

Weyman Stanley John

The New Rector



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CHAPTER I

"LE ROI EST MORT!"

The king was dead. But not at once, not until after some short breathing-space, such as was pleasant enough to those whose only concern with the succession lay in the shouting, could the cry of "Long live the king!" be raised. For a few days there was no rector of Claversham. The living was during this time in abeyance, or in the clouds, or in the lap of the law, or in any strange and inscrutable place you choose to name. It may have been in the prescience of the patron, and, if so, no locality could be more vague, the whereabouts of Lord Dymore himself, to say nothing of his prescience, being as uncertain as possible. Messrs. Gearn & Baker, his solicitors and agents, should have known as much upon this point as any one; yet it was their habit to tell one inquirer that his lordship was in the Cordilleras, and another that he was on the slopes of the Andes, and another that he was at the forty-ninth parallel-quite indifferently-these places being all one to Messrs. Gearn & Baker, whose walk in life had lain for so many years about Lincoln's Inn Fields that Clare Market had come to be their ideal of an uncivilized country.

And more, if the whereabouts of Lord Dymore could only be told in words rather far-sounding than definite, there was room for a doubt whether his prescience existed at all. For, according to his friends, there never was a man whose memory was so notably eccentric-not weak, but eccentric. And if his memory was impeccable, his prescience- But we grow wide of the mark. The question being merely where the living of Claversham was during the days which immediately followed Mr. Williams's death, let it be said at once that we do not know.

Mr. Williams was the late incumbent. He had been rector of the little Warwickshire town for nearly forty years; and although his people were ready enough to busy themselves with the question of his successor, he did not lack honor in his death. His had been a placid life, such as suited an indolent and easy-going man. "Let me sit upon one chair and put up my feet on another, and there I am," he was once heard to say; and the town repeated the remark and chuckled over it. There were some who would have had the parish move more quickly, and who talked with a sneer of the old port-wine kind of parson. But if he had done little good, he had done less evil. He was kindly and open-handed, and he had not an enemy in the parish. He was regretted as much as such a man should be. Besides, people did not die commonly in Claversham. It was but once a year, or twice at the most, that any one who was any one passed away. And so, when the event did occur the most was made of it in an old-fashioned way. When Mr. Williams passed for the last time into his churchyard, there was no window which did not, by shutter or blind, mark its respect for him, not a tongue which wagged foul of his memory. And then the shutters were taken down and the blinds pulled up, and every one, from Mr. Clode, the curate, to the old people at Bourne's Almshouses, who, having no affairs of their own, had the more time to discuss their neighbors', asked, "Who is to be the new rector?"

On the day of the funeral two of these old pensioners watched the curate's tall form as he came gravely along the opposite side of the street, to fall in at the door of his lodgings with two ladies, one elderly, one young, who were passing so opportunely that it really seemed as if they might have been waiting for him. He and the elder lady-she was so plump of figure, so healthy of eye and cheek, and was dressed besides with such a comfortable richness that it did one good to look at her-began to talk in a subdued, decorous fashion, while the girl listened. He was telling them of the funeral, how well

the archdeacon had read the service, and what a crowd of Dissenters had been present, and so on: and at last he came to the important question.

"I hear, Mrs. Hammond," he said, "that the living will be given to Mr. Herbert of Easthope, whom you know, I think? To me? Oh, no, I have not, and never had, any expectation of it. Please do not," he added, with a slight smile and a shake of the head, "mention such a thing again. Leave me in my content."

"But why should you not have it?" said the young lady, with a pleasant persistence. "Every one in the parish would be glad if you were appointed. Could we not do something or say something-get up a petition or anything? Lord Dynmore ought, of course, to give it to you. I think some one should tell him what are the wishes of the parish. I do indeed!"

She was a very pretty young lady, with bright brown eyes and hair and rather arch features, and the gentleman she was addressing had long found her face pleasant to look upon; but at this moment it really seemed to him as the face of an angel. Yet he only answered with a kind of depressed gratitude. "Thank you, Miss Hammond," he said. "If good wishes could procure me the living, I should have an excellent reason for hoping. But as things are, it is not for me."

"Pooh! pooh!" said Mrs. Hammond cheerily, "who knows?" And then, after a few more words, they went on their way, and he turned into his rooms.

The old women were still watching. "I don't well know who'll get it, Peggy," said one, "but I be pretty sure of this, as he won't! It isn't his sort as gets 'em. It's the lord's friends, bless you!"

So it appeared that she and Mr. Clode were of one mind on the matter. But was that really Mr. Clode's opinion? It was when the crow opened its beak that it dropped the piece of cheese; and so to this day the wise man has no chance or expectation of this or that until he gets it. And if a patron or a patron's solicitor has for some days had under his paperweight a letter written in a hand that bears a strange likeness to the wise man's-a letter setting forth the latter's claims and wisdom-what of that? That is a private matter, of course.

Be that as it may, there was scarcely a person in Claversham who did not give some time that evening, and on subsequent evenings too, to the interesting question who was to be the new rector. The rector was a big factor in the town-life. Girls wondered whether he would be young, and hoped he would dance. Their mothers were sanguine that he would be unmarried, and their fathers that he would play whist. And one questioned whether he would buy Mr. Williams's stock of port, and another whether he would dine late. And some trusted that he would let things be, and some hoped that he would cleanse the stables. And only one thing was certain and sure and immutably fixed-that, whoever he was, he would not be able to please everybody.

Nay, the ripple of excitement spread far beyond Claversham. Not only at the archdeacon's at Kingsford Carbonel, five miles away among the orchards and hopyards, was there much speculation upon the matter, but even at the Homfrays', of Holberton, ten miles out beyond the Baer Hills, there was talk about it, and bets were made across the billiard-table. And in more distant vicarages and curacies, where the patron was in some degree known, there were flutterings of heart and anxious searchings of the "Guardian" and Crockford. Those who seemed to have some chance of the living grew despondent, and those who had none talked the thing over with their wives after the children had gone to bed, until they persuaded themselves that they would die at Claversham Rectory. Middle-aged men who had been at college with Lord Dynmore remembered that they had on one occasion rowed in the same boat with him; and young men who had danced with his niece thought secretly that, dear little woman as Emily or Annie was, they might have done better. And a hundred and eleven letters, written by people who knew less than Messrs. Gearns & Baker of the Andes, seeing that they did not know that Lord Dynmore was there or thereabouts, were received at Dynmore Park and forwarded to London, and duly made up into a large parcel with other correspondence by Messrs. Gearns & Baker, and so were despatched to the forty-ninth parallel-or thereabouts.

CHAPTER II

"VIVE LE ROI!"

It was at the beginning of the second week in October that Mr. Williams died; and, the weather in those parts being peculiarly fine and bright for the time of year, men stood about in the churchyard with bare heads, and caught no colds. And it continued so for some days after the funeral. But not everywhere. Upon a morning, some three perhaps after the ceremony at Claversham, a young gentleman sat down to his breakfast, only a hundred and fifty miles away, under such different conditions—a bitter east wind, a dense fog, and a general murkiness of atmosphere—that one might have supposed his not over-plentiful meal to be laid in another planet.

The air in the room—a meagrely furnished, much littered room, was yellow and choking, and the candles burned dimly in the midst of yellow halos. The fire seemed to be smouldering, and the owner of the room had to pay some attention to it before he sat down and found a letter lying beside his plate. He glanced at it doubtfully. "I do not know the handwriting," he muttered, "and it is not a subscription, for they never come in an east wind. I am afraid it is a bill."

The letter was addressed to the Rev. Reginald Lindo, St. Barnabas Mission House, 383 East India Dock Road, London, E. After scrutinizing it for a moment, he pulled a candle toward him and tore open the envelope.

He read the letter slowly, his teacup at his lips, and, though he was alone, his face grew crimson. When he had finished it he turned back and read it again, and then flung it down and, starting up, began to walk the room. "What a boy I am!" he muttered. "But it is almost incredible. Upon my honor it is almost incredible!"

He was still at the height of his excitement, now sitting down to take a mouthful of breakfast and now leaping up to pace the room, when his housekeeper entered and said that a woman from Tamplin's Rents wanted to see him.

"What does she want, Mrs. Baxter?" he asked.

"Husband is dying, sir," the old lady replied briefly.

"Do you know her at all?"

"No, sir. She is as poor a piece as I have ever seen. She says that she could not have come out, for want of clothes, if it had not been for the fog. And they are not particular here, as I know—the hussies!"

"Say that I shall be ready to go with her in less than five minutes," the young clergyman answered. "And here! Give her some tea, Mrs. Baxter. The pot is half full."

He bustled about; but nevertheless the message and the business he was now upon had sobered him, and as he buttoned up the letter in his breast-pocket, his face was grave. He was a tall young man, fair, with regular features, and curling hair cut rather short. His eyes were blue and pleasantly bold; and in his every action and in his whole carriage there was a great appearance of confidence and self-possession. Taking a book and a small case from a side-table, he put on his overcoat and went out. A moment, and the dense fog swallowed him up, and with him the tattered bundle of rags, which had a husband, and very likely had nothing else in the world of her own. Tamplin's Rents not affecting us, we may skip a few hours, and then go westward with him as far as the Temple, which in the East India Dock Road is considered very far west indeed by those who have ever heard of it.

Here he sought a dingy staircase in Fig-tree Court, and, mounting to the second floor, stopped before a door which was adorned by about a dozen names, painted in white on a black ground. He knocked loudly, and, a small boy answering his summons with great alacrity and importance, our friend asked for Mr. Smith, and was promptly ushered into a room about nine feet square, in which, at a table covered with papers and open books, sat a small, dark-complexioned man, very keen and eager in appearance, who looked up with an air of annoyance.

"Who is it, Fred?" he said impatiently, moving one of the candles, which the fog still rendered necessary, although it was high noon. "I am engaged at present."

"Mr. Lindo to see you, sir," the boy announced, with a formality very funny in a groom of the chambers about four feet high.

The little man's countenance instantly changed, and he jumped up grinning. "Is it you, old boy?" he said. "Sit down, old fellow! I thought it might be my own solicitor, and it is well to be prepared, you know."

"But you are not really busy?" said the visitor, looking at him doubtfully.

"Well, I am and I am not," replied Mr. Smith; and, deftly tipping aside the books, he disclosed some slips of manuscript. "It is an article for the 'Cornhill,'" he continued; "but whether it will ever appear there is another matter. You have come to lunch, of course? And now, what is your news?"

He was so quick and eager that he reminded people who saw him for the first time of a rat. When they came to know him better, they found that a stauncher friend than Jack Smith was not to be found in the Temple. With this he had the reputation of being a clever, clear-headed man, and his sound common-sense was almost a proverb. Observing that Lindo did not answer him, he repeated, "Is anything amiss, old fellow?"

"Well, not quite amiss," Lindo answered, his face flushing a little. "But the fact is" – taking the letter from the breast-pocket – "that I have had the offer of a living, Jack."

Smith leaped up and clapped his friend on the shoulder. "By Jove! old man," he exclaimed heartily, "I am glad of it! Right glad of it! You must have had enough of that slumming. But I hope it is a better living than mine," he continued, with a comical glance round the tiny room. "Let us have a look! What is it? Two hundred and a house?"

