

**BENNETT
ARNOLD**

ANNA OF THE
FIVE TOWNS

Arnold Bennett

Anna of the Five Towns

«Public Domain»

Bennett A.

Anna of the Five Towns / A. Bennett — «Public Domain»,

© Bennett A.

© Public Domain

Содержание

CHAPTER I	6
CHAPTER II	13
CHAPTER III	18
CHAPTER IV	26
CHAPTER V	31
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	34

Arnold Bennett

Anna of the Five Towns

'Therefore, although it be a history
Homely and rude, I will relate the same
For the delight of a few natural hearts.'

CHAPTER I

THE KINDLING OF LOVE

The yard was all silent and empty under the burning afternoon heat, which had made its asphalt springy like turf, when suddenly the children threw themselves out of the great doors at either end of the Sunday-school – boys from the right, girls from the left – in two howling, impetuous streams, that widened, eddied, intermingled and formed backwaters until the whole quadrangle was full of clamour and movement. Many of the scholars carried prize-books bound in vivid tints, and proudly exhibited these volumes to their companions and to the teachers, who, tall, languid, and condescending, soon began to appear amid the restless throng. Near the left-hand door a little girl of twelve years, dressed in a cream coloured frock, with a wide and heavy straw hat, stood quietly kicking her foal-like legs against the wall. She was one of those who had won a prize, and once or twice she took the treasure from under her arm to glance at its frontispiece with a vague smile of satisfaction. For a time her bright eyes were fixed expectantly on the doorway; then they would wander, and she started to count the windows of the various Connexional buildings which on three sides enclosed the yard – chapel, school, lecture-hall, and chapel-keeper's house. Most of the children had already squeezed through the narrow iron gate into the street beyond, where a steam-car was rumbling and clattering up Duck Bank, attended by its immense shadow. The teachers remained a little behind. Gradually dropping the pedagogic pose, and happy in the virtuous sensation of duty accomplished, they forgot the frets and fatigues of the day, and grew amiably vivacious among themselves. With an instinctive mutual complacency the two sexes mixed again after separation. Greetings and pleasantries were exchanged, and intimate conversations begun; and then, dividing into small familiar groups, the young men and women slowly followed their pupils out of the gate. The chapel-keeper, who always had an injured expression, left the white step of his residence, and, walking with official dignity across the yard, drew down the side-windows of the chapel one after another. As he approached the little solitary girl in his course he gave her a reluctant acid recognition; then he returned to his hearth. Agnes was alone.

'Well, young lady?'

She looked round with a jump, and blushed, smiling and screwing up her little shoulders, when she recognised the two men who were coming towards her from the door of the lecture-hall. The one who had called out was Henry Mynors, morning superintendent of the Sunday-school and conductor of the men's Bible-class held in the lecture-hall on Sunday afternoons. The other was William Price, usually styled Willie Price, secretary of the same Bible-class, and son of Titus Price, the afternoon superintendent.

'I'm sure you don't deserve that prize. Let me see if it isn't too good for you.' Mynors smiled playfully down upon Agnes Tellwright as he idly turned the leaves of the book which she handed to him. 'Now, do you deserve it? Tell me honestly.'

She scrutinised those sparkling and vehement black eyes with the fearless calm of infancy. 'Yes, I do,' she answered in her high, thin voice, having at length decided within herself that Mr. Mynors was joking.

'Then I suppose you must have it,' he admitted, with a fine air of giving way.

As Agnes took the volume from him she thought how perfect a man Mr. Mynors was. His eyes, so kind and sincere, and that mysterious, delicious, inexpressible something which dwelt behind his eyes: these constituted an ideal for her.

Willie Price stood somewhat apart, grinning, and pulling a thin honey-coloured moustache. He was at the uncouth, disjointed age, twenty-one, and nine years younger than Henry Mynors. Despite a continual effort after ease of manner, he was often sheepish and self-conscious, even, as now, when he could discover no reason for such a condition of mind. But Agnes liked him too. His simple, pale

blue eyes had a wistfulness which made her feel towards him as she felt towards her doll when she happened to find it lying neglected on the floor.

'Your big sister isn't out of school yet?' Mynors remarked.

Agnes shook her head. 'I've been waiting ever so long,' she said plaintively.

At that moment a grey-haired woman with a benevolent but rather pinched face emerged with much briskness from the girls' door. This was Mrs. Sutton, a distant relative of Mynors' – his mother had been her second cousin. The men raised their hats.

'I've just been down to make sure of some of you slippery folks for the sewing-meeting,' she said, shaking hands with Mynors, and including both him and Willie Price in an embracing maternal smile. She was short-sighted and did not perceive Agnes, who had fallen back.

'Had a good class this afternoon, Henry?' Mrs. Sutton's breathing was short and quick.

'Oh, yes,' he said, 'very good indeed.'

'You're doing a grand work.'

'We had over seventy present,' he added.

'Eh!' she said, 'I make nothing of numbers. Henry. I meant a *good* class. Doesn't it say – Where *two or three* are gathered together...? But I must be getting on. The horse will be restless. I've to go up to Hillport before tea. Mrs. Clayton Vernon is ill.'

Scarcely having stopped in her active course, Mrs. Sutton drew the men along with her down the yard, she and Mynors in rapid talk: Willie Price fell a little to the rear, his big hands half-way into his pockets and his eyes diffidently roving. It appeared as though he could not find courage to take a share in the conversation, yet was anxious to convince himself of his right to do so.

Mynors helped Mrs. Sutton into her carriage, which had been drawn up outside the gate of the school yard. Only two families of the Bursley Wesleyan Methodists kept a carriage, the Suttons and the Clayton Vernons. The latter, boasting lineage and a large house in the aristocratic suburb of Hillport, gave to the society monetary aid and a gracious condescension. But though indubitably above the operation of any unwritten sumptuary law, even the Clayton Vernons ventured only in wet weather to bring their carriage to chapel. Yet Mrs. Sutton, who was a plain woman, might with impunity use her equipage on Sundays. This license granted by Connexional opinion was due to the fact that she so obviously regarded her carriage, not as a carriage, but as a contrivance on four wheels for enabling an infirm creature to move rapidly from place to place. When she got into it she had exactly the air of a doctor on his rounds. Mrs. Sutton's bodily frame had long ago proved inadequate to the ceaseless demands of a spirit indefatigably altruistic, and her continuance in activity was a notable illustration of the dominion of mind over matter. Her husband, a potter's valuer and commission agent, made money with facility in that lucrative vocation, and his wife's charities were famous, notwithstanding her attempts to hide them. Neither husband nor wife had allowed riches to put a factitious gloss upon their primal simplicity. They were as they were, save that Mr. Sutton had joined the Five Towns Field Club and acquired some of the habits of an archaeologist. The influence of wealth on manners was to be observed only in their daughter Beatrice, who, while favouring her mother, dressed at considerable expense, and at intervals gave much time to the arts of music and painting. Agnes watched the carriage drive away, and then turned to look up the stairs within the school doorway. She sighed, scowled, and sighed again, murmured something to herself, and finally began to read her book.

'Not come out yet?' Mynors was at her side once more, alone this time.

'No, not yet,' said Agnes, wearied. 'Yes. Here she is. Anna, what ages you've been!'

Anna Tellwright stood motionless for a second in the shadow of the doorway. She was tall, but not unusually so, and sturdily built up. Her figure, though the bust was a little flat, had the lenient curves of absolute maturity. Anna had been a woman since seventeen, and she was now on the eve of her twenty-first birthday. She wore a plain, home-made light frock checked with brown and edged with brown velvet, thin cotton gloves of cream colour, and a broad straw hat like her sister's. Her grave face, owing to the prominence of the cheekbones and the width of the jaw, had a slight angularity;

the lips were thin, the brown eyes rather large, the eyebrows level, the nose fine and delicate; the ears could scarcely be seen for the dark brown hair which was brushed diagonally across the temples, leaving of the forehead only a pale triangle. It seemed a face for the cloister, austere in contour, fervent in expression, the severity of it mollified by that resigned and spiritual melancholy peculiar to women who through the error of destiny have been born into a wrong environment.

As if charmed forward by Mynors' compelling eyes, Anna stepped into the sunlight, at the same time putting up her parasol. 'How calm and stately she is,' he thought, as she gave him her cool hand and murmured a reply to his salutation. But even his aquiline gaze could not surprise the secrets of that concealing breast: this was one of the three great tumultuous moments of her life – she realised for the first time that she was loved.

'You are late this afternoon, Miss Tellwright,' Mynors began, with the easy inflections of a man well accustomed to prominence in the society of women. Little Agnes seized Anna's left arm, silently holding up the prize, and Anna nodded appreciation.

'Yes,' she said as they walked across the yard, 'one of my girls has been doing wrong. She stole a Bible from another girl, so of course I had to mention it to the superintendent. Mr. Price gave her a long lecture, and now she is waiting upstairs till he is ready to go with her to her home and talk to her parents. He says she must be dismissed.'

'Dismissed!'

Anna's look flashed a grateful response to him. By the least possible emphasis he had expressed a complete disagreement with his senior colleague which etiquette forbade him to utter in words.

'I think it's a very great pity,' Anna said firmly. 'I rather like the girl,' she ventured in haste; 'you might speak to Mr. Price about it.'

'If he mentions it to me.'

'Yes, I meant that. Mr. Price said – if it had been anything else but a *Bible*–'

'Um!' he murmured very low, but she caught the significance of his intonation. They did not glance at each other: it was unnecessary. Anna felt that comfortable easement of the spirit which springs from the recognition of another spirit capable of understanding without explanations and of sympathising without a phrase. Under that calm mask a strange and sweet satisfaction thrilled through her as her precious instinct of common sense – rarest of good qualities, and pining always for fellowship – found a companion in his own. She had dreaded the overtures which for a fortnight past she had foreseen were inevitably to come from Mynors: he was a stranger, whom she merely respected. Now in a sudden disclosure she knew him and liked him. The dire apprehension of those formal 'advances' which she had watched other men make to other women faded away. It was at once a release and a reassurance.

They were passing through the gate, Agnes skipping round her sister's skirts, when Willie Price reappeared front the direction of the chapel.

'Forgotten something?' Mynors inquired of him blandly.

'Ye-es,' he stammered, clumsily raising his hat to Anna. She thought of him exactly as Agnes had done. He hesitated for a fraction of time, and then went up the yard towards the lecture-hall.

'Agnes has been showing me her prize,' said Mynors, as the three stood together outside the gate. 'I ask her if she thinks she really deserves it, and she says she does. What do you think, Miss Big Sister?'

Anna gave the little girl an affectionate smile of comprehension. 'What is it called, dear?'

'"Janey's Sacrifice or the Spool of Cotton, and other stories for children,"' Agnes read out in a monotone: then she clutched Anna's elbow and aimed a whisper at her ear.

