy who has heard something that he finds it impossible to credit, 'do you mean that I can ask God for anything?'

'Anything, Tad!' repeated the teacher. 'That is prayer. God is Almighty: He can do anything. And He gives you the right to ask for anything; and, if you ask wisely and believingly, He will give you your heart's desire!'

Tad ran all the way home from Sunday school that afternoon to impart to his mother the astounding intelligence. From that hour he formed the habit of asking in the most unconventional terms, and yet with directness and reverence, for everything that he needed. Nancy often trembled lest disappointment should shatter his childish confidence: but, with the most amazing consistency, his requests were granted him.

Nancy was profoundly impressed. She scarcely liked to confess that she was doing it because Tad did it, but very often, when her father's drunkenness was particularly trying, or when life seemed to be pressing her too cruelly, she would find herself stealing away to some quiet spot to pray as Tad prayed. And even in the solitary walks that she sometimes took in the bush while Tad was at school, a feeling would creep over her—the sense of a Presence—and, before she realized what she was doing, she had entered into communion with things unseen.

Somehow, this new experience fitted into Nancy's more mature life in a way that made it possible for her, Tad's pupil, to correct the cruelties of his childish faith. When, for example, he prayed earnestly, for weeks beforehand, that the day set apart for the Sunday school picnic might be fine, Nancy uttered a discreet word of caution.

'You mustn't forget, Tad,' she said, 'that lots of other people may want rain that day, and, this very minute, they may be on their knees praying for it!'

'Oh, go on, Mum,' Tad replied scornfully, 'that's nothing to do with it! This is the Sunday school—God's own school. If He doesn't look after us, what will He look after? It's all right: don't you worry, Mum! It'll be fine, you see!'

When they awoke on the day of the picnic, the summer rain was pelting pitilessly down. But Tad was undismayed. He got his things together and set out for a day of undiluted enjoyment. Almost as he crossed the threshold, the rain ceased, the sun shone through the clouds, and the day proved to be one of unshadowed brightness.

'Told you so!' exclaimed Tad, when, tired but happy, he re-entered the cottage at night.

'Oh, you're weird; that's what you are,' remarked a boy who had brought him to the door, 'you're weird!'

'Weird, am I?' retorted Tad; 'Ah, well, let's hope I'll stay weird!' And Nancy, although she felt herself to be hopelessly out of her depth, heartily endorsed her boy's quaint wish.

On another occasion, a few months later, he hurried home from school and found, to his speechless consternation, that Nancy was in bed. Her father had been particularly violent for several weeks. Night after night, while Tad slept, he had filled the cottage with his senseless braggadocio and hideous oaths. Nancy was thoroughly unnerved: her head was splitting: she could scarcely stand. This development was something entirely new in Tad's experience. He moved to and fro on tiptoe like an uneasy ghost. All through the evening he could apply himself to nothing—could not even go out. He hung about her, watching her lying there, looking so dreadfully white, with the wet bandage tied round her head. When bedtime came—and, although he went early to bed that night, the evening

seemed an eternity—he crept to her bedside to say his prayers.

'Oh, God,' he half sobbed, 'make Mum better! If You'll make Mum better, I'll give my marbles—alleys and all—to the boys that haven't got any. If You'll make Mum better, I'll take both my peg-tops to Mike Turner, the lame boy, and I'll give my blue kite to Jock Hawkins.' A long pause, during which Tad was thinking vigorously. 'If You'll make Mum better, I'll never go tickling trout in the Silverstream any more; I'll never do anything wrong again, never, never; I'll be a good boy as long as I live! Honor bright, I will, if You'll make Mum better!' There was another long pause, and Nancy fancied that she felt the bed tremble as some convulsion passed over her boy's frame. Then, greatly daring, he began afresh.

'If You don't,' he cried in a startlingly altered tone… But Nancy, though no theologian, had an instinctive repugnance to hearing Deity hectored and threatened by her boy at her own bedside; so she checked him; kissed him good night; and sent him to bed.

Next morning, she was herself again, and she rejoiced for Tad's sake more than for her own. There was nothing that she more dreaded than that Tad should lose his faith.

It was thus that Nancy became the daughter of her own son. The Hebrew prophet who declared that a little child shall lead them had prognosticated her case with striking precision. Under Tad's guidance, Nancy became another woman. She scarcely realized the immensity of the transformation that she had undergone until one Sunday when Tad, as usual, brought home his lesson-paper and sought her help in answering the questions. It happened that the memory text for that Sunday was the text in Micah: Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. How it brought back to Nancy the atmosphere of the tent across the fields! She could see the crowd, the missioner, the soloist, and Alice Sandford sitting by her side. The phrases that were so often repeated that night rushed back upon her. 'They're gone!' the preacher had shouted. 'He's made an end of them…they're under the blood…they're nailed to His Cross…they're hurled behind His back…they're in the depths of the sea!' That was the point that Alice Sandford had reached at a bound when she rose, walked down the sawdust aisle, and knelt at the form beneath the preacher's desk. And that was the

point that she herself had now reached as a result of long years of pilgrimage—a pilgrimage in which Tad had always walked before her as her Greatheart and her guide.

Tad's work was done. He was gathering wild flowers for his mother one afternoon during the midsummer holidays when the train surprised him in the Wingatui cutting. At first, we trembled for Nancy; but, after the first desolating shock had spent itself, she lifted her head bravely. Strangely enough—perhaps because her former aloofness had been dictated by solicitude for the feelings of her boy or perhaps because she felt the need of human companionship—she no longer avoided that town as she had previously done. She moved among the townsfolk quietly and demurely, yet winning the affection of all who came in touch with her. Her face wore an expression that told of terrible suffering and yet of profound serenity—a serenity that lent a new and deeper loveliness to features that were always singularly attractive. After Tad's funeral, even his grandfather became strangely subdued. He still frequented his old haunts; but he seldom drank to excess; and he never again gave Nancy cause to dread his return to the cottage across the fields.

Chapter 20

MARY McNAB

From *The Nest of Spears*

It took me ten years to fathom the depths of the soul of Mary McNab. In the early part of my ministry at Mosgiel, I was often tempted to give Mary up as a bad job. The case baffled me. With my limited experience, I felt quite helpless; nor could I convince myself that I was justified in persisting in my attempts at penetration. Mary seemed secretive and stealthy. She wore a hunted look, and had developed that furtive—almost sly—behavior that hunted creatures so frequently display.

She lived on the slopes of Saddle Hill. About a mile from the township the road that intersects the Plain joins the great main road that runs from one end of the island to the other. And, at the junction, a cluster of cottages had sprung up. On the outskirts of this irresponsible little settlement three tiny dwellings stood by themselves. They were scarcely more than cabins—mere shanties, consisting of two rooms and a lean-to—although the one in the center invariably gave the impression of being loved and cared for. It was always in perfect repair; it was beautiful by an old-fashioned garden neatly kept, while a riot of roses luxuriated over the door. This was the home of Mary McNab; and if she was disposed to be reticent, taciturn, and uncommunicative, her next-door neighbors were not of a kind to coax her out of her severe seclusion. For between Mary McNab and her neighbors there appeared to be no affinity at all. The cottage on the right was occupied by Jock Sinclair, a big, hulking,

misshapen fellow, pitifully crippled and terribly addicted to drink. In the cottage on the left dwelt Judy O'Brien, an Irish widow, a devout Roman Catholic, who worked early and late to provide for her daughter Teresa and her disabled boy.

Mary was not a member of the Church. Silently as a shadow she came, and silently as a shadow she went; and she was obviously anxious that her connection with the Church should end at that. She always came by herself; slipped into a seat without speaking to anybody; slipped out again in exactly the same way; and, all alone, walked home. In every congregation there are people who desire nothing more than to be left alone. They have reasons of their own for wishing to come and go in silence. It is a minister's duty to respect such sentiments: and thus it was that the years came and went, leaving Mary McNab an inexplicable mystery to me.

Quite early in my ministry I noticed that she always welcomed an appeal for money. If I stressed the claims of the Sunday School, or referred to a new church that was being planted somewhere in the bush, or pleaded for a charity whose treasury was languishing, or hinted that our work in India was being hampered by want of funds, Mary always slipped a sovereign or two into my hand as she crept past me at the door. She seemed to come prepared for some such emergency, and gave me the impression that she was glad when it arose. It was clear that she enjoyed giving. She went away happier when she left her gold behind her. And the gladness with which she gave seemed to enhance the value of her gifts.