Lindo handed the letter to him. It was written from Lincoln's Inn Fields, and was dated the preceding day. It ran thus:

"Dear Sir: – We are instructed by our client, the Right Honorable the Earl of Dymore, to invite your acceptance of the living of Claversham in the county of Warwick, vacant by the death on the 15th instant of the Rev. John Williams, the late incumbent. The living, of which his lordship is the patron, is a town rectory, of the approximate value of 810*l* per annum and a house. Our client is travelling in the United States, but we have the requisite authorities to proceed in due form and without delay, which in this matter is prejudicial. We beg to have the pleasure of receiving your acceptance at as early a date as possible,

*"And remain, dear Sir,
Your obedient servants,
Gearns & Baker.*

"To the Rev. Reginald Lindo, M.A."

The barrister read this letter with even greater surprise than seemed natural, and, when he had done, looked at his companion with wondering eyes. "Claversham!" he ejaculated. "Why, I know it well!"

"Do you? I have never heard you mention it."

"I knew old Williams!" Jack continued, still in amaze. "Knew him well, and heard of his death, but little thought you were likely to succeed him. My dear fellow, it is a wonderful piece of good fortune! Wonderful! I shake you by the hand! I congratulate you heartily! But how did you come to know the high and mighty earl? Unbosom yourself, my dear boy!"

"I do not know him-do not know him from Adam!" replied the young clergyman gravely.

"You don't mean it?"

"I do. I have never seen him in my life."

Jack Smith whistled. "Are you sure it is not a hoax?" he said, with a serious face.

"I think not," the rector-elect replied. "Perhaps I have given you a wrong impression. I have had nothing to do with the earl; but my uncle was his tutor."

"Oh!" said Smith slowly, "that makes all the difference. What uncle?"

"You have heard me speak of him. He was vicar of St. Gabriel's, Aldgate. He died about a year ago-last October, I think. Lord Dymore and he were good friends, and my uncle used often to stay at his place in Scotland. I suppose my name must have come up some time when they were talking."

"Likely enough," assented the lawyer. "But for the earl to remember it, he must be one in a hundred!"

"It is certainly very good of him," Lindo replied, his cheek flushing. "If it had been a small country living, and my uncle had been alive to jog his elbow, I should not have been so much surprised."

"And you are just twenty-five!" Jack Smith observed, leaning back in his chair, and eyeing his friend with undisguised and whimsical admiration. "You will be the youngest rector in the Clergy List, I should think! And Claversham! By Jove, what a berth!"

A queer expression of annoyance for a moment showed itself in Lindo's face. "I say, Jack, stow that!" he said gently, and with a little shamefacedness. "I mean," he continued, smoothing down the nap on his hat, "that I do not want to look at it altogether in that way, and I do not want others to regard it so."

"As a berth, you mean?" Jack said gravely, but with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Well, from the loaves and fishes point of view," Lindo commenced, beginning to walk up and down the room. "I do not think an officer, when he gets promotion, looks only at the increase in his pay. Of course I am glad that it is a good living, and that I shall have a house, and a good position, and all that. But I declare to you, Jack, believe me or not as you like, that if I did not feel that I could do the work as I hope, please God, to do it, I would not take it up-I would not, indeed. As it is, I feel the responsibility. I have been thinking about it as I walked down here, and upon my honor for a while I thought I ought to decline it."

"I would not do that!" said Gallio, dismissing the twinkle from his eye, and really respecting his old friend, perhaps, a little more than before. "You are not the man, I think, to shun either work or responsibility. Did I tell you," he continued in a different tone, "that I had an uncle at Claversham?"

"No," said Lindo, surprised in his turn.

"Yes, and I think he is one of your church wardens. His name is Bonamy, and he is a solicitor. His London agent is my only client," Jack said jerkily.

"And he is one of the church wardens! Well, that is strange-and jolly!"

"Umph! Don't you be too sure of that!" retorted the barrister sharply. "He is a-well, he has been very good to me, and he is my uncle, and I am not going to say anything against him. But I am not quite sure that I should like him for my church warden. *Your* church warden! Why, it is like a fairy tale, old fellow!"

And so it seemed to Lindo when, an hour later, the small boy, with the same portentous gravity of face, let him out and bade him good-day. As the young parson started eastward, along Fleet Street first, he looked at the moving things round him with new eyes, from a new standpoint, with a new curiosity. The passers-by were the same, but he was changed. He had lunched, and perhaps the material view of his position was uppermost, for those in the crowd who specially observed the tall young clergyman noticed in his bearing an air of calm importance and a strong sense of personal dignity, which led him to shun collisions, and even to avoid jostling his fellows, with peculiar care. The truth was that he had all the while before his eyes, as he walked, an announcement which was destined to appear in the "Guardian" of the following week:

"The Rev. Reginald Lindo, M.A., St. Barnabas' Mission, London, to be Rector of Claversham. Patron, the Earl of Dymore."

CHAPTER III

AN AWKWARD MEETING

A fortnight after this paragraph in the "Guardian" had filled Claversham with astonishment and Mr. Clode with a modest thankfulness that he was spared the burden of office, a little dark man-Jack Smith, in fact-drove briskly into Paddington Station, and, disregarding the offers of the porters, who stand waiting on the hither side of the journey like Charon by the Styx, and see at a glance who has the obolus, sprang from the hansom without assistance, and bustled on to the platform.

Here he looked up and down as if he expected to meet some one, and then, glancing at the clock, found that he had a quarter of an hour to spare. He made at once for the bookstall, and, with a lavishness which would have surprised some of his friends, bought "Punch," a little volume by Howells, the "Standard," and finally, though he blushed as he asked for it, the "Queen." He had just gathered his purchases together and was paying for them, when a high-pitched voice at his elbow made him start. "Why, Jack! what in the world are you buying all those papers for?" The speaker was a girl about thirteen years old, who in the hubbub had stolen unnoticed to his side.

"Hullo, Daintry," he answered. "Why did you not say that you were here before? I have been looking for you. Where is Kate? Oh, yes, I see her," as a young lady turning over books at the farther end of the stall acknowledged his presence by a laughing nod. "You are here in good time," he went on, while the younger girl affectionately slipped her arm through his.

"Yes," she said. "Your mother started us early. And so you have come to see us off, after all, Jack?"

"Just so," he answered drily. "Let us go to Kate."

They did so, the young lady meeting them halfway. "How kind of you to be here, Jack!" she said. "As you have come, will you look us out a comfortable compartment? That is the train over there. And please to put this, and this, and Daintry's parcel in the corners for us."

This and this were a cloak and a shawl, and a few little matters in brown paper. In order to possess himself of them, Jack handed Kate the papers he was carrying.

"Are they for me?" she said, gratefully indeed, but with a placid gratitude which was not perhaps what the donor wanted. "Oh, thank you. And this too? What is it?"

"Their Wedding Journey," said Jack, with a shy twinkle in his eyes.

"Is it pretty?" she answered dubiously. "It sounds silly; but you are supposed to be a judge. I think I should like 'A Chance Acquaintance' better, though."

Of course the little book was changed, and Jack winced. But he had not time to think much about it, for he had to bustle away through the rising babel to secure seats for them in an empty compartment of the Oxford train, and see their luggage labelled and put in. This done, he hurried back, and pointed out to them the places he had taken. "Oh, dear, they are in a through carriage," Kate said, stopping short and eyeing the board over the door.

"Yes," he answered. "I thought that that was what you wanted."

"No, I would rather go in another carriage, and change. We shall get to Claversham soon enough without travelling with Claversham people."

"Indeed we shall," Daintry chimed in. "Let us go and find seats, and Jack will bring the things after us."

He assented meekly-very meekly for sharp Jack Smith-and presently came along with his arms full of parcels, to find them ensconced in the nearer seats of a compartment, which contained also one gentleman who was already deep in the "Times." Jack, standing at the open door, could not see his face, for it was hidden by the newspaper, but he could see that his legs wore a youthful and reckless

air; and he raised his eyebrows interrogatively. "Pooh!" whispered Daintry in answer. "How stupid you are! It is all right. I can see he is a clergyman by his boots!"

Jack smiled at this assurance, and, putting in the things he was holding, shut the door and stood outside, looking first at the platform about him, on which all was flurry and confusion, and then at the interior of the carriage, which seemed in comparison peaceful and homelike. "I think I will come with you to Westbourne Park," he said suddenly.

"Nonsense, Jack!" Kate replied, with crushing decision. "We shall be there in five minutes, and you will have all the trouble of returning for nothing."

He acquiesced meekly-poor Jack! "Well," he said, with a new effort at cheerfulness, "you will soon be at home, girls. Remember me to the governor. I am afraid you will be rather dull at first. You will have one scrap of excitement, however."

"What is that?" said Kate, very much as if she were prepared to depreciate it before she knew what it was.

"The new rector!"

"He will make very little difference to us!" the girl answered, with an accent almost of scorn. "Papa said in his letter that he thought it was a great pity a local man had not been appointed-some one who knew the place and the old ways. You say he is clever and nice; but either way it will not affect us much."

No one noticed that the "Times" newspaper in the far corner of the compartment rustled suspiciously, and that the clerical boots became agitated on a sudden, as though their wearer meditated a move; and, in ignorance of this, "I expect I shall hate him!" said Daintry calmly.

"Come, you must not do that," Jack remonstrated "You must remember that he is not only a very good fellow, but a great friend of mine."

"Then we ought indeed to spare him!" Kate said frankly, "for you have been very good to us and made our visit delightful."

His face flushed with pleasure even at those simple words of praise. "And you will write and tell me," he continued eagerly, "that you have reached your journey's end safely."

"One of us will," was the answer. "Daintry," Kate went on calmly, "will you remind me to write to Jack to-morrow evening?"

His face fell sadly. So little would have made him happy. He looked down and kicked the step of the carriage, and made his tiny moan to himself before he spoke again. "Good-bye," he said then. "They are coming to look at your tickets. You are due out in one minute. Good-bye, Daintry."

"Good-bye, Jack. Come and see us soon," she cried earnestly, as she released his hand.

"Good-bye, Kate." Alas! Kate's cheek did not show the slightest consciousness that his clasp was more than cousinly. She uttered her "Good-bye, Jack, and thank you so much," very kindly, but her color never varied by the quarter of a tone, and her grasp was as firm and as devoid of shyness as his own.

He had not much time to be miserable, however, then, for, the ticket-collector coming to the window, Jack had to fall back, and in doing so made a discovery. Kate, hunting for her ticket in one of those mysterious places in which ladies will put tickets, heard him utter an exclamation, and asked, "What is it, Jack?"

To her surprise, the collector having by this time disappeared, he stretched out his hand through the window to some one beyond her. "Why, Lindo!" he cried, "is that you? I had not a notion of your identity. Of course you are going down to take possession."

Kate, trembling already with a horrible presentiment, turned her head. Yes, it was the clergyman in the corner who answered Jack's greeting and rose to shake hands with him, the train being already in motion. "I did not recognize your voice out there," he said, looking rather hot.

"No? And I did not know you were going down to-day," Jack answered, walking beside the train. "Let me introduce you to my cousins, Miss Bonamy and Daintry. I am sorry that I did not see you before. Good luck to you! Good-bye, Kate!"

The train was moving faster and faster, and Jack was soon left behind on the platform gazing pathetically at the black tunnel which had swallowed it up. In the carriage there was silence, and in the heart of one at least of the passengers the most horrible vexation. Kate could have bitten out her tongue. She was conscious that the clergyman had bowed in acknowledgment of Jack's introduction and had muttered something. But then he had sunk back in his corner, his face wearing, as it seemed to her, a frown of scornful annoyance. Even if nothing awkward had been said, she would still have shunned, for a certain reason, such a meeting as this with a new clergyman who did not yet know Claversham. But now she had aggravated the matter by her heedlessness. So she sat angry, and yet ashamed, with her lips pressed together and her eyes fixed upon the opposite cushion.

