

BANKS GEORGE LINNAEUS

THE MAKING OF WILLIAM
EDWARDS; OR, THE STORY
OF THE BRIDGE OF
BEAUTY

George Banks

**The Making of William Edwards;
or, The Story of the Bridge of Beauty**

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The Making of William Edwards; or, The Story of the Bridge of Beauty

CHAPTER I. A THUNDERSTORM

It was a sad day for Mrs. Edwards, of Eglwysilan,¹ when her well-loved husband, on his return from Llantrissant market one sultry Friday in the autumn of 1721, in attempting to cross the River Taff, failed to observe its rising waters, missed the ford, and was carried down the stream, a drowning man.

Only that morning he had driven a goat and a score of sheep across in safety, the sheep following their agile and sure-footed leader, as he sprang from one to another of the out-cropping masses of rock, which, scattered in mid-stream, served alike as stepping-stones and as indications when the river was fordable, as it generally was in a dry summer.

But the Taff, born in a marsh, and running through a deep vale, is given to rise as swiftly as the traditional Welshman's temper. Many are its seen and unseen feeders among the mountain steeps; and, although there had been but a light passing shower in sheltered hill-side Llantrissant that day, farther north a heavy thunderstorm had burst in a deluge over bogs and hills; and down from countless rills and rivulets the waters had come flashing in leaps and bounds, to swell the tribute brooks and rivers alike bore to the Taff as vassals to a sovereign.

William Edwards was as steady a man as any farmer in Glamorganshire, but whenever a group of them got together, at fair or market, there great pitchers of *cwrw da*² were certain to be also, either to cement friendship or to clinch a bargain, and the beverage was uncommonly heady.

Now bargaining was a long and thirsty process, and, although he was thrifty and the ale was dear, when Edwards had completed the sale of goat and sheep to his satisfaction, he had imbibed a fair share of the common beverage; not, however, so much as to prevent other huckstering and bargaining on account of his wife. The stockings knitted on the farm had to be sold, or bartered for needles, pins, tapes, or shoe-latchets; he had to purchase a sieve, a supply of soap and candles, a pair of Sunday shoes for his little girl, and a couple of tin cans.

By the time these were thrust into his saddle-bags, the sieve and tinware secured to the pommel of his saddle so as to balance each other above the bags, and a final draught of *cwrw* swallowed as a refresher for his journey, the afternoon had slipped nearly away, and with it one or two impatient neighbours on whom he had depended for company on the rough, circuitous road over the mountain ridge to the fords.

Rough road indeed it was, little better than a beaten track worn by men and beasts constrained to pass that way; a road unsought except in dry weather, a rugged descent from Llantrissant to the ford of the Rhonda, and then up and down again, with stones and tree-roots lying in wait to trip unwary feet; for at that period the picturesque Vale of Taff was thickly wooded and scantily populated, and the roads were little better than deep gullies or natural stairways.

His sturdy Welsh pony, however, was a thorough mountaineer, and, left to himself, jogged along without stumbling or straying, whatever the hour or the road. He took to the water and crossed the ford of the swollen Rhonda safely enough, although twilight was falling; but the evening shadows

¹ Pronounced Egloo-is-ian.

² *Cwrw da*, good ale. The *w* has the sound of *oo*; thus *cooroo*.

had deepened with every mile they trod, and grew heavier as they descended towards the larger river, with darkening woods on either hand, for there they rode through a veil of blinding mist.

The mist had been gathering and the water rising rapidly, when Owen Griffith, one of his neighbours, who had prudently quitted the market three-quarters of an hour earlier than Edwards, finding the river evidently on the rise, had deemed it only wise to trust his pony's sagacity to find a trustworthy ford rather than depend on his own eyesight.

It was quite a matter for after conjecture, but it was always supposed that the sagacious animal Edwards bestrode had grown restive and refused to take the unsafe crossing, and that he, – a man doggedly obstinate and wise in his own conceit, – unable to discern a reason for his faithful beast's rebellion, had forcibly compelled the reluctant animal to attempt the ford in spite of its resistance, as shown by hoof-marks beaten in upon the bank.

Be that as it may, the riderless horse found its way home to the woodside farm on Eglwysilan Mountain, wet, foaming, and panting; the saddle and saddle-bags, drenched with discoloured water, telling all too surely that the uneasily watching wife was a widow, her four children fatherless. In such moments the mind always grasps at the worst suggestion.

The distracted woman rushed shrieking to her nearest neighbour. Her awakened boys called after her, but she heard them not.

The alarm spread. In an incredibly short space of time, considering how far apart lay the farms, and how few were the cottage homes, a score or two of half-dressed men and barefooted women were running or riding to the rescue, if such were possible. And wherever was practicable path or foothold, lanthorns were flashing along the steep and densely wooded banks upon the swiftly running river; but though it was seen where the poor horse had contrived to scramble up the bank, there was no sign of him they sought so anxiously.

The more fortunate beast had had a narrow escape.

Not forty yards ahead the chafing Rhonda came leaping and foaming to the deathly embrace of the Taff, and in the swirl of the confluent waters all hope was lost.

Yet still the despairing widow urged the wearied explorers on; and moved by her piteous entreaties, Owen Griffith, their near neighbour, declared he would not give up the search until the farmer was found, dead or alive, if he had to go as far as Cardiff to find him. The man was ill at ease, feeling as if a little more urgency on his part might have drawn Edwards away from the market in time for safety.

His determination arrested the steps of several others who were on the point of turning back, and they joined him readily, but only on the condition that Mrs. Edwards should return home with the rest of the women, and leave the search to them. 'You will be best at home, look you! Women have no business here!' said they, unnerved by her white face and stifled sobbing.

'Yes, yes, Jane,' urged the women. 'Think you of your children, do; and come back. It's crying in the dark, and all alone they will be, yes indeed!'

And moved by the picture of her desolate children in their affright and grief, the sorrowing and agitated mother was drawn homewards, by the strong cords of maternal affection, to clasp them in her arms, and stifle her own anguish in attempts to impart the comfort she could not yet take to her own stricken heart.

She was a religious woman, with a simple, unquestioning faith in the wisdom and love of her Heavenly Father; and who shall say the effort held for her no healing balm?

If she wept, she also prayed; and although two of her children, William, not yet a three years boy, and Jonet, a girl of four, were too young to enter into the depths of her grief, or comprehend her prayers, David and Rhys,³ respectively nine and twelve, were old enough to understand, and to feel how disastrous a calamity had fallen upon them unawares.

³ Rhys, pronounced Rees.

Before midnight the three youngest had cried themselves to sleep. Only Rhys remained, with his arms around his mother's neck, to share her terrible night-watch, and wait for what day might bring; his overflowing young heart swelling with unexpressed resolves to be her shield and protector when he should grow a man.

In the grey of the morning Owen Griffith and his helpers came upon what they sought a few miles below Treforest, on the eastern bank of the river, flung ashore like a weed by the inflowing current of the Rhonda, and left there by the rapid subsidence of the temporary spate. Soberly and reverently they laid it on an extemporised litter of boughs and reeds, covering the face with Owen's coat, and slowly re-trod the miles to lay the disfigured dead down on the bed from which a hearty man had risen the preceding morn.

There is no antidote to inconsolable grief like active employment, work which exercises hand and brain and cannot be set aside. Such is the daily work on a farm; and though kindly neighbours had taken care of the poor horse and its burden, had dressed the younger children, and volunteered assistance in other small household matters, neither the cows nor the goats would submit to be milked by strange hands.

Mrs. Edwards had, fortunately, no time to indulge in grief. She was a woman of determined energy and practical piety; and after the first overwhelming outburst of natural emotion, turned to her ordinary duties as if awakened to the consciousness that all the care and responsibility of farm and family rested on her individual shoulders.

Dashing the tears from her eyes, she snatched up a milking-stool and pail, and was off up the hill-side, Rhys darting after her with a smaller stool and pail to milk the she-goats, not for the first time, but for the first time voluntarily. His initiatory lessons had been taken that summer, with his father standing over him to keep the refractory in order, whether biped or quadruped.

He had not taken kindly to the task at the time, having all a boy's fondness for play, and would rather have gone bird-nesting than goat-milking. But *now* that his father was gone – so suddenly taken from them – he, too, seemed to feel as if new duties devolved on him, and that, boy though he was, he must aim at the work of a man, and spare his widowed mother all he could.

The idea was scarcely spontaneous. He had overheard a knot of gossips lamenting that Farmer Edwards had not left a son old enough to take his place on the farm, and help his mother to rear the younger ones as in duty bound. And he had straightway resolved to prove the gossips in the wrong.

'If I am not old enough to take my father's place, I am old enough to do my duty, and I shall get older and stronger every year. They shall see what I can do to help mother; and as for my brothers and sister, am I not the eldest, and ten whole years older than William? Sure I can take care of them – at least I can try.'

If this was not absolutely the boy's colloquy, it comes near enough to its spirit. There was something of the father's masterfulness in Rhys, and, directed to noble purposes, it might serve the widow in good stead. And noble purpose may be shown in small things as in great; indeed, is stronger in the lesser, where it makes no show, than in great deeds, which make a parade and attract applause. The only danger with Rhys was that, self-inflated, he might develop an obtrusively dominant will that should override his better qualities. At present his sole desire was to relieve his overburdened mother, and protect his sister and brothers – a worthy and noble aim for a boy of his age.

But a boy reared on a small farm in those primitive days was not the helpless creature progress and modern manners have manufactured between them. Very primitive indeed was Welsh farming in the last century, primitive as the farms themselves. But no child of seven or eight was too young for work of some kind or other, whether reared in the labourer's windowless hut or on the farmer's own wide hearth. If only stone-picking, weeding, or rook-scaring, there was always something to be done, something to keep active and restless boys and girls out of mischief before they were old enough to drive the cows to pasture, or assist shepherd and husbandman.

