YONGE CHARLOTTE MARY

THE CARBONELS

Charlotte Yonge

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Yonge C.

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Содержание

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Chapter One.
French Measure

"For thy walls a pretty slight drollery."
The Second Part of King Henry IV.

"A bad lot. Yes, sir, a thoroughly bad lot."

"You don't mean it."

"Yes, ma'am, a bad lot is the Uphill people. Good for nothing and ungrateful! I've known them these thirty-years, and no one will do anything with them."

The time was the summer of 1822. The place was a garden, somewhat gone to waste, with a gravel drive running round a great circle of periwinkles with a spotted aucuba in the middle. There was a low, two-storied house, with green shutters, green Venetian blinds, and a rather shabby verandah painted in alternate stripes of light and darker green. In front stood a high gig, with a tall old, bony horse trying to munch the young untrimmed shoots of a lilac in front of him as he waited for the speaker, a lawyer, dressed as country attorneys were wont to dress in those days, in a coat of invisible green, where the green constantly became more visible, brown trousers, and under them drab gaiters. He was addressing a gentleman in a blue coat and nankeen trousers, but evidently military, and two ladies in white dresses, narrow as to the skirts, but full in the sleeves. One had a blue scarf over her shoulders and blue ribbons in her very large Leghorn bonnet; the other had the same in green, and likewise a green veil. Her bonnet was rather more trimmed, the dress more embroidered, the scarf of a richer, broader material than the other's, and it was thus evident that she was the married sister; but they were a good deal alike, with the same wholesome smooth complexion, brown eyes, and hair in great shining rolls under their bonnet caps, much the same pleasant expression, and the same neat little feet in crossed sandalled shoes and white stockings showing out beneath their white tambour-worked gowns.

With the above verdict, the lawyer made his parting bow, and drove off along a somewhat rough road through two pasture fields. The first gate, white and ornamental, was held open for him by an old man in a short white smock and long leathern gaiters, the second his own servant opened, the third was held by half a dozen shock-headed children, with their backs against it and hands held out, but in vain; he only smacked his driving-whip over their heads, and though he did not strike any of them, they requited it with a prolonged yell, which reached the ears of the trio in front of the house.

"I'm afraid it is not far from the truth," said the green lady.

"Oh no; I am sure he is a horrid man," said her blue sister. "I would not believe him for a moment."

"Only with a qualification," rejoined the gentleman.

"But, Edmund, couldn't you be sure that it is just what he would say, whatever the people were?"

"I am equally sure that the exaction of rents is not the way to see people at their best."

"Come in, come in! We have all our settling in to do, and no time for you two to fight."

Edmund, Mary, Dorothea, and Sophia Carbonel were second cousins, who had always known one another in the house of the girls' father, a clergyman in a large country town. Edmund had been in the army just in time for the final battles of the Peninsular war, and had since served with the army of occupation and in Canada. He had always meant that Mary should be his wife, but the means were wanting to set up housekeeping, until the death of an old uncle of his mother's made him heir

to Greenhow Farm, an estate bringing in about 500 pounds a year. Mary and her next sister Dora had in the meantime lost their parents, and had been living with some relations in London, where their much younger sister Sophy was at school, until Edmund, coming home, looked over the farm, decided that it would be a fit home for the sisters, and retired from the army forthwith. Thus then, after a brief tour among the Lakes, they had taken up Dora in London, and here they were; Sophy was to join them when the holidays began. Disorder reigned indeed within, and hammers resounded, nor was the passage easy among the packing-cases that encumbered the narrow little vestibule whence the stairs ascended.

Under the verandah were the five sash windows of the three front rooms, the door, of course, in the middle. Each had a little shabby furniture, to which the Carbonels were adding, and meant to add more; the dining-room had already been papered with red flock in stripes, the drawing-room with a very delicate white, on which were traced in tender colouring-baskets of vine leaves and laburnums.

Dora gave a little scream. “Look! Between the windows, Mary; see, the laburnums and grapes are hanging upward.”

“Stupid people!” exclaimed Mary, “I see. Happily, it is only on that one piece, but how Edmund will be vexed.”

“Perhaps there is another piece unused.”

“I am sure I hope there is! Don’t you know, Edmund fell in love with it at Paris. It was his first provision for future housekeeping, and it was lying laid up in lavender all these years till we were ready for it.”

“It is only that one division, which is a comfort.”

“What’s the matter?” and the master of the house came in.

“Senseless beings! It must be covered directly. It is a desight to the whole room. Here!” and he went out to the carpenter, who was universal builder to the village, and was laying down the stair carpet. “Here, Hewlett, do you see what you have done?”

Hewlett, a large man with a smooth, plump, but honest face, came in, in his shirt sleeves, apron, and paper cap, touched his forehead to the ladies, stood, and stared.

“Can’t you see?” sharply demanded the captain.

Hewlett scratched his head, and gazed round.

“See here! How do grapes grow? Or laburnums?”

An idea broke in on him.

“What! they be topsy-turvy?” he slowly observed, after looking from the faulty breadth to the next.

“Of course they are. Find the rest of the paper! We must have a piece put on at once, or the whole appearance of the room is spoilt,” said Captain Carbonel. “It will make a delay, but it must be done at once. Where is the piece left over?”

Hewlett retreated to find it, while the captain said something about “stupid ass.”

Presently his gruff voice was heard demanding, “Dan, I say, where’s the remnant of that there fancy paper?”

Dan’s answer did not rise into audible words, but presently Hewlett tramped back, saying, “There ain’t none, sir.”

“I tell you there must be,” returned the captain, in the same angry tones. And he proceeded to show that the number of pieces he had bought, and the measure of which he had ascertained, was such that there ought to have been half-a-piece left over from papering the room, the size of which he had exactly taken. Hewlett could do nothing but stolidly repeat that “there weren’t none left, not enow to make a mouse’s nest.”

“Who did the papering? Did you?”

“Daniel Hewlett, sir, he did the most on it. My cousin, sir.”

The captain fell upon Daniel, who had more words at command, but was equally strong in denial of having any remnant. “They had only skimped out enough,” he said, “just enough for the walls, and it was a close fit anyhow.”

The captain loudly declared it impossible, but Mary ran out in the midst to suggest that mayhap the defect was in the French measure. Each piece might not have been the true number of whatever they called them in that new revolutionary fashion.

Dan Hewlett’s face cleared up. “Ay, ’tis the French measure, sure, sir. Of course they can’t do nothing true and straight! I be mortal sorry the ladies is disappointed, but it bain’t no fault of mine, sir.”

“And look here, Edmund,” continued Mary, “it will not spoil the room at all if Mr Hewlett will help move the tall bureau against it, and we’ll hang the ‘Death of General Wolfe’ above it, and then there won’t be more than two bits of laburnum to be seen, even if you are curious enough to get upon a chair to investigate.”

“Well, it must be so,” returned Captain Carbonel, “but I hate the idea of makeshifts and having imperfections concealed.”

“Just like you, Edmund,” laughed Dora. “You will always seem to be looking right through at the upright sprays, though all the solid weight of Hume, Gibbon, and Rollin is in front of them.”

“Precisely,” said Edmund. “It is not well to feel that there is anything to be hidden. The chief part of the vexation is, however,” he added—shutting the door and lowering his voice—“that I am convinced that there must have been foul play somewhere.”

“Oh, Edmund; French measure!”

“Nonsense! That does not account for at least a whole piece disappearing.”

He took out a pencil, and went again into his calculations, while his sister-in-law indignantly exclaimed—

“It is all prejudice, because that horrid attorney said all these poor people were a bad lot.”

“Hush, hush!” said Mrs Carbonel, rather frightened, and—

“I advise you to think before you speak,” said Captain Carbonel quietly but sternly.

Still Dora could not help saying, as soon as she was alone with her sister, “I shall believe in the French measure. I like that slow, dull man, and I am sure he is honest.”