For the Rev. Reginald, he had been by no means indifferent to the criticisms he had unfortunately overheard. Always possessed of a fairly good opinion of himself, he had lately been raising his standard to the rectorial height; and, being very human, he had come to think himself something of a personage. If Jack Smith had introduced him under the same circumstances to his aunt, there is no saying how far the acquaintance would have progressed or how long the new incumbent might have fretted and fumed. But presently he stole a look at Kate Bonamy and melted.

He saw a girl, slightly above the middle height, graceful and rounded of figure, with a grave stateliness of carriage which oddly became her. Her complexion was rather pale, but it was clear and healthy, and there was even a freckle here and a freckle there which I never heard a man say that he would have had elsewhere. If her face was a trifle long, with a nose a little aquiline and curving lips too wide, yet it was a fair and dainty face, such as Englishmen love. The brown hair, which strayed on to the broad white brow and hung in a heavy loop upon her neck, had a natural waviness—the sole beauty on which she prided herself. For she could not see her eyes as others saw them—big gray eyes that from under long lashes looked out upon you, full of such purity and truth that men meeting their gaze straightway felt a desire to be better men and went away and tried—for half an hour. Such was Kate outwardly. Inwardly she had faults of course, and perhaps pride and a little temper were two of them.

The rector was still admiring her askance, surprised to find that Jack Smith, who was not very handsome himself, had such a cousin, when Daintry roused him abruptly. For some moments she had been gazing at him, as at some unknown specimen, with no attempt to hide her interest. Now she said suddenly, "You are the new rector?"

He answered stiffly that he was; being a good deal taken aback at being challenged in this way. Remonstrance, however, was out of the question, and Daintry for the moment said no more, though her gaze lost none of its embarrassing directness.

But presently she began again. "I should think the dogs would like you," she said deliberately, and much as if he had not been there to hear; "you look as if they would."

Silence again. The rector smiled fatuously. What was a beneficed clergyman, whose dignity was young and tender, to do, subjected to the criticism of unknown dogs? He tried to divert his thoughts by considering the pretty sage-green frock and the gray fur cape and hat to match which the elder girl was wearing. Doubtless she was taking the latest fashions down to Claversham, and fur capes and hats, indefinitely and mysteriously multiplying, would listen to him on Sundays from all the nearest pews. And Daintry was silent so long that he thought he had done with her. But no. "Do you think that you will like Claversham?" she asked, with an air of serious curiosity.

"I trust I shall," he said, a flush rising to his cheek.

She took a moment to consider the answer conscientiously, and, thinking badly of it, remarked gravely, "I don't think you will."

This was unbearable. The clergyman, full of a nervous dread lest the next question should be, "Do you think that they will like you at Claversham?" made a great show of resuming his newspaper.

Kate, possessed by the same fear, shot an imploring glance at Daintry; but, seeing that the latter had only eyes for the stranger, hoped desperately for the best.

Which was very bad. "It must be jolly," remarked the unconscious tormentor, "to have eight hundred pounds a year, and be a rector!"

"Daintry!" Kate cried in horror.

"Why, what is the matter?" asked Daintry, turning suddenly to her sister with wide-open eyes. Her look of aggrieved astonishment at once overcame Lindo's gravity, and he laughed aloud. He was not without a charming sense, still novel enough to be pleasing, that Daintry was right. It was jolly to be a rector and have eight hundred a year!

That laugh came in happily. It seemed to sweep away the cobwebs of embarrassment which had lain so thickly about two of the party. Lindo began to talk pleasantly, pointing out this or that reach of the river, and Kate, meeting his cheery eyes, put aside a faint idea of apologizing which had been in her head, and replied frankly. He told them tales of summer voyages between lock and lock, and of long days idly spent in the Wargrave marshes; and, as the identification of Mapledurham and Pangbourne and Wittenham and Goring rendered it necessary that they should all cross and recross the carriage, they were soon on excellent terms with one another, or would have been if the rector had not still detected in Kate's manner a slight stiffness for which he could not account. It puzzled him also to observe that, though they were ready, Daintry more particularly, to discuss the amusements of London and the goodness of cousin Jack, they both grew reticent when the conversation turned toward Claversham and its affairs.

At Oxford he got out to go to the bookstall.

"Jack was right," said Daintry, looking after him. "He *is* nice."

"Yes," her sister allowed, rising and sitting down again in a restless fashion. "But I wish we had not fallen in with him, all the same."

"It cannot be helped now," said Daintry, who was evidently prepared to accept the event with philosophy.

Not so her sister. "We might go into another carriage," she suggested.

"That would be rude," said Daintry calmly.

The question was decided for them by the young clergyman's return. He came along the platform, an animated look in his face. "Miss Bonamy," he said, stopping at the open door with his hand extended, "there is some one in the refreshment-room whom I think that you would like to see. Mr. Gladstone is there, talking to the Duke of Westminster, and they are both eating buns like common mortals. Will you come and take a peep at them?"

"I don't think that we have time," she objected.

"There is sure to be time," Daintry cried. "Now, Kate, come!" And she was down upon the platform in a moment.

"The train is not due out for five minutes yet," Lindo said, as he piloted them through the crowd to the doorway. "There, on the left by the fireplace," he added.

Kate glanced, and turned away satisfied. Not so Daintry. With rapt attention in her face, she strayed nearer and nearer to the great men, her eyes growing larger with each step.

"She will be talking to them next," said Kate, in a fidget.

"Perhaps asking him if he likes Downing Street," Lindo suggested slyly. "There, she is coming now," he added, as Miss Daintry turned and came to them at last.

"I wanted to make sure," she said simply, seeing Kate's impatience, "that I should know them again. That was all."

"Quite so; I hope you have succeeded," Kate answered drily. "But, if we are not quick, we shall miss our train." And she led the way back with more speed than dignity.

"There is plenty of time-plenty of time," Lindo answered, following them. He could not bear to see her pushing her way through the mixed crowd, and accepting so easily a footing of equality with

it. He was one of those men to whom their womenkind are sacred. He took his time, therefore, and followed at his ease; only to see, when he emerged from the press, a long stretch of empty platform, three porters, and the tail of a departing train. "Good gracious!" he stammered, with dismay in his face. "What does it mean?"

"It means," Kate said, in an accent of sharp annoyance-she did not intend to spare him-"that you have made us miss our train, Mr. Lindo. And there is not another which reaches Claversham today!"

CHAPTER IV

BIRDS IN THE WILDERNESS

"There! That was your fault!" said Daintry, turning from the departing train.

The young rector could not deny it. He would have given anything for at least the appearance of being undisturbed; but the blood came into his cheek, and in his attempt to maintain his dignity he only succeeded in looking angry as well as confused and taken aback. He had certainly made a mess of his escort duty. What in the world had led him to go out of his way to make a fool of himself? he wondered. And with these Claversham people!

"There may be a special train to-day," Kate suggested suddenly. She had got over her first vexation, and perhaps repented that she had betrayed it so openly. "Or we may be allowed to go on by a luggage-train, Mr. Lindo. Will you kindly see?"

He snatched at the relief which her proposal held out to him, and went away to inquire. But almost at once he was back again. "It is most vexatious!" he said loudly. "It is only three o'clock, and yet there is no way of getting to Claversham to-night! I am very sorry, but I never dreamed the company managed things so badly. Never!"

"No," said Kate drily.

He winced and looked at her sharply, his vanity hurt again. But then he found that he could not keep it up. No doubt it was a ridiculous position for a beneficed clergyman, on his way to undertake the work of his life, to be delayed at a station with two girls; but, after all, for a young man to be angry with a young woman who is also pretty-well, the task is difficult. "I am afraid," he said shyly, and yet with a kind of frankness, "that I have brought you into trouble, Miss Bonamy. As your sister says, it was my fault. Is it a matter of great consequence that you should reach home tonight?"

"I am afraid that my father will be vexed," she answered.

"You must telegraph to him," he rejoined. "I am afraid that is all I can suggest. And that done, you will have only one thing to consider-whether we shall stay the night here or go on to Birmingham."

Kate looked at him, her gray eyes very doubtful, and did not at once answer. He had clearly made up his mind to join his fortunes to theirs, while she, on her side, had reasons for shrinking from intimacy with him. But he seemed to consider it so much a matter of course that they should remain together and travel together, that she scarcely saw how to put things on a different footing. She knew, too, that she would get no help from Daintry, who already regarded their detention in the light of a capital joke.

"What are you going to do yourself, Mr. Lindo?" she said at last, her manner rather chilling.

He opened his eyes and smiled. "You discard me, then?" he said. "You have lost all faith in me, Miss Bonamy? Well, I deserve it after the scrape into which I have led you."

"I did not mean that," she answered. "I wished to know if you had made any plans."

"Yes," he replied-"to make amends, if you will let me take command of the party. We will stay in Oxford, and I will show you round the colleges."

"No?" exclaimed Daintry. "Will you? How jolly! And then?"

"We will dine at the Mitre," he answered, smiling, "if Miss Bonamy will permit me to manage everything. And then, if you leave here at nine-thirty to-morrow you will be at Claversham soon after twelve. Will that suit you?"

Daintry's face answered sufficiently for her. As for Kate, she was in a difficulty. She knew little of hotels: yet they must stop somewhere, and no doubt Mr. Lindo would take a great deal of trouble off her hands. But would it be proper to do as he proposed? She really did not know-only that it sounded odd. That it would not be wise she knew. She could answer that question at once. But how

could she explain, and how tell him to go his way and leave them? And, after all, to see Oxford would be delightful; and he really was very pleasant, very different from the men she knew at home.

"You are very good," she said at length, with a grateful sigh-"if we have no choice but between Oxford and Birmingham."

"And no choice of guides at all," he said, smiling, "you will take me."

"Yes," she answered, looking away primly.

Her reserve, however, did not last. Once through the station gates, that free holiday feeling which we have all experienced on being set down in an unknown town, with no duty before us save to explore it, soon possessed her; while he wished nothing better than to play the showman-a part we love. The day was fine and bright, though cold. She had eyes for beauty and a soul for the past, and soon forgot herself; and he, piloting the sisters through Magdalen Walks, now strewn with leaves, or displaying with pride the staircase of Christ Church, the quaint library of Merton, or the ancient front of John's, forgot himself also, and especially his new-born dignity, in which he had lived rather too much, perhaps, during the last three weeks. He showed himself in his true colors-the colors known to his intimate friends-and was so bright and cheery that Kate found herself talking to him in utter forgetfulness of his position and theirs. The girl frankly sighed when darkness fell and they had to go into the house, their curiosity still unsated.

She thought it was all over. But, lo! there was a cheery fire awaiting them in the "house" room (he had looked in for a few minutes on their first arrival and given his orders), and before it a little table laid for three was sparkling with plate and glass. Nay, there were two cups of tea ready on a side-table, for it wanted an hour yet of dinnertime. Altogether, as Daintry naïvely told him, "even Jack could not have made it nicer for us."

"Jack is a favorite of yours?" he said, laughing.

"I should think so!" Daintry answered, in wonder. "There is no one like Jack."