Of school-going there was little enough; even dame-schools were as scarce in wild Wales as in rural England; but there was generally a substitute by the fireside, and the man who could not read was far less common in the little Principality than in the larger kingdom.

Still more scarce was the woman or man who could not knit. When a child was six years old, it was time to put knitting-pins into the little fingers to learn the simple stitch. And wander where you would, over the mountains or along the rough roads, you were sure to meet man or maid, on horseback or on foot, stocking-knitting with mechanical precision.

In the long winter evenings, when the only illumination was from the culm fire, the solitary candle, or homemade rushlight, knitting and spinning filled up usefully the darkened hours. And perchance then the big Welsh Bible Dr. Parry had provided for his countrymen a century before would be brought out and laid on the table close to the solitary candle, to be read aloud or spelled out by the growing boy or girl, under paternal instruction. On the Sabbath this was surely so.

Under such training it was clear that Rhys at twelve years of age would be more capable and practically helpful to his mother than a modern farmer's son, who sees the farm only in the holidays, or out of school hours, who handles tennis or cricket bat instead of spade and pitchfork, and never did a day's hard work in his young life.

When Rhys bravely resolved to work like a man, he knew what lay before him to do and to learn. Farming on a thin, unproductive stratum of soil in a mountain land is no child's play.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Is there any record of a catastrophe so great or appalling that it could not possibly have been worse?

In the first hours of her sudden bereavement, Mrs. Edwards felt as if an overwhelming flood of desolation had swept over her, and left her and her orphans helpless and hopeless. Not that her husband had been the most active spirit on the farm, but she was in no condition to reason or to weigh probabilities. She had not been wont to rely on him for advice or action, but in losing him she felt as if all was lost.

An apparently small matter roused her to the consciousness that there were depths of misery into which she had not been plunged, and that even out of her affliction she had cause to thank God for sparing a double blow.

When the drowned man had been discovered, he had been bruised and beaten against rocks and stones until his grey frieze coat was torn into shreds and tatters. But it was afterwards found that the old stocking-foot he carried as a money bag had been securely buttoned up in his breeches pocket, and the produce of his sales at the Friday's market was there intact in hard coin.

In the extremity of her grief for her one great loss she had overlooked the probability of the smaller. Not till the saturated bag was handed to her unopened did she realise what might have been.

As she poured the gold and silver out on her lap, she clasped her hands and fervently thanked God that in His wrath He had remembered mercy.

'I had forgotten that the sheep and goat had been sold to make up the half-year's rent. Yes, indeed I had. And what would become of the farm and the poor children if the rent could not be paid? Pryse, the agent, would turn us out for a better tenant than a poor widow, look you! But he shall see what a woman can do. The good God has not quite forsaken us.'

She wept again at the thought, and little William and Jonet having drawn close to her side questioning her with innocent eyes and tongues, she clasped them both in a close embrace, and, without trusting herself to answer, rose from her wooden stool and carried the recovered coin to a safe hiding-place in the big chest, her sad heart much lightened of its load.

Barefooted David, who was still petticoated – his nine years bringing no title to the dignity of week-day shoes or breeches, – ran with all speed in search of Rhys, to carry the news that a bag of money had been found in his father's pocket, and that his mother was crying over it.

Rhys was just then feeding the pigs in a stone trough, placed where they were walled in like sheep in a fold. He almost dropped the pail he was emptying, he turned round so sharply.

'Crying? What for?'

'Deed, I think it was about being turned out of the farm,' answered Davy, who had caught the words imperfectly, as he hurried out at the doorway.

Rhys looked aghast. What became of his heroic resolution to work for his brothers and sister if they left the farm?

'Turned out of the farm?' he echoed incredulously. Had not his father and grandfather been born upon it? It would be like tearing up an oak tree by the roots.

'Deed, and she said it,' replied David, as if injured by the doubt.

Down went the empty pail on the stones, and into the house strode Rhys, alternately red and white with excitement.

He could scarcely get the words out, they seemed to choke him. 'Davy says,' he began with a gasp, 'that we are to leave the farm' – he could not bring himself to say 'be turned out.'

'Nay, Rhys, not now I have all the money for the rent, thank God! If that had been lost in the river, I cannot tell what might have happened. There would be no chance of selling cows or pigs, or the oats, or anything before the rent-day, and Mr. Pryse would not wait an hour. "Out you go!" would be his word. "There's a man will give ten guineas more rent for it, and keep the land in better condition." Yes, look you, he has been saying that these three years, and now it's he will be for saying a woman will not be able to keep the hundred acres and pay my lord his forty pounds. It's poor land, so much rock and bog and wood, and he knows it, so much barren hill-side, scarcely fit to pasture the few sheep and goats. Yes, 'deed it will take hard work to make the farm pay now the husbandman is gone. Ah, yes, yes! We have had a terrible loss, Rhys, *fach*.'⁴

As she spoke the last words the poor widow's tears gushed forth again, and would not be restrained. The flowers she was strewing over the sheet-covered form of her dead fell to the floor, and she dropped on her knees beside the bed, where it was her mournful duty to watch, and hid her face with her hands as if to conceal the passion of grief she could no longer control.

Rhys was sobbing too, though he strove against it in his effort to be manly. His arm went round her heaving shoulders with an unstudied air of natural protection, and in a broken voice he begged her to be calm. Not that he was by any means calm himself, but he was feeling early the need for self-restraint.

'Don't, mother, don't,' he murmured; 'you will be making yourself ill, and then who will mind the farm or the children? I will be a good steady boy, and will work as hard almost as a man. You shall not miss father more than I can help, look you. And sure we have a terrible loss; but, mother dear, it might be worse if we did lose the farm and all, as Davy did say. You are a good farmer, so Owen Griffith do say, and you will be teaching me.'

'Yes, indeed, please God, and you shall be a good farmer too, Rhys,' sobbed she, drying her eyes on her long check apron, and giving him a look of profound trust and loving motherhood, whilst he drew himself up with a renewed sense of importance.

At that moment a figure darkened the bedroom doorway. In stepped a fresh-looking young woman with bare legs and feet, short petticoats of striped flannel, a dark blue woollen cloak, and a man's tall hat worn over a plain linen cap, white as a snowdrop, though the stray locks beneath it might have been more orderly had looking-glasses been more common. She had a bundle on her left arm, a stocking she was knitting in her hand, whilst little Willie held her fast by the other, and Jonet clung to her cloak.

'Ah, Ales,⁵ is that you?' burst from Mrs. Edwards with an evident gasp of relief. 'You was not expected back so soon. Had you heard of our loss? Is your poor mother well again?'

'Not quite well, but better, look you. She can sit up, and Mary may manage to do for her now, perhaps.' There was a dubious tone in the 'perhaps,' but she went on to say, 'Mother would not let me stay when she heard of your great trouble, after you was so kind as to let me go away to nurse her. It was not right I should stay at Caerphilly when you was being left all alone by yourself, with nobody to keep watch with you or to help at all;' and she passed into the kitchen as she spoke.

'Yes, *I'm* here, Ales,' thrust in Rhys, as he followed. 'I shall help mother now; yes, indeed!'

'You?' ejaculated Ales incredulously, whilst divesting herself of bundle, cloak, etc. 'Help's a little word and soon said, but it's not much more than the saying we will be getting from you, Rhys. You never was fond of work, whatever!'

Rhys pulled himself up as if insulted. 'You shall see,' he said loftily, and quitted the kitchen, where Mrs. Griffith was paring turnips for dinner, his chin in the air. And not another word did he vouchsafe to the young woman, his mother's hired servant. He might, by his manner, have expected her to understand his altered position and good resolution intuitively, but she only knew him as a lad

⁴ *Fach*, equivalent to the English dear.

⁵ Ales, pronounced Alis; in English, Alice.

with more liking for play than work, and expected no more from the present than from the past. Nay, perhaps less, now there was no father to drive him to his daily tasks and thrash him into industry.

It was a time of unusually painful bustle and excitement, yet there was no cheeriness about the daily tasks. Indoors there was a hush even in the scrubbing of benches, tables, and platters, almost in the dash of the churn, for was not the widow still keeping her watch by the dead – the dead who could not be buried on the third day, but must wait until coroner and jury could be called together to verify the cause of Mrs. Edwards' widowhood? Mrs. Griffith was there, alternately to help Ales with her work, and to relieve the mourner – a kind, motherly sort of woman, one to rely on in emergency.

Out of doors Rhys kept David well employed, telling him he would have to learn to be a man, directing him to do this or that with quite an elder-brotherly air of proprietorship, though not unkindly. Ales wondered what had come to him, he worked about the farm with so much more knowledge of the right thing to be done at the right time than she had given him credit for possessing.

As for poor little Jonet and William, they shrank whispering into corners out of everybody's way, or slunk out into the bit of ground that did duty for a garden, or strayed into the orchard, where they made themselves useful picking up windfall apples for the pony and the pigs, and did their best to make themselves ill by eating the unripe fruit at the same time; for although four years old Jonet was imitative in assuming a protectorate over her two years brother, she had not herself outlived a childish love for the crude and indigestible. They were, fortunately, too young to comprehend the mystery of the closed room, yet the general air of restraint affected even them, as they went about hand in hand.

The valley of the Taff has long been noted for its fertility. It was otherwise in the early years of the last century, when husbandry in Wales was so primitive that the spade did duty for the plough, and crops had to be wrung from exhausted soil wholly by hand-labour; ignorance, and old prejudice in favour of doing as their fathers had done before them, standing in the way of progress, equally with the paucity of good roads and bridges over which to convey produce.

In places the lowlands near the river were fertile; and where the stream was bordered by lofty slopes, and not hemmed in by precipitous limestone crags, they were clothed with dense woods of fir and mountain ash, oak and beech, with willows by the water edge, all more esteemed by the sparse population for their timber than for their wondrously picturesque beauty. But at the top of the mountain range eastward of the vale, and on their upper slopes, much of the ground was sour and boggy, and called for more agricultural knowledge and appliances than had found their way thither, even when this century was born.