This sort of thing had been going on for some years when I had my first heart-to-heart talk with Mary. I had been farther up the hill to visit Flora Harris, a girl who was dying in the house beside the coal mine; and, on my return, I caught Mary weeding among the saxifrage and larkspur in her garden. I seized the opportunity, engaged her in conversation, and, to my delight, was invited in.

'Excuse me just a minute while I wash my hands,' she exclaimed, slipping off into the lean-to at the back; and the interval of solitude gave me the opportunity of admiring the neatness of her cozy little parlor.

We talked about all sorts of things. She showed me, I remember, an album which contained portraits of her parents, of her brothers and sisters, and of herself as a girl and at various stages

of her earlier development. Poor Mary was withered and careworn when I first met her; but these photographs proved that she had been a remarkably handsome and beautiful woman in her time. In the course of our chat she referred appreciatively, and, I thought, a little feelingly, to the service of the previous Sunday. I had dealt with the very familiar but very beautiful story of the alabaster box of ointment with which, in those last hours at Bethany, Mary had anointed her Lord. And I had emphasized the Savior's promise that, as long as this old world shall last, the perfume of that ointment shall be wafted about all its continents and islands. Having discussed in a general way the sermon I had so recently preached, Mary turned upon me with hungry eyes and asked a striking question.

'Do you think,' she inquired, 'that Mary, the sister of Martha, who poured out her costly spikenard in the home at Bethany, is identical with that other woman—the woman which was a sinner—who, in the earlier days of our Lord's ministry, crept in from the streets and, washing His feet with her tears, wiped them with the hairs of her head?'

Puzzled by her intense eagerness, I confessed that I was not at all sure. I should like, I said, to look into the question before replying. Secretly, I determined to make the matter an excuse for a further visit.

'I will go into it very carefully,' I assured her, as I rose to take my leave, 'and, if I can find anything at all definite on the subject, I will let you know.'

'I wish you would,' she replied; and then, after a slight pause, she added, with evident feeling, 'it means a good deal to me.' Her words greatly perplexed me; I repeated them to myself all the way home; and, the more I thought of them, the more incomprehensible they became. I resolved, when I repeated my visit, to mingle audacity with courtesy. I would get to closer grips.

A week later I was at the cottage again. She had just shaken out her cloth and was watching the sparrows feasting on the crumbs. Her greeting was more cordial: I felt that I was on a better footing already.

'I am afraid,' I said, when, after some preliminary gossip, we settled down to serious conversation, 'I am afraid I have not solved your problem. But,' I added, 'it may interest you to know that

so distinguished a scholar as St. Augustine and so eminent a saint as St. Bernard of Clairvaux held positively that "the woman which was a sinner was Mary of Bethany."' And I showed her a sentence which I had copied from Dr. David Smith's The Days of His Flesh. It read: 'None ever loved Jesus more passionately or worshipped Him more reverently than St. Bernard of Clairvaux; and he deemed it no offence but a soul-gladdening marvel that the harlot who rained hot tears on His feet in the Pharisee's house was none other than Lazarus's sister Mary who anointed Him at Bethany.' And I told her that Dr. Smith himself endorsed this conclusion. I could see that my poor companion was deeply moved. She was leaning forward with her elbows on her knees, and her face buried in her hands.

'Oh, how should I love to think so!' she almost moaned.

And then, recalling my previous resolve, I felt that the time had come to show a little daring. I drew my chair nearer hers, placed my hand on her shoulder, and said: 'Now, tell me all about it! Why are you so interested in this question? How does it affect you?'

And then, her courage answering to mine, she told me one of the most heart-breaking and most terrible stories that it has ever been my lot to hear. She told me of the sin that had spread its hideous defilement over twenty years of her life. The guilt was, clearly, less hers than another's; but this reflection brought her no comfort at all.

'You cannot understand the anguish of it,' she cried. 'Why, the other Sunday, when you all remained for the Communion Service, and I had to creep home with this vile canker eating out my heart, I thought I should have died on the road. I would stand up and confess my shame before earth and heaven; but it would blast his name and ruin his political career; the black, black secret is his as well as mine. Sometimes,' she added after a pause, 'sometimes I think it would have been more tolerable if our wickedness had forced itself into the light—if I had become a mother, or if she, his poor wife, who thought me her dearest friend, had suspected or discovered it. But she died—went down to her grave trusting me, loving me, and begging me to watch over her children. And now I can never, never, never ask or receive her forgiveness!' and poor Mary broke into a fresh tempest of grief.

The tragedy of her life was no recent thing. An interval of fifteen years separated the days of her terrible transgression from the

days of her tearful confession. I encouraged her to join the Church, and she eventually did so. I shall never forget her first Communion. I have often been touched by the solemn yet shining faces of young communicants for the first time. But Mary sat with her handkerchief to her face, sobbing as if her heart would break. She never took any active part in the Church's work. She felt that her frightful secret excluded her from the social joys of the faith; and I respected her sentiment. She made one or two fast friendships among us. Elsie Hammond, who had a genius for winning the confidence of such shrinking souls, became her special companion. Elsie was with her at the last.

In the cold grey dawn of a sharp October morning we were startled by the ringing of the front-door bell. Slipping out of bed, I answered it promptly as was possible. And, to my amazement, whom should I find on the verandah but old Jock Sinclair? Jock was the last man on earth I ever expected to see at the Manse. He was obviously agitated, and I feared that he was recovering but tardily from an overnight carouse.

'It was Elsie Hammond that sent me,' he explained. 'She is staying at Mistress McNab's place, next door to mine. Mistress McNab was taken ill yesterday afternoon and she died during the night. Elsie asked me to let you know.'

He was shuffling away, hobbling painfully on his crutch, when he suddenly turned as if he had forgotten part of his mission.

'My, she was a good woman, was yon!' he exclaimed, brushing his face with his sleeve. 'Many's the time I've come home drunk and thrown myself on my bed with my clothes on to sleep it off; and the next thing I knew was a tap at the door, and there, on the chair, was a tray with some bread and butter and a cup of tea! She never said six words to me in her life: but I tell you she often made me terrible ashamed of myself.'

As soon as breakfast was over I set off for the hill. I told Elsie how glad I was that she was there.

'You're not more glad than I am,' Elsie replied, with deep sincerity. 'I wouldn't have missed being here for anything. Poor old Mary had a lot of pain last night; but it stopped an hour before she died; and, during that hour, it was beautiful to be with her. She made me read the story of the woman who washed the Savior's feet

with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. She just murmured the words: much forgiven—loved much; and then fell asleep as peacefully as a tired child.' Elsie moved across to the bed and stood for a moment in silence.

When she again turned towards me she told me of an incident that had profoundly affected her. About an hour before I arrived, Judy O'Brien, the Roman Catholic woman next door, had come round.

'Is it true,' she had asked, 'that Mistress McNab is dead?' Elsie confirmed the sad news, and the Irishwoman buried her face in her apron.

'She was very good to me,' sobbed Judy, as soon as she recovered her voice. 'We never spoke; but there were times when Teresa and I had to leave poor little Sonnie in the house by himself; and, when that happened, she always slipped cakes and sweets through the fence, and kept her eye on him till one of us returned. I wonder,' she added, hesitatingly, 'I wonder if I might see her?' Elsie drew her in and led her across to the bed. She bowed, crossed herself, and then, after a pause, turned to Elsie again: 'May I kiss her?' she asked. Elsie smiled permission. Judy stooped, kissed Mary's cold forehead reverently, and then knelt for some time in prayer beside the bed. When she rose, she pressed Elsie's hand and then moved straight towards the door.

'She was very beautiful,' she whispered to Elsie through her tears, 'very beautiful!'

She was, indeed; and on the following Sunday I preached again on the story of the woman who knelt at the Savior's feet, and whose fond devotion has won for her an everlasting renown.