“Yes, dear, only pray don’t say any more to Edmund, but let us get the book-case placed as fast as we can, and let him forget all about it.”

Chapter Two.
The Lie of the Land

"Thank you, pretty cow, that gave
Pleasant milk to soak my bread,
Every day and every night
Warm and fresh, and sweet and bright."

J. Taylor.

Darkness had descended before there had been time to do more than shake into the downstair rooms and bedrooms and be refreshed with the evening meal, but with morning began the survey of the new home.

The front part of the house had three living rooms, with large sash windows, almost to the ground, shaded by the verandah. These were drawing-room, dining-room, and study, the last taken out of the entry, where was the staircase, and there were three similar rooms above. These had been added by the late owner to the original farmhouse, with a fine old-fashioned kitchen that sent Mary and Dora into greater raptures than their cook. There were offices around, a cool dairy, where stood great red glazed pans of delicious-looking cream and milk, and a clean white wooden churn that Dora longed to handle. The farmhouse rooms were between it and the new ones, and there were a good many rooms above, the red-tiled roof rising much higher than that of the more modern part of the house. There was a narrow paling in front, and then came the farmyard, enclosed in barns, cow-houses and cart-sheds, and a cottage where the bailiff, Master Pucklechurch, had taken up his abode, having hitherto lived in the farmhouse. He was waiting to show Captain Carbonel over the farm. He was a grizzled, stooping old fellow, with a fine, handsome, sunburnt face; bright, shrewd, dark eyes looking out between puckers, a short white smock-frock, and long gaiters. It was not their notion of a bailiff but the lawyer, who was so chary of his praise, had said that old Master Pucklechurch and his wife were absolutely trustworthy. They had managed the farm in the interregnum, and brought him weekly accounts in their heads, for neither could write, with the most perfect regularity and minuteness. And his face did indeed bespeak confidence in his honesty, as he touched his hat in answer to the greeting.

The ladies, however, looked and smelt in some dismay, for the centre of the yard was a mountain of manure and straw, with a puce-coloured pond beside it. On the summit of the mountain a handsome ruddy cock, with a splendid dark-green arched tail, clucked, chuckled, and scratched for his speckled, rose-crowned hens, a green-headed, curly-tailed drake "steered forth his fleet upon the lake" of brown ducks and their yellow progeny, and pigs of the plum-pudding order rooted in the intermediate regions. The road which led to the cart-sheds and to the house, skirted round this unsavoury tract.

"Oh, Edmund!" sighed Mary.

"Farmer's wife, Mary," said her husband, smiling. "It ought to be a perfect nosegay to you."

"I'm sure it is not wholesome," she said, looking really distressed, and he dropped his teasing tone, and said—

"Of course it shall be remedied! I will see to it."

A dismal screeching and cackling here attracted the attention of the sisters, who started towards Pucklechurch's cottage, and the fowl-house, (a very foul house by the by) in front of which, on a low wooden stool, sat a tidy old woman, Betty Pucklechurch in fact, in a tall muslin cap, spotted kerchief blue gown, and coarse apron, with a big girl before her holding the unfortunate hen, whose cries had startled them.

"Oh, don't go near! She is killing it," cried Dora.

"No;" as the hen, with a final squawk, shook out her ruffled feathers, and rushed away to tell her woes to her companions on the dunghill, while the old woman jumped up, smoothed down her apron, and curtsied low.

"What were you doing?" asked Mary, still startled.

"Only whipping her breast with nettles, ma'am, to teach her to sit close in her nest, the plaguey thing, and not be gadding after the rest."

"Poor thing!" cried Dora. "But oh, look, look, Mary, at the dear little chickens!"

They were in the greatest delight at the three broods of downy little chickens, and one of ducklings, whose parent hens were clucking in coops; and in the kitchen they found a sickly one nursed in flannel in a basket, and an orphaned lamb which staggered upon its disproportionate black legs at sight of Betty.

"Ay! he be always after me," she said. "They terrify one terrible, as if 'twas their mother, till they can run with the rest."

Dora would have petted the lamb, but it retreated from her behind Betty's petticoats, and she could only listen to Mary's questions about how much butter was made from how many cows milk, and then be taken to see the two calves, one of which Betty pronounced to be "but a staggering Bob yet, but George Butcher would take he in a sen'night," which sounded so like senate, that it set Dora wondering what council was to pronounce on the fate of the poor infant bull.

Over his stall, Edmund found them, after an inspection of the pig-styes, and having much offended Master Pucklechurch by declaring that he would have them kept clean, and the pigs no longer allowed to range about the yard.

"Bless you, sir, the poor things would catch their death of cold and die," was the answer to the one edict; and to the other, "They'd never take to their victuals, nor fat kindly without their range first."

"Then let them have it in the home-field out there, where I see plenty of geese."

"They'll spile every bit of grass, sir," was the growling objection; and still worse was the suggestion, which gradually rose into a command, that the "muck-heap" should be removed to the said home-field, and never allowed to accumulate in such close proximity to the house.

Pucklechurch said little; but his "If it be your will, sir," sounded like a snarl, and after ruminating for some time, he brought out—as if it were an answer to a question about the team of horses—

"We'll have to take on another boy, let be a man, if things is to be a that 'en a."

"Let us, then," said the captain, and joined his ladies, with the old man depressed and grumbling inwardly.

There was an orchard preparing to be beautiful with blossom, and a considerable kitchen garden at the back and on the other side of the house, bounded by an exceedingly dirty and be-rutted farm road, over which the carriage had jolted the evening before. The extensive home-field in front was shut off from the approach by a belt of evergreens, and sloped slightly upwards towards the hill which gave the parish its name.

"We will cut off a nice carriage road," said Mary, as she looked at it.

"All in good time," replied her husband, not wishing further to shock poor Master Pucklechurch, who had to conduct the party to the arable fields—one of which was being ploughed by three fine sleek horses, led by Bill Morris, with his father at the shafts. In another, their approach was greeted by hideous yells and shouts which made Dora start.

"Ay, ay," said Pucklechurch, "he knows how to holler when he see me a-coming;" and at the same time a black-specked cloud of rooks rose up from the furrows, the old man stamping towards the boy who ought to have been keeping them, vituperating him in terms that it was as well not to hear.

And it was such a tiny boy after all, and in such a pair of huge boots with holes showing his bare toes. However, they served him to run away from Master Pucklechurch into the furthest ditch, and if the ladies had designs on him, they had to be deferred.

On the opposite side were more fields, with crops in various stages, one lovely with the growing wheat and barley, another promising potatoes, and another beans; and beyond, towards the river, were meadows parted by broad hedgerows, with paths between, in which a few primroses and golden celandines looked up beneath the withy buds and the fluttering hazel catkins. Then came the meadows, in one of which fed the cows, pretty buff-and-white creatures, and in another field were hurdled the sheep, among their dole of turnips, sheep and turnips alike emitting an odour of the most unpleasant kind, and the deep baas of the ewes, and the thinner wail of the lambs made a huge mass of sounds; while Captain Carbonel tried to talk to Master Buttermere the shepherd, a silent, crusty, white-haired old man in a green smock and grey old coat, who growled out scarcely a word.

So the tour of the property was made, and old Pucklechurch expressed his opinion. “He’ll never make nothing of it; he is too outlandish and full of his fancies, and his madam’s a fine lady. ’Pon my word and honour, she was frought at that there muck-heap!”

This pleasant augury was of course not known to the new-comers, who found something so honest and worthy about the Pucklechurches that they could not help liking them, though Mrs Carbonel had another tussle with Betty about fresh butter. “It war no good to make it more than once a week. Folk liked it tasty and meller;” and that the Carbonels had by no means the same likings, made her hold up her hands and agree with her husband that their failure was certain. These first few days were spent in the needful arrangements of house and furniture, during which time Captain Carbonel came to the conclusion that no one could be more stupid or awkward than Master Hewlett, but that he was an honest man, and tried to do his best, such as it was, while his relation, Dan, though cleverer, was much more slippery, and could not be depended upon. Dora asked Master Hewlett what schools there were in the place, and he made answer that the little ones went in to Dame Verdon, but she didn’t make much of it, not since she had had the shaking palsy, and she could not give the lads the stick. He thought of sending his biggest lad to school at Poppleby next spring, but ’twas a long way, and his good woman didn’t half like it, not unless there was some one going the same way.