The farm of the Edwardses was so situated on the mountain-side, and certainly enjoyed a diversity of soil capable of development in capable hands. In Eglwysilan parish it was regarded as a fairly large farm, and the house was the envy of the neighbours, though my modern readers may think there was little to envy. It had not only three rooms besides the capacious kitchen, but that kitchen could boast two glazed windows, one on either side the entrance; a very rare distinction, except in good houses or towns, so rare that not even shutters closed the apertures through which air and light found their way to the two sleeping rooms or to the long apartment in the rear, which served a variety of purposes. These were the housing of general stores, household and farming implements, a passage being kept clear from the kitchen midway through to the back door and farmyard. And this was all the isolation considered necessary for the dairy and dairy utensils, notwithstanding the purpose to which the other half of its space was devoted.

All these separate rooms were upon the ground floor. Stairs were almost unknown conveniences in the cots and farms of wild Wales. Even in the villages few were the inhabitants privileged to look down upon poorer neighbours from upper windows. Lime, however, was plentiful in Glamorganshire, and though walls were put together of roughly hewn stone, they were whitewashed both inside and out with conscientious frequency.

In no place short of a mansion was much furniture to be found. And to say that Mrs. Edwards had a well-scrubbed dresser filled with wooden platters and with mugs of Staffordshire pottery; that

she had not only a large oaken table, but a linen cloth to cover it on occasion, and that there was a chair near the chimney corner in addition to the high-backed bench, or settle, and the three-legged stools; that a spinning-wheel stood between the two bedroom doors opposite to the fireplace, and that a large oaken chest stood under one window containing the family stock of clothing, and of flannel the wheel had helped to spin, was to say that she was for her time and place a thrifty, well-to-do woman, somewhat in advance of her class.

However, the great feature of the kitchen was the expansive open fireplace, where the fire was made on a broad hearthstone, slightly raised, the inside of the chimney, which sloped upwards towards the top like a narrowing funnel, being set with stone seats for the elders of the family.

On the Tuesday following the catastrophe which had made Mrs. Edwards a widow – although all the morning there had been the trampling through of coroner and jurymen – a fierce fire of peat and fire-balls filled the whole of the hearth, and two huge iron pots like witches' cauldrons hung suspended by chains above it, bubbling and steaming. At the same time, in the large oven built into the wall on the right of the fireplace, she and her helpers had been baking spiced cake and oaten bread the whole of the morning, as if providing for a regiment of soldiers.

It was a hot day and hot work, though casements and doors stood open to let out the vaporous fumes of cookery; and had not neighbourly Mrs. Griffith come with her young daughter Cate to the assistance of Ales and her troubled mistress, the former would have been unable to relieve Rhys of his voluntary but fatiguing duty at the remorseless churn, so great, if not unusual, were the preparations for the guests expected on the morrow.

Indeed, as Mrs. Edwards said, she did not know what she could possibly have done without Owen Griffith and his wife, they had been such zealous friends to her in her great affliction.

She was not aware how the man's tender conscience stung him for leaving Edwards to return home alone from Llantrissant. He was feeling himself in some sort responsible for her bereavement. At any rate, no brother could have served her in better stead had a brother been at hand.

CHAPTER III. A BOY'S WILL

As my story concerns not the dead man, but the family he left behind, I might pass over his burial in silence, had it not been marked by peculiar customs, few traces of which remain. Mountainous and inaccessible regions retain their characteristic traits of life and language long after intercourse has fused together the differing speech and habits of dwellers on the plains, whether city or suburban.

It was the last watch-night, and neither Ales nor her mistress had been in bed for a couple of nights, the girl electing to share the widow's watch beside the closed coffin of her good master, as Rhys would still have done had his careful mother not forbidden.

But long before the grey mists of morning had risen above the tree-tops, or lifted off the mountain-side, Rhys was up and astir with them. There was no leisure for indulgence in grief. There was so much to be done and cleared away before the mournful business of the day began. There were flowers to gather to strew upon the coffin-lid, and carry to the grave. And, if the sheep and cattle out on the hill-side could find pasture for themselves, the cows and ewes must be milked, the pigs and poultry fed, or released to feed themselves.

So Rhys and Ales were off betimes, laden with empty pails; bare-legged Ales brushing the dew from the gorse and heather as she trudged along with a pitcher balanced on her head, a stool tucked under one arm, a pail on the other, her knitting, for a wonder, left behind; Rhys, by her side, swinging a large milking-pail to balance a second stool.

When they returned with laden pails to be emptied into the tall churn, the fire was aglow, the porridge ready, the younger children up and dressed in sombre suits, Davy in his first breeches, and all three stiff and uncomfortable in shoes and stockings, neighbourly Mrs. Griffith and her young daughter Cate having come upon the scene to set the afflicted and harassed widow free for the rest of the day.

Owen Griffith was also there, and by the time breakfast was over and a clearance effected, Mrs. Edwards and Rhys had changed their garments and assumed the sable hooded-cloaks prescribed for mourners. Then the table was covered with a clean homespun linen cloth, and re-set with cold beef, cake, and cheese, for all comers, along with mugs to hold the customary draught of hot ale and *abelion*, the latter a spiced decoction of elderberries and herbs, chiefly rosemary, huge pitchers of which were kept piping hot on the hearth.

Meanwhile, Owen Griffith and a companion had improvised a table of planks, and a long bench in front of the house, piling up turf and stones as supports, a proceeding William watched with wondering interest. He may have puzzled where the mugs and platters came from, and who would sit at the long boards and consume all the beef, the piles of cake, and the great cheeses set out in halves, and what the two empty bowls were for in the middle of each table.

At all events, Jonet wondered, and communicated her perplexity to David, who in turn referred to Rhys, to be answered curtly, 'Wait and see! I'm more puzzled to know what do bring Owen Griffith here, ordering about and as busy as if he was master.'

The mother could have told that a distant cousinship between Griffith and the deceased sufficed for authority to make all needful arrangements in the absence of nearer kin, and that she was extremely grateful to him for his kindness all through the trying time.

Very soon the other children had their questions answered, for guests, bidden or unsought, came trooping in from valley and mountain near and far, not by twos and threes only, but by dozens; relatives, friends, and mere acquaintances, for Edwards was a man held in high esteem. All were in their Sunday best, yet very few had so much as a bit of crape, a black kerchief, or a black pair of stockings. Their presence was supposed a sufficient token of respect.

In succession as they came began, not merely a clatter of subdued voices discussing the sad accident – which might have overtaken any of them – but a general distribution and consumption of cheese, cake, and ale flavoured with the *abelion*, which custom may have rendered palatable, the simple provisions rapidly disappearing and being replaced as fresh arrivals brought fresh appetites, sharpened by journeying through the keen morning air, and eaten in primitive fashion, each man bringing his own pocket-knife, and converting his bread into a plate to be cut up and eaten with the meat upon it.

And as the widow could not be reasonably expected to provide for so numerous and impromptu a party —*cwrw* being rather an expensive item – each partaker cast a sixpence or other coin into the bowl provided, a proceeding at which the younger children expanded their astonished eyes – all was so strange to them.

Then the crowd, both within and without the house, made way for the bearers with their heavy burden, and for the black-cloaked widow and her two eldest orphans to follow.

On account of their tender years, the roughness and distance of the road to be traversed, it had been decided to leave Jonet and William behind, in care of Ales.

But silent William had had his wondering eyes and ears open the whole of the morning; and no sooner did it dawn on his infantile comprehension that his father was being carried away in the big box, and that his mother and brothers were going away with it, than he insisted on going likewise; clung to his mother's skirts, and held fast, neither amenable to persuasion nor command to release her and remain at home with obedient Jonet.

No! He saw his mother and brothers in tears, and the bearers slowly moving away with the coffin in which his father was shut up, and in his baby-ignorance he concluded some great wrong was being done. He had been told by Ales that he would never see his father any more, and must have concluded the others were being taken away also; for when he was carried into the house by main force, he fought and struggled in Owen Griffith's strong arms, and cried with dogged persistence, 'Me will go! me shall go!'

Even when shut up close in the bedroom, he kicked at the door and screamed, 'Let me out, let me out; I will go!' until, after a while, the noise ended in a sob and a scuffle, and busy Ales concluded he had wearied himself out and fallen asleep.

When Ales, some quarter of an hour later, opened the door in compliance with Jonet's piteous entreaties, the room was deserted, and William nowhere to be found.

Kicking at the hard door had hurt his toes, in spite of his new shoes, so he turned round to try his heels. On so doing he discovered that the small window-hole was wide open. In another minute he was across the room, scrambling up on to a box lying beneath the narrow aperture in the thick wall, a look of sudden triumph on his determined round face.

He thrust out his head and beheld a long procession winding in and out of the rocky and uneven road, a multitude of high-crowned hats, some atop of women's linen caps, these rising above a medley of red and grey cloaks, striped petticoats and dark jackets crossed with small shawls, mingling with men's grey coats and blue ones; but it did not occur to the child, as it might strike us, that there was any incongruity in these vari-coloured garments on so solemn an occasion. All to him was new. He had never seen such a concourse of people before; his sole idea was that his mother and his brothers were being borne away after his father, and that he was bound to overtake and bring them back.

The window was not much more than a yard from the ground outside, but it seemed far to so young a child. However, he managed to clamber up in some way, and to drop outside on his feet, and, after a sly glance round to see that the coast was clear, he trotted off as fast as his sturdy little legs would carry him, and out at a narrow gap in the stone wall, which did duty for a gateway; and as the descending procession moved but slowly, and there were occasional stoppages for change of bearers, he contrived to keep the rear of it in sight.