Chapter 21

EVERYTHING QUIET

From *The Boulevards of Paradise*

He was a good sort, was Cecil. He could play a good game; he could sing a good song; and nobody was more fond than he of a good, long, hearty laugh. When in a mischievous mood, he would improvise recitations; and he was sometimes well into the performance before members of the audience would recognize that they were under fire. A fellow must have something in him to enable him to pass muster in the common-room of a university; but in the common-room in which his tall figure was so often seen Cecil stood that crucial test. 'He was the soul of our social life', writes one of his professors, 'and he endeared himself to every one of us.' He is the first man from the University of Tasmania to lay down his life at the Front. He was on observation duty at dead of night. He looked over the parapet and reported, 'Everything quiet!' A minute or two later he looked again, and fell back with a bullet through his temple. A moan and a quiver; and all was over. *'Everything quiet!'*

I was his minister and I well remember our first conversations on the matter of church membership. To a young fellow, and especially to a young student, it often seems for a while as though Reason and Faith are at war. Cecil passed through that stage. Like Tennyson's friend, 'he touched a jarring lyre at first, but ever strove to make it true.' He was absolutely determined never to make a profession in advance of his experience; and yet he resolved that he would never recognize his doubts as his masters if he could by any possibility subdue them. I brought no pressure to bear upon

him. I simply watched the conflict. And at last he won. He came to me of his own accord, and asked to be admitted to the membership of that Church which he afterwards adorned. He told me that the clamorous voices in his soul were all hushed and stilled at last. He reported, *'Everything quiet!'*

Then came the war, and the war filled him with a tumult of a different kind. Should he go? But he was the only child of parents who worshipped him! He was the light of their eyes. Upon him they had fastened all their affections. Or should he stay at home? But to stay at home, while duty called and danger, seemed like cowardice; and he would rather be anything than be a coward. It was a great struggle, a struggle in which a father's anguish, a mother's tears, and his own filial loyalty each played their part. At last he saw his way and spoke the word. 'It is my duty,' he said, 'to go!' There was no more to be said. His parents consented bravely and without demur. The terrible inner struggle was over. He reported once more, *'Everything quiet!'*

A pretty little English cemetery just behind the firing line. Right against it a dreamy, picturesque orchard, with gnarled old apple trees. The long green grass is studded with red poppies. Nearby is a quaint little cottage with an old-fashioned garden, and, just beyond, a clump of lofty elms. It was there that they laid him to rest. 'It is terrible to have lost him', writes the Anglican chaplain who conducted the burial; 'he was one of the very finest fellows we had. He turned out a really beautiful character; such a clean, pure face through which a clean, pure soul seemed to shine. He was a wonderful influence for good among the men under him. They gathered round with tears in their eyes when he was hit, and said that he was too good to be a soldier. It just shows that sheer downright goodness is the most telling force in the world after all.' There he lies, with a cross above his head that his comrades erected to his memory. The elms will keep guard beside his grave. The old apple trees will fling their blossoms his way in the sunny springtime. And the red, red poppies will whisper to each other of the sacrifice he made. 'Everything quiet!'

And in the old home far away everything is quiet too! In his little room there lies his Bible; he took a smaller one to the Front. He did not indulge in Bible-marking; but, before leaving for the

Front, he marked three texts—one for himself, one for his parents, and one for all the world.

THIS FOR HIMSELF:
'He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 John 3:16).

THIS FOR HIS FATHER AND MOTHER:
'He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe all tears from off all faces' (Isaiah 25:8).

AND THIS FOR ALL THE WORLD:
'God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16).

There lies the Bible, with the three texts marked, in that hushed and sacred chamber: 'Everything quiet!'

Yes, everything quiet; and yet, out of that stillness, what voices speak!

Chapter 22

THE THIEF

From *The Ivory Spires*

A cluster of congenial cronies having dropped in to supper, we were unusually late that night: and when at last I bolted the doors, snibbed the windows, and saw that all the lights were out, I little dreamed that, before sleeping, I was to encounter an experience which was destined to cause me more qualms of conscience, more mental disturbance, and more secret heart-searching than any other incident in my ministerial life.

I was nearly ready for bed when, to my astonishment, we were startled by the sound of the front door bell. Slipping on a dressing-gown, I answered it myself.

'Please don't turn on a light!' pleaded a girlish voice out of the darkness. I opened the door more widely in order to get the best possible view of my untimely visitor. It was a young woman—tall, slim, neatly-dressed, and with a pale, set face which seemed to indicate a good deal of character and self-possession.

'I cannot tell you how sorry I am to trouble you at this hour,' she exclaimed with evident sincerity, 'but could you possibly see me for a few minutes? Only,' she added, anxiously, 'if you show me into a front room, please do not turn on a light. My movements may be watched: I am not sure.'

I invited her into the study, taking the precaution to leave that door, like the front door, wide open. I drew up the blinds, so that I could just see the outline of her face as she talked.

'I'm having a terrible time,' she began, 'and I suppose it's entirely my own fault. You have probably heard about the robbery at Innisdale—at Johnson's place? Somebody seems to have got into Nancy's bedroom; her gold wristlet watch—a valuable one set with diamonds—her bracelet, a lovely chain and pendant, and a number of other trinkets, were all taken.' I admitted that I had heard something about it, or seen it in the paper; I could not remember which.

'Well, I stole them,' my visitor blurted out with staggering suddenness, 'and I have them still!'

I felt as if I had been struck; her shameless candour took my breath away. It was one of those occasions on which I wished myself a smoker, so that, with perfect naturalness, I might pause for some considerable time before speaking.

'And I suppose,' I said at length, 'that you want me to communicate your confession to the Johnsons or the police, and do my best to make your peace with them?'

'That's a very bad guess,' she smiled, provokingly. 'If that were so, why should I come at this hour of the night? And why should I ask you to see me in the dark? No, no; you're quite wrong. I took the things deliberately in cold blood, and I mean to go through with it. I don't believe for a moment that, if I sit tight, the police will be able to prove anything!'

'They suspect you, then?' I inquired.

'Of course they do,' she replied, with icy composure; 'why do you suppose I asked you not to switch on the light? They may be watching outside at this very minute for aught I know. You see, I was probably the last person in Nancy's room before the things were missed. Nancy won't hear anything against me—we are old friends—and the Johnsons have assured the police that they do not suspect me for a moment; but I know that the detectives have their doubts about it!'

'Well, now,' I reasoned, 'let's be practical! What do you want me to do in this unhappy business?'

'You must do nothing—absolutely nothing!' she answered emphatically. 'I only came to you because I just felt that I must tell somebody: the secrecy and the sense of being shadowed were becoming too much for my nerves; I could remain silent no longer!'

'But, my dear girl,' I expostulated, realizing the gravity of my position, 'I must take some action or I become a kind of accomplice. Besides, it's only right! If you stole these things, you ought to own up and restore them. And, if you won't, then it becomes my duty to see that justice is done!'

'Oh, you couldn't, you simply couldn't,' she cried, springing to her feet and facing me. 'Do you mean to say that you could betray my most sacred confidence? I've often come to hear you on Sunday evenings. I was always impressed and I felt that I could trust you implicitly—with anything. And when I decided that I must tell somebody of this trouble, you were the first person I thought of. Of course you won't say anything! I should never believe in Churches or ministers again if you did anything so terrible!' I merely promised that I would do nothing that night, and, since it was on the stroke of midnight when I said it, I was fairly safe.

'Oh, well,' she exclaimed, with a look of infinite relief, 'if you do nothing tonight, I know that you'll do nothing after sleeping over it! You simply couldn't! And I shall come again—perhaps tomorrow night—and tell you how things are going. And, if anything happens, I may ring you up. Only of course I can't talk about police and detectives on the telephone; you never know who's listening! If I want you to understand that the police have interviewed me, I shall say on the phone that the butcher has just been; and if I want to tell you that I've had an adventure with detectives, I shall say that the grocer called. Can you remember that? Now I must really go! Fancy keeping you out of bed all this time! I'm thoroughly ashamed of myself! Goodnight!' And, in just a second or two, the darkness swallowed her.

For the next few weeks the joy of living was, for me, a diminishing quantity. Sleeping and waking I was conscious of a guilty secret. I trembled at the sight of a policeman. In hours of nervous prostration, I even caught glimpses of myself in convict garb. I was not at all sure as to the legal aspect of such incriminating confidences as had been entrusted to me, and I felt that, besides being extremely dangerous, it would be a breach of that confidence to inquire. And so, night and day, I suffered in melancholy silence. Or almost in silence. For, once or twice a week, my nocturnal visitor returned. I did everything that mortal man could do to induce her to

confess and restore. I reasoned; I coaxed; I threatened; I stormed. On one occasion I ordered her out of the house and imperatively forbade her return. It was all to no purpose. She came again and again—'to talk things over,' as she said. And every few days she would ring me up; or, on returning from a meeting, I would get a message to the effect that 'Miss Canning wished me to know that the grocer had called and was still earnestly soliciting her custom.'