'Very well, dear,' Anna answered aloud, 'but we must be back by a quarter-past four.' And turning to Mynors: 'Agnes wants to go up to the Park to hear the band play.'

'I'm going up there, too,' he said. 'Come along, Agnes, take my arm and show me the way.' Shyly Agnes left her sister's side and put a pink finger into Mynors' hand.

Moor Road, which climbs over the ridge to the mining village of Moorthorne and passes the new Park on its way, was crowded with people going up to criticise and enjoy this latest outcome of municipal enterprise in Bursley: sedate elders of the borough who smiled grimly to see one another on Sunday afternoon in that undignified, idly curious throng; white-skinned potters, and miners with the swarthy pallor of subterranean toil; untidy Sabbath loafers whom neither church nor chapel could entice, and the primly-clad respectable who had not only clothes but a separate deportment for the seventh day; house-wives whose pale faces, as of prisoners free only for a while, showed a naïve and timorous pleasure in the unusual diversion; young women made glorious by richly-coloured stuffs and carrying themselves with the defiant independence of good wages earned in warehouse or painting-shop; youths oppressed by stiff new clothes bought at Whitsuntide, in which the bright necktie and the nosegay revealed a thousand secret aspirations; young children running and yelling with the marvellous energy of their years; here and there a small well-dressed group whose studious repudiation of the crowd betrayed a conscious eminence of rank; louts, drunkards, idiots, beggars, waifs, outcasts, and every oddity of the town: all were more or less under the influence of a new excitement, and all with the same face of pleased expectancy looked towards the spot where, half-way up the hill, a denser mass of sightseers indicated the grand entrance to the Park.

'What stacks of folks!' Agnes exclaimed. 'It's like going to a football match.'

'Do you go to football matches, Agnes?' Mynors asked. The child gave a giggle.

Anna was relieved when these two began to chatter. She had at once, by a firm natural impulse, subdued the agitation which seized her when she found Mynors waiting with such an obvious intention at the school door; she had conversed with him in tones of quiet ease; his attitude had even enabled her in a few moments to establish a pleasant familiarity with him. Nevertheless, as they joined the stream of people in Moor Road, she longed to be at home, in her kitchen, in order to examine herself and the new situation thus created by Mynors. And yet also she was glad that she must remain at his side, but it was a fluttered joy that his presence gave her, too strange for immediate appreciation. As her eye, without directly looking at him, embraced the suave and admirable male creature within its field of vision, she became aware that he was quite inscrutable to her. What were his inmost thoughts, his ideals, the histories of his heart? Surely it was impossible that she should ever know these secrets! He – and she: they were utterly foreign to each other. So the primary dissonances of sex vibrated within her, and her own feelings puzzled her. Still, there was an instant pleasure, delightful, if disturbing and inexplicable. And also there was a sensation of triumph, which, though she tried to scorn it, she could not banish. That a man and a woman should saunter together on that road was nothing; but the circumstance acquired tremendous importance when the man happened to be Henry Mynors and the woman Anna Tellwright. Mynors – handsome, dark, accomplished, exemplary and prosperous – had walked for ten years circumspect and unscathed amid the glances of a whole legion of maids. As for Anna, the peculiarity of her position had always marked her for special attention: ever since her father settled in Bursley, she had felt herself to be the object of an interest in which awe and pity were equally mingled. She guessed that the fact of her going to the Park with Mynors that afternoon would pass swiftly from mouth to mouth like the rumour of a decisive event. She had no friends; her innate reserve had been misinterpreted, and she was not popular among the Wesleyan community. Many people would say, and more would think, that it was her money which was drawing Mynors from the narrow path of his celibate discretion. She could imagine all the innuendoes, the expressive nods, the pursing of lips, the lifting of shoulders and of eyebrows. 'Money 'll do owt': that was the proverb. But she cared not. She had the just and unshakable self-esteem which is fundamental in all strong and righteous natures; and she knew beyond the possibility of doubt that, though Mynors might have no incurable aversion to a fortune, she herself, the spirit and body of her, had been the sole awakener of his desire.

By a common instinct, Mynors and Anna made little Agnes the centre of attraction. Mynors continued to tease her, and Agnes growing courageous, began to retort. She was now walking between

them, and the other two smiled to each other at the child's sayings over her head, interchanging thus messages too subtle and delicate for the coarse medium of words.

As they approached the Park the bandstand came into sight over the railway cutting, and they could hear the music of 'The Emperor's Hymn.' The crude, brazen sounds were tempered in their passage through the warm, still air, and fell gently on the ear in soft waves, quickening every heart to unaccustomed emotions. Children leaped forward, and old people unconsciously assumed a lightsome vigour.

The Park rose in terraces from the railway station to a street of small villas almost on the ridge of the hill. From its gilded gates to its smallest geranium-slips it was brand-new, and most of it was red. The keeper's house, the bandstand, the kiosks, the balustrades, the shelters – all these assailed the eye with a uniform redness of brick and tile which nullified the pallid greens of the turf and the frail trees. The immense crowd, in order to circulate, moved along in tight processions, inspecting one after another the various features of which they had read full descriptions in the 'Staffordshire Signal' – waterfall, grotto, lake, swans, boat, seats, faïence, statues – and scanning with interest the names of the donors so clearly inscribed on such objects of art and craft as from divers motives had been presented to the town by its citizens. Mynors, as he manoeuvred a way for the two girls through the main avenue up to the topmost terrace, gravely judged each thing upon its merits, approving this, condemning that. In deciding that under all the circumstances the Park made a very creditable appearance he only reflected the best local opinion. The town was proud of its achievement, and it had the right to be; for, though this narrow pleasaunce was in itself unlovely, it symbolised the first faint renascence of the longing for beauty in a district long given up to unredeemed ugliness.

At length, Mynors having encountered many acquaintances, they got past the bandstand and stood on the highest terrace, which was almost deserted. Beneath them, in front, stretched a maze of roofs, dominated by the gold angel of the Town Hall spire. Bursley, the ancient home of the potter, has an antiquity of a thousand years. It lies towards the north end of an extensive valley, which must have been one of the fairest spots in Alfred's England, but which is now defaced by the activities of a quarter of a million of people. Five contiguous towns – Turnhill, Bursley, Hanbridge, Knype, and Longshaw – united by a single winding thoroughfare some eight miles in length, have inundated the valley like a succession of great lakes. Of these five Bursley is the mother, but Hanbridge is the largest. They are mean and forbidding of aspect – sombre, hard-featured, uncouth; and the vaporous poison of their ovens and chimneys has soiled and shrivelled the surrounding country till there is no village lane within a league but what offers a gaunt and ludicrous travesty of rural charms. Nothing could be more prosaic than the huddled, red-brown streets; nothing more seemingly remote from romance. Yet be it said that romance is even here – the romance which, for those who have an eye to perceive it, ever dwells amid the seats of industrial manufacture, softening the coarseness, transfiguring the squalor, of these mighty alchemic operations. Look down into the valley from this terrace-height where love is kindling, embrace the whole smoke-girt amphitheatre in a glance, and it may be that you will suddenly comprehend the secret and superb significance of the vast Doing which goes forward below. Because they seldom think, the townsmen take shame when indicted for having disfigured half a county in order to live. They have not understood that this disfigurement is merely an episode in the unending warfare of man and nature, and calls for no contrition. Here, indeed, is nature repaid for some of her notorious cruelties. She imperiously bids man sustain and reproduce himself, and this is one of the places where in the very act of obedience he wounds and maltreats her. Out beyond the municipal confines, where the subsidiary industries of coal and iron prosper amid a wreck of verdure, the struggle is grim, appalling, heroic – so ruthless is his havoc of her, so indomitable her ceaseless recuperation. On the one side is a wresting from nature's own bowels of the means to waste her; on the other, an undismayed, enduring fortitude. The grass grows; though it is not green, it grows. In the very heart of the valley, hedged about with furnaces, a farm still stands, and at harvest-time the sooty sheaves are gathered in.

The band stopped playing. A whole population was idle in the Park, and it seemed, in the fierce calm of the sunlight, that of all the strenuous weekday vitality of the district only a murmurous hush remained. But everywhere on the horizon, and nearer, furnaces cast their heavy smoke across the borders of the sky: the Doing was never suspended.

'Mr. Mynors,' said Agnes, still holding his hand, when they had been silent a moment, 'when do those furnaces go out?'

'They don't go out,' he answered, 'unless there is a strike. It costs hundreds and hundreds of pounds to light them again.'

'Does it?' she said vaguely. 'Father says it's the smoke that stops my gilliflowers from growing.'

Mynors turned to Anna. 'Your father seems the picture of health. I saw him out this morning at a quarter to seven, as brisk as a boy. What a constitution!'

'Yes,' Anna replied, 'he is always up at six.'

'But you aren't, I suppose?'

'Yes, I too.'

'And me too,' Agnes interjected.

'And how does Bursley compare with Hanbridge?' Mynors continued. Anna paused before replying.

'I like it better,' she said. 'At first – last year – I thought I shouldn't.'

'By the way, your father used to preach in Hanbridge circuit –'

'That was years ago,' she said quickly.

'But why won't he preach here? I dare say you know that we are rather short of local preachers – good ones, that is.'

'I can't say why father doesn't preach now,' Anna flushed as she spoke. 'You had better ask him that.'

'Well, I will do,' he laughed. 'I am coming to see him soon – perhaps one night next week.'

Anna looked at Henry Mynors as he uttered the astonishing words. The Tellwrights had been in Bursley a year, but no visitor had crossed their doorsteps except the minister, once, and such poor defaulters as came, full of excuse and obsequious conciliation, to pay rent overdue.

'Business, I suppose?' she said, and prayed that he might not be intending to make a mere call of ceremony.

'Yes, business,' he answered lightly. 'But you will be in?'

'I am always in,' she said. She wondered what the business could be, and felt relieved to know that his visit would have at least some assigned pretext; but already her heart beat with apprehensive perturbation at the thought of his presence in their household.

'See!' said Agnes, whose eyes were everywhere, 'There's Miss Sutton.'

Both Mynors and Anna looked sharply round. Beatrice Sutton was coming towards them along the terrace. Stylishly clad in a dress of pink muslin, with harmonious hat, gloves, and sunshade, she made an agreeable and rather effective picture, despite her plain, round face and stoutish figure. She had the air of being a leader. Grafted on to the original simple honesty of her eyes there was the unconsciously-acquired arrogance of one who had always been accustomed to deference. Socially, Beatrice had no peer among the young women who were active in the Wesleyan Sunday-school. Beatrice had been used to teach in the afternoon school, but she had recently advanced her labours from the afternoon to the morning in response to a hint that if she did so the force of her influence and example might lessen the chronic dearth of morning teachers.