"After that I shall take myself off," he replied. "I really want to call on a friend, Miss Bonamy. But if I may join you at dinner-"

"Oh, do!" she said impulsively. Then, more shyly, she added, "We shall be very glad if you will, Mr. Lindo."

He felt singularly pleased with himself as he turned the windy corner of the Broad. It was pleasant to be in Oxford again, a beneficed clergyman. Pleasant to have such a future to look forward to, such a holiday moment to enjoy. Pleasant to anticipate the cheery meal and the girl's smile, half shy, half grateful. And Kate? – she remained before the fire, saying little because Daintry's tongue gave few openings, but thinking a good deal. Once she did speak. "It won't last," she said pettishly.

"Why, Kate? Do you think he will be different at Claversham?" Daintry protested.

"Of course he will!" She spoke with a little scorn in her voice, and that sort of decision which we use when we wish to crush down our own unwarranted hopes.

"But he is nice," Daintry persisted. "You do think so, Kate, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, he is very nice," she said drily. "But he will be in the Hammond set at home, and we shall see nothing of him."

But presently he was back, and Kate found it impossible to resist the charm. He ladled the soup and dispensed the mutton-chops with a gaiety and boyish glee which were really the stored-up effervescence of weeks, the ebullition of the long-repressed delight which he took in his promotion. He learned casually that the girls had been in London for more than a month staying with Jack's mother in Bayswater, and that they were very sorry to be upon their road home.

"And yet," he said-this was toward the end of dinner-"I have been told that your town is a very picturesque one. But I fancy that we never appreciate our home as we do a place strange to us."

"Very likely that is so," Kate answered quietly. And then a little pause ensued, such as he had observed several times before, and come to connect with any mention of Claversham. The girls' tongues would run on frankly and pleasantly enough about their London visit, or Mr. Gladstone; but

let him bring the talk round to his parish and its people, and forthwith something of reserve seemed to come between him and them until the conversation strayed afield again.

After the others had finished, he still toyed with his meal, partly in lazy enjoyment of the time, partly as an excuse for staying with them. They were sitting in a momentary silence, when a boy passed the window chanting a ditty at the top of his voice. The dogrel came clearly to their ears-

Here we sit like birds in the wilderness,
Birds in the wilderness, birds in the wilderness;
Here we sit like birds in the wilderness,
Samuel asking for more.

As the sound passed on the young man looked up, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, and met their eyes, and all three burst into a merry peal of laughter. They were the birds in the wilderness, sitting there in the circle of light, in the strange room in the strange town, almost as intimate as if they had known one another for years, or had been a week at sea together.

But Kate, having acknowledged by that pleasant outburst her sense of the oddity of the position, rose from the table, and the rector had to say good-night, explaining at the same time that he should not travel with them next morning, but intended to go on by a later train, as his friend wished to see more of him. Nevertheless, he said he should be up to breakfast with them and should see them off. And in this resolution he persisted, notwithstanding Kate's protest, which perhaps was not very violent.

Notwithstanding, he was a little late next morning. When he came down he found them already seated in the coffee-room. There were others breakfasting here and there in the room, chiefly upon toast-racks and newspapers, and he did not at once observe that the gentleman standing with his back set negligently against the mantelpiece was talking to Kate. Arrived at the table, however, he saw that it was so; and the cheery greeting on his lips faded into a commonplace "Good-morning, Miss Bonamy." He took no apparent notice of the stranger as he added, "I am afraid I am rather late."

The intruder, a short dark-whiskered man between thirty and forty, seemed to the full as much surprised by the clergyman's appearance as Lindo was by his, and as little able to hide the feeling as Kate herself to control the color which rose in her cheeks. She gave Mr. Lindo his tea in silence, and then with an obvious effort introduced the two men. "This is Dr. Gregg of Claversham-Mr. Lindo," she said.

Lindo rose and shook hands. "Mr. Lindo the younger, I presume?" said the doctor, with a bow and a swagger intended to show that he was quite at his ease.

"The only one, I am afraid," replied the rector, smiling. Though he by no means liked the look of the man.

"Did I rightly catch your name?" was the answer-"Mr. Lindo?"

"Yes," said the rector again, opening his eyes.

"But-you are not-you do not mean to say that you are the new rector?" pronounced the dark man abruptly, and with a kind of aggressiveness which seemed his most striking quality-"the rector of Claversham, I mean?"

"I believe so," said Lindo quietly. "You want some more water, do you not, Miss Bonamy?" he continued. "Let me ring the bell." He rose and crossed the room to do so. The truth was, he hated the newcomer already. His first sentence had been enough. His manner was not the manner of the men with whom Lindo had mixed, and the rector felt almost angry with Kate for introducing Gregg-albeit his parishioner-to him, and quite angry with her for suffering the doctor to address her with the familiarity he seemed to affect.

And Kate, her eyes downcast, knew by instinct how it was with him, and what he was thinking. "I have been telling Dr. Gregg," she said hurriedly, when he returned, "how we missed our train yesterday."

"Rather how I missed it for you," Lindo answered gravely, much engaged apparently with his breakfast.

"Ah, yes, it was very funny!" fired off the doctor, watching each mouthful they ate. Daintry had finished, and was sitting back in her chair kicking the leg of the table monotonously; not in the best of tempers apparently. "Very funny indeed!" the doctor continued. "An accident, I hope?" with a little sniggling laugh.

"Yes!" said the rector, looking up at him with a black brow and steadfast eyes-"it was an accident."

Gregg was a little cowed by the look, and in a moment, with a muttered word or two, fidgeted himself away, cursing the general superciliousness of parsons and the quiet airs of this one in particular. He was a little dog-in-the-mangerish man, ill-bred, and, like most ill-bred men, resentful of breeding in others. The fact that he had a sneaking liking for Kate did not tend to lessen his disgustful wonder how the Bonamy girls and the new rector came to be travelling together-which, indeed, to any Claversham person would have seemed a portent. But, then, Lindo did not know that.

The objectionable item removed, and the temptation to remark upon him overcome, Lindo soon recovered his good temper, and rattled away so pleasantly that the train time seemed to all of them to come very quickly. "There," he said, as he handed the last of Kate's books into the railway-carriage, "now I have done something to make amends for my fault, I trust. One thing more I can do. When you get home you need not spare me. You can put it all on my shoulders, Miss Bonamy."

"Thank you," Kate answered demurely.

"You are going to do so, I see," he said, laughing. "I fear my character will reach Claversham before me."

"I do not think we shall spread it very widely," she answered in a peculiar tone, which he naturally misunderstood.

The train was already in motion then, and he shook hands with her as he walked beside it. "Goodbye," he said. And then he added in a lower tone-he was such a very young rector-"I hope to see very much of you in the future, Miss Bonamy."

Kate sank back in her seat, her cheek a shade warmer. And in a moment he was alone upon the platform.

CHAPTER V

"REGINALD LINDO, 1850."

Long before the later train by which the rector came on arrived at the Claversham station, the Rev. Stephen Clode was waiting on the platform. The curate was a tall, dark man, somewhat over thirty, with a strong rugged face and a bush of stiff black hair standing up from his forehead. He had been at Claversham three years, enjoying all the importance which old Mr. Williams's long illness naturally gave to his curate and *locum tenens*; and, though the town was agreed that his chagrin at having a new rector set over his head was great, it must be admitted that he concealed it with admirable skill. More than one letter had passed between him and the new incumbent, and, in securing for the latter Mr. Williams's good old-fashioned furniture, and in other ways, he had made himself very useful to Lindo. But the two had not met, and consequently the curate viewed the approaching train with lively, though secret, curiosity.

It came, the bell rang, the porter cried, "Claversham! Claversham!" and the curate walked down it, past the carriage-windows, looking for the man he had come to meet. Half-a-dozen people stepped out, and for a moment there was a mimic tumult on the little platform; but nowhere amid it all could Clode see any one like the new rector. "He has missed another train!" he muttered to himself in contemptuous wonder; and he was already casting a last look round him before turning on his heel, when a tall, fair young man, in a clerical overcoat, who had been one of the first to alight, stepped up to him. "Am I speaking to Mr. Clode?" said the stranger pleasantly. And he lifted his hat.

"Certainly," the curate answered. "I am Mr. Clode. But I fear I have not the-"

"No, I know," replied the other, smiling, and at the same time holding out his hand. "Though, indeed, I hoped that you might have been here on purpose to meet me. My name is Lindo."

The curate uttered an exclamation of surprise; and, hastily returning the proffered grip, fixed his black eyes curiously on his new friend. "Mr. Lindo did not mention that you were with him," he answered in a tone of some embarrassment. "But, there, let me see to your luggage. Is it all here?"

"Yes, I think so," Lindo answered, tapping one article after another with his umbrella, and giving the stationmaster a pleasant "Good-day!" "Is there an omnibus or anything?"

"Yes," Clode said; "it will be all right. They know where to take it. You will walk up with me, perhaps. It is about a quarter of a mile to the rectory."

The new comer assented gladly, and the two passed out of the station together. Lindo let his eye travel up the wide steep street before him, until it rested on the noble tower which crowned the little hill and looked down now, as it had looked down for five centuries, on the red roofs clustering about it. His tower! His church! Even his companion did not remark, so slight was the action, that, as he passed out of the station and looked up, he lifted his hat for a second.

"And where is your father?" Clode asked. "Was he delayed by business? Or perhaps," he added, dubiously scanning him, "you are Mr. Lindo's brother?"

"I *am* Mr. Lindo!" said our friend, turning in astonishment and looking at his companion.

"The rector?"

"Yes."

It was the curate's turn to stare now, and he did so-his face flushing darkly and his eyes wide opened for once. He even seemed for a moment to be stricken dumb with surprise and emotion. "Indeed!" he said at last, in a half stifled voice which he vainly strove to control. "Indeed! I beg your pardon. I had thought-I don't know why-I mean that I had expected to see an older man."

"I am sorry you are disappointed," the rector replied, smiling ruefully. "I am beginning to think I am rather young, for you are not the first to-day who has made that mistake."

The curate did not answer, and the two walked on in silence, feeling somewhat awkward. Clode, indeed, was raging inwardly. By one thing and another he had been led to expect a man past middle life, and the only Clergy List in the parish, being three years old and containing the name of Lindo's uncle only, had confirmed him in the error. He had never conceived the idea that the man set over his head would be a fledgling, scarcely a year in priest's orders, or he would have gone elsewhere. He would never have stayed to be at the beck and call of such a puppy as this! He felt now that he had been entrapped, and he chafed inwardly to such an extent that he did not dare to speak. To have this young fellow, six or seven years his junior, set over him would humiliate him in the eyes of all those before whom he had long played a different part!

In a minor degree Lindo was also vexed-not only because he was sufficiently sensitive to enter into the other's feelings, but also because he foresaw trouble ahead. It was annoying, too, to be received at each new *rencontre* as a surprise-as the reverse of all that had been expected and all that had been, as he feared, hoped.

"You will find the rectory a very comfortable house," said the curate at last, his mind fully made up now that he would leave at the earliest possible date. "Warm and old-fashioned. Rough-cast outside. Many of the rooms are panelled."

"It looks out on the churchyard, I believe," replied the rector, with the same labored politeness.

"Yes, it stands high. The view from the windows at the back is pleasant. The front is perhaps a little gloomy-in winter at least."