Ere long his wood-soled shoes and stockings chafed and cramped his feet, and he sat down on a wayside stone to remove them. When he looked up, the last hat had disappeared, but, nothing daunted, he set off again at a run, carrying his shoes and stockings in his hands, and ere long caught sight of the nodding hats at a turn of the tortuous road.

He had run nearly a mile, and was getting breathless and footsore, but he went panting forward, with no thought of giving in; but soon he began to call out for some one to stop, and tears ran coursing down his chubby cheeks. Still he trotted on for another half mile or so; but the pace became slower, the tears ran faster, and when the tail of the procession again disappeared he sobbed aloud, beset with fears.

At this juncture a man leaning over a wall, who had followed the long train with his eyes, caught sight of the woe-begone child, in its black frock, limping painfully along, and asked what he was doing there, and what he was crying for.

The answer was not very coherent or articulate, but the man was sharp as he was good-natured. In a very short time he was out in the road, with William Edwards mounted on a sleek ass, following in the wake of the mourners, who after a short distance on the level began to ascend the lofty hill on the brow of which, like an eagle on its eyrie, stood Eglwysilan's⁶ ancient church, with the modest vicarage beside it, isolated from the widely scattered parishioners, and almost inaccessible in foul or wintry weather.

Local tradition assigned to this time-worn edifice a date coeval with the apostles. But suppose we allow the apostles to have slept for nearly three hundred years, and assign to our British St. Helena (or Elian), the church-founding mother of Constantine, the credit of selecting the breezy site for a structure to which she stands sponsor, we still accredit the long-bodied, square-towered, and small-windowed church with a most venerable antiquity, and solid masonry which might make modern architects blush for shame.

No sooner were adventurous William's fears of being left behind set at rest by overtaking the slow pedestrians of the long train, than his spirits revived. He began to look about him, and to question the kind cottager, 'What's this?' or, 'What's that?'

Of course he spoke in Welsh, as did all the people. I but render their language into English for my readers.

From his elevated seat he could overlook low walls, and glancing down through the autumnal woods on his left, where the red ash-berries shone temptingly bright against the russet – leaved oak and yellowing beech, caught glimpses here and there of the shining river that had proved so treacherously cruel to his poor father. But neither red berries nor glancing river had such powerful attractions for him as the stupendous pile whence boomed the tolling bell – the 'church' of which he had heard so oft, but never seen.

He had gone with his sister and brothers to the wooded glen which bounded their own farm on the north, there to help, or hinder, the gathering of ash-berries and acorns; but of human habitations he had seen nothing hitherto so large as his own home.

He seemed absolutely fascinated by the grey lichen-covered church, and its low massive square tower, which he took for a huge chimney, and the nearer they drew to it the greater became his absorption.

Being told, in answer to a query, 'People do go there to say prayers,' he asked again, 'Why for? We say prayers at home.' But though the man scratched his tangled red locks, no adequate reply was forthcoming.

At that moment there was a halt at the arched lych-gate. All the men took off their hats, for the white-robed vicar had come to lead the way into the church.

⁶ Or, Eglwys-elian.

The boy, who had no hat to remove, could only look on and listen in blank astonishment, understanding nothing of the solemn ceremony, but awed by the mysterious proceedings, and the unfamiliar aspect of the, to him, vast interior.

It was not until he beheld the coffin lowered into the 'big hole' that he screamed out, and was not to be pacified, though Owen Griffith stole gently away from the grave-side and took him in his arms for the second time that day.

The ceremony was soon over, and nothing heard but the sobbing of the mourners and the dropping of small coin into the shovel the sexton held forth for their reception; for thus were the fees of the vicar and himself paid by general contribution, and not merely by the bereaved relatives. It was an old custom, seldom better observed than on this occasion; for of the motley multitude drawn thither to show their esteem for the dead and their sympathy with his family, two-thirds were wofully poor, had travelled far, and lost a day's earnings to be there; but few so poor as to pass the sexton's spade without a tributary coin, however small. Set it, therefore, to their credit, and also that all were decently clad, and flaunted no rags, if they had no crape to mourn in. Custom is its own law, and respect is not shown by the colour of a coat.

But what of the little fellow who had found his way thither, and created so much consternation by his unseemly interruption?

CHAPTER IV. PAYING THE RENT

"Deed to goodness! that boy's rightly named, for he's Will by name and will by nature!" said Ales when the child was brought home, showing no remorse for the trick he had played her, and little but indifference to the chiding of his mother or Rhys.

'Me fought they was take you all away. Me said me would go. Me *did* go!' was all the excuse they could extract from him.

He had made his return home triumphantly on the donkey of his stranger friend, a peat-cutter named Robert Jones, and was not at all disposed for humiliation. On the contrary, he was rather proud of his victory, and excited by his introduction to new scenes.

The man, who was hospitably received and entertained, along with a numerous party of 'cousins,' for whose refecton boiled beef and *cwrw da* had been again set out, was quite ready to recount where and how he had picked up the child, and expressed his surprise at the resolute endurance that had carried him so far on a stony, unknown road, no less than the strong affection which had overpowered the little fellow's natural fears and sense of fatigue or pain.

He repeated with much humour some of the boy's queer questions and sayings, promising to give him another donkey-ride some day. And finally, when taking his departure, Robert Jones patted the boy's brown head, and called him 'a little hero!' as the child ran past with Jonet.

This was not very wise, for the tone of admiration was ill calculated to repress the child's early developed strength of will, or to soothe the ruffled feelings of Rhys on finding his own superlative good conduct apparently unappreciated, and William's wilful disobedience thus applauded.

His chagrin did not escape the notice of the man, who, going round the country as he did, selling peat and culm,⁷ had frequent opportunities for the study of human nature.

'Yes, look you,' cried he from the doorway, as he saw a scornful curl on the lip of Rhys, 'your little brother will be greater than any of you some day – head of the house perhaps.'

'He never will. I'm eldest, and then there's Davy. *He's* a baby!' was Rhys' indignant protest.

'A great good man, or a great bad one, Robert Jones?' called out Ales after the turf-cutter, an old acquaintance of hers. She had not forgiven William the fright he had caused by his escapade.

'Indeed, sure, and that depends on what you make of him among you,' the peat-cutter called back over his shoulder, ere he bestrode his donkey and went off.

'The man is right, Jane Edwards,' said Owen Griffith then to the widow; 'there do be great capacities for good or evil in Willem; he will need a firm hand to control him.'

'Ah, sure,' she sighed deeply, her grey eyes filling with tears, 'and now the firm hand is gone.'

'Ah, 'deed for sure! more's the pity!' was echoed round the board.

Rhys alone made no remark; but he set his lips close over his teeth, and tightened his grip on his knife-handle, looking as if he thought *his* hand firm enough to control his baby-brother, and as if *he* meant to curb the wilful little one, whatever others might do. Ales saw it, if the mother did not.

Meanwhile William, unaware of his eldest brother's paternal intentions, was seated under an apple-tree with Jonet, struggling for words to give expression to all the wonders he had seen and heard that day, the 'big house with the big chimney' more than all; whilst Davy, leaning listlessly against the tree trunk, as if fatigued with his long walk, crammed his mouth with bread and cheese, and smiled complacently at the youngster's first impressions of things familiarity had deprived of attraction for him, though over some he looked serious enough.

⁷ Culm, the dust of hard coal, used for fuel when mixed with clay and peat.

Five miles away on the south-east from the mountain spur on which the Edwards' family had held a farm for more than a century, lay, in a broad plain among barren hills, the grand old ruins of Caerphilly Castle, the ancient stronghold of the Despencers, and the very small straggling market town it overshadowed, a town which had either gone to ruin or ceased to grow, since the great castle had been despoiled and tenantless.

It had ceased to be a borough in King Henry VIII.'s time, but still it clung to its fair and market, and thither came farmers and their wives with their produce; miners or their wives, and the servants from the few great houses thereabouts, as buyers. And there, too, came, at stated periods, with his string of pack-horses, the travelling collector of the hand-made goods of the district, such as knitted hosiery, linen checks, woollen shawls, flannels, blankets, all spun and woven in farms and cottages scattered among the mountains. He was the medium between the English merchant and the poor producer, who in the days when there were neither canals nor railroads, nor any facilities for swift conveyance of goods or people, could otherwise have found no market for his wares. As it was, the weaver might probably have obtained better prices at Cardiff, but the miles of extra distance had to be calculated in the reckoning.

Early on the Thursday morning Mrs. Edwards, with a grey duffle⁸ cloak over her short black linsey⁹ gown, and a black, low-crowned man's hat above her white linen cap, her healthy face pale and worn with the agitation of the week, stood by her egg and butter basket, debating whether she should go to the market alone, or yield to the entreaty of Rhys and take him along with her.

It was likewise the rent-day. Mr. Pryse, the noble landowner's steward, condescendingly rode all the way from Cardiff to Caerphilly to meet his lord's tenantry at the little inn, 'The Cross Keys,' and woe betide the poor unfortunate who failed to put in an appearance, or to bring the full quota of coin.

She was in no predicament of that kind, although she felt she might have been; but, hitherto, Edwards had always paid the rent himself, even if she had borne him company, and she rather shrank from her first encounter with the disagreeable agent.

'You had better let me go, mother. Mr. Pryse will find that you are not quite alone, and may be more civil when he sees how big and strong I am, whatever,' urged Rhys.

(Mr. Pryse was a little, wizened, cantankerous fellow, with a skin like shrivelled parchment.)

Ales put in her word. "Deed, mistress, you had best take the boy. A little stick is better than no stick in a fight."

Ales had settled the question with this last remark.

'Well, perhaps it's best to be having a witness when you deal with queer folk,' assented her mistress; and Rhys had permission to scuffle off and slip on his black short-tailed jacket and breeches, so as to look his best and bravest. He was a sturdy, well-grown lad for his years, with a firm chin and fearless grey eyes, and whether it was fancy or reality his mother thought him taller in his new clothes.