'Good afternoon, Miss Tellwright,' Beatrice said as she came up. 'So you have come to look at the Park.'

'Yes,' said Anna, and then stopped awkwardly. In the tone of each there was an obscure constraint, and something in Mynors' smile of salute to Beatrice showed that he too shared it.

'Seen you before,' Beatrice said to him familiarly, without taking his hand; then she bent down and kissed Agnes.

'What are you doing here, mademoiselle?' Mynors asked her.

'Father's just down below, near the lake. He caught sight of you, and sent me up to say that you were to be sure to come in to supper to-night. You will, won't you?'

'Yes, thanks. I had meant to.'

Anna knew that they were related, and also that Mynors was constantly at the Suttons' house, but the close intimacy between these two came nevertheless like a shock to her. She could not conquer a certain resentment of it, however absurd such a feeling might seem to her intelligence. And this attitude extended not only to the intimacy, but to Beatrice's handsome clothes and facile urbanity, which by contrast emphasised her own poor little frock and tongue-tied manner. The mere existence of Beatrice so near to Mynors was like an affront to her. Yet at heart, and even while admiring this shining daughter of success, she was conscious within herself of a fundamental superiority. The soul of her condescended to the soul of the other one.

They began to discuss the Park.

'Papa says it will send up the value of that land over there enormously,' said Beatrice, pointing with her ribboned sunshade to some building plots which lay to the north, high up the hill. 'Mr. Tellwright owns most of that, doesn't he?' she added to Anna.

'I dare say he does,' said Anna. It was torture to her to refer to her father's possessions.

'Of course it will be covered with streets in a few months. Will he build himself, or will he sell it?'

'I haven't the least idea,' Anna answered, with an effort after gaiety of tone, and then turned aside to look at the crowd. There, close against the bandstand, stood her father, a short, stout, ruddy, middle-aged man in a shabby brown suit. He recognised her, stared fixedly, and nodded with his grotesque and ambiguous grin. Then he sidled off towards the entrance of the Park. None of the others had seen him. 'Agnes dear,' she said abruptly, 'we must go now, or we shall be late for tea.'

As the two women said good-bye their eyes met, and in the brief second of that encounter each tried to wring from the other the true answer to a question which lay unuttered in her heart. Then, having bidden adieu to Mynors, whose parting glance sang its own song to her, Anna took Agnes by the hand and left him and Beatrice together.

CHAPTER II

THE MISER'S DAUGHTER

Anna sat in the bay-window of the front parlour, her accustomed place on Sunday evenings in summer, and watched Mr. Tellwright and Agnes disappear down the slope of Trafalgar Road on their way to chapel. Trafalgar Road is the long thoroughfare which, under many aliases, runs through the Five Towns from end to end, uniting them as a river might unite them. Ephraim Tellwright could remember the time when this part of it was a country lane, flanked by meadows and market gardens. Now it was a street of houses up to and beyond Bleakridge, where the Tellwrights lived; on the other side of the hill the houses came only in patches until the far-stretching borders of Hanbridge were reached. Within the municipal limits Bleakridge was the pleasantest quarter of Bursley – Hillport, abode of the highest fashion, had its own government and authority – and to reside 'at the top of Trafalgar Road' was still the final ambition of many citizens, though the natural growth of the town had robbed Bleakridge of some of that exclusive distinction which it once possessed. Trafalgar Road, in its journey to Bleakridge from the centre of the town, underwent certain changes of character. First came a succession of manufactories and small shops; then, at the beginning of the rise, a quarter of a mile of superior cottages; and lastly, on the brow, occurred the houses of the comfortable-detached, semi-detached, and in terraces, with rentals from 25*l.* to 60*l.* a year. The Tellwrights lived in Manor Terrace (the name being a last reminder of the great farmstead which formerly occupied the western hill side): their house, of light yellow brick, was two-storied, with a long narrow garden behind, and the rent 30*l.* Exactly opposite was an antique red mansion, standing back in its own ground – home of the Mynors family for two generations, but now a school, the Mynors family being extinct in the district save for one member. Somewhat higher up, still on the opposite side to Manor Terrace, came an imposing row of four new houses, said to be the best planned and best built in the town, each erected separately and occupied by its owner. The nearest of these four was Councillor Sutton's, valued at 60*l.* a year. Lower down, below Manor Terrace and on the same side, lived the Wesleyan superintendent minister, the vicar of St. Luke's Church, an alderman, and a doctor.

It was nearly six o'clock. The sun shone, but gentlier; and the earth lay cooling in the mild, pensive effulgence of a summer evening. Even the onrush of the steam-car, as it swept with a gay load of passengers to Hanbridge, seemed to be chastened; the bell of the Roman Catholic chapel sounded like the bell of some village church heard in the distance; the quick but sober tramp of the chapel-goers fell peacefully on the ear. The sense of calm increased, and, steeped in this meditative calm, Anna from the open window gazed idly down the perspective of the road, which ended a mile away in the dim concave forms of ovens suffused in a pale mist. A book from the Free Library lay on her lap; she could not read it. She was conscious of nothing save the quiet enchantment of reverie. Her mind, stimulated by the emotions of the afternoon, broke the fetters of habitual self-discipline, and ranged voluptuously free over the whole field of recollection and anticipation. To remember, to hope: that was sufficient joy.

In the dissolving views of her own past, from which the rigour and pain seemed to have mysteriously departed, the chief figure was always her father – that sinister and formidable individuality, whom her mind hated but her heart disobediently loved. Ephraim Tellwright¹ was one of the most extraordinary and most mysterious men in the Five Towns. The outer facts of his career were known to all, for his riches made him notorious; but of the secret and intimate man none knew anything except Anna, and what little Anna knew had come to her by divination rather than discernment. A native of Hanbridge, he had inherited a small fortune from his father, who was a

¹ Tellwright: tile-wright, a name specially characteristic of, and possibly originating in, this clay-manufacturing district.

prominent Wesleyan Methodist. At thirty, owing mainly to investments in property which his calling of potter's valuer had helped him to choose with advantage, he was worth twenty thousand pounds, and he lived in lodgings on a total expenditure of about a hundred a year. When he was thirty-five he suddenly married, without any perceptible public wooing, the daughter of a wood merchant at Oldcastle, and shortly after the marriage his wife inherited from her father a sum of eighteen thousand pounds. The pair lived narrowly in a small house up at Pireford, between Hanbridge and Oldcastle. They visited no one, and were never seen together except on Sundays. She was a rosy-cheeked, very unassuming and simple woman, who smiled easily and talked with difficulty, and for the rest lived apparently a servile life of satisfaction and content. After five years Anna was born, and in another five years Mrs. Tellwright died of erysipelas. The widower engaged a housekeeper: otherwise his existence proceeded without change. No stranger visited the house, the housekeeper never gossiped; but tales will spread, and people fell into the habit of regarding Tellwright's child and his housekeeper with commiseration.

During all this period he was what is termed 'a good Wesleyan,' preaching and teaching, and spending himself in the various activities of Hanbridge chapel. For many years he had been circuit treasurer. Among Anna's earliest memories was a picture of her father arriving late for supper one Sunday night in autumn after an anniversary service, and pouring out on the white tablecloth the contents of numerous chamois-leather money-bags. She recalled the surprising dexterity with which he counted the coins, the peculiar smell of the bags, and her mother's bland exclamation, 'Eh, Ephraim!' Tellwright belonged by birth to the Old Guard of Methodism; there was in his family a tradition of holy valour for the pure doctrine: his father, a Bursley man, had fought in the fight which preceded the famous Primitive Methodist Secession of 1808 at Bursley, and had also borne a notable part in the Warren affrays of '28, and the disastrous trouble of the Fly-Sheets in '49, when Methodism lost a hundred thousand members. As for Ephraim, he expounded the mystery of the Atonement in village conventicles and grew garrulous with God at prayer-meetings in the big Bethesda chapel; but he did these things as routine, without skill and without enthusiasm, because they gave him an unassailable position within the central group of the society. He was not, in fact, much smitten with either the doctrinal or the spiritual side of Methodism. His chief interest lay in those fiscal schemes of organisation without whose aid no religious propaganda can possibly succeed. It was in the finance of salvation that he rose supreme – the interminable alternation of debt-raising and new liability which provides a lasting excitement for Nonconformists. In the negotiation of mortgages, the artful arrangement of appeals, the planning of anniversaries and of mighty revivals, he was an undisputed leader. To him the circuit was a 'going concern,' and he kept it in motion, serving the Lord in committee and over statements of account. The minister by his pleading might bring sinners to the penitent form, but it was Ephraim Tellwright who reduced the cost per head of souls saved, and so widened the frontiers of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Three years after the death of his first wife it was rumoured that he would marry again, and that his choice had fallen on a young orphan girl, thirty years his junior, who 'assisted' at the stationer's shop where he bought his daily newspaper. The rumour was well-founded. Anna, then eight years of age, vividly remembered the home-coming of the pale wife, and her own sturdy attempts to explain, excuse, or assuage to this wistful and fragile creature the implacable harshness of her father's temper. Agnes was born within a year, and the pale girl died of puerperal fever. In that year lay a whole tragedy, which could not have been more poignant in its perfection if the year had been a thousand years. Ephraim promptly re-engaged the old housekeeper, a course which filled Anna with secret childish revolt, for Anna was now nine, and accomplished in all domesticity. In another seven years the housekeeper died, a gaunt grey ruin, and Anna at sixteen became mistress of the household, with a small sister to cherish and control. About this time Anna began to perceive that her father was generally regarded as a man of great wealth, having few rivals in the entire region of the Five Towns. Definite knowledge, however, she had none: he never spoke of his affairs; she knew only that he

possessed houses and other property in various places, that he always turned first to the money article in the newspaper, and that long envelopes arrived for him by post almost daily. But she had once heard the surmise that he was worth sixty thousand of his own, apart from the fortune of his first wife, Anna's mother. Nevertheless, it did not occur to her to think of her father, in plain terms, as a miser, until one day she happened to read in the 'Staffordshire Signal' some particulars of the last will and testament of William Wilbraham, J.P., who had just died. Mr. Wilbraham had been a famous magnate and benefactor of the Five Towns; his revered name was in every mouth; he had a fine seat, Hillport House, at Hillport; and his superb horses were constantly seen, winged and nervous, in the streets of Bursley and Hanbridge. The 'Signal' said that the net value of his estate was sworn at fifty-nine thousand pounds. This single fact added a definite and startling significance to figures which had previously conveyed nothing to Anna except an idea of vastness. The crude contrast between the things of Hillport House and the things of the six-roomed abode in Manor Terrace gave food for reflection, silent but profound.