Betty Pucklechurch’s account amounted to much the same. “Dame Verdon had had the school nigh about forty years. She had taught them all to read their Testament, all as stayed long enough, for there was plenty for the children to do; and folks said she wasn’t up to hitting them as she used to be.”

Farmer Goodenough, the churchwarden, who came to see Captain Carbonel about the letting of a field which was mixed up with the Greenhow property, gave something of the like character. “She is getting old, certain sure, but she is a deserving woman, and she keeps off the parish.”

“But can she teach the children?”

“She can teach them all they need to know, and keep the little ones out of mischief,” said the farmer, perhaps beginning to be alarmed. “No use to learn them no more. What do they want of it for working in the fields or milking the cows?”

“They ought at least to know their duty to God and their neighbour,” said Captain Carbonel. “Is there no Sunday School?”

“No, sir,”—very bluntly. “I hear talk of such things at Poppleby and the like,” he added, “but we don’t want none of them here. The lot here are quite bad enough, without maggots being put into their heads.”

Captain Carbonel did not wish to continue the subject. The farmer’s own accent did not greatly betoken acquaintance with schools of any sort.

Of course the wife and sister were amused as well as saddened by his imitative account of the farmer’s last speech, but they meant to study the subject on their first Sunday. They had learnt already that Uphill Priors was a daughter church to Downhill Priors, and had only one service on a Sunday, alternate mornings and evenings. The vicar was the head of a house at Oxford, and only came to the parsonage in the summer. The services were provided for by a curate, living at Downhill, with the assistance of the master of a private school, to whom the vicarage was let. When Captain Carbonel

asked Master Pucklechurch about the time, he answered, “Well, sir, ’tis morning churching. So it will be half-past ten, or else eleven, or else no time at all.”

“What, do you mean that there will be none?”

“No, sir. There will be churching sure enough, but just as time may chance, not to call it an hour. Best way is to start as soon as you sights the parson a-coming past the gate down there. Then you’re sure to be in time. Bell strikes out as soon as they sees him beyond the ‘Prior’s Lane.’”

The Carbonels, in Sunday trim, with William the man-servant, and two maids, their Prayerbooks in white pocket-handkerchiefs, following in the rear, set forth for the gate, in the spring freshness. The grass in the fields was beginning to grow up, the hedges were sprouting with tender greens and reds, the polished stems of the celandine were opening to the sunshine in the banks, with here and there a primrose. Birds were singing all round, and a lark overhead—most delightful pleasures to those so long shut up in a town. It was the side of a hill, where the fields were cut out into most curious forms, probably to suit the winding of a little brook or the shape of the ground; and there were, near the bottom, signs of a mass of daffodils, which filled the sisters with delight, though daffodils were not then the fashion, and were rather despised as yellow and scentless.

As they came near the second gate, they saw a black figure go by on an old white horse; then they came out on a long ascending lane with deep ruts, bordered by fresh soft turf on either sides, with hawthorn hedges, and at intervals dark yew trees.

A cracked bell struck up, by which they understood that the clergyman had come in sight, and they came themselves out upon a village green, where geese, donkeys, and boys in greenish smock-frocks, seemed to be all mixed up together. Thatched cottages stood round the green, and a public-house—the “Fox and Hounds.” The sign consisted of a hunt, elaborately cut out in tin, huntsman, dogs, and fox, rushing across from the inn on a high uplifted rod of iron, fastened into a pole on the further side of the road, whence the sound of the bell proceeded, and whither the congregation in smock-frocks and black bonnets were making their way.

Following in this direction, the Carbonels, much amused, passed under the hunt, went some distance further, and found a green churchyard, quite shut in by tall elm trees, which, from the road, almost hid the tiny tumble-down church, from whose wooden belfry the call proceeded. It really seemed to be buried in the earth, and the little side windows looked out into a ditch. There were two steps to go down into the deep porch, and within there seemed to be small space between the roof and the top of the high square pew into which they were ushered by Master Hewlett, who, it seemed, was the parish clerk.

They saw little from it, but on one side, hung from the roof a huge panel with the royal arms, painted in the reign of William and Mary, as the initials in the corners testified, and with the lion licking his lips most comically; on the other side was a great patch of green damp; behind, a gallery, full of white smock-frocked men with their knees thrust through the rails in front. Immediately before them rose the tall erection of pulpit, the fusty old cushion and tassels, each faded to a different tint, overhanging so much that Dora could not help thinking that a thump from an energetic preacher would send it down on Edmund’s head in a cloud of dust. There was the reading-desk below, whence the edges of a ragged Prayer-book protruded, and above it presently appeared a very full but much-frayed surplice, and a thin worn face between white whiskers. The service was quietly and reverently read, but not a response seemed to come from anywhere except from Master Hewlett’s powerful lungs, somewhere in the rear, and there was a certain murmur of chattering in the chancel followed by a resounding whack. Then Master Hewlett’s head was seen, and his steps heard as he tramped along the aisle and climbed up the gallery stairs, as the General Thanksgiving began, and there he shouted out the number of the Psalm, “new version,” that is, from Brady and Tate, which every one had bound up with the Prayer-book. Then a bassoon brayed, and a fiddle squealed, and the Psalm resounded with hearty goodwill and better tone than could have been expected.

Master Hewlett stayed to assist in the second singing, and the children, who sat on low forms and on the chancel step, profited by it to make their voices more audible than the Commandments, though the clergyman had not gone to the altar, and once in the course of the sermon, Captain Carbonel was impelled to stand up and look over the edge of the pew, when he beheld a battle royal going on over a length of string, between a boy in a blue petticoat and one in a fustian jacket. At the unwonted sight, the fustian-clad let go, and blue petticoat tumbled over backwards, kicking up a great pair of red legs, grey socks, and imperfect but elephantine boots, and howling at the same time. The preacher stopped short, the clerk had by this time worked his way down from the gallery, and, collaring both the antagonists, hauled them out into the churchyard, the triple stamping being heard on the pavement all the way. The sermon was resumed and read to its conclusion. It was a very good one, but immensely beyond the capacity of the congregation, and Mary Carbonel had a strong suspicion that she had heard it before.

It was only on coming out that any notion could be gathered of the congregation. There were a good many men and big boys, in smocks, a few green, but most of them beautifully white and embroidered; their wearers had sat without books through the whole service, and now came out with considerable trampling.

The pews contained the young girls in gorgeous colours, the old women, and the better class of people, but not many of them, for the "*petit noblesse*" of Uphill were very "*petit*" indeed, in means and numbers; but their bonnets were enormous, and had red or purple bows standing upright on them, and the farmers had drab coats and long gaiters. The old dames curtsied low, the little girls stared, and the boys peeped out from behind the slanting old headstones and grinned. Some of them had been playing at marbles on the top of the one square old monument, until routed by Master Hewlett on his coming out with the two combatants.

Captain Carbonel had gone round to the vestry door to make acquaintance with the clergyman, though Farmer Goodenough informed him in an audible whisper, "He ain't the right one, sir; he be only schoolmaster."

And when the two met at the door, and the captain shook hands and said that they would be neighbours, he was received with a certain hesitating smile.

"I should tell you, sir, that I am only taking occasional duty here—assisting. I am Mr Atkins. I have a select private academy at the vicarage, which the President of Saint Cyril's lets to me. He is here in the summer holidays."

"I understand. The curate lives at Downhill!" said Captain Carbonel.