The thing drifted on, and then, to my infinite relief, fizzled out. The visits and the telephone calls became more and more infrequent, and gradually the incident passed into oblivion. The police, baffled, discontinued their quest, and the Innisdale robbery was numbered among their unsolved mysteries. Very often, on Sunday evenings, I saw my midnight visitor in the congregation; if I chanced to be at the church-door, she would shake hands cordially and smile knowingly. And then, a year or two later, I crossed the sea to undertake another charge and naturally concluded that I had shaken myself entirely free of an ugly episode that, occasioning me endless perturbation, had afforded me no satisfaction at all.

But such hateful things die hard. Their lives are legion. You bury them ten thousand fathoms deep; their ghosts will haunt you still. After five year's respite, my old problem rushed suddenly back upon me, assuming, on this occasion, a still more acute form. One Sunday, on surveying my congregation, I caught myself looking full into the face of the unwelcome visitor of years before. There was very little change in her appearance except that her hair seemed to have become tinged with silver. Her perfect serenity and self-possession were as marked as ever. From the pulpit, I caught sight of her several times during the weeks that followed, and then, after an evening service, one of the officers of the church brought me a message. 'A Miss Canning,' he said, 'is waiting in the eastern porch and wonders if she could see you for a few minutes in the vestry.' He escorted her in.

'Yes,' she exclaimed, after greeting me. 'I've come to live over here now; and I couldn't attend any Church but yours; now could I? And that brings me to a very important matter about which I wanted to see you; I should like to become a Church-member. Would you let me?' I was astounded at her sheer audacity; it seemed almost blasphemous.

'Miss Canning,' I began, assuming that attitude of a judge addressing the prisoner, 'Miss Canning, before we can discuss or even consider such a proposal, I shall need you to be perfectly satisfied on three essential points. Have you confessed to anybody but myself the theft that you committed? Have you done everything in your power to exculpate those who, innocently placed in compromising circumstances, fell under a certain amount of suspicion? And have you made any kind of reparation to Nancy Johnson?'

'Is this quite fair?' she retorted, a little warmly. 'You are the only man in the world who knows of that affair. It occurred years ago and across the sea. You happen now to be the minister of this Church. If any other man on the face of the globe had been minister here, I should have been welcomed with open arms. Have you any right to use to my detriment the knowledge that you chance to have gained elsewhere and that was entrusted to you, as one may say, in the sanctity of the confessional?'

'I am sorry, Miss Canning,' I replied. 'On a previous occasion you placed me in a position in which I was extremely hazy as to my duty; and—to be perfectly frank—I am not even yet clear as to the rectitude of the course I took. I do not know how far a minister is bound to respect such incriminating confidences. But that is past. You now present a fresh problem. You maintain that I ought to act as though I knew nothing of our earlier adventure. On this occasion I am in no uncertainty at all. It is nothing to me that any other man, occupying my present position, would welcome you to membership. He would not know the past. I do know. And, knowing, I must act according to that knowledge. I must follow the gleam. You will never be received into the membership of this Church until you have completely satisfied me on the three points I put to you.'

I spoke sternly because I knew by experience her powers of persuasion and her skill in argument. I wanted her to feel that my mind was made up and that my decision was final. She seemed hurt; made to attempt a reply; but, rising, remarked that she would think it over and, perhaps, see me again.

She was as good as her word. About ten days later she came, not to the vestry, but to the house.

'I have resolved,' she said, as soon as she was seated, 'to tell you the whole story.'

'I thought I knew it,' I innocently replied.

'That's the worst of being a man,' she continued. 'A man is quicker than a woman at gathering up the facts; but a woman is quicker than a man at seeing what lies behind those facts; a woman would have sensed something underneath the story I told you years ago, and, divining that hidden treasure, would have sunk a shaft to find it.' I swallowed the rebuke with due humility and waited for her to go on.

'You see,' she resumed, 'Nancy Johnson and I were great chums. She was a simple little thing and I was very fond of her. Then, taking up with Clarrie Grimthorpe, she became engaged to him, and, naturally, she had less time for me. Clarrie gave her several beautiful and valuable presents—gifts that seemed far beyond his means. Nancy showed them to me with great pride; I was surprised at their splendor; but of course I said nothing. Then, from a cousin who worked in the same warehouse as Clarrie, I heard whispers concerning certain things that were missing and concerning certain suspicions that were being entertained. I was horrified. I thought of the disgrace if Clarrie were discovered and convicted. I thought of poor little Nancy; she would be crushed. Yet what could I do? Nothing was known for certain. And of the sinister rumors that I had heard I was not free to speak. It was like watching her floating towards the rapids without being able to raise a hand to save, or even a voice to warn her. On the Sunday evening you preached on: Am I my brother's keeper? Do you remember? As you stressed our responsibility for one another, I could think of nothing but Nancy. I determined to go to Innisdale first thing on Monday morning, although, since my tongue was tied on the matter that was torturing my mind, I saw no real purpose to be served by my visit. Anyhow, I went. It was washing-day at the Johnson's. Nancy was helping her mother and was wearing none of the trinkets that were so worrying me. I went into her room to take off my hat and coat, and there were the jewels! I spent an hour or so in the home; we had morning tea together; and then I began to talk of leaving. But, as I prepared to depart, a hare-brained scheme took entire possession of me; and,

before I realized what had happened, I carried it into effect. I forbade them to leave their washing, assuring them that I could easily let myself out. Returning to Nancy's room for my hat and coat, I swept all the jewelry into my handbag, taking care to throw the window wide open in order to suggest the possibility of burglary. It seemed to me that, the valuables having vanished, the case against Clarrie Grimthorpe must automatically break down, and certainly Nancy could no longer be implicated in the horrid business. As soon as they discovered their loss, the Johnsons reported the matter to the police; and, although they laughed at the bare idea of my having stolen the things, the police were not sure, and, as you remember, they led me a terrible dance for a few weeks. I kept the trinkets for a year or two, not knowing what on earth to do with them. I was afraid that if I attempted to return them to their rightful and original owners, it might implicate either Clarrie Grimthorpe or myself. By this time, Nancy had made the inevitable discovery that Clarrie was not all that she had imagined him to be; the engagement was broken off; and I was no longer in touch with him. So, a couple of years ago, hating the very sight of the wretched baubles, I took them with me on my voyage to New Zealand, and, in mid-ocean, threw them all overboard! I feel that I acted stupidly, perhaps wickedly, all the way through; the whole thing is a ghastly nightmare to me. But I was moved by a sincere and desperate desire to save Nancy, and,' she added, with one of her quiet and mischievous smiles, 'it was really your sermon that drove me to it. And now I feel that if I could join the Church, and give myself some form of Christian service, it would be the best way of leaving the whole sad business behind me.'

On the cordial recommendation of the Minister and Officers, the name of Annie Canning was, at the next Church Meeting, inscribed upon the Roll of Membership; and, for many a long year, her charm of personality, her beautiful unselfishness and her tireless activities have proved an inspiration and an enrichment, not only to the congregation, but to the entire neighborhood.

Chapter 23

DUSTY

From *The Nest of Spears*

I

It is May Day morning, and on May Day morning I always think of Dusty. For it was on May Day morning that I saw him for the first time, and it was on May Day morning—exactly a year later—that I saw the last of him. I shall never forget that introduction. I remember how surprised I was at being recognized, for I was a long way from home. In the course of an extensive motor tour we had paused for lunch at a small wayside inn back among the hills. As I rose from the table, and stepped out into the roadway, a tall and bearded man—a typical Australian farmer—approached and addressed me by name.

'I thought so,' he said, when I acknowledged my identity. 'I heard you once years ago; but I shouldn't have spoken but that I have, up at the farm, an Irish boy who is very ill. He worked his passage out from the Old Country a year or two ago and tramped his way through the country looking for work. He was just about dead-beat by the time he arrived at Braebanks; the wife and girls took pity on him and begged me to give him a job; he took bad a few weeks ago, and has been getting worse ever since. There's no minister up in these parts, and I wondered if it would be too much trouble for you to run up to Braebanks and have a look at him.'