Tellwright had long ago retired from business, and three years after the housekeeper died he retired, practically, from religious work, to the grave detriment of the Hanbridge circuit. In reply to sorrowful questioners, he said merely that he was getting old and needed rest, and that there ought to be plenty of younger men to fill his shoes. He gave up everything except his pew in the chapel. The circuit was astounded by this sudden defection of a class-leader, a local preacher, and an officer. It was an inexplicable fall from grace. Yet the solution of the problem was quite simple. Ephraim had lost interest in his religious avocations; they had ceased to amuse him, the old ardour had cooled. The phenomenon is a common enough experience with men who have passed their fiftieth year – men, too, who began with the true and sacred zeal, which Tellwright never felt. The difference in Tellwright's case was that, characteristically, he at once yielded to the new instinct, caring naught for public opinion. Soon afterwards, having purchased a lot of cottage property in Bursley, he decided to migrate to the town of his fathers. He had more than one reason for doing so, but perhaps the chief was that he found the atmosphere of Hanbridge Wesleyan chapel rather uncongenial. The exodus from it was his silent and malicious retort to a silent rebuke.

He appeared now to grow younger, discarding in some measure a certain morose taciturnity which had hitherto marked his demeanour. He went amiably about in the manner of a veteran determined to enjoy the brief existence of life's winter. His stout, stiff, deliberate yet alert figure became a familiar object to Bursley: that ruddy face, with its small blue eyes, smooth upper lip, and short grey beard under the smooth chin, seemed to pervade the streets, offering everywhere the conundrum of its vague smile. Though no friend ever crossed his doorstep, he had dozens of acquaintances of the footpath. He was not, however, a facile talker, and he seldom gave an opinion; nor were his remarks often noticeably shrewd. He existed within himself, unrevealed. To the crowd, of course, he was a marvellous legend, and moving always in the glory of that legend he received their wondering awe – an awe tinged with contempt for his lack of ostentation and public splendour. Commercial men with whom he had transacted business liked to discuss his abilities, thus disseminating that solid respect for him which had sprung from a personal experience of those abilities, and which not even the shabbiness of his clothes could weaken.

Anna was disturbed by the arrival at the front door of the milk-girl. Alternately with her father, she stayed at home on Sunday evenings, partly to receive the evening milk and partly to guard the house. The Persian cat with one ear preceded her to the door as soon as he heard the clatter of the can. The stout little milk-girl dispensed one pint of milk into Anna's jug, and spilt an eleemosynary supply on the step for the cat. 'He does like it fresh, Miss,' said the milk-girl, smiling at the greedy cat, and then, with a 'Lovely evenin',' departed down the street, one fat red arm stretched horizontally out to balance the weight of the can in the other. Anna leaned idly against the doorpost, waiting while the cat finished, until at length the swaying figure of the milk-girl disappeared in the dip of the road. Suddenly she darted within, shutting the door, and stood on the hall-mat in a startled attitude

of dismay. She had caught sight of Henry Mynors in the distance, approaching the house. At that moment the kitchen clock struck seven, and Mynors, according to the rule of a lifetime, should have been in his place in the 'orchestra' (or, as some term it, the 'singing-seat') of the chapel, where he was an admired baritone. Anna dared not conjecture what impulse had led him into this extraordinary, incredible deviation. She dared not conjecture, but despite herself she knew, and the knowledge shocked her sensitive and peremptory conscience. Her heart began to beat rapidly; she was in distress. Aware that her father and sister had left her alone, did he mean to call? It was absolutely impossible, yet she feared it, and blushed, all solitary there in the passage, for shame. Now she heard his sharp, decided footsteps, and through the glazed panels of the door she could see the outline of his form. He stopped; his hand was on the gate, and she ceased to breathe. He pushed the gate open, and then, at the whisper of some blessed angel, he closed it again and continued his way up the street. After a few moments Anna carried the milk into the kitchen, and stood by the dresser, moveless, each muscle braced in the intensity of profound contemplation. Gradually the tears rose to her eyes and fell; they were the tincture of a strange and mystic joy, too poignant to be endured. As it were under compulsion she ran outside, and down the garden path to the low wall which looked over the grey fields of the valley up to Hillport. Exactly opposite, a mile and a half away, on the ridge, was Hillport Church, dark and clear against the orange sky. To the right, and nearer, lay the central masses of the town, tier on tier of richly-coloured ovens and chimneys. Along the field-paths couples moved slowly. All was quiescent, languorous, beautiful in the glow of the sun's stately declension. Anna put her arms on the wall. Far more impressively than in the afternoon she realised that this was the end of one epoch in her career and the beginning of another. Enthralled by austere traditions and that stern conscience of hers, she had never permitted herself to dream of the possibility of an escape from the parental servitude. She had never looked beyond the horizons of her present world, but had sought spiritual satisfaction in the ideas of duty and sacrifice. The worst tyrannies of her father never dulled the sense of her duty to him; and, without perhaps being aware of it, she had rather despised love and the dalliance of the sexes. In her attitude towards such things there had been not only a little contempt but also some disapproval, as though man were destined for higher ends. Now she saw, in a quick revelation, that it was the lovers, and not she, who had the right to scorn. She saw how miserably narrow, tepid, and trickling the stream of her life had been, and had threatened to be. Now it gushed forth warm, impetuous, and full, opening out new and delicious vistas. She lived; and she was finding the sight to see, the courage to enjoy. Now, as she leaned over the wall, she would not have cared if Henry Mynors indeed had called that night. She perceived something splendid and free in his abandonment of habit and discretion at the bidding of a desire. To be the magnet which could draw that pattern and exemplar of seemliness from the strict orbit of virtuous custom! It was she, the miser's shabby daughter, who had caused this amazing phenomenon. The thought intoxicated her. Without the support of the wall she might have fallen. In a sort of trance she murmured these words: 'He loves me.'

This was Anna Tellwright, the ascetic, the prosaic, the impassive.

After an interval which to her was as much like a minute as a century, she went back into the house. As she entered by the kitchen she heard an impatient knocking at the front door.

'At last,' said her father grimly, when she opened the door. In two words he had resumed his terrible sway over her. Agnes looked timidly from one to the other and slipped past them into the house.

'I was in the garden,' Anna explained. 'Have you been here long?' She tried to smile apologetically.

'Only about a quarter of an hour,' he answered, with a grimness still more portentous.

'He won't speak again to-night,' she thought fearfully. But she was mistaken. After he had carefully hung his best hat on the hat-rack, he turned towards her, and said, with a queer smile:

'Ye've been day-dreaming, eh, Sis?'

'Sis' was her pet name, used often by Agnes, but by her father only at the very rarest intervals. She was staggered at this change of front, so unaccountable in this man, who, when she had unwittingly annoyed him, was capable of keeping an awful silence for days together. What did he know? What had those old eyes seen?

'I forgot,' she stammered, gathering herself together happily, 'I forgot the time.' She felt that after all there was a bond between them which nothing could break – the tie of blood. They were father and daughter, united by sympathies obscure but fundamental. Kissing was not in the Tellwright blood, but she had a fleeting wish to hug the tyrant.

CHAPTER III

THE BIRTHDAY

The next morning there was no outward sign that anything unusual had occurred. As the clock in the kitchen struck eight Anna carried to the back parlour a tray on which were a dish of bacon and a coffee-pot. Breakfast was already laid for three. She threw a housekeeper's glance over the table, and called: 'Father!' Mr. Tellwright was re-setting some encaustic tiles in the lobby. He came in, coatless, and, dropping a trowel on the hearth, sat down at the end of the table nearest the fireplace. Anna sat opposite to him, and poured out the coffee.

On the dish were six pieces of bacon. He put one piece on a plate, and set it carefully in front of Agnes's vacant chair, two he passed to Anna, three he kept for himself.

'Where's Agnes?' he inquired.

'Coming – she's finishing her arithmetic.'

In the middle of the table was an unaccustomed small jug containing gilly-flowers. Mr. Tellwright noticed it instantly.

'What an we gotten here?' he said, indicating the jug.

'Agnes gave me them first thing when she got up. She's grown them herself, you know,' Anna said, and then added: 'It's my birthday.'

'Ay!' he exclaimed, with a trace of satire in his voice. 'Thou'rt a woman now, lass.'

No further remark on that matter was made during the meal.

Agnes ran in, all pinafore and legs. With a toss backwards of her light golden hair she slipped silently into her seat, cautiously glancing at the master of the house. Then she began to stir her coffee.

'Now, young woman,' Tellwright said curtly.

She looked a startled interrogative.

'We're waiting,' he explained.

'Oh!' said Agnes, confused. 'I thought you'd said it. "God sanctify this food to our use and us to His service for Christ's sake, Amen."'

The breakfast proceeded in silence. Breakfast at eight, dinner at noon, tea at four, supper at eight: all the meals in this house occurred with absolute precision and sameness. Mr. Tellwright seldom spoke, and his example imposed silence on the girls, who felt as nuns feel when assisting at some grave but monotonous and perfunctory rite. The room was not a cheerful one in the morning, since the window was small and the aspect westerly. Besides the table and three horse-hair chairs, the furniture consisted of an arm-chair, a bent-wood rocking chair, and a sewing-machine. A fatigued Brussels carpet covered the floor. Over the mantelpiece was an engraving of 'The Light of the World,' in a frame of polished brown wood. On the other walls were some family photographs in black frames. A two-light chandelier hung from the ceiling, weighed down on one side by a patent gas-saving mantle and a glass shade; over this the ceiling was deeply discoloured. On either side of the chimney-breast were cupboards about three feet high; some cardboard boxes, a work-basket, and Agnes's school books lay on the tops of these cupboards. On the window-sill was a pot of mignonette in a saucer. The window was wide open, and flies buzzed to and fro, constantly rebounding from the window panes with terrible thuds. In the blue-paved yard beyond the cat was licking himself in the sunlight with an air of being wholly absorbed in his task.

Mr. Tellwright demanded a second and last cup of coffee, and having drunk it pushed away his plate as a sign that he had finished. Then he took from the mantelpiece at his right hand a bundle of letters and opened them methodically. When he had arranged the correspondence in a flattened pile, he put on his steel-rimmed spectacles and began to read.

'Can I return thanks, father?' Agnes asked, and he nodded, looking at her fixedly over his spectacles.

'Thank God for our good breakfast, Amen.'

In two minutes the table was cleared, and Mr. Tellwright was alone. As he read laboriously through communications from solicitors, secretaries of companies, and tenants, he could hear his daughters talking together in the kitchen. Anna was washing the breakfast things while Agnes wiped. Then there were flying steps across the yard: Agnes had gone to school.

