Tracy Louis

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I
QUESTIONINGS

"And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"

The voice of the reader was strident, his utterance uneven, his diction illiterate. Yet he concluded the 18th chapter of the second Book of Samuel with an unctuous force born of long familiarity with the text. His laborious drone revealed no consciousness of the humanism of the Jewish King. To suggest that the Bible contained a mine of literature, a series of stories of surpassing interest, portraying as truthfully the lives of the men and women of to-day as of the nomad race which a personal God led through the wilderness, would have provoked from this man's mouth a sluggish flood of protest. The slow-moving lips, set tight after each syllabic struggle, the shaggy eyebrows overhanging horn-rimmed spectacles, the beetling forehead and bull-like head sunk between massive shoulders, the very clutch of the big hands

on the Bible held stiffly at a distance, bespoke a triumphant dogmatism that found as little actuality in the heartbroken cry of David as in a description of a seven-branched candlestick.

The boy who listened wondered why people should "think such a lot about" high priests and kings who died so long ago. David was interesting enough as a youth. The slaying of Goliath, the charming of Saul with sweet music on a harp, appealed to the vivid, if unformed, imagination of fourteen. But the temptation of the man, the splendid efforts of the monarch to rule a peevish people – these were lost on him. Worse, they wearied him, because, as it happened, he had a reasoning brain.

He refused to credit all that he heard. It was hard to believe that any man's hair could catch in an oak so that he should be lifted up between heaven and earth, merely because he rode beneath the tree on the back of a mule. This sounded like the language of exaggeration, and sturdy little Martin Court Bolland hated exaggeration.

Again, he took the winged words literally, and the ease with which David saw, heard, spoke to the Lord was disturbing. Such things were manifestly impossible if David resembled other men, and that there were similarities between the ruler of Israel and certain male inhabitants of Elmsdale was suggested by numberless episodes of the very human history writ in the Book of Kings.

"The Lord" was a terrific personality to Martin – a personality seated on a thunder-cloud, of which the upper rim of gold and

silver, shining gloriously against a cerulean sky, was Heaven, and the sullen blackness beneath, from which thunder bellowed and lightning flashed, was Hell. How could a mere man, one who pursued women like a too susceptible plowman, one who "smote" his fellows, and "kissed" them, and ate with them, hold instant communion with the tremendous Unseen, the ruler of sun and storm, the mover of worlds?

"David inquired of the Lord"; "David said to the Lord"; "The Lord answered unto David" – these phrases tortured a busy intelligence, and caused the big brown eyes to flash restlessly toward the distant hills, while quick ears and retentive brain paid close heed to the text.

For it was the word, not the spirit, that John Bolland insisted on. The boy knew too well the penalty of forgetfulness. During half an hour, from five o'clock each day, he was led drearily through the Sacred Book; if he failed to answer correctly the five minutes' questioning which followed, the lesson was repeated, verse for verse, again, and yet again, as a punishment.

At half-past four o'clock the high tea of a north-country farmhouse was served. Then the huge Bible was produced solemnly, and no stress of circumstances, no temporary call of other business, was permitted to interfere with this daily task. At times, Bolland would be absent at fairs or detained in some distant portion of the farm. But Martin's "portion of the Scriptures" would be marked for careful reading, and severe corporal chastisement corrected any negligence. Such was the

old farmer's mania in this regard that his portly, kind-hearted wife became as strict as John himself in supervising the boy's lesson, merely because she dreaded the scene that would follow the slightest lapse.

So Martin could answer glibly that Ahimaaz was the son of Zadok and that Joab plunged three darts into Absalom's heart while the scapegrace dangled from the oak. Of the love that David bore his son, of the statecraft that impelled a servant of Israel to slay the disturber of the national peace, there was never a hint. Bolland's stark Gospel was harshly definite. There was no channel in his gnarled soul for the turbulent life-stream flowing through the ancient text.