Dusty, as they called him, was a lad of about nineteen, with

a great shock of auburn hair, a very florid complexion, and laughing, roguish eyes. I read him a few verses from my pocket Bible. In doing so, a little card, which I used as a book-mark fluttered to the floor. It was just a card that one of the children had brought home from Sunday school; it represented a robin sitting on a bough, and, underneath, the words: All His saints are in Thy hand. Dusty caught sight of it and asked if he might see it.

'It reminds a fellow of home!' he said, as he looked at the redbreast. And then, reading the words aloud, he asked their meaning.

'It just means,' I answered, 'that all those who are trusting the Savior in the way that I described just now are in God's hand. He holds them fast and keeps them safe.'

'What, all of them?' he asked, in surprise.

'It says so,' I answered, pointing to the first word on the card.

'My! What a handful!' he exclaimed, with a pleasant twinkle in his eyes, 'What a hand He must have, mustn't He?'

I left the card lying on his pillow and promised that, if it were possible, I would come and see him again. I was twice at Braebanks after that. Once, a few months later, I motored up for another talk with Dusty; and once May Day came again, I journeyed up to bury him. On the occasion of that third visit to his room, I caught sight, just in time, of the card standing on the mantelpiece. I crossed to the coffin, gave Dusty's forehead a reverent stroke of farewell, and laid the card upon his breast.

II

Even as I sit here at my desk today I see again the sparkle of delight that came into Dusty's deep blue eyes when, in reply to his question, I pointed to the first word on the card. All His saints! I knew the thoughts that were surging in his heart. Whenever an Australian minister is called to the bedside of a sick immigrant, he knows that he will soon be talking to a homesick man. All the oceans of the world were rolling between Dusty and Dusty's people. Just

when his heart was most hungry for a mother's voice and a mother's caress he was tortured by the tyranny of the countless leagues between. I understood. Most of us on this side of the world have trodden that heartbreaking path at some time or other. Dusty told me, when I went to see him for the second time, of the village down in County Clare, from which his thirst for adventure had drawn him. He described the cottage, the garden, the fields, the school, and the church; and he talked of the dear, dear faces he had left behind him. It was when his thoughts took that far flight that the first word of the text soothed and comforted him.

Peace, perfect peace—with loved ones far away,
In Jesus' keeping we are safe—and they!

All His saints! All in His hand! Dusty liked to think of that, and he hoped that some such thoughts would flit through the minds of the folk in County Clare whenever they thought of him. He gave me their address before I left, and I promised to write and tell them of the conversation that I have here recorded.

'They're Catholics, you know,' he said, a little timidly, as though afraid that this fact might make some dreadful difference. 'They're Catholics, and I'm supposed to be. But I haven't been near any church since I left home, and you're the first minister I've spoken to since Father O'Brien saw me off at the station.'

I smiled and pointed again to the first word on the card. All His saints! I told him that some of the men and women whom I loved best were of the same faith as his parents. As he was tired with talking, I took the opportunity of doing my share. I told him of my debt to Francis of Assisi, to Santa Teresa, to Francis Xavier, to Bernard of Clairvaux, and to Sister Clare. I told him that some of the choicest hymns in my own hymn-book were written by priests of his Church. By way of illustration I quoted—for reasons of my own—from Faber's best-known verses:

O come to the merciful Saviour who calls you,
O come to the Lord who forgives and forgets;
Though dark be the fortune on earth that befalls you,
There's a bright home above where the sun never sets.

Come, come to His feet and lay open your story
Of suffering and sorrow, of guilt and of shame;
For the pardon of sin is the crown of His glory,
And the joy of our Lord to be true to His name.

O come then to Jesus, whose arms are extended
To fold His dear children in closest embrace;
O come, for your exile will shortly be ended,
And Jesus will show you His beautiful face.

At the funeral I told the story of the card. It seemed peculiarly fitting. The great farm kitchen was crowded. The family felt Dusty's death very keenly; one might have fancied, on beholding their grief, that he had been of their own kith and kin. All the men who worked about the place were present: some had brought their wives and children: and several farmers from a distance had driven over. Dusty had evidently captured the hearts of all who knew him. I spoke of the comfort that he had found in the first word on the card. All His saints! All in His hand!

'And that,' I added, 'is our comfort. We do not know exactly where Dusty is at this minute; but we know that he is in God's hand. Death makes no difference to that. Those who, in the simplicity of faith, placed themselves in God's hand before death are still safe in God's hand after death. It makes him seem very near, doesn't it? He is in God's hand; we are in God's hand. All His saints—the saints of the Church militant and the saints of the Church triumphant—are there. All His saints are in His hand. I laid the card on Dusty's breast yonder, and we must lay the thought to our stricken hearts today.'

I told George Macdonald's story of the woman who could not be argued out of her conviction that her sailor-boys were in God's care, and, therefore, perfectly safe. 'But,' reasoned the objector, 'supposing that, for all that you say about their safety, some of your sons were drowned at sea.' 'Well sir,' she answered with a sigh, 'I trust that they are none the less safe for that. It would be a strange thing for an old woman like me to suppose that safety lay in not being drowned. What is the bottom of the sea, sir? The bottom of the sea is the hollow of His hand!' Her sons would still be safe, though they were there! And so, I said, was Dusty.

After our return from the lonely little cemetery on the ridge, we all had tea together in the cavernous kitchen in which the service had been held; and then I started for home. The sun was setting over the great silent hills as I motored back to town. And, somehow, the further I found myself from the roomy farm-house and the tiny God's acre, the more the words grew upon me. All His saints are in His hand!

Saints of the early dawn of Christ,
Saints of Imperial Rome,
Saints of the cloistered middle ages,
Saints of the modern home;
Saints of the soft and sunny East,
Saints of the frozen seas,
Saints of the Isles that wave their palms
In the fair Antipodes;

Saints of the marts and busy streets,
Saints of the squalid lanes,
Saints of the silent solitudes,
In the prairies and plains;
Saints who were wafted to the skies,
In the torment robe of flame,
Saints who have graven on men's thoughts
A monumental name.

All in His hand! 'What a handful!' Dusty exclaimed, when first he read the text; and I felt like echoing his words. By this time, the west was a pageant of gold: the sky seemed all aflame: the vision of its splendor became entangled with the thought that was uppermost in my mind. The glory before me seemed to be the glory of the ransomed host—the host that Dusty had now joined. I felt myself speeding towards it—rushing into it—drawn to it as though I were part of it. As, indeed, I was. For that is the beauty of Dusty's text. All His saints—the saints that are separated by the oceans and the saints that are separated by the ages—all His saints are in His hand. I shall always associate that shining word with the sparkling eyes of Dusty.

III

One of these May Days will fall on a Sunday, and when it does there will be but one text possible for me. All His saints are in His hand. I have no idea what I shall say about it. Perhaps it will suffice if I tell the story of Dusty, and make a point of frequently repeating the text.

All His saints are in His hand! Then how pure they must be! A man instinctively shrinks from handling anything that stains or sullies or defiles. We like to caress the thing that is clean. And God holds His people in His hand! 'Purge me with hyssop,' they used to cry, 'that I may be clean; wash me that I may be whiter than snow!' And the fact that He now fondles them in His fingers and holds them in His hand shows how perfectly He has answered that penitential prayer of theirs.

All His saints are in His hand! Then how precious they must be!

'Frank,' I said to a small boy the other day, 'I want you to run a message for me. You will need to take this money, so you must be very, very careful!'

'All right,' he said, smiling at my solicitude, 'I shan't lose it; I'll hold it in my hand all the way!'

I have known men and women adopt the same expedient. A purse may be committed to pocket or handbag; but when they find it necessary to carry something that is particularly precious, they hold it in their hand all the way.

All His saints are in His hand! Then how useful they may be! The world's work is done, not by the thing that the hand holds, but by the hand that holds it.

When Richard Baxter lay dying, his friends, pitying his pain, liked to comfort him by speaking of the good that he had achieved by means of his writings. Baxter shook his head. 'No,' he said, 'I was but a pen in God's hand, and what praise is due to a pen?'