After he had mastered his correspondence, Mr. Tellwright took up the trowel again and finished the tile-setting in the lobby. Then he resumed his coat, and, gathering together the letters from the table in the back parlour, went into the front parlour and shut the door. This room was his office. The principal things in it were an old oak bureau and an old oak desk-chair which had come to him from his first wife's father; on the walls were some sombre landscapes in oil, received from the same source; there was no carpet on the floor, and only one other chair. A safe stood in the corner opposite the door. On the mantelpiece were some books – Woodfall's 'Landlord and Tenant,' Jordan's 'Guide to Company Law,' Whitaker's Almanack, and a Gazetteer of the Five Towns. Several wire files, loaded with papers, hung from the mantelpiece. With the exception of a mahogany what-not with a Bible on it, which stood in front of the window, there was nothing else whatever in the room. He sat down to the bureau and opened it, and took from one of the pigeon-holes a packet of various documents: these he examined one by one, from time to time referring to a list. Then he unlocked the safe and extracted from it another bundle of documents which had evidently been placed ready. With these in his hand, he opened the door, and called out:

'Anna.'

'Yes, father;' her voice came from the kitchen.

'I want ye.'

'In a minute. I'm peeling potatoes.'

When she came in, she found him seated at the bureau as usual. He did not look round.

'Yes, father.'

She stood there in her print dress and white apron, full in the eye of the sun, waiting for him. She could not guess what she had been summoned for. As a rule, she never saw her father between breakfast and dinner. At length he turned.

'Anna,' he said in his harsh, abrupt tones, and then stopped for a moment before continuing. His thick, short fingers held the list which he had previously been consulting. She waited in bewilderment. 'It's your birthday, ye told me. I hadna' forgotten. Ye're of age to-day, and there's summat for ye. Your mother had a fortune of her own, and under your grandfeyther's will it comes to you when you're twenty-one. I'm the trustee. Your mother had eighteen thousand pounds i' Government stock.' He laid a slight sneering emphasis on the last two words. 'That was near twenty-five year ago. I've nigh on trebled it for ye, what wi' good investments and interest accumulating. Thou'rt worth' – here he changed to the second personal singular, a habit with him – 'thou'rt worth this day as near fifty thousand as makes no matter, Anna. And that's a tidy bit.'

'Fifty thousand —*pounds*!' she exclaimed aghast.

'Ay, lass.'

She tried to speak calmly. 'Do you mean it's mine, father?'

'It's thine, under thy grandfeyther's will – haven't I told thee? I'm bound by law for to give it to thee this day, and thou mun give me a receipt in due form for the securities. Here they are, and here's the list. Tak' the list, Anna, and read it to me while I check off.'

She mechanically took the blue paper and read: 'Toft End Colliery and Brickworks Limited, five hundred shares of ten pounds.'

'They paid ten per cent. last year,' he said, 'and with coal up as it is they'll pay fiftane this. Let's see what thy arithmetic is worth, lass. How much is fiftane per cent. on five thousand pun?'

'Seven hundred and fifty pounds,' she said, getting the correct answer by a superhuman effort worthy of that occasion.

'Right,' said her father, pleased. 'Recollect that's more till two pun a day. Go on.'

'North Staffordshire Railway Company ordinary stock, ten thousand and two hundred pounds.'

'Right. Th' owd North Stafford's getting up i' th' world. It'll be a five per cent. line yet. Then thou mun sell out.'

She had only a vague idea of his meaning, and continued: 'Five Towns Waterworks Company Limited consolidated stock, eight thousand five hundred pounds.'

'That's a tit-bit, lass,' he interjected, looking absently over his spectacles at something outside in the road. 'You canna' pick that up on shardrucks.'

'Norris's Brewery Limited, six hundred ordinary shares of ten pounds.'

'Twenty per cent.,' said the old man. 'Twenty per cent. regular.' He made no attempt to conceal his pride in these investments. And he had the right to be proud of them. They were the finest in the market, the aristocracy of investments, based on commercial enterprises of which every business man in the Five Towns knew the entire soundness. They conferred distinction on the possessor, like a great picture or a rare volume. They stifled all questions and insinuations. Put before any jury of the Five Towns as evidence of character, they would almost have exculpated a murderer.

Anna continued reading the list, which seemed endless: long before she had reached the last item her brain was a menagerie of monstrous figures. The list included, besides all sorts of shares English and American, sundry properties in the Five Towns, and among these was the earthenware manufactory in Edward Street occupied by Titus Price, the Sunday-school superintendent. Anna was a little alarmed to find herself the owner of this works; she knew that her father had had some difficult moments with Titus Price, and that the property was not without grave disadvantages.

'That all!' Tellwright asked, at length.

'That's all.'

'Total face value,' he went on, 'as I value it, forty-eight thousand and fifty pounds, producing a net annual income of three thousand two hundred and ninety pounds or thereabouts. There's not many in this district as 'as gotten that to their names, Anna – no, nor half that – let 'em be who they will.'

Anna had sensations such as a child might have who has received a traction-engine to play with in a back yard. 'What am I to do with it?' she asked plaintively.

'Do wi' it?' he repeated, and stood up and faced her, putting his lips together: 'Do wi' it, did ye say?'

'Yes.'

'Tak' care on it, my girl. Tak' care on it. And remember it's thine. Thou mun sign this list, and all these transfers and fal-lals, and then thou mun go to th' Bank, and tell Mester Lovatt I've sent thee. There's four hundred pound there. He'll give thee a cheque-book. I've told him all about it. Thou'll have thy own account, and be sure thou keeps it straight.'

'I shan't know a bit what to do, father, and so it's no use talking,' she said quietly.

'I'll learn ye,' he replied. 'Here, tak' th' pen, and let's have thy signature.'

She signed her name many times and put her finger on many seals. Then Tellwright gathered up everything into a bundle, and gave it to her to hold.

'That's the lot,' he said. 'Have ye gotten 'em?'

'Yes,' she said.

They both smiled, self-consciously. As for Tellwright, he was evidently impressed by the grandeur of this superb renunciation on his part. 'Shall I keep 'em for ye?'

'Yes, please.'

'Then give 'em me.'

He took back all the documents.

'When shall I call at the Bank, father?'

'Better call this afternoon – afore three, mind ye.'

'Very well. But I shan't know what to do.'

'You've gotten a tongue in that noddle of yours, haven't ye?' he said. 'Now go and get along wi' them potatoes.'

Anna returned to the kitchen. She felt no elation or ferment of any kind; she had not begun to realise the significance of what had occurred. Like the soldier whom a bullet has struck, she only knew vaguely that something had occurred. She peeled the potatoes with more than her usual thrifty care; the peel was so thin as to be almost transparent. It seemed to her that she could not arrange or examine her emotions until after she had met Henry Mynors again. More than anything else she wished to see him: it was as if out of the mere sight of him something definite might emerge, as if when her eyes had rested on him, and not before, she might perceive some simple solution of the problems which she had obscurely discerned ahead of her.

During dinner a boy brought a note for her father. He read it, snorted, and threw it across the table to Anna.

'Here,' he said, 'that's your affair.'

The letter was from Titus Price: it said that he was sorry to be compelled to break his promise, but it was quite impossible for him to pay twenty pounds on account of rent that day; he would endeavour to pay at least twenty pounds in a week's time.

'You'd better call there, after you've been to th' Bank,' said Tellwright, 'and get summat out of him, if it's only ten pun.'

'Must I go to Edward Street?'

'Yes.'

'What am I to say? I've never been there before.'

'Well, it's high time as ye began to look after your own property. You mun see owd Price, and tell him ye canna accept any excuses.'

'How much does he owe?'

'He owes ye a hundred and twenty-five pun altogether – he's five quarters in arrear.'

'A hundred and – ! Well, I never!' Anna was aghast. The sum appeared larger to her than all the thousands and tens of thousands which she had received in the morning. She reflected that the weekly bills of the household amounted to about a sovereign, and that the total of this debt of Price's would therefore keep them in food for two years. The idea of being in debt was abhorrent to her. She could not conceive how a man who was in debt could sleep at nights. 'Mr. Price ought to be ashamed of himself,' she said warmly. 'I'm sure he's quite able to pay.' The image of the sleek and stout superintendent of the Sunday-school, arrayed in his rich, almost voluptuous, broadcloth, offended her profoundly. That he, debtor and promise-breaker, should have the effrontery to pray for the souls of children, to chastise their petty furtive crimes, was nearly incredible.

'Oh! Price is all *right*,' her father remarked, with an apparent benignity which surprised her. 'He'll pay when he can.'

'I think it's a shame,' she repeated emphatically.

Agnes looked with a mystified air from one to the other, instinctively divining that something very extraordinary had happened during her absence at school.

'Ye mun'na be too hard, Anna,' said Tellwright. 'Supposing ye sold owd Titus up? What then? D'ye reckon ye'd get a tenant for them ramshackle works? A thousand pound spent wouldn't 'tice a tenant. That Edward Street property was one o' ye grandfeyther's specs; 'twere none o' mine. You'd best tak' what ye can get.'

Anna felt a little ashamed of herself, not because of her bad policy, but because she saw that Mr. Price might have been handicapped by the faults of her property.

That afternoon it was a shy and timid Anna who swung back the heavy polished and glazed portals of the Bursley branch of the Birmingham, Sheffield and district Bank, the opulent and spacious

erection which stands commandingly at the top of St. Luke's Square. She looked about her, across broad counters, enormous ledgers, and rows of bent heads, and wondered whom she should address. Then a bearded gentleman, who was weighing gold in a balance, caught sight of her: he slid the gold into a drawer, and whisked round the end of the counter with a celerity which was, at any rate, not born of practice, for he, the cashier, had not done such a thing for years.

'Good afternoon, Miss Tellwright.'

'Good afternoon. I –'

'May I trouble you to step into the manager's room?' and he drew her forward, while every clerk's eye watched. Anna tried not to blush, but she could feel the red mounting even to her temples.

'Delightful weather we're having. But of course we've the right to expect it at this time of year.' He opened a door on the glass of which was painted 'Manager,' and bowed. 'Mr. Lovatt – Miss Tellwright.'

Mr. Lovatt greeted his new customer with a formal and rather fatigued politeness, and invited her to sit in a large leather armchair in front of a large table; on this table lay a large open book. Anna had once in her life been to the dentist's; this interview reminded her of that experience.

'Your father told me I might expect you to-day,' said Mr. Lovatt in his high-pitched, perfunctory tones. Richard Lovatt was probably the most influential man in Bursley. Every Saturday morning he irrigated the whole town with fertilising gold. By a single negative he could have ruined scores of upright merchants and manufacturers. He had only to stop a man in the street and murmur, 'By the way, your overdraft –,' in order to spread discord and desolation through a refined and pious home. His estimate of human nature was falsified by no common illusions; he had the impassive and frosty gaze of a criminal judge. Many men deemed they had cause to hate him, but no one did hate him: all recognised that he was set far above hatred.

'Kindly sign your full name here,' he said, pointing to a spot on the large open page of the book, 'and your ordinary signature, which you will attach to cheques, here.'

Anna wrote, but in doing so she became aware that she had no ordinary signature; she was obliged to invent one.