The cold-blooded murder of Absalom, it is true, induced in the boy's mind a certain degree of belief in the narrative, a belief somewhat strained by the manner of Absalom's capture. Through his brain danced a *tableau vivant* of the scene in the wood. He saw the gayly caparisoned mule gallop madly away, leaving its rider struggling with desperate arms to free his hair from the rough grasp of the oak.

Then, through the trees came a startled man-at-arms, who ran back and brought one other, a stately warrior in accouterments that shone like silver. A squabble arose between them as to the exact nature of the King's order concerning this same Absalom, but it was speedily determined by the leader, Joab, snatching three arrows from the soldier's quiver and plunging them viciously, one after the other, into the breast of the man

hanging between the heaven and the earth.

Martin wondered if Absalom spoke to Joab. Did he cry for mercy? Did his eyes glare awfully at his relentless foe? Did he squeal pitiful gibberish like Tom Chandler did when he chopped off his fingers in the hay-cutter? How beastly it must be to be suspended by your own hair, and see a man come forward with three barbed darts which he sticks into your palpitating bosom, probably cursing you the while!

And then appeared from the depths of the wood ten young men, who behaved like cowardly savages, for they hacked the poor corpse with sword and spear, and made mock of a gallant if erring soldier who would have slain them all if he met them on equal terms.

This was the picture that flitted before the boy's eyes, and for one instant his tongue forgot its habitual restraint.

"Father," he said, "why didn't David ask God to save his son, if he wished him to live?"

"Nay, lad, I doan't knoä. You mun listen te what's written i' t' Book – no more an' no less. I doan't ho'd wi' their commentaries an' explanations, an' what oor passon calls anilitical disquisitions. Tak' t' Word as it stands. That's all 'at any man wants."

Now, be it observed that the boy used good English, whereas the man spoke in the broad dialect of the dales. Moreover, Bolland, an out-and-out Dissenter, was clannish enough to speak of "our" parson, meaning thereby the vicar of the parish, a gentleman whom he held at arm's length in politics and religion.

The latter discrepancy was a mere village colloquialism; the other – the marked difference between father and son – was startling, not alone by reason of their varying speech, but by the queer contrast they offered in manners and appearance.

Bolland was a typical yeoman of the moor edge, a tall, strong man, twisted and bent like the oak which betrayed Absalom, slow in his movements, heavy of foot, and clothed in brown corduroy which resembled curiously the weatherbeaten bark of a tree. There was a rugged dignity in his bearded face, and the huge spectacles he had now pushed high up on his forehead lent a semblance of greater age than he could lay claim to. Yet was he a lineal descendant of Gurth, the swineherd, Gurth, uncouth and unidealized.

The boy, a sturdy, country-built youngster in figure and attire, had a face of much promise. His brow was lofty and open, his mouth firm and well formed, his eyes fearless, if a trifle dreamy at times. His hands, too, were not those of a farmer's son. Strong they were and scarred with much use, but the fingers tapered elegantly, and the thumbs were long and straight.

Certainly, the heavy-browed farmer, with his drooping nether lip and clumsy spatulate digits, had not bequeathed these bucolic attributes to his son. As they sat there, in the cheerful kitchen where the sunbeams fell on sanded floor and danced on the burnished contents of a full "dresser," they presented a dissimilarity that was an outrage on heredity.

Usually, the reading ended, Martin effaced himself by way of

the back door. Thence, through a garden orchard that skirted the farmyard, he would run across a meadow, jump two hedges into the lane which led back to the village street, and so reach the green where the children played after school hours.

He was forced early to practice a degree of dissimulation. Though he hated a lie, he at least acted a reverent appreciation of the chapter just perused. His boyish impulses lay with the cricketers, the minnow-catchers, the players of prisoner's base, the joyous patrons of well-worn "pitch" and gurgling brook. But he knew that the slightest indication of grudging this daily half-hour would mean the confiscation of the free romp until supper-time at half-past eight. So he paid heed to the lesson, and won high praise from his preceptor in the oft-expressed opinion:

"Martin will make a rare man i' time."