"At the priory, in fact, with his father's family. Yes, it is rather an unfortunate state of affairs," he said, answering the captain's countenance rather than his words; "but I have no responsibility. I merely assist in the Sunday duty; and, indeed, I advise you to have as little to do with the Uphill people as possible. An idle good-for-nothing set! Any magistrate would tell you that there's no parish where they have so many up before them."

"No wonder!" said Captain Carbonel under his breath.

"A bad set," repeated Mr Atkins, pausing at the shed where his old grey horse was put up; and there they parted.

The captain and his wife and her sister walked to Downhill, two miles off, across broad meadows, a river, and a pretty old bridge, the next Sunday morning, found the church scantily filled, but with more respectable-looking people, and heard the same sermon over again, so that Mary was able to identify it with one in a published volume.

Chapter Three.
The Turnip Field

"You ask me why the poor complain,
And these have answered thee."

Southey.

"Hullo, Molly Hewlett, who'd ha' thought of seeing you out here?"

It was in a wet turnip field, and a row of women were stooping over it, picking out the weeds. The one that was best off had great boots, a huge weight to carry in themselves; but most had them sadly torn and broken. Their skirts, of no particular colour, were tucked up, and they had either a very old man's coat, or a smock-frock cut short, or a small old woollen shawl, which last left the blue and red arms bare; on their heads were the oldest of bonnets, or here and there a sun-bonnet, which looked more decent. One or two babies were waiting in the hedgeside in the charge of little girls.

"Molly Hewlett," exclaimed another of the set, straightening herself up. "Why, I thought your Dan was working with Master Hewlett, for they Gobblealls," (which was what Uphill made of Carbonel).

"So he be; but what is a poor woman to do when more than half his wage goes to the 'Fox and Hounds,' and she has five children to keep and my poor sister, not able to do a turn? There's George Hewlett, grumbling and growling at him too, and no one knows how long he'll keep him on."

"What! George, his cousin, as was bound to keep him on?"

"I don't know; George is that particular himself, and them new folks, Gobbleall as they call them, are right down mean, and come down on you if they misses one little mossle of parkisit; and there's my poor sister to keep—as is afflicted, and can't do nothing!"

"But she pays you handsome," said Betsy Seddon, "and looks after the children besides."

"Pays, indeed! Not half enough to keep her, with all the trouble of helping her about! Not that I grudges it, but she wants things extry, you see, and Dan he don't like it. But no doubt the ladies will take notice of her."

"I thought the lady kind enough," interposed another woman. "She noticed how lame our granny was with the rheumatics, and told me to send up for broth."

"We wants somewhat bad enough," returned another thin woman, with her hand to her side. "Nobody never does nothing for no one here!"

"Nor we don't want no one to come worriting and terrifying," cried the last of the group, with fierce black eyes and rusty black hair sticking out beyond her man's beaver hat, tied on with a yellow handkerchief. "Always at one about church and school, and meddling with everything—the ribbon on one's bonnet and to the very pots on the fire. I knows what they be like in Tydeby! And what do you get by it, but old cast clothes and broth made of dish-washings?" She enforced all this with more than one word not to be written.

"I know, I'd be thankful for that!" murmured the thin woman, who looked as if she had barely a petticoat on, and could have had scarcely a breakfast.

"Oh, we all know's Bessy Mole is all for what she can get!" said the independent woman, tossing her head.

"And had need to be," returned Molly Hewlett, in a scornful tone, which made the poor woman in question stoop all the lower, and pull her groundsel more diligently.

"The broth ain't bad," ventured she who had tried it.

"I shall see what I can get out of them," added another. "I bain't proud; and my poor children's shoes is a shame to see."

"You'll not get much," said Molly Hewlett, with a sniff. "The captain, as they calls him, come down on my Jem, as was taking home a little bit of a chip for the fire, and made him put it down, as cross as could be."

"How now, you lazy, trolloping, gossiping women! What are you after?"

Farmer Goodenough was upon them; and the words he showered on them were not by any means "good enough" to be repeated here. He stormed at them for their idleness so furiously as to set off the babies in the hedge screaming and yelling. Tirzah Todd, the gipsy-looking woman whom he especially abused, tossed her head and marched off in the midst, growling fiercely, to quiet her child; and he, sending a parting imprecation after her, directed his violence upon poor Bessy Mole, though all this time she had been creeping on, shaking, trembling, and crying, under the pelting of the storm; but, unluckily, in her nervousness and blindness from tears, she pulled up a young turnip, and the farmer fell on her and rated her hotly for not being worth half her wage, and doing him more harm than good with her carelessness. She had not a word to say for herself, and went on shivering and trying to check her sobs while he shouted out that he only employed her from charity, and she had better look out, or he should turn her off at once.

"Oh, sir, don't!" then came out with a burst of tears. "My poor children—"

"Don't go whining about your children, but let me see you do your work."

However, this last sentence was in a milder tone, as if the fit of passion had exhausted itself; and Mr Goodenough found his way back to the path that crossed the fields, and went on. Tirzah Todd set her teeth, clenched her fist and shook it after him, while the other women, as soon as he was out of sight, began to console Bessy Mole, who was crying bitterly and saying, "what would become of her poor children, and her own poor father."

"Never you mind, Bessy," said Molly Hewlett, "every one knows as how old Goodenough's bark is worse than his bite."

"He runs out and it's over," put in Betsy Seddon.

"I'm sure I can hardly keep about any way," sobbed the widow. "My inside is all of a quake. I can't abide words."

"Ten to one he don't give you another sixpence a week, after all," added Nanny Barton.

"He ain't no call to run out at one," said Tirzah, standing upright and flourishing her baby.

"I'd like to give him as good as he gave, an old foul-mouthed brute!"

"Look there! There's the ladies coming," exclaimed Nanny Barton.

"I thought there was some reason why he stopped his jaw so soon," exclaimed Molly, stooping down and pulling up weeds (including turnips) with undiscerning energy, in which all the others followed her example, except Tirzah, who sulkily retreated under the hedge with her baby, while Jem Hewlett and Lizzie Seddon ran forward for better convenience of staring. It was a large field, and the party were still a good way off; but as it sloped downwards behind the women, the farmer must have seen them a good deal before the weeders had done so.

These, be it remembered, were days when both farmers and their labourers were a great deal rougher in their habits than we, their grandchildren, can remember them; and there was, besides, the Old Poor Law, which left the amount of relief and of need to be fixed at the vestry meetings by the ratepayers themselves of each parish alone so that the poor were entirely dependent on the goodwill or judgment of their employers, whose minds were divided between keeping down the wages and the rates, and who had little of real principle or knowledge to guide them. It was possible to have recourse to the magistrates at the Petty Sessions, who could give an order which would override the vestry; but it was apt to be only the boldest, and often the least deserving, who could make out the best apparent cases for themselves, that ventured on such a measure.

The two ladies stopped and spoke to Molly Hewlett and Nanny Barton, whom they had seen at their doors, and who curtsied low; and Nanny, as she saw Mrs Carbonel's eyes fall on her boots, put in—

"Yes, ma'am, 'tis bitter hard work this cold, damp weather, and wears out one's shoes ter'ble. These be an old pair of my man's, and hurts my poor feet dreadful, all over broken chilblains as they be; and my fingers, too," she added, spreading out some fingers the colour of beetroot, with dirty rags rolled round two of them.

Dora shrank. "And you can go on weeding with them?"

"Yes, ma'am. What can us do, when one's man gets but seven shillings a week. And I've had six children, and buried three," and her face looked ready for tears.

"Well, we will come and see you, and try to find something to help you," said Mrs Carbonel. "Where do you live?"

"Out beyond the church, ma'am—a long way for a lady."

"Oh, we are good walkers."

"And please, my lady," now said Molly, coming to the front, "if you could give me an old bit of a pelisse, or anything, to make up for my boy there. He's getting big, you see, and he is terrible bad off for clothes. I don't know what is to be done for the lot of 'em."