He certainly was developing rapidly; for no sooner was the shaggy pony jogging along with its double load, Mrs. Edwards in front with her basket resting on a bag of wool she had combed and spun, than he begun to expatiate on the necessity there was now for him to learn how to go to market, and buy and sell, if he was to be a real help to her. He 'could not be learning too much or too soon,' he said, and was not contradicted, though a week earlier she would have laughed at him.

The road wound in and out among the hills, where the abundant waxen blossoms of the cross-leaved heath were fast losing their delicate blush and fading with the season, and the rosettes of the sundew had forgotten their dead florets a month or more. The very bracken was turning brown and husky, and the roadway was strewn with yellow and russet leaves that were whirled hither and thither by the wind or were trodden into the earth by unrelenting hoofs.

⁸ Duffle, made both in scarlet and grey, was a very thick, close-grained woollen cloth, its upper surface covered with pin-head curly knots. It was almost waterproof.

⁹ Linsey-woolsey, a mixture of linen and woollen, is still in use.

For it was also the first October fair, and there was no lack of company by the way. Owen Griffith, farmer and weaver, had joined them early with a great pack of flannel across his mare; and from almost every fold of the hills came one or more on foot or horseback to swell the general stream, every one, male or female, knitting along the road. The grimy collier and the swart digger of tin and iron hailed each other by the way, and the widow had many a respectful salutation as they jogged along, and answered many an inquiry about the boy behind her.

Her first business when they reached Caerphilly was to get over her ordeal with Mr. Pryse, Griffith kindly taking charge of her horse and commodities.

The narrow entrance to the inn was crowded with tenants on their way to the important deputy's room or from it, but all were ready with natural politeness to make way for William Edwards' widow. Mr. Pryse might have taken a lesson from men of lesser degree.

From the table by the window where he sat, with an inkhorn and papers before him, small piles of coin at his right hand, he looked up.

Rhys had taken off his hat; the steward, to assert his superiority, kept his upon his head.

'So I hear you're a widow, Mrs. Edwards,' was his abrupt salutation. 'The farmer could not see his way home, I'm told, and so got drowned. Blind drunk, I suppose?' A supercilious lift of his narrow shoulders emphasised his brutal comment.

Rhys flamed up. 'No, sir; my father *never* got drunk. He could not see for the mist, and the flood carried him away. If he had been drunk, sir, he could not have crossed the Rhonda ford.'

If Mrs. Edwards had been shocked by the steward's unfeeling rudeness, now she feared her farm was in peril, and began to wish she had left Rhys outside.

With half-shut eyes, Mr. Pryse scanned the impetuous boy from head to foot curiously. Ignoring the warm defence of a dead father, he drew his sinister brows together, and asked curtly —

'That your son?'

'Deed, yes, sir.'

'How old is he?'

'Twelve last March, sir.'

An unpleasant smile thinned the thin lips that asked again —

'Your eldest?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Humph! And do you expect to manage the farm with only *his* help?'

'Not altogether, sir. I've' —

'What?' he interrupted. 'Come to give it up?'

'No,' said the widow firmly. 'I have come to pay the rent. I can hire a man. But *I* shall be the farmer, please God.'

She counted out the money on the table as she spoke, the fire in her eyes burning up the tears.

'And what sort of a farmer will *you* make?' he replied with a sneer. 'You'd better give up the holding at once.'

'You'd better wait and see, sir. When I cannot pay the rent I may give in, not before. I am wanting the receipt, look you.'

'Humph! Oh, ah, the receipt, sure!'

Had he counted on her being so ignorant, or simple, or careless as to pay rent and take no receipt, his quill pen went squeaking over the paper so reluctantly? At all events he watched her narrowly through his slits of eyes as she took it up and read it carefully over, before she folded it up and stowed it away in her needle-book for safe carriage in her capacious pocket.

He was not quite so confident of her incapacity for management when she left with a brief 'Good-morning,' and was followed by her son, who put on his hat and said never a word. He was wise, for if he had said anything there would have been unpleasantness.

So there would have been had he heard the growl that followed them. 'Humph! the young cub's as hot and unmannerly as his pig-headed lout of a father! but he'll get his nails cut when the widow marries again, indeed will he.'

'Mother, does Mr. Pryse ever cheat any one? I don't think he wanted you to have that receipt you had to be asking for,' whispered Rhys when they got outside. 'I felt as if I'd like to knock him down, 'deed I did.'

'Hush, Rhys,' and the widow looked round, afraid of listeners; 'you must not say that. He's a very hard man, and nobody does be liking him much, but I never heard of his really cheating any one. You must be very careful not to offend him. Your poor father did it once, and he has owed us a grudge ever since.'

'Then he is a bad man, and I shall hate him for the wicked words he said of father.'

Owen Griffith was waiting, and brief was the widow's opportunity to impress on Rhys the sin and danger of fostering hatred. As brief was the influence on him. Mr. Pryse, apart from the insult to his father's memory, had touched the sensitive nerve of his own sprouting self-sufficiency, and shown, so the boy thought, a tendency to overreach his mother; and, without any analysis of his own motives, Rhys had conceived on the spot an unconquerable aversion to the unprepossessing steward.

When Owen Griffith's turn came, Mr. Pryse was, for him, unusually bland and gracious, much interested in his small holding and the welfare of his family, and *incidentally* interested in his near neighbours, the family so suddenly deprived of its head. But though he passed the weaving farmer through a very fine sieve, he got nothing for his pains that could be laid up against either the drowned man or the capable widow.

So capable, that she had disposed of her wool, her butter and eggs, sold a quantity of oats from a sample, hired a trustworthy young man named Evan Evans for the farm, made her own purchases, called to see the rheumatic mother of Ales, who lived in a small cot built within the very ruins of the castle, exchanged messages and Christian sympathy with the old dame, and was refreshed and ready for her return home with Rhys long before Owen or his friends thought of stirring.

And home they got whilst there was light to pick their way, though clouds had been gathering in the south-west, and the first drops of a heavy downpour caught them as they neared the farm. They were welcomed by the joyous shouts of the little ones, and the assurance of Ales that they had all of them been 'as good as gold,' and well deserved the gingerbread brought home for them. Even William, of whom there had been some doubts, accepted the 'going to market' as a common occurrence, and had given her very little trouble, though he had exacted a promise that she would take him some day to see 'the great big house, with the big chimney, that they called the church.'

CHAPTER V. THE NEW INMATE

The rain was still coming down with steady persistence when, two hours later, Evan Evans lifted the great wooden latch of Brookside Farm, and entered the large kitchen with a 'God save you' for greeting.

Ales, who was giving the last stir to something bubbling in an iron pot on the fire, whence came a steaming savour of leeks, turned round sharply to see what sort of a young fellow had come into the house as an inmate, and seeing, returned his salutation, as did the two lads waiting for their supper.

What she saw was a strong-limbed young man, about three or four and twenty, with a good-humoured smile upon his face, as if a drenched coat and muddy nether garments were quite minor discomforts. He carried a lighted lanthorn in one hand, and a bundle slung on a stick over his shoulder.

'If you're Evan Evans,' said she, 'you'd best take off your coat, and sit down by the fire to get dry,' a corresponding smile on her face sufficing for a welcome, and indicating her content with the sample as presented.

As if to ensure her good graces, his first act was to step across the floor, and with one strong brown hand lift from the chimney-hook the heavy broth-pot, on the handle of which the girl had just laid both of hers.

'Good for you, Evan Evans; may you be always as ready,' said she, showing her firm white teeth, and hastening to ladle out the broth the boiled beef had supplied.

'Always ready for a good supper,' was the prompt reply. 'One does not always get broth every day.'

Meat was not often boiled for broth then on small farms. Indeed, was never cooked except on rare occasions.

At that moment Mrs. Edwards came in from what we may call the 'dairy' in the rear.

'I did not expect you to-night,' said she, 'but it is well you are here.'

'Sure and indeed, ma'am, you would not have me come on a Friday, and I was not myself like to come on a Saturday, and I thought you would want me before the Monday, look you.'

'Why not Saturday?' interrupted Rhys, waiting impatiently for his broth.

'Sure and "Saturday's flitting is a short sitting" my Irish grandmother was used to say, and she was a wise woman,' answered the young man gravely.

Superstition was so widespread and general, that no one uttered a word of doubt or dissent to either proposition, but Mrs. Edwards remarked, "Deed and it's quite as well you came. We have lost a week, and it's time some of the roots was out of the ground. It will be soft for the digging after the rain.'

'Do you be having any potatoes among your crops?' he asked then over his steaming bowl of thick broth.

"Deed, no; Edwards' (a sigh) 'said they was only for the gentry to grow in their gardens.'

'Then I would have you try them next year. The head man at Castella says they was the most profitable crop he had on the land. They was good for the cows and the hogs if he had any to spare from the family table. He was be going to plough half an acre of ground for them.'

'Plough? What's that?' questioned Rhys, to whom the very word was unknown.

Evan explained to more than one attentive listener.

'Ah, well,' said Mrs. Edwards, when he had done. 'Where I was in England, every farmer did plough his fields. And my own father used to be saying that the laws King Howel the Good did be making nearly eight hundred years ago, would not allow any man to be a farmer unless he could make his own plough, as well as guide it. But there did be only wooden ploughs in those days, and they did

get knocked to bits on the stony ground among the mountains of wild Wales, and they did get out of use, whatever. I did want to have a good strong plough here, but Edwards was always be saying the spade was good enough for him. His father and his grandfather before him had dug every rood of the land with the spade, and what was good enough for them was good enough for him.'

'Good enough's all very well where there's never a better,' thrust in go-ahead Ales, with the freedom of the time. 'You didn't be thinking your grandmother's distaff good enough for you when you bought that spinning-wheel.'

Both Evan and Rhys looked up from their half-empty bowls across the table at Ales, as if struck by her pertinent shrewdness.