When Saladin saw the sword with which Richard Cœur de Lion had fought so bravely, he marveled that so common a blade should have wrought such mighty deeds. 'It was not the sword,'

replied one of the English officers, 'it was the arm of Richard!'

When Paganini appeared for the first time at the Royal Opera House in Paris, the aristocracy of France was gathered to hear him. In his peculiar ghostly manner he glided on to the stage amidst the breathless silence of the expectant throng. Commencing to tune his violin, a string snapped. The audience tittered. Commencing again, a second string broke; and, a moment later, a third gave way. The people stared in consternation. Paganini paused for just a second, and then, giving one of his grim smiles, he lifted his instrument, and, from the single string, drew music that seemed almost divine.

Only a pen—but a pen in the hand of a poet!

Only a common sword—but a sword in the hand of Richard!

Only a broken violin—but a violin in the hand of a master!

Only five loaves and two small fishes—but five loaves and two small fishes in the hands of the Son of God!

Only common clay like Dusty and me—but Dusty and me, and all His saints, in such hands! In the skilful hands of such a Potter, the commonest clay may be fashioned into a vessel of honor, sanctified and meet for the Master's use.

Chapter 24

BIDDY

From *A Witch's Brewing*

It must have been in the month of April that I saw her first, for, now that I apply myself to the task of putting her story in record, I distinctly remember that the chrysanthemums were in all their glory in the gardens that I passed that afternoon. I was on my way to visit the Blandfords: I scarcely knew why. I had been in the home quite recently, so that a visit was scarcely due. No sickness had broken out in the family. Indeed, none of the reasons that usually suggest a pastoral call obtained in this particular case. Yet I felt an irresistible pull in that direction. I cannot account for it except that I had fancied that Mrs. Blandford had worn a worried look. She was a tall, queenly woman, full of life and vivacity; her rich, musical laugh made you feel that it was good to be alive. But, for some weeks, a perpetual gloom seemed to have settled down upon her; she appeared to be carrying a burden that was beyond her strength; her gaiety had become a thing of the past. A feeling gradually crept over me that, if I called, she might welcome the opportunity of confiding to me her trouble; and so it came to pass that, on the afternoon that I so vividly remember, I took the train to Clifford Avenue.

Opposite me in the tram sat a young mother with a little boy. He was evidently a great chatterbox; nothing escaped his notice; and, on every object that caught his restless eye, he had some striking and incisive comment to offer. Presently, the tram stopping at a side street, a young lady entered. She was a striking figure, tall, erect, and well-proportioned, with sparkling black eyes,

an abundance of dark hair and a graceful athletic carriage. She was daintily attired in a close-fitting costume of navy-blue.

'A lady, mummy!' commented the boy. The newcomer heard, looked in an amused way at the little man, and received an apologetic smile from the mother. But the childish criticisms were not yet complete.

'Mummy,' continued the boy, 'isn't she a pretty lady?'

Again the newcomer heard, and her confusion added to her charms. The mother, who shared the stranger's embarrassment, lifted her offspring bodily from the kneeling position that he had there-to-fore occupied, and, in a desperate attempt to silence him, seated him sedately beside her.

As we approached Clifford Avenue, the girl in navy-blue rose: we were evidently destined to leave the car together. Stepping off first, she turned into the Avenue a yard or two ahead of me. I had occasion to call at a house a few doors from the corner in order to return a book that I had recently borrowed; and, by the time that I was once more upon the footpath, my travelling-companion had vanished. There was no sign of her anywhere, and I never for a moment expected to see her laughing eyes and shapely form again.

In due course I reached 'Inglenook,' the home of the Blandfords, and, walking up the winding path among the lawns, admired the taste with which the shrubs and flowerbeds had been arranged. Here again the flaunting chrysanthemums threw everything else in the shade. Before I had had time to ring, Mrs. Blandford herself opened the door to me.

'I saw you coming down the path,' she explained with a welcoming smile; but, behind the smile, I detected the undercurrent of sadness that had so often oppressed me of late. She showed me into the drawing-room and there, in the armchair facing me as I entered, was the girl in navy-blue! She rose on being introduced; smiled as she recognized me; and the blushed afresh as the memory of her experience on the train rushed back upon her.

I saw that, however pleasant it might prove on other grounds, my visit was doomed to failure so far as its original purpose was concerned. How could Mrs. Blandford pour out her heart in company? I resolved to leave as soon as a suitable opportunity presented itself. We chatted, with a certain indefinable restraint, on

a variety of commonplace themes. The girl, I thought, tried to be lively and pleasant; but seemed checked at every turn by the total failure of her hostess to respond. I did my best to bridge the gulf between them; and then, to my unutterable relief, Dulcie Blandford appeared with the afternoon tea. Dulcie is one of the brightest girls I know. She and her brother, Alan, kept the home rocking with merriment. I knew that the conversation would not flag as long as Dulcie was in the room. For the next quarter of an hour we were a very happy party, although I noticed that Mrs. Blandford was rather listener to, than a participant in, our frolic of conversation. Her sweet and affable good nature seemed to be struggling bravely with her depression: there were fitful bursts of sunshine through her banks of cloud; but she was far from being her old self.

When I rose to take my leave, she accompanied me to the door, leaving Dulcie and her visitor to look after each other. As soon as we were in the hall, with the drawing-room door closed behind us, she burst into tears and almost collapsed. I took her by the arm and led her into the billiard-room nearby.

'Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful!' she cried, sobbing as if her heart would break. 'I don't know what to do or what to say! It's just killing me! She's such a lovely girl, and Alan's hopelessly in love with her, but she's a barmaid and a Catholic!' She yielded to a fresh outburst of passionate grief, and I felt that it was no time for speech.

'She' a barmaid and a Catholic!' she repeated. 'Her brother is a member of Alan's cricket club, and Alan met her first at the club's annual concert. She has a wonderful voice; and Alan, as you know, is passionately fond of music; and what with her catchy songs and her pretty face and her charming ways, she completely captivated him that night. From that time to this, it's been Biddy, Biddy, Biddy, Biddy all the time. He often goes home with her brother after cricket matches and after practice, and of course he meets her there. He brought her here one evening and we were all delighted. We thought her perfectly lovely, and felt so proud to think that Alan was in a fair way to win so charming and sensible a wife. But, of course, we had no idea then that she was a barmaid or that her people are Catholics. This is the first time she has been here since we made the discovery. It seems terrible,' she exclaimed, as she struggled with her emotion, 'but we are quite determined

that it must not be. Alan mentioned last night that she was coming to see me this afternoon and his father told him plainly that he must give her up. We have quite made up our minds that, if they insist on marrying, we will have nothing further to do with them. How could we? It would be too dreadful for anything! And yet,' she added, and added in such a way that the words seemed to intensify her anguish, 'she's such a beautiful girl: nobody could help loving her.' And she hid her face in her hands afresh.

I comforted her as best I could: advised her to do nothing precipitately, but to give time every opportunity to setting things right. 'If,' I said, 'either her occupation or her creed has tainted her mind or contaminated her spirit, she will probably say or do something that will grate upon Alan and cause him to shrink from her; or he, being of a different faith, and with a different outlook upon life, may say or do something that will fill her with repugnance; there will be a mutual recoil and they will see for themselves that their union would never do. It is so much better for them to make such discoveries on their own account than for other people to attempt to reveal these things to them. If I were you, I should make no attempt to force matters.' She thanked me and I came away.

During the next few months, I met Mrs. Blandford several times. Each time she had the same story to tell. Things were drifting along in exactly the same way.

'The extraordinary thing is,' she added, as she bade me goodbye one afternoon after a social gathering at the church, 'the extraordinary thing is that she still comes to see us—sometimes of an evening with Alan and sometimes of an afternoon by herself. She knows perfectly well that we hate the thought of any closer intimacy between Alan and herself: she is sensible enough to see that her visits are not welcome. And yet she comes! She simply will not take a rebuff. She does not come defiantly or with any undue boldness. If we have other visitors, she always keeps herself in the background. She does everything in her power to make herself agreeable and helpful. She makes us feel that she loves coming, that she is genuinely fond of us all, and that she would do anything for us. She captivates everybody. I really believe that, in her heart of hearts, Dulcie almost worships her. Mr. Blandford admits that she always dresses very tastefully, acts very modestly and talks

very sensibly. And yet we all feel, more strongly than ever, that it would never do. And we have told Alan quite frankly that it must go no further. We have even said that, if they marry, we can have nothing further to do with them. For, after all, you know, Biddy is a barmaid—a barmaid and a Catholic.'