Dora had recognised in the staring boy, who had come up close, him who had made the commotion in church; and she ventured to say, "I remember him. Don't you think, if you or his father kept him with you in church, he would behave better there?"

"Bless you, miss, his father is a sceptic. I can't go while I've got no clothes—nothing better than this, miss; and I always was used to go decent and respectable. Besides, I couldn't nohow take he into the seat with me, as Master Pucklechurch would say I was upsetting of his missus."

"Well, I hope to see him behave better next Sunday."

"Do you hear, Jem? The lady is quite shocked at your rumbustiousness! But 'twas all Joe Saunders's fault, ma'am, a terrifying the poor children. His father will give him the stick, that he will, if he hears of it again."

Meantime Mrs Carbonel had turned to Widow Mole, who, after her first curtsey, had been weeding away diligently and coughing.

"Where do you live?" she asked. "I don't think I have seen you before."

"No, ma'am," she said quietly. "I live down the Black Hollow."

"You don't look well. Have you been ill? You have a bad cough."

"It ain't nothing, ma'am, thank you. I can keep about well enough."

"Do you take anything for it?"

"A little yarb tea at night sometimes, ma'am."

"We will try and bring you some mixture for it," said Mrs Carbonel. And then she spoke to Betsy Seddon, who for a wonder had no request on her tongue, and asked her who the other woman was, in the hedge with the baby.

"That's Tirzah Todd, ma'am," began Mrs Seddon, but Molly Hewlett thrust her aside, and went on, being always the most ready with words; "she is Reuben Todd's wife, and I wouldn't wish to say no harm of her, but she comes of a gipsy lot, and hasn't never got into ways that us calls reverend, though I wouldn't be saying no harm of a neighbour, ma'am."

"No, you'd better not," exclaimed a voice, for Tirzah was nearer or had better ears than Mrs Daniel Hewlett had suspected, "though I mayn't go hypercriting about and making tales of my neighbours, as if you hadn't got a man what ain't to be called sober twice a week."

"Hush! hush!" broke in Mrs Carbonel; "we don't want to hear all this. I hope no one will tell us unkind things of our new neighbours, for we want to be friends with all of you, especially with that bright-eyed baby. How old is it?"

She made it smile by nodding to it, and Tirzah was mollified enough to say, “Four months, ma’am; but she have a tooth coming.”

“What’s her name?”

Tirzah showed her pretty white teeth in a smile. “Well, ma’am, my husband he doth want to call her Jane, arter his mother, ’cause ’tis a good short name, but I calls her Hoglah, arter my sister as died.”

“Then she hasn’t been christened?”

“No. You see we couldn’t agree, nor get gossips; and that there parson, he be always in such a mighty hurry, or I’d a had her half-baptized Hoglah, and then Reuben he couldn’t hinder it.”

Tirzah was getting quite confidential to Mrs Carbonel, and Dora meantime was talking to Molly Hewlett, but here it occurred to the former that they must not waste the women’s time, and they wished them good-bye, Dora fearing, however, that there would be a quarrel between Tirzah and Molly.

“Oh dear! oh dear!” she sighed, “couldn’t you make peace between those two,” she said; “they will fight it out.”

“No, I think the fear of the farmer and the need of finishing their work will avert the storm for the present at least,” said Mary, “and I thought the more I said, the worse accusations I should hear.”

“But what people they are! I do begin to believe that attorney man, that they are a bad lot.”

“Don’t be disheartened, Dora, no one has tried yet, apparently, to do anything for them. We must try to see them in their own homes.”

“Beginning with Mrs Seddon. She was quiet and civil, and did not beg.”

“Neither did that thin little woman. I should like to give her a flannel petticoat. There is a look of want about her.”

“But I’m most taken with the wild woman, with the teeth and the eyes, and the merry smile. I am sure there is fun in her.”

“Little enough fun, poor things!” sighed Mrs Carbonel.

She was more used to poor people. She had more resolution, though less enthusiasm than her sister.

Chapter Four.
Nobody's Business

"For the rector don't live on his living like other Christian sort of folks."
—T. Hood.

The sisters found on coming home that a very handsome chestnut horse was being walked up and down before the front door, and their man-servant, William, informed them that it belonged to the clergyman.

As they advanced to the verandah, Captain Carbonel and his visitor came out to meet them, and Mr Ashley Selby was introduced. He looked more like a sportsman than a clergyman, except for his black coat; he had a happy, healthy, sunburnt face, top boots, and a riding-whip in his hand, and informed Mrs Carbonel that his father and mother would have the honour of calling on her in a day or two. They had an impression that he had come to reconnoitre and decide whether they were farmers or gentry.

"We have been trying to make acquaintance with some of your flock," said Mary.

"The last thing I would advise you to do," he answered; "there are not a worse lot anywhere. Desperate poachers! Not a head of game safe from them."

"Perhaps they may be improved."

He shrugged his shoulders. "See what my father has to say of them."

"Is there much distress?"

"There ought not to be, for old Dr Fogram and my father send down a handsome sum for blankets and coals every Christmas, and Uphill takes care to get its share!" He laughed. "No sinecure distributing!"

"We have not been to see the school yet."

"A decrepit old crone, poor old body! She will soon have to give in. She can't even keep the children from pulling off her spectacles."

"And Sunday School?"

"Well, my father doesn't approve of cramming the poor children. I believe the Methodists have something of the kind at Downhill; but there is no one to attend to one here, and the place is quite free of dissent."

"Cause and effect?" said Captain Carbonel, drily.

"Would you object if we tried to teach the poor children something?" asked Mrs Carbonel, cautiously.

"Oh no, not at all. All the good ladies are taking it up, I believe. Mrs Grantley, of Poppleby, is great at it, and I see no harm in it; but you'll have to reckon with my father. He says there will soon be no ploughmen, and my mother says there will be no more cooks or housemaids. You'd better write to old Fogram, he'll back you up."

Mary had it on her lips to ask him about Widow Mole, but he had turned to Edmund to discuss the hunting and the shooting of the neighbourhood. They discovered, partly at this time, and partly from other visitors, that he was the younger son of the squire of Downhill, who had been made to take Holy Orders without any special fitness for it, because there was a living likely soon to be ready for him, and in the meantime he was living at home, an amiable, harmless young man, but bred up so as to have no idea of the duties of his vocation, and sharing freely in the sports of his family, acting as if he believed, like his father, that they were the most important obligations of man; and accepting the general household belief that only the Methodistical could wish for more religious practice.

Be it understood that all this happened in the earlier years of the century, and would be impossible under the revival of the Church that has since taken place. No one now can hold more than one piece of preferment at a time, so that parishes cannot be left unprovided. Nor could Ashley Selby be ordained without a preparation and examination which would have given him a true idea of what he undertook, or would have prevented his ordination. This, however, was at a time when the work of the church had grown very slack, and when a better spirit was beginning to revive. The father of Mary and Dora had been a zealous and earnest man, and both they and Edmund had really serious ideas of duty and of the means of carrying them out. In London they had heard sermons which had widened and deepened their views, but they had done no work, as the relation with whom they lived thought it impossible and improper for young ladies there. Thus they were exceedingly desirous of doing what they could to help the place where their lot was cast, and they set forth to reconnoitre. First, they found their way to the school, which stood on the border of the village green, a picturesque thatched cottage, with a honeysuckle and two tall poplars outside. But strange sounds guided them on their way, and the first thing they saw was a stout boy of four or five years old in petticoats bellowing loudly outside, and trying to climb the wicket gate which was firmly secured by a rusty chain. Mary tried to undo the gate, speaking meanwhile to the urchin, but he rushed away headlong back into the school, and they heard him howling, “They bees a-coming!”

A big girl in a checkered pinafore came out and made a curtsey, assisting to undo the chain.

“What has he been doing?” asked Dora.

“He be a mortial bad boy!” answered the girl. “He’ve been getting at Dame Verdon’s sugar.”