'Indeed, Ales, I did not; nor did I think holes that let in the wind and weather along with the light good enough. But till the grandfather did die of rheumatics there could be no glass windows. And I did not think it good for the pigs to run loose, rooting up my garden and destroying what they could not eat, but there has never been a sty built to this day.'

'And what's a sty?' asked Rhys.

'A house for the hogs.'

Rhys laughed. 'Why, mother, who ever did see pigs with a house of their own? All pigs run loose in the woods. Lewis did say to me he never saw any but ours shut up in a fold like sheep.'

'Never mind Lewis. He has never gone far from Eglwysilan. If he had been in England as I was before I married, he would have been seeing pig-styes on every farm. But there be plenty in Wales, and Evan will set up one here very soon.'

'Yes, indeed,' was the man's hearty response.

There was some further talk over work to be done, and how it was to be done, before Evan followed Rhys to bed, neither having a word to say against overcrowding, although David was there before them.

And then Mrs. Edwards and Ales, comparing notes, agreed that she had hired a very capable man.

It might have been said with equal propriety that the widow had shown her own capability in the choice of a farm-servant who would live in close companionship with her fatherless sons.

Over the board set forth with funeral meats she had named her want among the assembled relatives, and then had ensued a warm controversy on the merits of various men likely to be at the Caerphilly hirings.

Some one had named Evan Evans. Thereupon arose a general outcry that he would ruin the farm with the notions he had picked up at Castella, where there was an English farm-bailiff. It was admitted that he was hard-working, honest, sober, and religious, but all these were as dust in the balance compared with the crime of departing from the old ways, and preferring new methods of husbandry.

She had listened, making no comments. But she had hired the young fellow the more readily for those very detractions. She had not found the old ways pleasant or profitable. She meant to show Mr. Pryse what good farming could do for but indifferent land. And she counted on Evan's religious principles as warrants for the example he would set before her growing boys.

The hiring was for the year, and could only be terminated by mutual agreement. At the same time it was renewable from year to year, and sometimes both men and maids remained with the same master or mistress half their lives. If any breach of contract occurred, the law was very strict and severe. A prison awaited the servant absent without leave, or wilfully refractory, and heavy fines the masters who ill-treated the servants so hired. Such cases were not frequent, but they did occur at intervals.

Though the sky was clear, the rain was still dripping from the eaves, and had worn little runnels in the soil and between the grey stones on its way down hill to swell the noisy woodland brook,

when Evan and the boys turned out of their close and darkened bedroom in the morning, and Rhys volunteered to show the former over the farm before the others were up.

"Deed, no," said the man, "that do be your mother's place. She might not be liking us to make so free, whatever. We can make up the fire, and set on the porridge-pot for Ales, to lose no time. Where are the fire-balls kept?"

This was a check to the boy's newly-born importance. Not choosing to wait upon the man, he ordered Davy to fetch the fire-balls, and marched out at the back in some dudgeon. Meanwhile, bidable Davy brought the fire-balls. Evan, all unconscious of the young master's wounded dignity, fanned the smouldering peat on the hearth to a glow, and had a clear fire under the black pot when Ales and her mistress came upon the scene, leaving Jonet and William still asleep.

The morning ablutions of Evan and the two elder boys were performed in the open air, at a spring which gushed from the stony mountain-side into a natural water-worn basin; Mrs. Edwards and Ales in the nondescript apartment in the rear, there being little time or ceremony wasted in the operation.

The rough-and-ready toilette completed, Ales went back to the kitchen; and the sun having just risen above the mountain-top to waken up bird and beast, and turn the lingering rain-drops into fairy gems, Mrs. Edwards herself led Evan over the primitive homestead, from the rude stabling and cowshed, where the fowls roosted overhead, to the dilapidated thing they called a barn, and the sodden farmyard, where a huge sow and her brood of piglings lay wallowing in the mire.

Two years earlier the young man would have looked on all with complacency as the common state of things; but then he could only shake his head and coincide with his new mistress that there was room for improvements that would require time, energy, and some outlay. They had looked into the orchard, and at the stone fences, and, the survey over, came in at the front, where Mrs. Edwards had done her ineffectual best to copy an English garden for herbs and flowers, and to keep out pigs, poultry, and goats.

By this time Ales and offended Rhys were back from milking, the two little ones were washed and dressed, and the porridge was ready for pouring out, quiet Davy having lent a hand wherever needed, without any fuss or assumption. He was always ready to fetch and carry at any one's bidding, and was seldom allowed to sit still. It was he who had brought water from the spring to wash the younger ones, and emptied it when used; he who had laid wooden bowls and spoons on the table and brought in the great brown pitcher of milk, and was lifting William to his seat at the table when his mother and Evan came in at the door. Just docile Davy, of whom nobody made much account either to praise or blame.

Rhys, who had not yet recovered his composure, had already taken his seat at the table in silent displeasure, and took no note of their entrance, but both Jonet and William stared hard at the strange man, the former shyly, the latter with open-mouthed wonder, which he put into words.

"Who's 'oo?" he wanted to know when Evan drew his stool to the table beside him.

Being answered pleasantly, he rained childish questions thick and fast on the 'strange man,' all relative to his presence there, and was barely silenced when grace was said over the hot porridge. There had been so many strange men coming and going in the past week that he wondered if Evan had been left behind. His queries only ceased with a scalded mouth.

"If you want to learn farming, Rhys, you had better come with Evan and me. We are going over the fields to settle what is best to be done," said his mother when breakfast was over.

Had his mother asked him to go along with *her* to settle what had best to be done, and how, he would have risen with alacrity to share her cares and counsels, but much as he had professed his desire to learn he did not want Evan Evans for a teacher. Had not his interest and curiosity been excited overnight, he might have lingered behind, so sore was he from the morning's rebuff. As it was he rose but sullenly to obey.

"May I come?" asked Davy.

"Deed, no. You will be wanted here. Get your knitting and mind Jonet and Willem."

The peremptory reply served for both Davy and Jonet, though the latter did put a pouting finger to her lips. But William had ideas and a will of his own.

'Me go with 'oo!' 'Me must go!' 'Me *will* go!' 'Man, take me!' were his persistent iterations, while his sturdy bare legs and feet went pattering after his elders over the rain-washed stones, and he struggled with all his little might against the attempts of Rhys to force him back.

Their wills were equally strong, but their strength was not. No doubt Rhys clutched the tender arms too tightly, for William screamed and cried out —

"Oo hurt me; 'oo hurt me."

Evan, who had reached the gateway with Mrs. Edwards, turned back, saying pitifully, 'Don't be hurting the little man. If your mother do be willing to let him go, I will carry him on my shoulders, look you.'

In another minute, triumphantly, masterful William was mounted on the low stone wall, on his way to the big man's shoulders, his mother smiling a passive consent, whilst Rhys bit his under lip and clenched his hands tightly in ill-concealed chagrin.

It was the second time that morning Evan Evans, the hired man, had thwarted him, his father's first-born. Rhys, in his own opinion, had ceased to be a boy. He had quite decided that he was to be his mother's right-hand man, and that they would manage the farm between them, with underlings of course, and here was this great interloper come and thrusting him into the background.

It was with no good will he followed over grass land and arable, over the fallow and on to the high moorland, where the cows ruminated among the tall grasses, and the sheep nibbled close to the ground the sweet morsels the cows had left, and the omnivorous goats browsed on heather or anything else in the way of vegetation. He heard them talk of the carrots and other roots to be dug up and housed at once, of the lime and farm manure to be laid on this field or that, and the suitable crops to be raised; but though he had a crude perception that Evan was a better farmer than his father, he sullenly resented the change in contemplation. All the more, perhaps, because his mother called for his attention, with 'You hear this, Rhys?' 'Yes, Rhys; indeed, that will be best.'

He gloomed, whilst William, released from his perch, ran hither and thither in high glee, chasing away the rooks and water-wagtails that were, unsuspectingly, doing the farmer good service.

CHAPTER VI. LOST

It is difficult in these days of chemistry, steam, and mechanical contrivances for reducing labour – if not for dispensing with it altogether – to realise the difficulties attending the farmer in wild mountainous districts, far removed from the centres of civilisation, and unacquainted with the agricultural implements and appliances even then in use in more favoured districts. Places where there were no carts and no proper roads, and where the ascents and descents were too abrupt for anything but a biped or a mule; where every acre of the cultivated mountain or moorland had to be turned over with the spade, and every particle of manure laid on the land had to be carried thither in baskets strapped on human shoulders, or in panniers borne by ass or mule.

Yet, such were the difficulties Mrs. Edwards and other Welsh farmers had to contend with even up to the present century, the moorland farmers of Cumberland and the North-West Riding of Yorkshire being somewhat similarly situated.

The loss of a whole week's labour at the beginning of October was a serious detriment. Even Rhys knew that, and finding that he was to take his instructions from his mother and not from Evan, he smothered his ill-humour and buckled to in earnest, though his brows contracted when a new form of labour was suggested to him.

'Rhys, do you think you could cut down the bracken at the edge of the wood?' asked his mother dubiously.

'Yes, surely, I can cut it. Did I not help to reap the oats? But why should it be cut?'

'Evan says it will save straw in the farmyard, and should be stacked for bedding for the pigs and cattle before it do be too late. And after it has served the beasts, it will be better for some of the land than lime.'

'Deed, an' Evan do seem mighty clever! Houses and bedding for pigs indeed!'

'Yes, indeed, Rhys, and I am not too proud or too old to learn from him. Please God, he will be helping us to keep the farm in spite of Mr. Pryse.'

Not another word of scorn fell from the boy's lips.