Near the top of the street a quaint, narrow flight of steps conducted them to the churchyard-an airy, elevated place, surrounded on three sides by the church and houses, but open on the fourth, where a terraced walk, running along the summit of the old town wall, admitted the southern sun and afforded a wide view of plain and hill. The two men crossed the churchyard, the new rector looking about him with curiosity and a little awe, his companion marching straight onward, his strongly-marked face set ominously. He would go! He would go at the earliest possible minute! he was thinking.

It did not affect him nor alter his resolution that in the wooden porch of the old rectory the new rector turned to him and shyly, yet with real feeling, besought his help and advice in the work before him. The young clergyman, commonly so self-confident, was moved, and moved deeply, by the evening light and his strange and solemn surroundings. Stephen Clode's answer was in the affirmative-it could hardly have been other; and it was spoken becomingly, if a little coldly, in view of the rector's advances; but, even while the curate spoke it, he was considering how he might best escape from Claversham. Still his Yea, yea, comforted his companion and lightened his momentary apprehensions.

Nor was the curate, when he had recovered from the first shock of surprise and disgust, so foolish as to betray his feelings by wanton churlishness. He parted from his companion at the door, leaving him to the welcome of Mrs. Baker, the rector's London housekeeper, who had come down two days before; but at the same time he consented readily to return at half-past six and share his dinner, and gave him in the course of the meal all the information in his power. Left to himself, the rector went over the house under Mrs. Baker's guidance, and, as he trod the polished floors, could not but feel some access of self-importance. The panelled hall, with its wide oak staircase, fed this, and the spacious sombrely-furnished library, with its books and busts, its antique clock and one good engraving, and its lofty windows opening upon the garden. So, in a less degree, did the long oak-panelled dining-room and a smaller sitting-room which looked to the front and the churchyard; and the drawing-room, which was situated over the library, and seemed the larger because Mr. Williams had furnished it but scantily and lived in it less. Then there were six or seven bedrooms, and in the garden a stone basin and fountain. Altogether, when the rector descended after washing his hands, and stood on the library hearth-rug looking about him, he would have been more than human if he had not, with a feeling of thankfulness, entertained also some faint sense of self-congratulation and personal desert. Nor, probably, would Mr. Clode have been human if, coming in and finding the younger man standing on that hearth-rug, and betraying in his face and attitude something of his

thoughts, he on his part had not felt a degree of envy and antagonism. The man was so prosperous, so self-contented, so conscious of his own merit and success.

But the curate was too wise to betray this feeling; and, laying himself out to be pleasant, he had, before the little meal was over, so far ingratiated himself with his entertainer that the rector was greatly surprised when he presently learned that Clode had not been to a university. "You astonish me," he said, "for you have so completely the manner of a 'varsity-man!"

The observation was a little too gracious, a little wanting in tact, but it would not have hurt the curate had he not been at the moment in a state of irritation. As it was, Clode treasured it up, and never got rid of the feeling that the Oxford man looked down upon him because he had been only at Wells; whereas Lindo, with some prejudices and sufficiently prone to judge his fellows, had far too high an opinion of himself to be bound by such distinctions, but was just as likely to make a friend of a ploughboy, if he liked him, as of a Christchurch man. After that speech, however, the curate was more than ever resolved to go, and go quickly.

But, when dinner was over and he was about to take his leave, he happened to pick up, as he moved about the room, a small prayer-book which Lindo had just unpacked, and which was lying on the writing-table. Clode idly looked into it as he talked, and, seeing on the flyleaf "Reginald Lindo, 1850," took occasion, when he had done with the subject in hand, to discuss it. "Surely," he said, holding it up, "you did not possess this in 1850, Mr. Lindo!"

"Hardly," Lindo answered, laughing. "I was not born until '54."

"Then who?"

"It was my uncle's," the rector explained. "I was his god-son, and his name was mine also."

"Is he alive, may I ask?" the curate pursued, looking at the title-page as if he saw something curious there-though, indeed, what he saw was not new to him; only from it he had suddenly deduced a thought.

"No, he died about a year ago-nearly a year ago, I think," Lindo answered carelessly, and without the least suspicion. "He was always particularly kind to me, and I use that book a good deal. I must have it rebound."

"Yes," Clode said mechanically; "it wants rebinding if you value it."

"I shall have it done. And a lot of these books," the rector continued, looking at old Mr. Williams's shelves, "want their clothes renewing. I shall have them all looked to, I think." He had a pleasant sense that this was in his power. The cost of the furniture and library had made a hole in his not very large private means; but that mattered little now. Eight hundred a year, paid quarterly, will bind a book or two.

Had the curate been attending, he would have read Lindo's thoughts with ease. But Clode was pursuing a train of reflections of his own, and so was spared this pang. "Your uncle was an old man, I suppose," he said. "I think I observed in the Clergy List that he had been in orders about forty years."

"Not quite so long as that," Lindo replied. "He was sixty-four when he died. He had been Lord Dynmore's private tutor you know, though they were almost of an age."

"Indeed," the curate rejoined, still with that thoughtful look on his face. "You knew Lord Dynmore through him, I suppose, then, Mr. Lindo?"

"Well, I got the living through him, if that what you mean," Lindo said frankly. "But I do not think that I ever met Lord Dynmore. Certainly I should not know him from Adam."

"Ah!" said the curate, "ah! indeed!" He smiled as he gazed into the fire, and stroked his chin. In the other's place, he thought, he would have been more reticent. He would not have disclaimed, though he might not have claimed, acquaintance with Lord Dynmore. He would have left the thing shadowy, to be defined by others as they pleased. Thinking thus, he got up somewhat abruptly, and wished Lindo good-night. A cool observer, indeed, might have noticed-but the rector did not-a change in his manner as he did so-a little accession of familiarity, which did seem not far removed from a

delicate kind of contempt. The change was subtle, but one thing was certain. Stephen Clode had no longer any intention of leaving Claversham in a hurry. That resolve was gone.

Once out of the house, he passed quickly from the churchyard by a narrow lane leading to an irregular open space quaintly called "The Top of the Town." Here were his own lodgings, on the first-floor over a stationer's; but he did not enter them. Instead, he strode on toward the farther and darker side of the square, where were no buildings, but a belt of tall trees stood up, gaunt and rustling in the night wind above a line of wall. Through the trees the lights of a large house were visible. He walked up the avenue which led to the door and, ringing loudly, was at once admitted.

The sound of the bell came to the ears of two ladies who had been for some time placidly expecting it. They were seated in a small but charming room filled with soft, shaded light and warmth and color, an open piano and dainty pictures and china, and a well-littered writing-table all contributing to the air of accustomed luxury which pervaded it. The elder lady—that Mrs. Hammond whom we saw talking to the curate on the day of the old rector's funeral—looked up expectantly as Mr. Clode entered, and, extending to him a podgy white hand covered with rings, began to chide him in a rich full voice for being so late. "I have been dying," she said cheerfully, "to hear what is the fate before us, Mr. Clode. What is he like?"

"Well," he answered, taking with a word of thanks the cup of tea which Laura offered him, "I have one surprise in store for you. He is comparatively young."

"Sixty?" said Mrs. Hammond interrogatively.

"Forty?" said Laura, raising her eyebrows.

"No," Clode replied, smiling and stirring his tea, "you must guess again. He is twenty-six."

"Twenty-six! You are joking," exclaimed the elder lady. While Laura opened her eyes very wide, but said nothing yet.

"No," said the curate. "He told me himself that he was not born until 1854."

The two ladies were loud in their surprise then, while for a moment the curate sipped his tea in silence. The brass kettle hissed and bubbled on the hob. The tea-set twinkled cheerfully on the wicker table, and faint scents of flowers and fabrics filled the room with an atmosphere which he had long come to associate with Laura. It was Laura Hammond, indeed, who had introduced him to this new world. The son of an accountant living in a small Lincolnshire town, he owed his clerical profession to his mother's ardent wish that he should rise in the world. His father was not wealthy, and, before he came as curate to Claversham, Mr. Clode had had no experience of society. Then, alighting: on a sudden in the midst of much such a small town as his native place, he found himself astonishingly transmogrified into a person of social importance. He found every door open to him, and among them the Hammonds', who were admitted to be the first people in the town. He fell in easily enough with the "new learning," but the central figure in the novel pleasant world of refinement continued throughout to be Laura Hammond.

Much petting had somewhat spoiled him, and it annoyed him now, as he sat sipping his tea, to observe that the ladies were far from displeased with his tidings. "If he is a young man, he is sure not to be evangelical," said Mrs. Hammond decisively. "That is well. That is a comfort, at any rate."

"He will play tennis, I dare say," said Laura.

"And Mr. Bonamy will be kept in some order now," Mrs. Hammond continued. "Not that I am blaming you, Mr. Clode," she added graciously—indeed, the curate was a great favorite with her, "but in your position you could do nothing with a man so impracticable."

"He really will be an acquisition," cried Laura gleefully, her brown eyes shining in the firelight. And she made her tiny lace handkerchief into a ball and flung it up—and did not catch it, for, with all her talk of lawn-tennis, she was no great player. Her *rôle* lay rather in the drawing-room. She was as fond of comfort as a cat, and loved the fire with the love of a dog, and was, in a word, pre-eminently feminine, delighting to surround herself with all such things as tended to set off this side

of her nature. "But now," she continued briskly, when the curate had recovered her handkerchief for her, "tell me what you think of him. Is he nice?"

"Certainly; I should say so," the curate answered, smiling.

But, though he smiled, he became silent again. He was reflecting, with well-hidden bitterness, that Lindo would not only override him in the parish, but would be his rival in the particular inner clique which he affected—perhaps his rival with Laura. The thought awoke the worst nature of the man. Up to this time, though he had not been true, though he had kept back at Claversham details of his past history which a frank man would have avowed, though in the process of assimilating himself to his new surroundings he had been over-pliant, he had not been guilty of any baseness which had seemed to him a baseness, which had outraged his own conscience. But, as he reflected on the wrong which this young stranger was threatening to do him, he felt himself capable of much.

"Mrs. Hammond," he said suddenly, "may I ask if you have destroyed Lord Dynmore's letter which you showed me last week?"

"Destroyed Lord Dynmore's letter!" Laura answered, speaking for her mother in a tone of comic surprise. "Do you think, sir, that we get peers' autographs every day of the week?"

"No," Mrs. Hammond said, waving aside her daughter's flippancy and speaking with some stateliness. "It is not destroyed, though such things are not so rare with us as Laura pretends. But why do you ask?"

"Because the rector was not sure when Lord Dynmore meant to return to England," Clode explained readily. "And I thought he mentioned the date in his letter to you, Mrs. Hammond."

"I do not think so," said Mrs. Hammond.

"Might I look?"

"Of course," was the answer. "Will you find it, Laura? I think it is under the malachite weight in the other room."

It was, sitting there in solitary majesty. Laura opened it, and took the liberty of glancing through it first. Then she gave it to him. "There, you unbelieving man," she said, "you can look. But he does not say a word about his return."

The curate read rapidly until he came to one sentence, and on this his eye dwelt a moment. "I hear with regret," it ran, "that poor Williams is not long for this world. When he goes I shall send you an old friend of mine. I trust he will become an old friend of yours also." Clode barely glanced at the rest of the letter, but, as he handed it back, he informed himself that it was dated in America two days before Mr. Williams's death.

"No," he admitted, "I was wrong. I thought he had said when he would return."

"And you are satisfied?" said Laura.

"Perfectly," he answered. "Perfectly!" with a little unnecessary emphasis.