'Do you wish to draw anything out now? There is already a credit of four hundred and twenty pounds in your favour,' said Mr. Lovatt, after he had handed her a cheque-book, a deposit-book, and a pass-book.

'Oh, no, thank you,' Anna answered quickly. She keenly desired some money, but she well knew that courage would fail her to demand it without her father's consent; moreover, she was in a whirl of uncertainty as to the uses of the three books, though Mr. Lovatt had expounded them severally to her in simple language.

'Good-day.'

'Good-day, Miss Tellwright.'

'My compliments to your father.'

His final glance said half cynically, half in pity: 'You are naïve and unspoilt now, but these eyes will see yours harden like the rest. Wretched victim of gold, you are only one in a procession, after all.'

Outside, Anna thought that everyone had been very agreeable to her. Her complacency increased at a bound. She no longer felt ashamed of her shabby cotton dress. She surmised that people would find it convenient to ignore any difference which might exist between her costume and that of other girls.

She went on to Edward Street, a short steep thoroughfare at the eastern extremity of the town, leading into a rough road across unoccupied land dotted with the mouths of abandoned pits: this road climbed up to Toft End, a mean annexe of the town about half a mile east of Bleakridge. From Toft End, lying on the highest hill in the district, one had a panoramic view of Hanbridge and Bursley, with Hillport to the west, and all the moorland and mining villages to the north and north-east. Titus

Price and his son lived in what had once been a farm-house at Toft End; every morning and evening they traversed the desolate and featureless grey road between their dwelling and the works.

Anna had never been in Edward Street before. It was a miserable quarter – two rows of blackened infinitesimal cottages, and her manufactory at the end – a frontier post of the town. Price's works was small, old-fashioned, and out of repair – one of those properties which are forlorn from the beginning, which bring despair into the hearts of a succession of owners, and which, being ultimately deserted, seem to stand for ever in pitiable ruin. The arched entrance for carts into the yard was at the top of the steepest rise of the street, when it might as well have been at the bottom; and this was but one example of the architect's fine disregard for the principle of economy in working – that principle to which in the scheming of manufactories everything else is now so strictly subordinated. Ephraim Tellwright used to say (but not to Titus Price) that the situation of that archway cost five pounds a year in horseflesh, and that five pounds was the interest on a hundred. The place was badly located, badly planned and badly constructed. Its faults defied improvement. Titus Price remained in it only because he was chained there by arrears of rent; Tellwright hesitated to sell it only because the rent was a hundred a year, and the whole freehold would not have fetched eight hundred. He promised repairs in exchange for payment of arrears which he knew would never be paid, and his policy was to squeeze the last penny out of Price without forcing him into bankruptcy. Such was the predicament when Anna assumed ownership. As she surveyed the irregular and huddled frontage from the opposite side of the street, her first feeling was one of depression at the broken and dirty panes of the windows. A man in shirt-sleeves was standing on the weighing platform under the archway; his back was towards her, but she could see the smoke issuing in puffs from his pipe. She crossed the road. Hearing her footfalls, the man turned round: it was Titus Price himself. He was wearing an apron, but no cap; the sleeves of his shirt were rolled up, exposing forearms covered with auburn hair. His puffed, heavy face, and general bigness and untidiness, gave the idea of a vast and torpid male slattern. Anna was astounded by the contrast between the Titus of Sunday and the Titus of Monday: a single glance compelled her to readjust all her notions of the man. She stammered a greeting, and he replied, and then they were both silent for a moment: in the pause Mr. Price thrust his pipe between apron and waistcoat.

'Come inside, Miss Tellwright,' he said, with a sickly, conciliatory smile. 'Come into the office, will ye?'

She followed him without a word through the archway. To the right was an open door into the packing-house, where a man surrounded by straw was packing basins in a crate: with swift, precise movements, twisting straw between basin and basin, he forced piles of ware into a space inconceivably small. Mr. Price lingered to watch him for a few seconds, and passed on. They were in the yard, a small quadrangle paved with black, greasy mud. In one corner a load of coal had been cast; in another lay a heap of broken saggars. Decrepit doorways led to the various 'shops' on the ground floor; those on the upper floor were reached by narrow wooden stairs, which seemed to cling insecurely to the exterior walls. Up one of these stairways Mr. Price climbed with heavy, elephantine movements: Anna prudently waited till he had reached the top before beginning to ascend. He pushed open a flimsy door, and with a nod bade her enter. The office was a long narrow room, the dirtiest that Anna had ever seen. If such was the condition of the master's quarters, she thought, what must the workshops be like? The ceiling, which bulged downwards, was as black as the floor, which sank away in the middle till it was hollow like a saucer. The revolution of an engine somewhere below shook everything with a periodic muffled thud. A greyish light came through one small window. By the window was a large double desk, with chairs facing each other. One of these chairs was occupied by Willie Price. The youth did not observe at first that another person had come in with his father. He was casting up figures in an account book, and murmuring numbers to himself. He wore an office coat, short at the wrists and torn at the elbows, and a battered felt hat was thrust far back over his head so that the brim rested on his dirty collar. He turned round at length, and, on seeing Anna, blushed brilliant crimson, and rose, scraping the legs of his chair horribly across the floor. Tall, thin, and

ungainly in every motion, he had the look of a ninny: it was the fact that at school all the boys by a common instinct had combined to tease him, and that on the works the young paintresses continually made private sport of him. Anna, however, had not the least impulse to mock him in her thoughts. For her there was nothing in his blue eyes but simplicity and good intentions. Beside him she felt old, sagacious, crafty: it seemed to her that some one ought to shield that transparent and confiding soul from his father and the intriguing world.

He spoke to her and lifted his hat, holding it afterwards in his great bony hand.

'Get down to th' entry, Will,' said his father, and Willie, with an apologetic sort of cough, slipped silently away through the door.

'Sit down, Miss Tellwright,' said old Price, and she took the Windsor chair that had been occupied by Willie. Her tenant fell into the seat opposite – a leathern chair from which the stuffing had exuded, and with one of its arms broken. 'I hear as ye father is going into partnership with young Mynors – Henry Mynors.'

Anna started at this surprising item of news, which was entirely fresh to her. 'Father has said nothing to me about it,' she replied, coldly.

'Oh! Happen I've said too much. If so, you'll excuse me, Miss. A smart fellow, Mynors. Now you should see *his* little works: not very much bigger than this, but there's everything you can think of there – all the latest machinery and dodges, and not over-rented, I'm told. The biggest fool i' Bursley couldn't help but make money there. This 'ere works 'ere, Miss Tellwright, wants mendin' with a new 'un.'

'It looks very dirty, I must say,' said Anna.

'Dirty!' he laughed – a short, acrid laugh – 'I suppose you've called about the rent.'

'Yes, father asked me to call.'

'Let me see, this place belongs to you i' your own right, doesn't it, Miss?'

'Yes,' said Anna. 'It's mine – from my grandfather, you know.'

'Ah! Well, I'm sorry for to tell ye as I can't pay anything now – no, not a cent. But I'll pay twenty pounds in a week. Tell ye father I'll pay twenty pound in a week.'

'That's what you said last week,' Anna remarked, with more brusqueness than she had intended. At first she was fearful at her own temerity in thus addressing a superintendent of the Sunday-school; then, as nothing happened, she felt reassured, and strong in the justice of her position.

'Yes,' he admitted obsequiously. 'But I've been disappointed. One of our best customers put us off, to tell ye the truth. Money's tight, very tight. It's got to be give and take in these days, as ye father knows. And I may as well speak plain to ye, Miss Tellwright. We canna' stay here; we shall be compelled to give ye notice. What's amiss with this bank² is that it wants pullin' down.' He went off into a rapid enumeration of ninety-and-nine alterations and repairs that must be done without the loss of a moment, and concluded: 'You tell ye father what I've told ye, and say as I'll send up twenty pounds next week. I can't pay anything now; I've nothing by me at all.'

'Father said particularly I was to be sure and get something on account.' There was a flinty hardness in her tone which astonished herself perhaps more than Titus Price. A long pause followed, and then Mr. Price drew a breath, seeming to nerve himself to a tremendous sacrificial deed.

'I tell ye what I'll do. I'll give ye ten pounds now, and I'll do what I can next week. I'll do what I can. There!'

'Thank you,' said Anna. She was amazed at her success.

He unlocked the desk, and his head disappeared under the lifted lid. Anna gazed through the window. Like many women, and not a few men, in the Five Towns, she was wholly ignorant of the staple manufacture. The interior of a works was almost as strange to her as it would have been to a farm-hand from Sussex. A girl came out of a door on the opposite side of the quadrangle: the creature

² Bank: manufactory.

was clothed in clayey rags, and carried on her right shoulder a board laden with biscuit³ cups. She began to mount one of the wooden stairways, and as she did so the board, six feet in length, swayed alarmingly to and fro. Anna expected to see it fall with a destructive crash, but the girl went up in safety, and with a nonchalant jerk of the shoulder aimed the end of the board through another door and vanished from sight. To Anna it was a thrilling feat, but she noticed that a man who stood in the yard did not even turn his head to watch it. Mr. Price recalled her to the business of her errand.

'Here's two fives,' he said, shutting down the desk with the sigh of a crocodile.

'Liar! You said you had nothing!' her unspoken thought ran, and at the same instant the Sunday-school and everything connected with it grievously sank in her estimation; she contrasted this scene with that on the previous day with the peccant schoolgirl: it was an hour of disillusion. Taking the notes, she gave a receipt and rose to go.

'Tell ye father' – it seemed to Anna that this phrase was always on his lips – 'tell ye father he must come down and look at the state this place is in,' said Mr. Price, enheartened by the heroic payment of ten pounds. Anna said nothing; she thought a fire would do more good than anything else to the foul, squalid buildings: the passing fancy coincided with Mr. Price's secret and most intense desire.

Outside she saw Willie Price superintending the lifting of a crate on to a railway lorry. After twirling in the air, the crate sank safely into the waggon. Young Price was perspiring.

'Warm afternoon, Miss Tellwright,' he called to her as she passed, with his pleasant bashful smile. She gave an affirmative. Then he came to her, still smiling, his face full of an intention to say something, however insignificant.

'I suppose you'll be at the Special Teachers' Meeting to-morrow night,' he remarked.

'I hope to be,' she said. That was all: William had achieved his small-talk: they parted.

'So father and Mr. Mynors are going into partnership,' she kept saying to herself on the way home.

³ Biscuit: a term applied to ware which has been fired only once.