To-day he did not hurry away as usual. For one reason, he was going with a gamekeeper to see some ferreting at six o'clock, and there was plenty of time; for another, it thrilled him to find that there were episodes in the Bible quite as exciting as any in the pages of "The Scalp-Hunters," a forbidden work now hidden with others in the store of dried bracken at the back of the cow-byre.

So he said rather carelessly: "I wonder if he kicked?"

"You wunner if wheä kicked?" came the slow response.

"Absalom, when Joab stabbed him. The other day, when the pigs were killed, they all kicked like mad."

Bolland laid down the Bible and glanced at Martin with

a puzzled air. He was not annoyed or even surprised at the unlooked-for deduction. It had simply never occurred to him that one might read the Bible and construct actualities from the plain-spoken text.

"Hoo div' I knoä?" he said calmly; "it says nowt about it i' t' chapter."

Then Martin awoke with a start. He saw how nearly he had betrayed himself a second time, how ready were the lips to utter ungoverned thoughts.

He flushed slightly.

"Is that all for to-day, father?" he said.

Before Bolland could answer, there came a knock at the door.

"See wheä that is," said the farmer, readjusting his spectacles.

A big, hearty-looking young man entered. He wore clothes of a sporting cut and carried a hunting-crop, with the long lash gathered in his fingers.

"Oah, it's you, is it, Mr. Pickerin'?" said Bolland, and Martin's quick ears caught a note of restraint, almost of hostility, in the question.

"Yes, Mr. Bolland, an' how are ye?" was the more friendly greeting. "I just dropped in to have a settlement about that beast."

"A sattlement! What soart o' sattlement?"

The visitor sat down, uninvited, and produced some papers from his pocket.

"Well, Mr. Bolland," he said quietly, "it's not more'n four months since I gave you sixty pounds for a thoroughbred

shorthorn, supposed to be in calf to Bainesse Boy the Third."

"Right enough, Mr. Pickerin'. You've gotten t' certificates and t' receipt for t' stud fee."

Martin detected the latent animosity in both voices. The reiterated use of the prefix "Mr." was an exaggerated politeness that boded a dispute.

"Receipts, certificates!" cried Pickering testily. "What good are they to me? She cannot carry a calf. For all the use I can make of her, I might as well have thrown the money in the fire."

"Eh, but she's a well-bred 'un," said Bolland, with sapient head-shake.

"She might be a first-prize winner at the Royal by her shape and markings; but, as matters stand, she'll bring only fifteen pounds from a butcher. I stand to lose forty-five pounds by the bargain."

"You canna fly i' t' feäce o' Providence, Mr. Pickerin'."

"Providence has little to do with it, I fancy. I can sell her to somebody else, if I like to work a swindle with her. I had my doubts at the time that she was too cheap."

John Bolland rose. His red face was dusky with anger, and it sent a pang through Martin's heart to see something of fear there, too.

"Noo, what are ye drivin' at?" he growled, speaking with ominous calmness.

"You know well enough," came the straight answer. "The poor thing has something wrong with her, and she will never hold a

calf. Look here, Bolland, meet me fairly in the matter. Either give me back twenty pounds, and we'll cry 'quits,' or sell me another next spring at the same price, and I'll take my luck."

Perhaps this *via media* might have been adopted had it presented itself earlier. But the word "swindle" stuck in the farmer's throat, and he sank back into his chair.

"Nay, nay," he said. "A bargain's a bargain. You've gotten t' papers – "

It was the buyer's turn to rise.

"To the devil with you and your papers!" he shouted. "Do you think I came here without making sure of my facts? Twice has this cow been in calf in your byre, and each time she missed. You knew her failing, and sold her under false pretenses. Of course, I cannot prove it, or I would have the law of you; but I did think you would act squarely."