He lingered long enough to give them a personal description of the new-comer—speaking always of him in words of praise—and then he took his leave. As his hand met Laura's, his face flushed ever so slightly and his dark eyes glowed; and the girl, as she turned away, smiled furtively, knowing well, though he had never spoken, that she was the cause of this. So she was, but in part only. At that moment the curate saw something besides Laura—he saw across a narrow strait of trouble the fairer land of preferment, his footing on which once gained he might pretend to her and to many other pleasant things at present beyond his reach.

CHAPTER VI

THE BONAMYS AT HOME

Lindo made his first exploration of the neighborhood, not on the day after his arrival, which was taken up with his induction by the archdeacon and with other matters, but on the day after that. He chose to avoid the streets, in which he felt somewhat shy, so polite were the attentions and so curious the glances of his parishioners; and he selected instead a lane which, starting from the churchyard, seemed to plunge at once into the country. It was a pleasant lane. It lay deep sunk in a cutting through the sandstone rock—a cutting first formed, perhaps, when the great stones for the building of the church were dragged up that way. He paused halfway down the slope to look about him curiously, and was still standing when some one came round the corner before him. It was Kate Bonamy. He saw the girl's cheek—she was alone—flush ever so slightly as their eyes met; and he noticed, too, that to all appearance she would have passed him with a bow had he not placed himself in her way. "Come," he said, laughing frankly as he held out his hand, "you must not cut me, Miss Bonamy! Let me tell you, you have quite the aspect of an old friend, for until now I have not seen one face since I came here that was not absolutely new to me."

"It must feel strange, no doubt," she murmured.

"It is. *I* feel strange!" he replied. "I want you to tell me where this road goes to, if you please. I am so strange, I do not even know that."

"Kingsford Carbonel," she answered briefly.

"Ah! The archdeacon lives there, does he not?"

"Yes."

"And the distance, please, is-?"

"Three miles."

"Thank you," he said. "Really you are as concise as a mile-stone, Miss Bonamy. And now let me remind you," he continued—there was an air of "I am going on this moment" about her, which provoked him to detain her the longer—"that you have not yet asked me what I think of Claversham."

"I would rather ask you in a month's time," Kate answered quietly, holding out her hand to take leave. "Though it is already reported in the town that you will only stay a year, Mr. Lindo."

"I shall only stay a year!" the rector repeated in astonishment.

"Certainly," she answered, smiling, and relapsing for a moment into the pleasant frankness of that day at Oxford—"only a year; your days are already numbered."

"What do you mean?" he said point-blank.

"Have you never heard the old tradition that as many times as a clergyman sounds the bell at his induction, so many years will he remain in the living? And the report in Claversham is that you rang it only once."

"You did not hear it yourself?" he said, catching her eyes suddenly, a lurking smile in his own.

Her color rose faintly. "I am not sure," she said. Then, meeting his eyes boldly, she added in a different tone, "Yes, I did hear it."

"Only once?"

She nodded.

"Oh, that is sad," he answered. "Well, the tradition is new to me. If I had known it," he added, laughing, "I should have tolled the bell at least fifty times. Clode should have instructed me; but I suppose he thought I knew. I remember now that the archdeacon did say something afterward, but I did not understand the reference. You know the archdeacon, Miss Bonamy, I suppose?"

"No," said Kate, growing stiff again.

"Do you not? Well, at any rate you can tell me where Mrs. Hammond lives. She has kindly asked me to dine with her on Tuesday. I put my acceptance in my pocket, and thought I would deliver it myself when I came back from my walk."

"Mrs. Hammond lives at the Town House," Kate answered. "It is the large house among the trees by the top of the town. You cannot mistake it."

"Shall I have the pleasure of meeting you there?" he asked, holding out his hand at last.

"No; I do not know Mrs. Hammond," Miss Bonamy said with decision. "Good-day, Mr. Lindo." And she was gone; rather abruptly at last.

"That is odd-very odd," Lindo reflected as, continuing his walk, he turned to admire her graceful figure and the pretty carriage of her head. "I fancied that in these small towns every one knew every one. What sort of people are the Hammonds, I wonder? New, rich, and vulgar perhaps. It may be, and that would account for it. Yet Clode spoke highly of them."

Something which he did not understand in the girl's manner continued to pique the young man's curiosity after he had parted from her, and led him to dwell more intently upon her than upon the scenery, novel as this was to him. She had shown herself at one moment so frank, and at another so stiff and constrained, that it was equally impossible to ascribe the one attitude to shyness or the other to a naturally candid manner. The rector considered the question so long, and found it so puzzling-and interesting-that on his return to town he had come to one conclusion only-that it was his immediate duty to call upon his church wardens. He had made the acquaintance of Mr. Harper, his own warden, at his induction. It remained therefore to call upon Mr. Bonamy, the peoples' warden. When he had taken his lunch, it seemed to him that there was no time like the present.

He had no difficulty in finding Mr. Bonamy's house, which stood in the middle of the town, about halfway down Bridge Street. It was a substantial, respectable residence of brick, not detached nor withdrawn from the roadway. It had nothing aristocratic in its appearance, and was known by a number. Its eleven windows, of which the three lowest rejoiced in mohair blinds, were sombre, its doorway was heavy. In a word, it was a respectable middle-class house in a dull street in a country town-a house suggestive of early dinners and set teas. The rector felt chilled by its very appearance; but he knocked, and presently a maid-servant opened the door about a foot. "Is Mr. Bonamy at home?" he said.

"No, sir," the girl drawled, holding the door as if she feared he might attempt to enter by force, "he is not."

"Ah, I am sorry I have missed him," said the clergyman, handling his card-case. "Do you know at what time he is likely to return?"

"No, sir, I don't," replied the girl, who was all eyes for the strange rector; "but I expect Miss Kate does. Will you walk up-stairs, sir? and I will tell her."

"Perhaps I had better," he answered, pocketing his card-case. Accordingly he walked in, and followed the servant to the drawing-room, where she poked the sinking fire and induced a sickly blaze.

Left to himself-for Kate was not there-he looked round curiously, and as he looked the sense of disappointment which he had felt at sight of the house grew upon him. It was a cold, uncomfortable room. It had a set, formal look, which was not quaintness, nor harmony, and which was strange to the Londoner. It was so neat: every article in it had a place, and was in its place, and apparently never had been out of its place. There was a vase of chrysanthemums on the large centre table, but the rector thought they must be wax, they were so prim. There were other wax flowers-which he hated. He almost shivered as he looked at the four walls. He felt obliged to sit upright on his chair, and to place his hat exactly in the middle of a square of the carpet, and to ponder over the question of what the maid had done with the poker. For she had certainly not stirred the fire with the bright and shining thing which lay in evidence in the fender.

He was in the act of rising cautiously with the intention of solving this mystery, when the door opened and the elder sister came in, Daintry following her. "My father is not in, Mr. Lindo," Kate said, advancing to meet him, and shaking hands with him.

"No; so I learned down-stairs," he answered. "But I-"

The girl-she had scarcely turned from him-cut him short with an exclamation of dismay. "Oh, Daintry, you naughty girl!" she cried. "You have brought Snorum up."

"Well," said Daintry simply-a large white dog, half bull-dog, half terrier, with red-rimmed eyes and projecting teeth, had crept in at her heels-"he followed me."

"You know papa would be so angry if he found him here."

"But I only want him to see Mr. Lindo. You are unkind, Kate! You know he never gets a chance of seeing a stranger."

"You want to know if he likes me?" the rector said, laughing.

"That is it," she answered, nodding.

But Kate, though she laughed, was inexorable. She bundled the big dog out. "Do you know, she has two more like that, Mr. Lindo?" she said, apologetically.

"Snip and Snap," said Daintry. "But they are not like that. They are smaller. Jack gave me Snorum, and Snip and Snap are Snorum's sons."

"It is quite a genealogy," the rector said, smiling.

"Yes, and Jack was the Genesis. Genesis means beginning, you know," Daintry explained.

"Daintry, you must go down-stairs if you talk nonsense," Kate said imperatively. She was looking, the young man thought, prettier than ever in a gray and blue plaid frock and the neatest of collars and cuffs. As for Daintry, she shrugged her shoulders under the rebuke, and lolled in one of the stiff-backed chairs, her attitude much like that of a vine clinging to a telegraph-post.

Her wilfulness had one happy effect, however. The rector in his amusement forgot the chill formality of the room and the dull respectability of the house's exterior. For half an hour he talked on without a thought of the gentleman whom he had come to see. Some inkling of the circumstances of the case which had entered his head before the sisters' appearance faded again, and in gazing on the pure animated faces of the two girls he quickly lost sight of the evidences of lack of taste which appeared in their surroundings. If Kate, on her side, forgot for a moment certain chilling realities and surrendered herself to the pleasure of the moment, it must be remembered that hitherto-in Claversham, at least-her experience of men had been confined to Dr. Gregg and his fellows, and also that none of us, even the wisest and proudest, are always on guard.

Mr. Bonamy not appearing, Reginald left at last, perfectly assured that the half-hour he had just spent was the pleasantest he had spent in Claversham. He went out of the house in a gentle glow of enthusiasm. The picture of Kate Bonamy, trim and neat, with her hair in a bright knot, and laughter softening her eyes, remained with him, and he walked half-way down the street lost in a delightful reverie.

He was aroused by the approach of a tall, elderly man who had just turned the corner before him, and was now advancing along the pavement with long, rapid strides. The stranger, who seemed about sixty, wore a wide-skirted black coat, and had a tall silk hat, from under which the gray hairs straggled thinly, set far back on his head. His figure was spare, his face sallow, his features prominent. His mouth was peevish, his eyes sharp and saturnine. As he walked he kept one hand in his trousers'-pocket, the other swung by his side. The rector looked at him a moment in doubt, and then stopped him. "Mr. Bonamy, I am sure?" he said, holding out his hand.

"Yes, I am," replied the other, fixing him with a penetrating glance. "And you, sir?"

"May I introduce myself? I have just called at your house, and, unluckily, failed to find you at home. I am Mr. Lindo."

"Oh, the new rector!" said Mr. Bonamy, putting out a cold hand, while the chill glitter of his eye lost none of its steeliness.

"Yes, and I am glad to have intercepted you," Lindo continued, with a little color in his cheek, and speaking quickly under the influence of his late enthusiasm, which as yet was proof against the lawyer's reserve. "For I have been extremely anxious to make your acquaintance, and, indeed, to say something particular to you, Mr. Bonamy."

The elder man bowed to hide a smile. "As church warden, I presume?" he said smoothly.

"Yes, and-and generally. I am quite aware, Mr. Bonamy," continued the rash young man in a fervor of frankness, "that you were not disposed to look upon my appointment-the appointment of a complete stranger, I mean-with favor."

"May I ask who told you that?" said Bonamy abruptly.

The young clergyman colored. "Well, I-perhaps you will excuse me saying how I learned it," he answered, beginning to see that he would have done better to be more reticent. There is no mistake which youth more often makes than that of arousing sleeping dogs, and trying to explain things which a wiser man would pass over in silence. Mr. Bonamy had his own reasons for regarding the parson with suspicion, and had no mind to be addressed in the indulgent vein. Nor was he propitiated when Lindo added, "I learned your feeling, if I may say so, by an accident."

"Then I think you should have kept knowledge so gained to yourself!" the lawyer retorted.