“And what is your name?” asked Mrs Carbonel.

“Lizzie Verdon, ma’am. I helps Grannie.”

Grannie did seem in need of help. There she sat in a big wooden chair by the fire, the very picture of an old dame, with a black bonnet, high-crowned and crescent shaped in front, with a white muslin cap below, a buff handkerchief crossed over her shoulders, a dark short-sleeved gown, long mittens covering her arms, and a checkered apron; a regular orthodox birch-rod by her side, and a black cat at her feet. But her head was shaking with palsy, and she hardly seemed to understand what Lizzie screamed into her ear that, “Here was the ladies.”

But the door which they had shut in the face of their spaniel was thrust open. Up went the cat’s back, bristle went her tail, her eyes shot sparks, and she bounded to the top of her mistress’s chair. Dandy barked defiance, all the children shouted or screamed and danced about, and the old woman gasped and shook more. Lizzie alone was almost equal to the occasion. She flew at the cat who was standing on tiptoe on the tall back of the chair, with huge tail and eyes like green lamps, swearing, hissing, and spitting, and, regardless of scratches, caught him up by the scruff of his neck and disposed of him behind the staircase door; while Dora at the same moment secured Dandy by the collar, and rushing out, put him over the garden gate and shut both that and the door. Mary, afraid that the old lady was going to have a fit, went up to her with soothing apologies, but the unwonted sight seemed to confuse her the more, and she began crying. Lizzie, however, came to the rescue. She evidently had all her wits about her. First she called out: “Order, children. Don’t you see the ladies? Sit down, Jem Hewlett, or I’ll after you with the stick!” Then, as the children ranged themselves, she stamped at some to enforce her orders, shook the rod at others, and set up the smallest like so many ninepins, handling them by the shoulder on one small bench, interspersing the work with consolations to granny and explanations to the ladies, who were about to defer their visit.

“Granny, now never you mind. Tip is all right upstairs. Benny, you bad boy, I’ll be at you. Don’t go, please, lady. Bet, what be doin’ to Jim? Never mind, granny! Susan Pucklechurch, you’ll read to the lady, so pretty.”

About five children, more tidily dressed than the others, had a whole and sound form to themselves near the fire and the mistress. The other two benches were propped, the one on two blocks of wood, the other on two sound and two infirm legs, and this was only balanced by a child at each

end, so that when one got up the whole tumbled down or flew up, but the seat was very low, and the catastrophe generally produced mirth.

Susan Pucklechurch, granddaughter to the old bailiff and his Betty, was evidently the show scholar. “She be in her Testament, ma’am,” explained Lizzie; and accordingly a terribly thumbed and dilapidated New Testament was put into the child’s hand, from which she proceeded to bawl out, with long pauses between the words, and spelling the longest, a piece of the Sermon on the Mount, selected because there were no names in it. It was a painful performance to reverent ears, and as soon as practicable Mrs Carbonel stopped it with “Good child!” and a penny, and asked what the others read. Those who were not “in the Testament” read the “Universal Spelling-book,” provided at their own expense, but not in much better condition, and from this George Hewlett, son and heir to the carpenter, and a very different person from his cousin Jem, read the history of the defence of that city where each trade offered its own commodity for the defence, even to the cobbler, who proposed to lay in a stock of good l-e-a-t-h-e-r—lather!

These, and three little maidens who had picture spelling-books not going beyond monosyllables, were the aristocracy, and sat apart, shielded from the claws and teeth of their neighbours in consideration of paying fourpence, instead of twopence, a week. The boy was supposed to write large letters on a slate, and the bigger girls did some needlework, and not badly—indeed, it was the best of their performances. The dame went on mumbling and shaking all the time, and it was quite evident that she was entirely past the work, and that Lizzie was the real mistress; indeed, Mrs Carbonel was inclined to give her credit for a certain talent for teaching and keeping order, when the sisters emerged from the close little oven of a place, hardly knowing whether to laugh or cry, but full of great designs.

Captain Carbonel, however, to their disappointment, advised them to wait to set anything on foot till Dr Fogram, the President of Saint Cyril’s, came down in the summer holidays, when counsel could be taken with him, and there would be more knowledge of the subject. Dora did not like this at all. She was sure that the Son of Mist, as she was naughty enough to call the doctor, would only hamper them, and she was only half consoled by being told that there was no objection to her collecting a few of the children on Sunday and trying to teach them, and in the meantime acquaintance might be made with the mothers.

Chapter Five.
At Home

"Now I've gone through all the village, from end to end,
save and except one more house;
But I haven't come to that, and I hope I never shall,
and that's the village Poor House."

T. Hood.

Cottage visiting turned out to be a much chequered affair. One of the first places to which the sisters made their way was the Widow Mole's. They found it, rather beyond the church, down a lane, where it was hidden behind an overgrown thorn hedge, and they would scarcely have found it at all, if a three-year-old child had not been clattering an old bit of metal against the bar put across to prevent his exit. He was curly and clean, except with the day's surface dirt, but he only stared stolidly at the question whether Mrs Mole lived there. A ten-year-old girl came out, and answered the question.

"Yes, mother do live here, but her be out at work."

"Is that your grandfather?" as they caught sight of a very old man on a chair by the door, in the sun.

"Yes, ma'am. Will you come in and see him?"

He was a very old man, with scanty white hair, but he was very clean, and neatly dressed in a white smock, mended all over, but beautifully worked over the breast and cuffs, and long leather buskins. He was very civil, too. He took off his old straw hat, and rose slowly by the help of his stout stick, though the first impulse of the visitors was to beg him not to move. He did not hear them, but answered their gesture.

"I be so crippled up with the rheumatics, you see, ma'am," and he put his knotted and contracted hand up to his ear.

Mrs Carbonel shouted into his ear that she was sorry for him. She supposed his daughter was out at work.

"Yes, ma'am, with Farmer Goodenough—a charing to-day it is."

"Washing," screamed the little girl.

"She was off at five o'clock this morning," he went on. "She do work hard, my daughter Bess, and she's a good one to me, and so is little Liz here. Thank the Lord for them."

"And her husband is dead?"

"Yes, ma'am. Fell off a haystack three years ago, and never spoke no more. We have always kept off the parish, ma'am. This bit of a cottage was my poor wife's, and she do want to leave it to the boy; but she be but frail, poor maid, and if she gave in, there'd be nothing for it but to give up the place and go to the workhouse; and there's such a lot there as I could not go and die among."

He spoke it to the sympathising faces, not as one begging, and they found out that all was as he said. He had seen better days, and held his head above the parish pay, and so had his son-in-law but the early death of poor Mole, and the old man's crippled state, had thrown the whole maintenance of the family on the poor young widow, who was really working herself to death, while, repairs being impossible, the cottage was almost falling down.

"Oh, what a place, and what a dear old man!" cried the ladies, as they went out. "Well, we can do something here. I'll come and read to him every week," exclaimed Dora.

"And I will knit him a warm jacket," said Mary, "and surely Edmund could help them to prop up that wretched cottage."

"What a struggle their lives must have been, and so patient and good! Where are we going now?"

"I believe that is the workhouse, behind the church," said Mary. "That rough-tiled roof."

"It has a bend in the middle, like a broken back. I must sketch it," said Dora.

"Why, there's Edmund, getting over the churchyard stile."

"Ay, he can't keep long away from you, Madam Mary."

"Were you going to the workhouse?" said Captain Carbonel, coming up, and offering an arm to each lady, as was the fashion in those days.

"We thought of it. All the poorest people are there, of course."

"And the worst," said the captain. "No, I will not have you go there. It is not fit for you."

For besides that he was very particular about his ladies, and had no notion of letting them go to all the varieties of evil where they could hope to do good, like the ladies of our days, the workhouse was an utterly different place from the strictly disciplined union houses of the present Poor Law. Each parish had its own, and that of Uphill had no master, no order, but was the refuge of all the disorderly, disreputable people, who could not get houses, or pay their rent, who lived in any kind of fashion, on parish pay and what they could get, and were under no restraint.