Bidding Lewis, the shepherd's son, follow with Breint, the pony, to carry home the fern, as instructed by his mother, he, with a sickle over his arm, took his way across a grassy slope towards the steep woodland, stepping alongside the musical runnel the gushing hill-side spring sent, as overflow from a huge stone trough or basin, across the land and down the incline to join the tumbling brook from which the farm derived its name. The tawny brook itself had its source high up in the peaty moss on the mountain-top, and had worn, or found, a channel in a narrow cleft between precipitous rocks, whose seamy sides barely afforded foothold for fir and larch. Yet widening and deepening into a picturesque glen, the ash and the elder hung out their red or purple-black berries over the noisy and tumbling watercourse, and the sturdy trunks of oak and beech uprose and spread out leafy arms to shade it from the too intrusive westering sun, dropping in a ripe acorn or a triangular nut quietly now and then, to float away and fructify in a future season far from the parent tree.

It was otherwise when the wild north-east winds came rushing and roaring down the glen, for then ripe or unripe acorns and prickly mast were torn rudely away along with shoals of russet leaves and flung to the ground as offerings to the hogs and omnivorous goats, the brook coming in for its share, as well as the fringe of feathery ferns.

The larger portion of the farm lands were on the steep but undulating uplands above the white homestead, the more fertile, including the orchard and the garden-plot, lying below.

Bordered on either side by rough stone fences, and separating the grass land from these, a wider well-trodden path or road, which the flaky character of the stony ground converted into a natural

succession of broad shallow steps, trended obliquely from the house to the level or main road such as it was. Across this, some two hundred yards farther north, the simple brook spread itself out and chafed at the stepping-stones which barred its passage to deeper woods and the great river that would swallow it up. Just as some thoughtless youth rushes from the safe shelter of a home too narrow for his ambition, and plunging into the vortex of the untried world is lost for ever.

Some thirty or forty paces beyond the shallow brook stood the low cottage of Owen Griffith, whitewashed like the larger farm above. Then the lane took a turn and was crossed by intersecting roads perplexing to strange travellers.

The outskirts of a flourishing and busy town now cover much of the land I have described so carefully. Even the lanes and highways have undergone changes since the Edwardses held Brookside Farm and traversed them.

On that sunny October forenoon, while Rhys and Lewis cut down fern on the borders of the wood, and Evan plied his spade to turn over the stubble in good furrows higher up the hill, Mrs. Edwards midway, like a true Welsh farmer's wife, resolutely dug up the long-rooted, tenacious carrots, sparing not her toil, whilst Davy (again in petticoats) and even four-year-old Jonet freed them from the loosened earth, and cast them into wicker baskets for Ales to carry from the field to the barn, poised on her head. The basket was not light when full, but she stepped along with ease and grace, knitting as she went or came, only tucking the rapidly increasing stocking in her girdling apron-string whilst she emptied her load, or changed an empty basket for a full one.

At first, imitative William insisted on helping, or hindering, Davy and Jonet, and for a while was as busy as the rest. Then he began to trot beside Ales as she went to and fro. After a time the little bare legs grew weary, and when the toilers rested on upturned baskets, to take their noontide meal of oaten cake and buttermilk, he was almost too sleepy to eat or drink, and, resting his sunny head against his mother's knee, fell off into a doze.

Seeing that, Ales promptly lifted him up in her strong arms, and, carrying him to the farm, laid him on his mother's bed and left him there, as she thought, secure from harm.

Once or twice, after emptying her baskets in the barn, she came down to the house and found him sleeping peacefully. So an hour and a half must have slipped by, perhaps more, when turning in to look at her charge, she found the room vacant.

Still, she was beset by no apprehensions of ill. She made up the smouldering fire, and did one or two little household matters before she went back to the field with her empty basket, nothing doubting but she would find the boy with his mother. He knew his way about the farm.

'Is not Willem with you?' she cried out as she neared the group in the field. 'He is not in bed.'

'Not in bed?' echoed his mother, but without alarm. "Deed then, he will have gone to Evan or to Rhys. That will be it. He will have met Lewis with the pony, and got a ride in one of the empty panniers.'

'Sure, and that's most like.'

But on her next journey to the barn she saw Lewis bringing up the pony laden with the panniers of bracken, but no child. Hastily ridding herself of her load, she waited until he came near. Then she called out —

'Have you seen Willem?'

"Deed, no! Is he lost again?" came back in reply.

'Lost? Name o' goodness, I hope not! Mistress will go distracted if he is. Empty your bracken, and keep a look-out; I'm off up the hill to Evan.'

And away she sped at flying speed, straight as an arrow, over field and fallow. Her heart sank as she came in sight of Evan digging away as if his life depended on his day's labour, companioned only by feathered searchers for the worms he brought to light.

'Evan!' she screamed, affrighted at last, 'have you seen Willem? We cannot find him anywhere, whatever.'

Down went the man's spade, and over the freshly-turned ground he came bounding, in spite of his wooden-soled shoes. 'You don't mean to say the child is lost?' he cried.

But she was already running back to her mistress, who took the alarm as soon as they came in sight, and clasping her hands in sudden terror, shrieked out, 'Oh, what is it? What has happened to my boy? Where is my darling Willem? Oh, if I lose him too, I shall go crazy!'

Her only thought was that the child, in seeking Rhys, had fallen over a rock and been killed.

Her shriek, her unbidden tears, communicated her fright to Jonet and Davy, who clung to her skirts and cried for companionship, Jonet hardly knew why.

There was a general rush to meet Rhys.

'Sure, he will be in the orchard,' said he confidently.

But he was not in the orchard, not anywhere on the farm.

'Deed, and I think he will be for going to the church,' put in Davy. 'He wanted to be going yesterday, look you!'

The idea was instantly caught up. Evan and Rhys were off in search, and Lewis after them. Ales in vain endeavoured to persuade the mother to remain behind, whilst she went up to the moor, to see if he had strayed thither after the sheep. 'Don't fret,' she said, 'they are certain to be bringing him back soon. His little legs would not carry him far.'

'Oh, Ales,' expostulated her mistress, 'how can you ask me to sit still while my darling Willem may be dead or in danger?'

'Mother,' said Davy, with a gulp to swallow a sob, 'I will stay and take care of Jonet if you both go. You will be good with me, won't you, Jonet?'

'Yes, indeed,' replied the little girl, as his arm stole protectingly round her shoulders, and he kissed her tear-stained face, 'I will be very good.'

So, with strong injunctions not to go away, the two children were left alone in the house, with only a grey cat and a rough dog to bear them company.

At first they sat still and waited expectantly, clinging to each other. Then the silence and solitude became oppressive. Presently Jonet began to cry for her missing playfellow, and when brave-hearted Davy failed to console her, his own tears began to fall. A dreadful fear began to creep over him lest William should be lost like his father, and they might never see him again. How long the time did seem to those two children left alone with a new fear!

Ales was the first to return. She found the two seated on the stone stile in front that commanded a view of the steep path, anxiously and with beating hearts watching for some one to come.

She brought them no good news, and was off again with stool and pail, for the cows were lowing to be milked. But her very coming had broken up the dreary silence and monotony. And when she went she left them milk and cake, and the consciousness she was not far away. Then, at her suggestion, Davy began to teach Jonet to knit, and in the occupation time passed less painfully.

Ales came back with her milk-pails, and commended them for being good; made up the fire and set on the pot for supper. And so long as the setting sun shone redly in through door and windows they were passive, and she bustled about her household affairs, hiding her own fears.

But the sun set, and dusk came down, yet never a foot came near the farm to say the boy was found.

Then Evan came up for lanthorns to renew the search. He said he had been to the very church gates, but could find no trace of the child. Owen Griffith had left his loom, and his wife had kept watch to give each returning seeker news of the others. Mrs. Edwards was then at the weaver's in pitiable distress, and Rhys rushing hither and thither almost as wild.

The two children, unwilling to go to bed, had fallen asleep huddled together in the chimney corner, when, between nine and ten o'clock, restless Ales thought she heard a shout, and before she could get to the door in burst Rhys, crying out, 'He is found! he is found!' and close at his heels came Evan with the poor wanderer in his arms, limp and helpless, his hair and his clothes saturated with

heavy dew or mist, his little bare feet cut and bleeding, his lips and hands stained with the juice of purple berries.

The woods and every possible nook and corner seemed to have been explored, when Evan chanced to question a young man upon the Merthyr Road. The stupid fellow stared vacantly, then blundered out, "Deed, an' sure I did hear something about an hour ago up by the Druid Stones, but I took it for a stray lamb bleating for the ewe."

'Well, sure, and it *might* be a child crying. I didn't go to see,' he replied stupidly to a second question.

Evan stopped to hear no more. Without seeking a regular path, he made his way through bush and bramble, over rock and hollow, and there in the very midst of the hoary circle of lichen-covered grey stones, which seemed to sentinel him round in upright double file, the light of the lanthorn revealed the child lying in a heap under the overhanging shadow of the great rocking-stone, his head pillowed on the arm that rested against its conical base. Had the child mistaken those grey stones for the upright slabs in the churchyard?

The first rejoicing over, and the boy in bed, Rhys and Ales were both of opinion that he should be 'well whipped in the morning to teach him better than to put people in such frights.' And no doubt Evan was of the same mind, though he made no remark.

But the tender-hearted mother could only thank God for his restoration, and say that he had punished himself quite sufficiently. He was not likely to stray again.

Not for some time, for though all his garments were woollen, as were those of his elders, the damp, the exposure, no less than his childish terror, laid him up with a feverish illness that lasted for weeks.

As well as could be made out from his disjointed confession, Davy's conjecture had been the true one.

He had wakened, found himself alone, and had set off to 'see the big church,' nothing doubting he should find Robert Jones and his donkey to help him on his way. He had gone splashing through the shallow brook, and past Owen Griffith's unseen, but when he came to the bisecting roads his memory failed; he hesitated, turned to the right instead of the left, trudged on manfully northward, then took a by-path up-hill, as he fancied to the church, got bewildered among walls and winding ways, and out on the wild moor, stopping here and there to rest or gather blackberries, for he was growing both weary and hungry. But he never felt the solitude oppressive whilst there was a bird or a stray sheep about. And it was not until the dusk began to gather and he sank utterly exhausted under the great rocking-stone, that his courage forsook him, and he cried piteously in his hungry loneliness and desolation, cried himself into the insensibility of sleep, with only night and the everlasting arms around him.