The rector started and turned crimson under the reproof. His dignity was new and tender, and the other's tone was offensive in the last degree. Yet the young man tried to control himself, and for the moment succeeded. "Possibly," he said, with some stiffness. "My only motive in mentioning the latter, however, was this, that I hope in a short time, by appealing to you for your hearty co-operation, to overcome any prejudices you may have entertained."

"My prejudices are rather strong," the lawyer answered grimly. "You are quite at liberty to try, however, Mr. Lindo. But I may as well warn you of one thing now, as frankness seems to be in fashion. I have just been told that you are meditating considerable changes in our church here. Now, I must tell you this, that I object to anything new-anything new, and not only to new incumbents!" with a smile which somewhat softened his last words.

"But who informed you," cried the rector in angry surprise, "that I meditated changes, Mr. Bonamy?"

"Ah!" the lawyer answered in his driest and thinnest voice. "That is just what I cannot tell you. Let us say that I learned it-by accident, Mr. Lindo!" And his sharp eyes twinkled.

"It is not true, however!" the rector exclaimed.

"Is it not? Well," with a slight cough, "I am glad to hear it!"

Mr. Bonamy's tone as he made this admission, however, was such that it only irritated Lindo the more. "You mean that you do not believe me!" he cried, speaking so fiercely that Clowes the bookseller, who had been watching the interview from his shop-door, was able to repeat the words to a dozen people afterward. "I can assure you that it is so. I am not thinking of making any changes whatever-unless you consider the mere removal of the sheep from the churchyard a change!"

"I do. A great change," replied the church warden with grimness.

"But surely you do not object to it!" Lindo exclaimed in astonishment. "Every one must agree that in these days, and in town churchyards at any rate, the presence of sheep is unseemly."

"I do not agree to that at all!" Mr. Bonamy answered calmly. "Neither did Mr. Williams, the late rector, who had had long experience, act as if he were of that mind."

The present rector threw up his hands in disgust-in disgust and wonder. Remember, he was very young. The thing seemed to him so clear that he was assured the other was arguing for the sake of argument-a thing we all hate in other people-and he lost patience. "I do not think you mean what you say, Mr. Bonamy," he blurted out at last. He was much discomposed, yet he made an attempt to assume an air of severity which did not sit well upon him at the moment.

Mr. Bonamy grinned. "That you will see when you turn out the sheep, Mr. Lindo," he said. "For the present I think I will bid you good evening." and taking off his hat gravely-to the rector the gravity seemed ironical-he went his way.

Men take these things differently. To the lawyer there was nothing disturbing in such a passage of arms as this. He was never so happy-Claversham knew it well-as in and after a quarrel. "Master Lindo thought to twist me round his finger, did he?" he muttered to himself as he stopped on his own doorstep and thrust the key into the lock. "He has found out his mistake now. We will have nothing new here-nothing new while John Bonamy is warden, at any rate, my lad! It is well, however," continued Mr. Bonamy with a backward glance, "that Clode gave me a hint in time. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride-we know whither!" And the lawyer went in and slammed the door behind him.

Meanwhile, what is sauce for the goose is not always sauce for the gander. The younger man turned away, at the moment, indeed, in a white heat, full of wrath at the other's unreasonableness, folly, churlishness. But the comfortable warmth which this engendered passed away quickly-alas! much too quickly-and long before Lindo reached the rectory, though the walk through the gray streets, where the shops were just being lighted, did not take him two minutes, a chill depression had taken its place. This was a fine beginning! This was a happy augury of his future administration of the parish! To have begun by quarrelling with his church warden-could anything have been worse? And the check had come so suddenly, so unexpectedly, and at a time when he had been on such good terms with himself, that he felt it the more sorely. He went into the house with his head bent, and was not best pleased to find Stephen Clode inquiring after him in the hall. He would rather have been alone.

The curate, as he came forward, did not fail to note that something was amiss, and a gleam of intelligence flashed for an instant across his dark face. "Come into the study," said the rector curtly. Since Clode was here, and could not be avoided, he felt it would be a relief to tell him all. And he did so, the curate listening and making no remark whatever, so that the rector presently looked at him in surprise. "What do you think of it?" he said, some impatience in his tone. "It is unfortunate, is it not?"

"Well, I don't know," the curate answered, leaning forward in his chair, with his elbows on his knees and his eyes cast down upon the hat which he was slowly revolving between his hands. "I am not astonished, you know. What can you expect from a pig but a grunt?"

The rector got up, and, leaning his arm on the mantel-shelf, felt, if the truth be told, rather uncomfortable. "I do not understand you," he said at length.

"It is what I should have expected from Bonamy. That is all."

"Then you must think him a very ill-conditioned man!" Lindo retorted warmly, scarcely knowing whether the annoyance he felt was a reminiscence of his late conflict or caused by his companion's manner.

"Well, again, what else can you expect?" Clode replied sagely, looking up and shrugging his shoulders. "You know all about him, I suppose?"

"I know nothing," said the rector, frowning slightly.

"He is not a gentleman, you know," the curate answered, still looking up and speaking with languid indolence as if what he said must be known to everyone. "You have heard his history?"

"No, I have not."

"He was an office-boy with Adams & Rooke, the old solicitors here, swept out the office, and brought the coal, and so forth. He had his wits about him, and old Adams gave him his articles, and finally took him into partnership. Then the old men died off and it all came to him. He is well off, and has power of a sort in the town; but, of course," the curate added, getting up lazily and yawning-"well, people like the Hammonds do not visit with him."

There was silence in the room for a full minute. The rector had left the fireplace and, with his back to the speaker, was raising the lamp-wick. "Why did you not tell me this before?" he said at length, his voice hard.

"I did not see why I should prejudice you against the man before you saw him," replied the curate, with much reason. "Besides, I really was not sure whether you knew his history or not. I am afraid I did not give much thought to the matter."

"Umph!"

CHAPTER VII

THE HAMMONDS' DINNER PARTY

The new top, the new book, the bride-the first joy in the possession of each one of these fades, not gradually, but at a leap, as day fades in the tropics. A chip in the wood, the turning of the last page, the first selfish word, and the thing is done; ecstasy becomes sober satisfaction. It was so with the rector. The first glamour of his good fortune, of his new toy, died abruptly with that evening-with the quarrel with his church warden, and the discovery of the cause of that constraint which he had remarked in Kate Bonamy's manner from the first.

He was a conscientious man, and the failure of his good resolutions, his aspirations to be the perfect parish priest, fretted him. Moreover, he had to think of the future. He soon learned that Mr. Bonamy might not be a gentleman, and was indeed reputed to be a stubborn, queer-tempered curmudgeon; but he learned also that he had great influence in the town, though, except in the way of business, he associated with few, and that he, Reginald Lindo, would have to reckon with him on that footing. The certainty of this and of the bad beginning he had made naturally depressed the young man, his customary good opinion of himself not coming to his aid at once. And, besides, he carried about with him-sometimes it came between him and his book, sometimes he saw it framed by the autumn landscape-the picture of Kate's pure proud face. At such moments he felt himself humiliated by the slights cast upon her. The Hammonds did not think her fit company for them! The Hammonds!

Not that he knew the Hammonds yet, or many others, the days which intervened between his induction and the dinner at the Town House being somewhat lonely days, during which he was much thrown back upon himself, and only felt by slow degrees the soothing influence of the routine work of his position. Of his curate, and of him only, he naturally saw much, and found it small comfort to learn from the Reverend Stephen that the fracas with Mr. Bonamy had not escaped the attention of the town, but was being made the subject of comment by many who were delighted to have so novel a subject as the new rector and his probable conduct.

He was sitting at breakfast a few days later-on the morning of the Hammonds' party-when Mrs. Baker announced an early visitor. "No, he is not a gentleman, sir," she said, "though he has on a black coat. A stranger to the town, I think, but he will not say what he wants, except to see you."

"I will come to him in the study," replied her master.

The housekeeper, however, going out, and taking a second glance at the caller, did not show him into the study, but instead, gave him a seat in the hall on the farther side from the coatstand. There the rector, when he came out, found him-a pale fat-faced man, dressed neatly and decorously, though his clothes were threadbare. He took him into the study, and asked him his business. "But first sit down," the rector added pleasantly, desiring to set the man at his ease.

The stranger sat down gingerly on the edge of a chair. For a moment there was a pause of seeming embarrassment, and then, "I am body-servant, sir," he said abruptly, passing his tongue across his lips, and looking up furtively to learn the effect of his announcement, "to the Earl of Dynmore."

"Indeed!" the rector replied, with a slight start. "Has Lord Dynmore returned to England, then?"

Again the man looked up slyly. "No, sir," he answered with deliberation, "I cannot say that he has, sir."

"You have brought some letter or message from him, perhaps?" the clergyman hazarded. The stranger seemed to have a difficulty in telling his own story.

"No, sir, if you will pardon me, I have come about myself, sir," the man explained, speaking a little more freely. "I am in a little bit of trouble, and I think you would help me, sir, if you heard the story."

"I am quite willing to hear the story," said the rector gravely. Looking more closely at the man, he saw that his neatness was only on the surface. His white cravat was creased, and his wrists displayed no linen. An air of seediness marked him in the full light of the windows, and, pale as his face was, it wore here and there a delicate flush. Perhaps the man's admission that he was in trouble helped the rector to see this.

"Well, sir, it was this way," the servant began. "I was not very well out there, sir, and his lordship—he is an independent kind of man—thought he would be better by himself. So he gave me my passage-money and board wages for three months, and told me to come home and take a holiday until he returned to England. So far it was all right, sir."

"Yes?" said the rector.

"But on board the boat—I am not excusing what I did, sir; but there are others have done worse," continued the man, with another of his sudden upward glances—"I was led to play cards with a set of sharpers, and—and the end of it was that I landed at Liverpool yesterday without a halfpenny."

"That was bad."

"Yes, it was, sir. I do not know that I ever felt so bad in my life," replied the servant earnestly. "And now you know my position, sir. There are several people in the town—but they have no means to help me—who can tell you I am his lordship's valet, and my name Charles Felton."

"You want help, I suppose?"

"I have not a halfpenny, sir! I want something to live on until his lordship comes back."

His tone changed as he said this, growing hard and almost defiant. The rector noted the alteration, and did not like it. "But why come to me?" he said, more coldly than he had yet spoken. "Why do you not go to Lord Dynmore's steward, or agent, or his solicitor, my man?"

"They would tell of me," was the curt answer. "And likely enough I should lose my place."

"Still, why come to me?" Lindo persisted—chiefly to learn what was in the man's mind, for he had already determined what he would do.

"Because you are rector of Claversham, sir," the applicant retorted at last. And he rose suddenly and confronted the parson with an unpleasant smile on his pale face—"which is in my lord's gift, as you know, sir," he continued, in a tone rude and almost savage—a tone which considerably puzzled his companion, who was not conscious of having said anything offensive to the man. "I came here, sir, expecting to meet an older gentleman, a gentleman of your name, a gentleman known to me, and I find you—and I see you, do you see, where I expected to find him."

"You mean my uncle, I suppose?" said Lindo.

"Well, sir, you know best," was the odd reply, and the man's look was as odd as his words. "But that is how the case stands; and, seeing it stands so, I hope you will help me, sir. I do hope, on every account, sir, that you will see your way to help me."

The rector looked at the speaker with a slight frown, liking neither the man nor his behavior. But he had already made up his mind to help him, if only in gratitude to his patron, whose retainer he was; and this, though the earl would never know of the act, nor possibly approve of it. The man had at least had the frankness to own the folly which had brought him to these straits, and Lindo was inclined to set down the oddity of his present manner to the fear and anxiety of a respectable servant on the verge of disgrace. "Yes," he said coldly, after a moment's thought, "I am willing to help you. Of course I shall expect you to repay me if and when you are able, Felton."