* * *

It must have been in the month of November that the crisis came, for I distinctly remember that the rhododendrons round the lawns at 'Inglenook' were a gorgeous mass of blossoms. Alan and Biddy were engaged!

'Of course we've told them that we shall none of us be at the wedding,' explained Mr. Blandford, 'and they know perfectly well that we shall never visit them afterwards!'

'Did you tell her that?' I inquired.

'Yes,' exclaimed Mrs. Blandford, answering for her husband, 'and what do you think she said when we told her?' I confessed that I could not frame the haziest conjecture.

'Well,' she said, as though the very recollection of it still filled her with utter amazement, 'she just slipped across to me, put her arms round my neck, and looking full into my eyes, exclaimed, "Well, then, dear Mrs. Blandford, all the visiting will have to be on our side!" What can you do with a girl like that?'

Many painful days followed—days that I need not attempt to describe. Tears were plentiful at 'Inglenook' as the wedding day drew nearer—a wedding day for which no preparations were being made. I once met Biddy on the street, and, instead of giving me the usual smile—a smile full of sparkle and vivacity—she turned away her head and I saw her fumbling for her handkerchief. And the wedding day itself was the saddest, heaviest day that 'Inglenook' had ever known. Mr. Blandford went to business as usual and tried to forget. Alan, after kissing his mother and Dulcie, went off by himself. Mrs. Blandford and Dulcie scarcely spoke all day; but they kept glancing at the clock and visualizing the scenes taking place elsewhere. Ought they to have gone? They wondered. And yet, how could they! For Biddy was a barmaid—a barmaid and a Catholic! Poor Alan! Poor Biddy! Poor Everybody! Nine times out

of ten, there are tears on the face of the bride on her wedding day. The joyousness is suffused with a poignant element of pathos. But very seldom, happily, is a wedding day so strangely tinctured with sadness as was the wedding day of Alan and Biddy Blandford.

* * *

It must have been in the month of February—ten years later—that I saw Biddy last, for I distinctly remember that the red gum along Clifford Avenue was showing a glorious profusion of bloom. That February will never be forgotten in Australia. The dread scourge of pneumonic influenza was exacting terrible toll. All public buildings, even the churches, were closed: the parks and open spaces were turned into emergency hospitals: and even on the city streets you were reminded of the ravages of the pestilence by the unsightly masks that people were compelled to wear. In common with all other ministers, my hands were very full. The epidemic was spreading alarmingly and the death-rate was appalling.

Early one morning I received a message telling me that 'Inglenook' had been stricken. Mr. Blandford and Dulcie were extremely ill; indeed, Mr. Blandford's case seemed hopeless. I hurried to the home immediately after breakfast. By the time I reached the house, Mrs. Blandford herself was betraying suspicious symptoms, and was resting on a couch in the drawing-room. Biddy was in sole charge of the patients.

'Oh she's wonderful, wonderful!' Mrs. Blandford exclaimed, when we found ourselves alone with each other. 'Nobody will ever know what Biddy has been to me. For years I've never said my prayers at night without thanking God for Biddy. Whenever we've been in trouble, or had sickness in the house, she has always come at once and taken charge of everything. Last year, when poor Alan was killed in France, she came to 'Inglenook' to comfort me as though she had no heartbreak of her own. She is always so bright and so brave. When she heard that Mr. Blandford has caught the pestilence, she hurried round at once; and has nursed him—and then Dulcie—as though she herself were immune from infection. And now I'm really afraid that she'll have to nurse me.'

The apprehension proved to be well grounded. A few days

later Mrs. Blandford was fighting her fevered way though the crisis of the malady. But by that time Mr. Blandford and Dulcie were out of danger, and, happily, were soon followed on the road to convalescence by Mrs. Blandford herself. But the price had to be paid. On the evening on which Mrs. Blandford was allowed to sit up in bed for the first time, it was noticed that Biddy's eyes sparkled with more than their accustomed brilliance; there was a glow about her cheeks that, even considering her bright complexion, seemed out of harmony with her extreme weariness; she complained of a slight headache and went early to bed.

Poor Biddy followed the others into the Valley of Shadow, but, unlike the others, she returned no more.

'Biddy was a Christian if ever there was one!' Mrs. Blandford murmured, feelingly, a few days after the funeral. 'I don't know now whether she was a Protestant or a Catholic at the end. She used to come to the church with Alan and ourselves; she loved the services; and I often heard her crooning to herself the hymns. But every now and again she liked to go off by herself to St. Patrick's; and that, too, seemed to soothe and comfort her. She never talked about these things; but she put us all to shame by the beauty of her life and the sweetness of her spirit. She would never take offence, would never harbor a grievance, would never think unkindly of any one for thinking unkindly of her. I often wonder whether Alan saw all this in her in the days when, despite our opposition, he was so true to her. He certainly saw it afterwards, for, devotedly as he loved her as his sweetheart, he simply adored her as his wife. It nearly broke his heart when he enlisted and had to leave her. And now'—taking out her handkerchief—'they are together again. And I suppose'—with a sad little smile—'nobody worries that she was once a barmaid and nobody asks if she was a Catholic or a Protestant.'

Perhaps not. At any rate Biddy sleeps sweetly in a green grave not far away, a grave that is constantly beautified by the choicest blossoms from the 'Inglenook' gardens, and over her head is the simple but eloquent inscription: By their fruits ye shall know them.

Chapter 25

TED PRINGLE

From *A Tuft of Comet's Hair*

I

'What's to be done about Ted Pringle?'—that was the question, a question more easily asked than answered.

It was the quarterly meeting of the teachers of the Mosgiel Sunday School. We had made our way through a lengthy agenda paper and the hour was late. Some of the teachers had a long way to drive home and were showing unmistakable symptoms of impatience. It is under such circumstances that hasty and disastrous decisions are often registered, and I was anxious on that account to close the meeting as soon as possible. Indeed, I was actually rising to pronounce the benediction when Alec Murdoch forestalled me.

'Mr. Chairman,' he said, a trifle petulantly, 'before you close the meeting—what's to be done about Ted Pringle? Have we got to put up with him any longer?'

Here was a knotty point to have sprung upon us at this late hour! At the mere mention of Ted Pringle's name, the meeting took a fresh lease of life. A moment before, I had seen some teachers yawning, and others reaching for hats and umbrellas. But Alec's question had acted like an electric shock and revitalized everybody. For Ted Pringle was the problem of the entire staff: indeed, he was the storm-center of the whole congregation. He was a tall, thick-set boy, with ruddy cheeks, and laughing eyes, and a great mop of

curly hair. He was a born leader: he simply took charge of the boys by whom he happened to be surrounded; and, as if by magic, they all did exactly what he wanted them to do. We transferred Ted from class to class, in the hope that the personality of this teacher, or of that one, might subdue or captivate him. Jean Menzies was very frail: she looked as if a puff of wind would blow her away; and she could scarcely speak above a whisper. We put Ted in her class thinking that her very weakness would appeal to his latent chivalry; but, like so many beautiful theories, the scheme did not work: poor Jean came to the superintendent in tears, begging that Ted might be taken from her or that another teacher, capable of controlling him, be found for her class. Davie Strachan, on the other hand, was an old sailor, with sinews of steel, a face like a flint, and a voice like a foghorn. When we handed Ted over to Davie, he welcomed him into his class with a grip of the hand that made Ted squirm, and we flattered ourselves that the tiresome problem was at length solved. And, indeed, it is quite possible that, had we allowed things to work their way to a conclusion, Davie might eventually have asserted his mastery. But the trouble was that Davie invariably expressed himself in stentorian tones that rang through the building, and Ted acquired the habit of addressing his teacher in a similarly sonorous register. The consequence was that the conversations between teacher and scholar—sometimes heated, often exciting, and always interesting—held the undivided attention of the entire school, and rendered teaching in the other classes out of the question.

It had never occurred to us to discuss Ted Pringle by name at a Teacher's Meeting before; but, now that Alec Murdoch had raised the matter in this pointed and personal way, we all recognized that the question stood more directly related to the success or failure of the school than many of the formal items that we had been drearily considering.