In losing himself had he lost his childish craving to see once more that wonder of wonders – the big church?

CHAPTER VII. THE YOUNG PLAGUE

Thankful as was Mrs. Edwards, the mother, for the restoration of her missing darling; as a farmer, sorely behind with the autumnal field-work, the loss of half a day's labour to every useful hand upon the farm chafed her no less than it irritated Rhys. But when the child was absolutely ill, and required careful nursing or watching, she was torn with a double anxiety. The life of her child was at stake, and so was her possession of the farm. There was so much to be done before November set in, and so few hands to accomplish all. The outdoor work could not be neglected, or the live stock and the crops would suffer. Yet *some one must* remain indoors to watch the child, restless with fever. Davy was willing, but Davy was too young, and lacked strength to overcome resistance to nauseous draughts.

She was at her wits' end; could not neglect her child, dared not neglect her farm.

In this emergency, Rhys made a suggestion that Mrs. Griffith might perhaps be willing to spare her daughter Cate, a stout, red-haired, good-looking lass about his own age, who had already shown her active ability to make herself useful.

After some slight hesitation on the part of the girl's mother, it was agreed that Cate should be at the farm early every morning, provided she returned home in the evenings before nightfall. Her temporary services were to be repaid with cheese made from the mixed milk of cows and ewes, or other farm produce, a customary mode of payment for casual service.

Owen had suggested to his wife that the farm would be a good school for their girl. She would see things done there, both by Mrs. Edwards and Ales, that she had no chance of seeing at home, and she could have no better training for future service.

The girl proved quite an acquisition. She was just as willing as Davy, and more efficient. When not wanted beside William, she was ready to relieve Ales at the churn or the scouring of pots and pails. Then she had a fairly good temper and persuasive ways that made her a capital nurse for a sick child with a resolute will.

Jonet took to her amazingly. She brought some pieces of striped flannel, the refuse of her father's loom, and dressed up the little one's wooden doll like a real Welshwoman. And she brought green rushes from the brookside, and wove toy-baskets for her.

Or, while Davy was away in the fields filling baskets with freshly-dug roots, or clearing the ground of stones (which many farmers in those days believed to *grow*, just as surely as weeds), and Jonet was ready to whimper for a playfellow, she would set down her knitting, or other work, to play at cat's cradle or push-pins; and, finding that Davy had tried to teach the little fingers to knit, she cast on stitches for a doll's belt, and, with a little patience on both sides, the feat was accomplished, and Jonet wonderfully proud of her new acquirement.

By thus amusing the healthy child longing for a romp, she preserved quiet by the bedside of the sick one, whom an apothecary, brought all the way from Caerphilly, pronounced 'in a critical state.'

Mrs. Edwards, anxiously coming and going, saw what a capital nurse she made, and judged she was of better use there than in the fields. Rhys, too, would put his head in through the open window now and then to ask how his brother was getting on, and satisfied himself that he had shown his discernment in suggesting Cate to his mother.

And when William began to recover, which was not until November had well set in, no one was more willing to admit her obligations to the girl than was Jane Edwards. Nay, she went so far as to send Rhys to light Cate home when the shortening of the days caused her to be kept after dark, and Rhys never raised any objection.

She had helped him on her first coming to strip the apple and pear trees of their late fruit, and to separate such as were to be saved for the market from those to be thrown into the mash-tub and

crushed for cider. And on the first day that William was allowed to sit at an open door, he watched her and Rhys preparing the winter store of fire-balls, so willing was she to help in any way. Propped up in bed, he had seen Robert Jones once or twice lead a mule and an ass up the steep path with heavily-laden barrels slung across; but though he called faintly to the man through the open window, and was as usual inquisitive, he was little wiser when told they 'brought culm and clay for fire-balls.'

Fire-balls were familiar things. Not so the culm or the clay, and to satisfy his persistent curiosity he was promised if he would keep quiet he should witness their conversion into the hard balls.

A few yards from the house he saw on one side a great heap of black dust (the refuse of hard coal). This, barefooted Cate was riddling through a wire sieve (the very sieve Breint had brought safely home, though he lost the buyer), flinging away into a separate heap all that was too coarse to pass through the sieve. At a distance on the other side was laid a quantity of yellow clay, portions of which Rhys was moistening with water, beating and turning over with a spade, and when of the proper consistence adding, a spadeful at a time, the fine black dust Cate had sieved, to be again mixed and kneaded like dough, and finally worked with the hands into round hard balls, which he set aside to dry for fuel.

The eagerness with which the pale little adventurer watched these grimy processes, his questions and quaint remarks, quite amused the two workers, but his searching interrogations speedily posed both of them; and when he wanted to know what *was* coal, and what was clay, and why they mixed the two together to make them burn, he was greeted with fresh laughter, and an impatient, 'Oh, don't bother,' or its Welsh equivalent, from Rhys.

But the little inquirer, who sat with his head on one side, resting it on his hand, was not contented with the put-off; and when Robert Jones came with a load of peat that afternoon, he was plied with the same questions.

The man smiled. His own information did not go very far, but he did his best to reach infantile understanding; told him that the clay was a kind of earth dug from the river-side, and that coal grew underground, and was brought up in baskets out of a deep hole by a horse that was always walking round and round to wind them up to the top by a rope that wound round a thick wooden post.¹⁰

This was a puzzler for William. He wanted to be taken there and then to see the horse go round and round.

Ales, coming at that moment to pay the man, hoping to put a check on the child's new notion, exclaimed —

'Name o' goodness, do you want the black man to carry you away down the dark pit-hole, where you would never see us any more whatever?'

'Me don't fink they 'ood. They don't take man down,' replied the child sturdily; and at length the 'man,' ready to go about his business, promised to take him to see the horse go round 'some day.'

"Oo said 'oo 'ood take me to see church, an' 'oo didn't,' then said William in high dudgeon, and lapsed into sullen silence. In all his long illness he had not forgotten the church he had seen but once.

'Never mind, Willem *fach*; if you are a good boy, perhaps mother will let you ride with her to church on Breint next Sunday,' said Rhys in a consolatory tone.

'Sure?' asked William, his face brightening.

'Not *sure*, but I will ask her.' And with that the little fellow seemed satisfied.

The three youngsters were in bed when Rhys made his suggestion over the frugal supper-table. It brought on a sharp controversy, in which Ales joined very freely.

Mrs. Edwards was undecided. She 'feared the child would not be strong enough to sit through the service after the long ride.'

¹⁰ This was the old method of drawing coal and pitmen to the surface, until superseded by machinery. Wells and mills were similarly worked. And still horses are so employed to draw up yachts on the sea-shore, the rope passing round a block.

'Deed, there's no fear o' that,' put in Ales; 'but it's Jonet's turn to go to church, before a babe that can't make head or tail of a word that's said; and more like take Davy than either. There's no good of humouring children.'

'Well, I don't know what queer fancy he has got into that curious head of his,' argued Rhys; 'but I think it would be best to humour him this time, lest he should be setting off again, and' —

'Humour him, indeed! More like be giving him a good whipping,' interrupted Ales. 'There's no end to his queer fancies. It's master over us all he will be soon, I'm thinking.'

Evan had been silent. He agreed with Rhys. 'It is never too soon to learn the way to church,' said he. 'I will carry him there on my shoulders.'

There was a sigh of relief from Mrs. Edwards. 'Ah, then,' she exclaimed, 'Jonet and Davy can take turns on Breint. If it be fine,' she added. She was disinclined to be severe with William at any time, and after his long illness she felt unwilling to thwart him. Yet she had misgivings about indulging the obstinate self-will, 'so like his poor father's,' she told herself, with another sigh. Evan's proposal was hailed as a compromise that would, at least, content Rhys.

Not altogether. He was not content that Evan should usurp his prerogative. *He* was the one to carry his brother if he must be carried. He considered his own proposal the fittest; but, perhaps, ashamed of his foolish jealousy, and remembering the boy's weight, kept his opinion to himself.

November though it was, Sunday happened to be fine. Whatever mist there might be on the mountain-tops, there was no thick smoke to blacken it, and down in the valley it was clearing off.

William and Jonet were in high glee. The little girl had not yet been to church, and he had led her to expect something marvellous. After illness children pick up their strength more rapidly than adults. The week had done wonders for the boy, who had been trotting indoors and out for two or three days.

He saw Jonet seated on a pillow in front of his mother on Breint, but was very much too much of a man to accept the proffered shoulders of Evan.

'Me walk well as Davy and Rhys,' maintained he proudly, and trudged on sturdily so long as the road descended and had been clean washed by rain. But little legs cannot keep the pace with long ones, any more than can short purses with long ones, and after a time the weary little limbs were glad of a mount on the big broad shoulders. Yet even then he made the excuse of 'uncomfrable shoes an' 'tockings.'

He did not talk much as they went, but cast his eyes from side to side, evidently taking note of wayside landmarks. Other people in their Sunday best were also on the road, and exchanged greetings in passing. He was apparently on the watch for Robert Jones, whose cottage of rough stone he recognised at a glance. He expected the 'man' and his donkey to be there also, and expressed his disappointment. But it was not until they passed under the shade of the dark firs that lined the roadside boundary of the vicar's glebe lands, when the lych-gate and the church, with its long body and massive square tower, were full in view, that he became demonstrative.

Breint had been left at a small inn at the foot of the hill, and then William was pleased to dismount from his perch, and, with quite an air of patronising superiority, to take his sister by the hand as if to lead her up the hill, and over the stone stile to astonish her sight with all that had astonished him.

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