"I will do that," replied the man rather cavalierly.

"You might have added, 'and thank you, sir,'" the rector said, with a keen glance of reproof. He turned, as he spoke, to a small cupboard constructed between the bookshelves near the fireplace, and, opening it, took out a cash-box.

The man colored under his reproach, and muttered some apology, resuming, as by habit, the tone of respect which seemed natural to him. All the same he watched the clergyman's movements with great closeness, and appraised, even before it was placed in his hand, the sum which Lindo took

from a compartment set apart apparently for gold. "I will allow you ten shillings a week-on loan, of course," Lindo said after a moment's thought. "You can keep yourself on that, I suppose? And, besides, I will advance you a sovereign to supply yourself with anything of which you have pressing need. That should be ample. There are three half sovereigns."

This time the man did thank him with an appearance of heartiness. But before he had said much the study door opened, and Stephen Clode came in, his hat in his hand. "Oh, I beg your pardon," the curate said, taking in at a glance the open cash-box and the stranger's outstretched hand, and preparing to withdraw. "I thought you were alone."

"Come in, come in!" said the rector, closing the money-box hastily, and with some embarrassment, for he was not altogether sure that he had not done a foolish and quixotic thing. "Our friend here is going. You can send me your address, Felton. Good-day."

The man thanked him and, taking up his hat, went. "Some one out of luck?" said Clode.

"Yes."

"I did not much like his looks," the curate remarked. "He is not a townsman, or I should know him." The rector felt that his discretion was assailed, and hastened to defend himself. "He is respectable enough," he said carelessly. "As a fact, he is Lord Dynmore's valet."

"But has Lord Dynmore come back?" the curate exclaimed, his hand arrested in the act of taking down a book from a high shelf, and his head turning quickly. If he expected to learn anything, however, from his superior's demeanor he was disappointed. Lindo was busy locking the cupboard, and had his back to him.

"No, he has not come back," Reginald explained, "but he has sent the man home, and the foolish fellow lost his money on the boat coming over, and wants an advance until his master's return."

"But why on earth does he come to you for it?" cried the curate, with undisguised, astonishment.

The rector shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, I do not know," he said, a trifle of irritation in his manners. "He did, and there is an end of it. Is there any news?"

Mr. Clode seemed to find a difficulty in at once changing the direction of his thoughts. But he did so with an effort, and, after a pause, answered, "No, I think not. There is a good deal of interest felt in the question of the sheep out there, I fancy-whether you will take your course or comply with Mr. Bonamy's whim."

"I do not know myself," said the young rector, turning and facing the curate, with his feet apart and his hands thrust deep into his pockets. "I do not, indeed. It is a serious matter."

"It is. Still you have the responsibility," said the curate with diffidence, "and, without expressing any view of my own on the subject, I confess-"

"Well?"

"I think if I bore the responsibility, I should feel called upon to do what I myself thought right in the matter."

The younger man shook his head doubtfully. "There is something in that," he said; "but, on the other hand, one cannot look on the point as an essential, and, that being so, perhaps one should prefer peace. But, there, enough of that now, Clode. I think you said you were not going to the Hammonds' this evening?"

"No, I am not."

The rector almost wished he were not. However sociable a man may be, a few days of solitude and a little temporary depression will render him averse from society if he be sensitive. Lindo as a man was not very sensitive; he held too good an opinion of himself. But as rector he was, and as he walked across to the Town House he anticipated anything but enjoyment.

In a few minutes, however-has it not some time or other happened to all of us? – everything was changed with him. He felt as if he had entered another world. The air of culture and refinement which surrounded him from the hall inward, the hearty kindness of Mrs. Hammond, the pretty rooms, the music and flowers, Laura's light laughter and pleasant badinage, all surprised and delighted him.

The party might almost have been a London party, it was so lively. The archdeacon, a red-faced, cherry, white-haired man, whose acquaintance Lindo had already made, and his wife, who was a mild image of himself, were of the number, which was completed by their daughter and four or five county people, all prepared to welcome and be pleased with the new rector. Lindo, sprung from gentlefolk himself, had the ordinary experience of society; but here he found himself treated as a stranger and a dignitary to a degree of notice and a delicate flattery of which he had not before tasted the sweets. Perhaps he was the more struck by the taste displayed in the house, and the wit and liveliness of his new friends, because he had so little looked for them—because he had insensibly judged his parish by his experience of Mr. Bonamy, and had come expecting this house to be as his.

If, under these circumstances, the young fellow had been unaffected by the incense offered to him he would have been more than mortal. But he was not. He began, before he had been in the house an hour, to change, all unconsciously of course, his standpoint. He began to wonder especially why he had been so depressed during the last few days, and why he had troubled himself so much about the opinions of people whose views no sensible man would regard.

Perhaps the girl beside him—he took in Laura—contributed as much as anything to this. It was not only that she was bright and sparkling, in the luxury of her pearls and evening dress even enchanting, nor only that the femininity which had enslaved Stephen Clode began to have its effects on her new neighbor. But Laura had a way while she talked to him, while her lustrous brown eyes dwelt momentarily on his, of removing herself and himself to a world apart—a world in which downrightness seemed more downright and rudeness an outrage. And so, while her manner gently soothed and flattered her companion, it led him almost insensibly to—well, to put it in the concrete—to think scorn of Mr. Bonamy.

"You have had a misunderstanding," she said softly, as they stood together by the piano after dinner, a feathering plant or two fencing them off in a tiny solitude of their own, "with Mr. Bonamy, have you not, Mr. Lindo?"

From anyone else, perhaps from her half an hour before, he would have resented mention of the matter. Now he did not seem to mind. "Something of the kind," he said, laughing.

"About the sheep in the churchyard, was it not?" she continued.

"Yes."

"Well, will you pardon me saying something?" Resting both her hands on the raised lid of the piano, she looked up at him, and it must be confessed that he thought he had never seen eyes so soft and brilliant before. "It is only this," she said earnestly. "That I hope you will not give way to him. He is a wretched, cross-grained, fidgety man and full of crotchets. You know all about him, of course?" she added, a slight ring of pride in her voice.

"I know that he is my church warden," said the rector, half in seriousness.

"Yes!" she replied. "That is just what he is fit for!"

"You think so?" Lindo retorted, smiling. "Then you really mean that I should be guided by him? That is it?"

She looked brightly at him for a moment. "I think you will be guided only by yourself," she murmured; and, blushing slightly, she nodded and left him to go to another guest.

They were all in the same tale. "He is a rude overbearing man, Mr. Lindo," Mrs. Hammond said roundly, even her good nature giving place to the *odium theologicum*. "And I cannot imagine why Mr. Williams put up with him so long."

"No indeed," said the archdeacon's wife, complacently smoothing down her skirt. "But that is the worst of a town parish. You have this sort of people."

Mrs. Hammond looked for the moment as if she would have liked to deny it. But under the circumstances this was impossible. "I am afraid we have," she admitted gloomily. "I hope Mr. Lindo will know how to deal with him."

"I think the archdeacon would," said the other lady, shaking her head sagely.

But, naturally enough, the archdeacon was more guarded in his expressions. "It is about removing the sheep from the churchyard, is it not?" he said, when he and Lindo happened to be left standing together and the subject came up. "They have been there a long time, you know."

"That is true, I suppose," the rector answered. "But," he continued rather warmly-"you do not approve of their presence there, archdeacon?"

"No, certainly not."

"Nor do I. And, thinking the removal right, and the responsibility resting upon me, ought I not to undertake it?"

"Possibly," replied the older man. "But pardon me making a suggestion. Is not the thing of so little importance that you may, with a good conscience, prefer quiet to the trouble of raising it?"

"If the matter were to end there, I think so," replied the new rector, with perhaps too strong an assumption of wisdom in his tone. "But what if this be only a test case? – if to give way here means to encourage further trespass on my right of judgment? The affair would bear a different aspect then, would it not?"

"Oh, no doubt. No doubt it would."

And that was all the archdeacon, who was a cautious man and knew Mr. Bonamy, would say. But it will be observed that the rector had both altered his standpoint and done another thing which most people find easy enough. He had discovered an answer to his own arguments.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO SURPRISES

On the evening of the Hammonds' party, Mr. Clode sat alone in his room, trying to compose himself to work. His lamp burned brightly, and his tea kettle—he had already sent down his frugal dinner an hour or more—murmured pleasantly on the hob. But for some reason Mr. Clode could do no work. He was restless, gloomy, ill-satisfied. The suspicions which had been aroused in his breast on the evening of the rector's arrival had received, up to to-day at least, no confirmation; but they had grown, as suspicions will, feeding on themselves, and with them had grown the jealousy which had fostered them into being. The curate saw himself already overshadowed by his superior, socially and in the parish; and this evening felt this the more keenly that, as he sat in his little room, he could picture perfectly the gay scene at the Town House, where, for nearly two years, not a party had taken place without his presence, no festivity had been arranged without his co-operation. The omission to invite him to-night, however natural it might seem to others, had for him a tremendous significance; so that from a jealousy that was general he leapt at once to a jealousy more particular, and conjured up a picture of Laura—with whose disposition he was not unacquainted—smiling on the stranger, and weaving about him the same charming net which had caught his own feet.

At this thought Clode sprang up with a passionate gesture and began to walk to and fro, his brow dark. He felt sure that Lindo had no right to his cure, but he knew also that the cure was a freehold, and that to oust the rector from it something more than a mere mistake would have to be shown. If the rector should turn out to be very incompetent, if he should fall on evil times in the parish, then indeed he might find his seat untenable when the mistake should be discovered; and with an eye to this the curate had already dropped a word here and there—as, for instance, that word which had reached Mr. Bonamy. But Clode was not satisfied with that now. Was there no shorter, no simpler course possible? There was one. The rector might be shown to have been aware of the error when he took advantage of it. In that case his appointment would be vitiated, and he might be compelled to forego it.

Naturally enough, the curate had scarcely formulated this to himself before he became convinced—in his present state of envy and suspicion—of the rector's guilt. But how was he to prove it? As he walked up and down the room, chafing and hot-eyed, he thought of a way in which proof might be secured. The letters which had passed between Lindo and Lord Dynmore's agents in regard to the presentation, must surely contain some word, some expression sufficient to have apprised the young man of the truth—that the living was intended not for him but for his uncle. A look at those letters, if they were in existence, might give Stephen Clode, mere curate though he was, the whip-hand of his rector!

He had another plan in his mind, of which more presently, and probably he would have pursued the idea which has just been mentioned no farther if his eye had not chanced to light at the moment on a small key hanging upon a nail by the fireplace. Clode looked at the key, and his face flushed. He stood thinking and apparently hesitating, the lamp throwing his features into strong relief, while a man might count twenty. Then he sat down with an angry exclamation and plunged into his work. But in less than a minute he lifted his head. His glance wandered again to the key; and, getting up suddenly, he took it down, put on his hat, and went out.

His lodgings were over the stationer's shop, but he could go in and out through a private passage. He saw, as he passed, however; that there was a light in the shop, and he opened the side door. "I am going to the rectory to consult a book, Mrs. Wafer," he said, seeing his landlady dusting the counter. "You can leave my lamp alight. I shall want nothing more to-night, thank you."

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