While the captain was explaining to them what he had heard from Farmer Goodenough, a sudden noise of shouting and laughing, with volleys of evil words, was heard near the "Fox and Hounds."

"What is that?" asked Dora, of a tidy young woman coming her way.

"That's only the chaps at old Sam," she answered, as if it was an ordinary sound. And on them exclaiming, she explained. "Samson Sanderson, that's his name, sir. He be what they calls *non-compos*, and the young fellows at the 'Fox and Hounds' they have their fun out of he. They do bait he shameful."

Violent shouts of foul words and riotous laughter could be distinguished so plainly, that Captain Carbonel hastily thrust his wife and sister into the nearest cottage, and marched into the group of rough men and boys, who stood holloaing rude jokes, and laughing at the furious oaths and abuse in intermittent gasps with which they were received.

"For shame!" his indignant voice broke in. "Are you not ashamed, unmanly fellows, to treat a poor weak lad in this way?"

There was a moment's silence. Then a great hulking drover called out, "Bless you, sir, he likes it."

"The more shame for you," exclaimed the captain, "to bait a poor innocent lad with horrid blasphemy and profanity. I tell you every one of you ought to be fined!"

The men began to sneak away from the indignant soldier. The poor idiot burst out crying and howling, and the ostler came forward, pulling his forelock, and saying, "You'll not be hard on 'em, sir. 'Tis all sport. There, Sammy, don't be afeared. Gentleman means you no harm."

Captain Carbonel held out some coppers, saying, "There, my poor lad, there's something for you. Only don't let me hear bad words again."

Sam muttered something, and pulled his ragged hat forward as he shambled off into some back settlements of the public-house, while the ostler went on—

"'Tis just their game, sir! None of 'em would hurt poor Sam! They'd treat him the next minute, sir. All in sport."

"Strange sport," said the captain, "to teach a poor helpless lad, who ought to be as innocent as a babe, that abominable blasphemy."

"He don't mean nought, sir! All's one to he!"

"All the worse in those who do know better, I tell you; and you may tell your master that, if this goes on, I shall certainly speak to the magistrates."

There was no need to tell the landlord, Mr Oldfellow. The captain was plainly enough to be heard through the window of the bar. The drovers had no notion that their amusement was sinful, for

"it didn't hurt no one," and, in fact, "getting a rise" out of Softy Sam was one of the great attractions of the "Fox and Hounds," so that Mr Oldfellow was of the same mind as Dan Hewlett, who declared that "they Gobblealls was plaguey toads of Methodys, and wasn't to think to bully them about like his soldiers."

They had another drink all round to recover from their fright, when they treated Softy Sam, but took care not to excite him to be noisy, while the captain might be within earshot.

The two ladies had meanwhile taken refuge in what proved to be no other than Mrs Daniel Hewlett's house, a better one, and less scantily provided with furniture, than the widow Mole's, but much less clean and neat. The door stood open, and there was a tub full of soap-suds within. The captain gave a low whistle to intimate his presence, and stood at the entrance. Unwashed dinner things were on a round table, a dresser in confusion against the wall, on another *Moore's Almanack* for some years past, full of frightful catastrophes, mixed with little, French, highly-coloured pictures of the Blessed Virgin.

His wife and her sister were seated, the one on a whole straw chair, the other on a rickety one, conversing with a very neat, pale, and pleasant-looking invalid young woman, evidently little able to rise from her wooden armchair. Molly Hewlett, in a coarse apron, and a cap far back amid the rusty black tangles of her hair, her arms just out of the wash-tub, was in the midst of a voluble discourse, into which the ladies would not break.

"You see, ma'am, she was in a right good situation, but she was always unlucky, and she had the misfortune to fall down the attic stairs with the baby in her arms."

"The baby was not hurt," put in the invalid.

"Not it, the little toad, but 'twas saving he as ricked her back somehow, and made her a cripple for life, as you see, ma'am; and she was six months in the hospital, till the doctor, he say as how he couldn't do nothing more for her, so Hewlett and me we took her in, as she is my own sister, you see, and we couldn't let her go to the workhouse, but she do want a little broth or a few extrys now and then, ma'am, more than we poor folks can give her."

"My mistress is very good, and gives me a little pension," put in the invalid, while her sister looked daggers at her, and Mrs Carbonel, in obedience to her husband's signal, took a hasty leave.

"There now! That's the way of you, Judith," cried Molly Hewlett, banging the door behind them. "What should you go for to tell the ladies of that pitiful pay of yours but to spile all chance of their helping us, nasty, mean skin-flints as they be!"

"I couldn't go for to deceive them," humbly replied Judith, meek, but cowering under the coming storm.

"Who asked you to deceive? Only to hold your tongue for your own good, and mine and my poor children's, that you just live upon. As if your trumpery pay was worth your board and all the trouble I has with you night and day, but you must come in and hinder these new folk from coming down liberal with your Methody ways and your pride! That's it, your pride, ma'am. Oh, I'm an unhappy woman, between you and Dan! I am!"

Molly sank into a chair, put her apron over her face and cried, rocking herself to and fro, while Judith, with tears in her eyes, tried gentle consolations all in vain, till Molly remembered her washing, and rose up, moaning and lamenting.

Meantime Mrs Carbonel and her sister were exclaiming in pity that this was a dear good girl, though Edmund shook his head over her surroundings.

"I wonder how to make her more comfortable," said Dora. "She seemed so much pleased when I promised to bring her something to read."

"I am afraid those Hewletts prey on her," said Mary.

"And patronising her will prove a complicated affair!" said the captain.

He wanted them to come home at once, but on the way they met Nanny Barton, who began, with low curtsies, a lamentable story about her girls having no clothes, and she would certainly have extracted a shilling from Miss Carbonel if the captain had not been there.

"Never accept stories told on the spur of the moment," he said.

Then Betsy Seddon and Tirzah Todd came along together, bending under heavy loads of broken branches for their fires. Tirzah smiled as usual, and showed her pretty teeth, but the captain looked after her, and said, "They have been tearing Mr Selby's woods to pieces."

"What can they do for firewood?" said his wife.

"Let us look out the rules of your father's coal store and shoe club," he said.

Chapter Six.
The Neighbourhood

"Through slush and squad,
When roads was bad,
But hallus stop at the Vine and Hop."

Tennyson.

Through all Pucklechurch's objections and evident contempt for his fancies, and those of young madam, Captain Carbonel insisted on the clearance of the yard. He could not agree with the old man, who made free to tell him that, "Such as that there muck-heap was just a bucket to a farmer's wife, if she was to be called a farmer's wife—was that it."

With some reflection, Captain Carbonel decided that a bucket might mean a bouquet, and answered, "Maybe she might have too much of a good thing. When I went down to Farmer Bell's the other day, they had a famous heap, and I was struck with the sickly look of his wife and daughters."

"His missus were always a poor, nesh 'ooman," returned Pucklechurch.

"And I don't mean mine to be like her if I can help it," said the captain.

But he did not reckon on the arrival of a prancing pair of horses, with a smart open carriage, containing two ladies and a gentleman, in the most odorous part of the proceedings, when he was obliged to clear the way from a half-loaded waggon to make room for them, and, what was quite as inconvenient, to hurry up the back stairs to his dressing-room to take off his long gaiters, Blucher boots (as half high ones were then called) and old shooting coat, and make himself presentable.

In fact, when he came into the room, Dora was amused at the perceptible look of surprised approval of the fine tall soldierly figure, as he advanced to meet Mr and Mrs Selby and their daughter, the nearest neighbours, who were, of course, in the regular course of instruction of the new-comers in the worthlessness and ingratitude of Uphill and the impossibility of doing anything for the good of the place.