CHAPTER IV

A VISIT

The Special Teachers' Meeting to which Willie Price had referred was one of the final preliminaries to a Revival – that is, a revival of godliness and Christian grace – about to be undertaken by the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Bursley. Its object was to arrange for a personal visitation of the parents of Sunday-school scholars in their homes. Hitherto Anna had felt but little interest in the Revival: it had several times been brought indirectly before her notice, but she had regarded it as a phenomenon which recurred at intervals in the cycle of religious activity, and as not in any way affecting herself. The gradual centring of public interest, however – that mysterious movement which, defying analysis, gathers force as it proceeds, and ends by coercing the most indifferent – had already modified her attitude towards this forthcoming event. It got about that the preacher who had been engaged, a specialist in revivals, was a man of miraculous powers: the number of souls which he had snatched from eternal torment was precisely stated, and it amounted to tens of thousands. He played the cornet to the glory of God, and his cornet was of silver: his more distant past had been ineffably wicked, and the faint rumour of that dead wickedness clung to his name like a piquant odour. As Anna walked up Trafalgar Road from Price's she observed that the hoardings had been billed with great posters announcing the Revival and the revivalist, who was to commence his work on Friday night.

During tea Mr. Tellwright interrupted his perusal of the evening 'Signal' to give utterance to a rather remarkable speech.

'Bless us!' he said. 'Th' old trumpeter 'll turn the town upside down!'

'Do you mean the revivalist, father?' Anna asked.

'Ay!'

'He's a beautiful man,' Agnes exclaimed with enthusiasm. 'Our teacher showed us his portrait after school this afternoon. I never saw such a beautiful man.'

Her father gazed hard at the child for an instant, cup in hand, and then turned to Anna with a slightly sardonic air.

'What are you doing i' this Revival, Anna?'

'Nothing,' she said. 'Only there's a teachers' meeting about it to-morrow night, and I have to go to that. Young Mr. Price mentioned it to me specially to-day.'

A pause followed.

'Didst get anything out o' Price?' Tellwright asked.

'Yes; he gave me ten pounds. He wants you to go and look over the works – says they're falling to pieces.'

'Cheque, I reckon?'

She corrected the surmise.

'Better give me them notes, Anna,' he said after tea. 'I'm going to th' Bank i' th' morning, and I'll pay 'em in to your account.'

There was no reason why she should not have suggested the propriety of keeping at least one of the notes for her private use. But she dared not. She had never any money of her own, not a penny; and the effective possession of five pounds seemed far too audacious a dream. She hesitated to imagine her father's reply to such a request, even to frame the request to herself. The thing, viewed close, was utterly impossible. And when she relinquished the notes she also, without being asked, gave up her cheque-book, deposit-book, and pass-book. She did this while ardently desiring to refrain from doing it, as it were under the compulsion of an invincible instinct. Afterwards she felt more at ease, as though some disturbing question had been settled once and for all.

During the whole of that evening she timorously expected Mynors, saying to herself however that he certainly would not call before Thursday. On Tuesday evening she started early for the teachers' meeting. Her intention was to arrive among the first and to choose a seat in obscurity, since she knew well that every eye would be upon her. She was divided between the desire to see Mynors and the desire to avoid the ordeal of being seen by her colleagues in his presence. She trembled lest she should be incapable of commanding her mien so as to appear unconscious of this inspection by curious eyes.

The meeting was held in a large class-room, furnished with wooden seats, a chair and a small table. On the grey distempered walls hung a few Biblical cartoons depicting scenes in the life of Joseph and his brethren – but without reference to Potiphar's wife. From the whitewashed ceiling depended a T-shaped gas-fitting, one burner of which showed a glimmer, though the sun had not yet set. The evening was oppressively warm, and through the wide-open window came the faint effluvium of populous cottages and the distant but raucous cries of children at play. When Anna entered a group of young men were talking eagerly round the table; among these was Willie Price, who greeted her. No others had come: she sat down in a corner by the door, invisible except from within the room. Gradually the place began to fill. Then at last Mynors entered: Anna recognised his authoritative step before she saw him. He walked quickly to the chair in front of the table, and, including all in a friendly and generous smile, said that in the absence of Mr. Titus Price it fell to him to take the chair; he was glad that so many had made a point of being present. Everyone sat down. He gave out a hymn, and led the singing himself, attacking the first note with an assurance born of practice. Then he prayed, and as he prayed Anna gazed at him intently. He was standing up, the ends of his fingers pressed against the top of the table. Very carefully dressed as usual, he wore a brilliant new red necktie, and a gardenia in his button-hole. He seemed happy, wholesome, earnest, and unaffected. He had the elasticity of youth with the firm wisdom of age. And it was as if he had never been younger and would never grow older, remaining always at just thirty and in his prime. Incomparable to the rest, he was clearly born to lead. He fulfilled his functions with tact, grace, and dignity. In such an affair as this present he disclosed the attributes of the skilled workman, whose easy and exact movements are a joy and wonder to the beholder. And behind all was the man, his excellent and strong nature, his kindliness, his sincerity. Yes, to Anna, Mynors was perfect that night; the reality of him exceeded her dreamy meditations. Fearful on the brink of an ecstatic bliss, she could scarcely believe that from the enticements of a thousand women this paragon had been preserved for her. Like most of us, she lacked the high courage to grasp happiness boldly and without apprehension; she had not learnt that nothing is too good to be true.

Mynors' prayer was a cogent appeal for the success of the Revival. He knew what he wanted, and confidently asked for it, approaching God with humility but with self-respect. The prayer was punctuated by Amens from various parts of the room. The atmosphere became suddenly fervent, emotional and devout. Here was lofty endeavour, idealism, a burning spirituality; and not all the pettinesses unavoidable in such an organisation as a Sunday-school could hide the difference between this impassioned altruism and the ignoble selfishness of the worldly. Anna felt, as she had often felt before, but more acutely now, that she existed only on the fringe of the Methodist society. She had not been converted; technically she was a lost creature: the converted knew it, and in some subtle way their bearing towards her, and others in her case, always showed that they knew it. Why did she teach? Not from the impulse of religious zeal. Why was she allowed to have charge of a class of immortal souls? The blind could not lead the blind, nor the lost save the lost. These considerations troubled her. Conscience pricked, accusing her of a continual pretence. The *rôle* of professing Christian, through false shame, had seemed distasteful to her: she had said that she could never stand up and say, 'I am for Christ,' without being uncomfortable. But now she was ashamed of her inability to profess Christ. She could conceive herself proud and happy in the very part which formerly she had despised. It was these believers, workers, exhorters, wrestlers with Satan, who had the right to disdain; not she. At that

moment, as if divining her thoughts, Mynors prayed for those among them who were not converted. She blushed, and when the prayer was finished she feared lest every eye might seek hers in inquiry; but no one seemed to notice her.

Mynors sat down, and, seated, began to explain the arrangements for the Revival. He made it plain that prayers without industry would not achieve success. His remarks revealed the fact that underneath the broad religious structure of the enterprise, and supporting it, there was a basis of individual diplomacy and solicitation. The town had been mapped out into districts, and each of these was being importuned, as at an election: by the thoroughness and instancy of this canvass, quite as much as by the intensity of prayerful desire, would Christ conquer. The affair was a campaign before it was a prostration at the Throne of Grace. He spoke of the children, saying that in connection with these they, the teachers, had at once the highest privilege and the most sacred responsibility. He told of a special service for the children, and the need of visiting them in their homes and inviting the parents also to this feast of God. He wished every teacher during to-morrow and the next day and the next day to go through the list of his or her scholars' names, and call if possible at every house. There must be no shirking. 'Will you ladies do that?' he exclaimed with an appealing, serious smile. 'Will you, Miss Dickinson? Will you, Miss Machin? Will you, Mrs. Salt? Will you, Miss Sutton? Will you – ' Until at last it came: 'Will you, Miss Tellwright?' 'I will,' she answered, with averted eyes. 'Thank you. Thank you all.'

Some others spoke, hopefully, enthusiastically, and one or two prayed. Then Mynors rose: 'May the blessing of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost rest upon us now and for ever.' 'Amen,' someone ejaculated. The meeting was over.

Anna passed rapidly out of the door, down the Quadrangle, and into Trafalgar Road. She was the first to leave, daring not to stay in the room a moment. She had seen him; he had not altered since Sunday; there was no disillusion, but a deepening of the original impression. Caught up by the soaring of his spirit, her spirit lifted, and she was conscious of vague but intense longing skyward. She could not reason or think in that dizzying hour, but she made resolutions which had no verbal form, yielding eagerly to his influence and his appeal. Not till she had reached the bottom of Duck Bank and was breasting the first rise towards Bleakridge did her pace slacken. Then a voice called to her from behind. She recognised it, and turned sharply beneath the shock. Mynors raised his hat and greeted her.

'I'm coming to see your father,' he said.

'Yes?' she said, and gave him her hand.

'It was a very satisfactory meeting to-night,' he began, and in a moment they were talking seriously of the Revival. With the most oblique delicacy, the most perfect assumption of equality between them, he allowed her to perceive his genuine and profound anxiety for her spiritual welfare. The atmosphere of the meeting was still round about him, the divine fire still uncooled. 'I hope you will come to the first service on Friday night,' he pleaded.

'I must,' she replied. 'Oh, yes. I shall come.'

'That is good,' he said. 'I particularly wanted your promise.'

They were at the door of the house. Agnes, obviously expectant and excited, answered the bell. With an effort Anna and Mynors passed into a lighter mood.

'Father said you were coming, Mr. Mynors,' said Agnes, and, turning to Anna, 'I've set supper all myself.'

'Have you?' Mynors laughed. 'Capital! You must let me give you a kiss for that.' He bent down and kissed her, she holding up her face to his with no reluctance. Anna looked on, smiling.

Mr. Tellwright sat near the window of the back parlour, reading the paper. Twilight was at hand. He lowered his head as Mynors entered with Agnes in train, so as to see over his spectacles, which were half-way down his nose.

'How d'ye do, Mr. Mynors? I was just going to begin my supper. I don't wait, you know,' and he glanced at the table.

'Quite right,' said Mynors, 'so long as you wouldn't eat it all. Would he have eaten it all, Agnes, do you think?' Agnes pressed her head against Mynors' arm and laughed shyly. The old man sardonically chuckled.

Anna, who was still in the passage, wondered what could be on the table. If it was only the usual morsel of cheese she felt that she should expire of mortification. She peeped: the cheese was at one end, and at the other a joint of beef, scarcely touched.

'Nay, nay,' said Tellwright, as if he had been engaged some seconds upon the joke, 'I'd have saved ye the bone.'

Anna went upstairs to take off her hat, and immediately Agnes flew after her. The child was breathless with news.

'Oh, Anna! As soon as you'd gone out father told me that Mr. Mynors was coming for supper. Did you know before?'

'Not till Mr. Mynors told me, dear.' It was characteristic of her father to say nothing until the last moment.

'Yes, and he told me to put an extra plate, and I asked him if I had better put the beef on the table, and first he said "No," cross – you know – and then he said I could please myself, so I put it on. Why has Mr. Mynors come, Anna?'