'What's to be done about Ted Pringle?' demanded Alec Murdoch, looking fixedly at me. I had no intention of answering his question, although I was as much affected as anybody present. For, again and again, my heart had sunk within me as, from my coign of vantage in the pulpit, I had seen Ted enter the church during the singing of the second hymn and slither into the back seat. If the back seat was filled before Ted entered, it made no difference to

Ted. Such trifles never baulked him. He always did exactly what he wanted to do, and, therefore, he always sat exactly where he wanted to sit. But when he entered, and took his favorite seat in the back row, I knew that, to all intents and purposes, the service was practically over. How could I hope to impress the minds or touch the hearts of people who were continually glancing over their shoulders to see what was going on in the back row?

But, although I felt Ted Pringle to be a terrible thorn in my side, I was determined that nothing should induce me to regard Alec Murdoch's question as a personal one. After all, it was a Teachers' Meeting: it was Ted's behavior in school, and not in church, that was under review; and, although the question awakened painful memories, I tried to look as if I were as disinterested as Julius Caesar or the Man in the Moon.

'What's to be done about Ted Pringle?' Alec inquired; and, evidently thinking that speech would be superfluous, especially at that hour, he simply asked his question and resumed his seat. There was a silence, during which teachers glanced at each other meaningly, shook their heads despairingly, and generally seemed to assume the attitude that, not being good at riddles, they gave the conundrum up. I therefore turned to Alec.

'Have you anything definite to propose?' I inquired.

'Yes,' he replied, with an acerbity that indicated that he was smarting under recent wounds, 'I think he ought to be expelled.'

A concrete proposal having been made, I turned instinctively to the superintendent—who was sitting beside me—raising my eyebrows, according to my custom, as a signal that I should like to have his opinion.

'I am afraid,' he began, with evident reluctance, 'I am afraid that it is the only thing to do. It is intolerable that the discipline and effectiveness of the whole school should be sacrificed to the caprice and waywardness of one boy. But as to whether or not we are prepared to take so drastic a step tonight—that is another question.'

Glad of the opening that the superintendent's doubt had offered me, I instantly sprung to my feet.

'We are all grateful to Mr. Murdoch,' I said, 'for having brought this troublesome matter so pointedly before us; but he will recognize, I am sure, the justice of the superintendent's scruples.

We ought not to act at this late hour. The matter was not on the agenda paper; we did not come prepared to consider it; we are all very tired: let us leave it until next month, and, in the interval, I will endeavor to have a talk with Ted himself about it.' Alec agreed; I pronounced the benediction; and we were soon scattered units in the darkness.

II

The adjourned discussion was never resumed. For, the very next morning, the matter took quite a new turn. As we sat at breakfast, the front-door bell suddenly rang.

'Mr. Pringle wants to see you: he looks as if there's something wrong: I've shown him into the study.'

To the study I accordingly hastened, a little troubled lest, by some perversity of circumstance, our discussion of the previous night should have reached Mr. Pringle's ears. But he soon allayed my apprehension.

'We're in a terrible trouble about Ted,' he began, speaking with evident emotion. 'For some time he's been hankering after the sea. We didn't take it very seriously. We knew that he'd been reading a lot of stories about smugglers and pirates and corsairs, and all that kind of thing. Whenever he mentioned it, we just put him off: I used to tell him that I had something better than that in store for him. But now he's disappeared. We haven't seen him since yesterday morning. He didn't come home to his meals; but we didn't take very much notice of that: it had happened before. But he hasn't been home all night. We reported it to the police; but I thought I'd like to come and tell you. If you happen to hear anything, I'll be glad if you'll let us know.'

I heard nothing. Nobody heard anything. How Ted got away to sea remained for years an inscrutable mystery. A few months later, however, his mother received a picture postcard from Valparaiso saying that he was well and happy and that he hoped to come and see her one of these days. Then followed years of silence. A sailor who was spending a week or two with relatives in Mosgiel

said that he had crossed Ted's tracks at San Francisco. He was then on board the *Elizabeth Armstrong*, and was expecting to sail within a few weeks for Sydney. For months after this the Pringles could find only one column in the newspaper—the shipping column. They read it from top to bottom every day, hoping against hope to find some news of the *Elizabeth Armstrong*. But the ship was never mentioned. A year later we heard in a roundabout way that the *Elizabeth Armstrong* had been totally wrecked on a small island in the Pacific; but as to whether Ted Pringle was a member of her crew at the time of the disaster we could get no information at all. I happened to be at the street-corner when a little group of Mosgiel men were discussing the possibilities of the situation.

'Well,' exclaimed one of them sardonically, 'it will be a good thing for himself and everybody else if he's been killed and eaten by cannibals!'

And in that barbarous opinion several other members of the group, cherishing painful memories of Ted's earlier delinquencies, heartily concurred.

III

All this happened twenty years ago. It is wonderful how much charity springs up in the most uncharitable heart in the course of twenty years. Through the golden haze of that lengthy period, the villain of long ago looks uncommonly like a hero. You think of him as you think of the highwaymen and pirates of literature: the contemplation of their lawless exploits affords far more pleasure than pain. Sitting beside the fire on a winter's evening, I have allowed my mind to wander back into the old days at Mosgiel, and whenever the thought of Ted Pringle has taken its place in the picture, I have caught myself reflecting upon his heart-breaking antics with a smile half fond and altogether forgiving. And, since I took it for granted that his bones were bleaching around the scene of some hideous orgy on a coral island in the Pacific, I felt under no obligation to temper with justice the softer sentiments I thus indulged.

The other night, however, I was a passenger on the Sydney

express; and, as the great train sped across our vast Australian spaces, the thought of Ted Pringle was as far from my mind as the thought of Ali Baba. At a wayside station we paused for five minutes, and most of the passengers paced the platform to stretch their legs. All at once I became conscious that a tall, handsome man in a grey suit—a man whom I somehow imagined to be a commercial traveler—was eyeing me narrowly. He approached me and addressed me by name. I confessed that he had the advantage over me.

'Do you really not know me?' he said. 'Have a good look!' I accepted his invitation, but the scrutiny brought no enlightenment.

'Do you mean to say you've forgotten Ted Pringle?'

'No, indeed, I haven't,' I replied in amazement; 'I shall never forget Ted Pringle! But you're not Ted!'

The whistle blew. 'I have a reserved compartment,' he said, 'with plenty of room. Come in with us for a while.' I was only too glad to do so; and, as the train gathered pace, he was introducing me to his wife—a sweet-faced, neatly-dressed, gentle-looking lady—and his two boys, who, like himself, were attractively attired in suits of grey.

We were a happy party on the train that night. Ted, I discovered, owned a fine ship which he himself commanded. He was on his way to put his two boys at a boarding-school in Sydney before sailing with his wife for South America.

'Have you seen the old folks lately?' I inquired.

'We've just come from New Zealand now,' he replied. 'I've visited them quite a lot during the past few years. They've left Mosgiel, and I've done what I can to make them cozy in a little cottage in Dunedin. Your ears must have burned last month, for we talked enough about you, and the old Mosgiel days, in all conscience!'

'But, Ted,' I remonstrated, 'you can't possibly remember much about me and the church: I don't believe you ever listened to a single word I said!'

'My word, didn't I?' he exclaimed; and then, to my utter astonishment, he reeled off text after text on which I had preached, and repeated bits of sermons that he had remembered and I had forgotten!

'I always give the men a bit of a service on board on

Sundays,' he said, 'and you'd be surprised how often the things that you told us at Mosgiel come into those sailor-talks of mine. I wonder,' he added thoughtfully, 'I wonder if you remember a lecture you gave on Mission Work in the Congo? I dare say you thought I wasn't listening; but I felt that night that I'd give my right arm to be allowed to go out there and work with Grenfell and Comber and those fellows. Of course,' he continued, his eyes moistening slightly, 'that's impossible now: but Alf here is going in for medicine, and he says that when he's through, he's going to offer for the Congo; so the lecture may bear fruit yet.'

We resumed our reminiscences in the morning, and then, as the express steamed into Sydney, I said good-bye to Ted with far more emotions than I ever expected to cherish towards him.

Boreham and some of the congregation in Mosgiel, New Zealand. Boreham's colleagues said his church had the most shocking architecture of any Baptist church in NZ