Mary was very glad that he interrupted the subject by saying merrily, "You caught me in the midst of my Augean stable. I hope next time you are kind enough to visit us that the yard may be in a more respectable condition."

Mr Selby observed that it was unpardonable not to have done the work beforehand, and the captain answered, "On the contrary, it was reserved as a fragrant bucket, or bouquet for a farmer's wife."

Whereat the visitors looked shocked, and Mary made haste to observe: "But we do hope to make a better road to the house through the fields."

"There is a great deal to be done first," said Dora, who thought the observation rather weak.

Nothing else that was interesting took place on this occasion. Mr Selby asked the captain whether he hunted, and gave him some information on the sport of all kinds in the neighbourhood. Miss Selby asked Dora if she liked archery, music, and drawing. Mrs Selby wanted to recommend a housemaid, and advised Mrs Carbonel against ever taking a servant from the neighbourhood. And then they all turned to talk of the evil doings of the parish thieves, poachers, idlers, drunkards, and to warn the Carbonels once more against hoping to improve them. The horses could be heard pawing and jingling outside, and, as the ladies rose to take leave, Captain Carbonel begged leave to hurry out and clear the coast. And it was well that he did so, for he had to turn back a whole procession of cows coming in to be milked, and sundry pigs behind them.

The farm court was finished, and never was so bad again, the animals being kept from spending their day there, except the poultry, in which Mary took great delight. Soon came more visitors, and it became a joke to the husband and sister that she always held out hopes of "the future drive" when they arrived, bumped or mired by the long lane. "Mary's Approach," as Edmund called it, had to be deferred till more needful work was done. The guests whom they best liked, Mr and Mrs Grantley, the clergyman and his wife from the little town of Poppleby, gave an excellent and hopeful account of their rector, Dr Fogram, who was, they said, a really good man, and very liberal.

Mrs Grantley was interested in schools and poor people, as it was easy to discover, and Mary and Dora were soon talking eagerly to her, and hearing what was done at Poppleby; but there were gentry and prosperous tradespeople there, who could be made available as subscribers or teachers; so that their situation was much more hopeful than that of the Carbonels, who had not the authority of the clergyman.

Poppleby was a much larger place than Downhill, on the post road to London. The mail-coach went through it, and thence post-horses were hired, and chaises, from the George Inn. The Carbonels possessed a phaeton, and a horse which could be used for driving or riding, and thus Captain Carbonel took the two ladies to return the various calls that had been made upon them. They found the Selbys not at home, but were warmly welcomed by the Grantleys, and spent the whole afternoon with them, and, at Dora's earnest request, were taken to see the schools. So different was the taste and feeling of those days that, though Poppleby Church was a very fine old one—in grand architecture, such as in these days is considered one of the glories of the country—no one thought of going to look at it, and the effect of Mr Grantley's excellent sermons had been the putting up of a new gallery right across the chancel arch.

It had a fine tower and steeple, and this Dora thought of as a delightful subject for a sketch from the Parsonage garden. She made great friends with Lucy Grantley, the eldest daughter, over their tastes in drawing, as well as in the Waverley novels and in poetry, and was invited to spend a long day at Poppleby and take a portrait of the steeple.

After the calls had been made and returned began the dinner-parties. Elmour Priory was so near Greenhow that it would have been easy to walk there across the fields, or to drive in the phaeton, especially as the hours were much earlier, and six or half-past was held to be a late dinner hour, but this would have been contrary to etiquette, especially the first time, with people who evidently thought much of "style," and the Carbonels were not superior to such considerations, which were—or were supposed to be—of more importance in those days. So a chaise was ordered, and they went in state, and had a long, dull evening, chiefly enlivened by the Miss Selbys and Dora playing on the piano.

As they were going home, all round by the road, when they were near the top of the hill, before they came to the "Fox and Hounds," the postilion first shouted and then came to a sudden stop. The captain, putting his head out at the window, saw by the faint light of a young moon, going down in the remains of sunset, that he was jumping off his horse, growling and swearing, but under his breath, when the captain sprang out. A woman was lying across the road, and had barely escaped being run over. Mary and Dora were both out in a moment.

"Poor thing, poor thing! Is it a fit? She is quite insensible."

"A fit of a certain kind," said the captain, who was dragging her into the hedge, while the post-boy held the horses. "Go back, Mary, Dora!"

"It is Nanny Barton!" said Dora in horror.

Mary took down one of the carriage lamps and held it to the face. "Yes, it is!" said she. "Can't we take her home, or do anything?"

"No, no; nonsense!" said Edmund. "Don't come near, don't touch her. Don't you see, she is simply dead drunk."

"But we can't leave her here."

"The best thing to do! Yes, it is; but we will stop at the 'Fox and Hounds,' if that will satisfy you, and send some one out to see after her."

They were obliged to be satisfied, for the tones were authoritative, and they had to accept his assurance that the woman was in no state for them to meddle with. She would come to no harm, he said, when he had put her on the bank, and it was only to pacify them that he caused the postilion to stop at the public-house, whence roaring, singing, and shouts proceeded. The landlord came out, supposing it was some new arrival, and when Captain Carbonel jumped out, and, speaking severely, desired that some one would go to look after the woman, who was lying in the road, and whom the horses had almost run over, he answered as if he had been doing the most natural and correct thing in the world.

"Yes, sir; I had just sent her home. They had been treating of her, and she had had a drop too much. She wasn't in a proper state."

"Proper state! No! I should think not! It is a regular shame and disgrace that you should encourage such goings on! Where's the woman's husband? Has no one got the humanity to come and take her home?"

Oldfellow called gruffly to some of the troop, who came reeling out to the door, and told them it was time to be off, and that some one, "You Tirzah had best see to that there Barton 'oman."

Captain Carbonel wished to keep his ladies from the sight, but they were watching eagerly, and could not help seeing that it was Tirzah Todd, more gipsy-looking than ever, who came out. Not, however, walking as if intoxicated, and quite able to comprehend Captain Carbonel's brief explanation where to find her companion.

"Ah, poor Nanny!" she said cheerfully. "She's got no head! A drop is too much for her."

The chaise door was shut, and they went on, Dora and Mary shocked infinitely, and hardly able to speak of what they had seen.

And they did not feel any happier when the next day, as Mary was feeding the chickens, Nanny came up to her curtseying and civil.

"Please, ma'am, I'm much obliged to you for seeing to me last night. I just went in to see if my husband was there, as was gone to Poppleby with some sheep, and they treated me, ma'am. And that there Tirzah and Bet Bracken, they was a-singing songs, as it was a shame to hear, so I ups and rebukes them, and she flies at me like a catamount, ma'am; and then Mr Oldfellow, he puts me out, ma'am, as was doing no harms as innocent as a lamb."

"Well," said Mrs Carbonel, "it was no place for any woman to be in, and we were grieved, I cannot tell you how much, that you should be there. You had better take care; you know drunkenness is a really wicked sin in God's sight."

"Only a little overtaken—went to see for my husband," muttered Nanny. "I didn't take nigh so much as that there Tirzah Todd, that is there with Bet Bracken every night of her life, to sing—"

"Never mind other people. Their doing wrong doesn't make you right."

"Only a drop," argued Nanny. "And that there Tirzah and Bet—"

Mary was resolved against hearing any more against Tirzah and Bet, and actually shut herself into the granary till Nanny was gone. And there she sat down on a sack of peas and fairly cried at the thought of the sin and ignorant unconsciousness of evil all round her. And then she prayed a little prayer for help and wisdom for these poor people and themselves. Then she felt cheered up and hopeful.

Chapter Seven.
Sunday School

"She hastens to the Sunday School."
Jane Taylor.

Captain Carbonel had written to the President of Saint Cyril's, and at once obtained his willing consent to the ladies attempting to form a little Sunday School. Dr Fogram said that he should come down himself on July 21, and should be very glad to take counsel with the Carbonels on the state of Uphill. He would be glad to assist if any outlay were needed.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.