'How should I know? Some business between him and father, I expect.'

'It's very *queer*,' said Agnes positively, with the child's aptitude for looking a fact squarely in the face.

'Why "queer"?''

'You know it is, Anna,' she frowned, and then breaking into a joyous anile: 'But isn't he nice? I think he's lovely.'

'Yes,' Anna assented coldly.

'But really?' Agnes persisted.

Anna brushed her hair and determined not to put on the apron which she usually wore in the house.

'Am I tidy, Anna?'

'Yes. Run downstairs now. I am coming directly.'

'I want to wait for you,' Agnes pouted.

'Very well, dear.'

They entered the parlour together, and Henry Mynors jumped up from his chair, and would not sit at table until they were seated. Then Mr. Tellwright carved the beef, giving each of them a very small piece, and taking only cheese for himself. Agnes handed the water-jug and the bread. Mynors talked about nothing in especial, but he talked and laughed the whole time; he even made the old man laugh, by a comical phrase aimed at Agnes's mad passion for gilly-flowers. He seemed not to have detected any shortcomings in the table appointments – the coarse cloth and plates, the chipped tumblers, the pewter cruet, and the stumpy knives – which caused anguish in the heart of the housewife. He might have sat at such a table every night of his life.

'May I trouble you for a little more beef?' he asked presently, and Anna fancied a shade of mischief in his tone as he thus forced the old man into a tardy hospitality. 'Thanks. *And* a morsel of fat.'

She wondered whether he guessed that she was worth fifty thousand pounds, and her father worth perhaps more.

But on the whole Anna enjoyed the meal. She was sorry when they had finished and Agnes had thanked God for the beef. It was not without considerable reluctance that she rose and left the side of the man whose arm she could have touched at any time during the previous twenty minutes. She

had felt happy and perturbed in being so near to him, so intimate and free; already she knew his face by heart. The two girls carried the plates and dishes into the kitchen, Agnes making the last journey with the tablecloth, which Mynors had assisted her to fold.

'Shut the door, Agnes,' said the old man, getting up to light the gas. It was an order of dismissal to both his daughters. 'Let me light that,' Mynors exclaimed, and the gas was lighted before Mr. Tellwright had struck a match. Mynors turned on the full force of gas. Then Mr. Tellwright carefully lowered it. The summer quarter's gas-bill at that house did not exceed five shillings.

Through the open windows of the kitchen and parlour, Anna could hear the voices of the two men in conversation, Mynors' vivacious and changeful, her father's monotonous, curt, and heavy. Once she caught the old man's hard dry chuckle. The washing-up was done, Agnes had accomplished her home-lessons; the grandfather's clock chimed the half-hour after nine.

'You must go to bed, Agnes.'

'Mustn't I say good-night to him?'

'No, I will say good-night for you.'

'Don't forget to. I shall ask you in the morning.'

The regular sound of talk still came from the parlour. A full moon passed along the cloudless sky. By its light and that of a glimmer of gas, Anna sat cleaning silver, or rather nickel, at the kitchen table. The spoons and forks were already clean, but she felt compelled to busy herself with something. At length the talk stopped and she heard the scraping of chair-legs. Should she return to the parlour? Or should she – ? Even while she hesitated, the kitchen door opened.

'Excuse me coming in here,' said Mynors. 'I wanted to say good-night to you.'

She sprang up and he took her hand. Could he feel the agitation of that hand?

'Good-night.'

'Good-night.' He said it again.

'And Agnes wished me to say good-night to you for her.'

'Did she?' He smiled; till then his face had been serious. 'You won't forget Friday?'

'As if I could!' she murmured after he had gone.

CHAPTER V

THE REVIVAL

Anna spent the two following afternoons in visiting the houses of her school-children. She had no talent for such work, which demands the vocal rather than the meditative temperament, and the apparent futility of her labours would have disgusted and disheartened her had she not been sustained and urged forward by the still active influence of Mynors and the teachers' meeting. There were fifteen names in her class-book, and she went to each house, except four whose tenants were impeccable Wesleyan families and would have considered themselves insulted by a quasi-didactic visit from an upstart like Anna. Of the eleven, some parents were rude to her; others begged, and she had nothing to give; others made perfunctory promises; only two seemed to regard her as anything but a somewhat tiresome impertinence. The fault was doubtless her own. Nevertheless she found joy in the uncongenial and ill-performed task – the cold, fierce joy of the nun in her penance. When it was done she said 'I have done it,' as one who has sworn to do it come what might, yet without quite expecting to succeed.

On the Friday afternoon, during tea, a boy brought up a large foolscap packet addressed to Mr. Tellwright. 'From Mr. Mynors,' the boy said. Tellwright opened it leisurely after the boy had gone, and took out some sheets covered with figures which he carefully examined. 'Anna,' he said, as she was clearing away the tea things, 'I understand thou'rt going to the Revival meeting to-night. I shall have a message as thou mun give to Mr. Mynors.'

When she went upstairs to dress, she saw the Suttons' landau standing outside their house on the opposite side of the road. Mrs. Sutton came down the front steps and got into the carriage, and was followed by a little restless, nervous, alert man who carried in his hand a black case of peculiar form. 'The Revivalist!' Anna exclaimed, remembering that he was to stay with the Suttons during the Revival week. Then this was the renowned crusader, and the case held his renowned cornet! The carriage drove off down Trafalgar Road, and Anna could see that the little man was talking vehemently and incessantly to Mrs. Sutton, who listened with evident interest; at the same time the man's eyes were everywhere, absorbing all details of the street and houses with unquenchable curiosity.

'What is the message for Mr. Mynors, father?' she asked in the parlour, putting on her cotton gloves.

'Oh!' he said, and then paused. 'Shut th' door, lass.'

She shut it, not knowing what this cautiousness foreshadowed. Agnes was in the kitchen.

'It's o' this'n,' Tellwright began. 'Young Mynors wants a partner wi' a couple o' thousand pounds, and he come to me. Ye understand; 'tis what they call a sleeping partner he's after. He'll give a third share in his concern for two thousand pound now. I've looked into it and there's money in it. He's no fool and he's gotten hold of a good thing. He sent me up his stock-taking and balance sheet to-day, and I've been o'er the place mysen. I'm telling thee this, lass, because I have na' two thousand o' my own idle just now, and I thought as thou might happen like th' investment.'

'But father –'

'Listen. I know as there's only four hundred o' thine in th' Bank now, but next week 'll see the beginning o' July and dividends coming in. I've reckoned as ye'll have nigh on fourteen hundred i' dividends and interests, and I can lend ye a couple o' hundred in case o' necessity. It's a rare chance; thou's best tak' it.'

'Of course, if you think it's all right, father, that's enough,' she said without animation.

'Am' na I telling thee I think it's all right?' he remarked sharply. 'You mun tell Mynors as I say it's satisfactory. Tell him that, see? I say it's satisfactory. I shall want for to see him later on. He

told me he couldna' come up any night next week, so ask him to make it the week after. There's no hurry. Dunna' forget.'

What surprised Anna most in the affair was that Henry Mynors should have been able to tempt her father into a speculation. Ephraim Tellwright the investor was usually as shy as a well-fed trout, and this capture of him by a youngster only two years established in business might fairly be regarded as a prodigious feat. It was indeed the highest distinction of Mynors' commercial career. Henry was so prominently active in the Wesleyan Society that the members of that society, especially the women, were apt to ignore the other side of his individuality. They knew him supreme as a religious worker; they did not realise the likelihood of his becoming supreme in the staple manufacture. Left an orphan at seventeen, Mynors belonged to a family now otherwise extinct in the Five Towns – one of those families which by virtue of numbers, variety, and personal force seem to permeate a whole district, to be a calculable item of it, an essential part of its identity. The elders of the Mynors blood had once occupied the red house opposite Tellwright's, now used as a school, and had there reared many children: the school building was still known as 'Mynors's' by old-fashioned people. Then the parents died in middle age: one daughter married in the North, another in the South; a third went to China as a missionary and died of fever; the eldest son died; the second had vanished into Canada and was reported a scapegrace; the third was a sea-captain. Henry (the youngest) alone was left, and of all the family Henry was the only one to be connected with the earthenware trade. There was no inherited money, and during ten years he had worked for a large firm in Turnhill, as clerk, as traveller, and last as manager, living always quietly in lodgings. In the fullness of time he gave notice to leave, was offered a partnership, and refused it. Taking a newly erected manufactory in Bursley near the canal, he started in business for himself, and it became known that, at the age of twenty-eight, he had saved fifteen hundred pounds. Equally expert in the labyrinths of manufacture and in the niceties of the markets (he was reckoned a peerless traveller), Mynors inevitably flourished. His order-books were filled and flowing over at remunerative prices, and insufficiency of capital was the sole peril to which he was exposed. By the raising of a finger he could have had a dozen working and moneyed partners, but he had no desire for a working partner. What he wanted was a capitalist who had confidence in him, Mynors. In Ephraim Tellwright he found the man. Whether it was by instinct, good luck, or skilful diplomacy that Mynors secured this invaluable prize no one could positively say, and perhaps even he himself could not have catalogued all the obscure motives that had guided him to the shrewd miser of Manor Terrace.

Anna had meant to reach chapel before the commencement of the meeting, but the interview with her father threw her late. As she entered the porch an officer told her that the body of the chapel was quite full and that she should go into the gallery, where a few seats were left near the choir. She obeyed: pew-holders had no rights at that service. The scene in the auditorium astonished her, effectually putting an end to the worldly preoccupation caused by her father's news. The historic chapel was crowded almost in every part, and the congregation – impressed, excited, eager – sang the opening hymn with unprecedented vigour and sincerity; above the rest could be heard the trained voices of a large choir, and even the choir, usually perfunctory, seemed to share the general fervour. In the vast mahogany pulpit the Reverend Reginald Banks, the superintendent minister, a stout pale-faced man with pendent cheeks and cold grey eyes, stood impassively regarding the assemblage, and by his side was the revivalist, a manikin in comparison with his colleague; on the broad balustrade of the pulpit lay the cornet. The fiery and inquisitive eyes of the revivalist probed into the furthest corners of the chapel; apparently no detail of any single face or of the florid decoration escaped him, and as Anna crept into a small empty pew next to the east wall she felt that she too had been separately observed. Mr. Banks gave out the last verse of the hymn, and simultaneously with the leading chord from the organ the revivalist seized his cornet and joined the melody. Massive yet exultant, the tones rose clear over the mighty volume of vocal sound, an incitement to victorious effort. The effect was instant: an ecstatic tremor seemed to pass through the congregation, like wind through ripe corn, and

at the close of the hymn it was not until the revivalist had put down his cornet that the people resumed their seats. Amid the *frou-frou*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.