For some reason the elder Bolland was in a towering rage. Martin had never before seen him so angry, and the boy was perplexed by the knowledge that what Pickering said was quite true.

"I'll not be sworn at nor threatened wi' t' law in my own house," bellowed the farmer. "Get out! Look tiv' your own business an' leave me te follow mine."

Pickering, too, was in a mighty temper. He took a half stride forward and shook out the thong of the whip.

"You psalm-singing humbug!" he thundered. "If you were a younger man – "

Martin jumped between them; his right hand clenched a heavy kitchen poker.

Pickering half turned to the door with a bitter laugh.

"All right, my young cub!" he shouted. "I'm not such a fool, thank goodness, as to make bad worse. It's lucky for you, boy, that you are not of the same kidney as that old ranter there. Catch me ever having more to do with any of his breed."

"An' what affair is it of yours, Mr. Pickerin', who the boy belongs to? If all tales be true, *you* can't afford to throw stones at other folks's glass houses!"

Mrs. Bolland, stout, hooded, aproned, and fiery red in face, had come from the dairy, and now took a hand in the argument.

Pickering, annoyed at the unlooked-for presence of a woman, said sternly:

"Talk to your husband, not to me, ma'am. He wronged me by getting three times the value for a useless beast, and if you can convince him that he took an unfair advantage, I'm willing, even now – "

But Mrs. Bolland had caught the flicker of amazement in Martin's eye and was not to be mollified.

"Who are you, I'd like to know?" she shrilled, "coomin' te one's house an' scandalizin' us? A nice thing, to be sure, for a man like you to call John Bolland a wrongdoer. The cow won't calve, won't she? 'Tis a dispensation on you, George Pickerin'. You're payin' for yer own misdeeds. There's plenty i' Elmsdale wheä ken your char-ak-ter, let me tell you that. What's become

o' Betsy Thwaites?"

But Pickering had resigned the contest. He was striding toward the "Black Lion," where a dogcart awaited him, and he laughed to himself as the flood of vituperation swelled from the door of the farm.

"Gad!" he muttered, "how these women must cackle in the market! One old cow is hardly worth so much fuss!"

Still smiling at the storm he had raised, he gathered the reins, gave Fred, the ostler, a sixpence, and would have driven off had he not seen a pretty serving-maid gazing out through an upper window. Her face looked familiar.

"Hello!" he cried. "You and I know each other, don't we?"

"No, we doan't; an' we're not likely to," was the pert reply.

"Eh, my! What have I done now?"

"Nowt to me, but my sister is Betsy Thwaites."

"The deuce she is! Betsy isn't half as nice-looking as you."

"More shame on you that says it."

"But, my dear girl, one should tell the truth and shame the devil."

"Just listen to him!" Yet the window was raised a little higher, and the girl leaned out, for Pickering was a handsome man, with a tremendous reputation for gallantry of a somewhat pronounced type.

Fred, the stable help, struck the cob smartly with his open hand. Pickering swore, and bade him leave the mare alone and be off.

"I was sorry for Betsy," he said, when the prancing pony was quieted, "but she and I agreed to differ. I got her a place at Hereford, and hope she'll be married soon."

"You'll get me no place at Hereford, Mr. Pickerin'" – this with a coquettish toss of the head.

"Of course not. When is the feast here?"

"Next Monday it starts."

"Very well. Good-by. I'll see you on Monday."

He blew her a kiss, and she laughed. As the smart turnout rattled through the village she looked after him.

"Betsy always did say he was such a man," she murmured. "I'll smack his feäce, though, if he comes near me a-Monday."

And Fred, leaning sulkily over the yard gate, spat viciously on Pickering's sixpence.

"Coomin' here for t' feäst, is he?" he growled. "Happen he'd better bide i' Nottonby."

CHAPTER II
STRANGERS, INDEED

Pickering left ruffled breasts behind him. The big farm in the center of the village was known as the White House, and had been owned by a Bolland since there were Bollands in the county. It was perched on a bank that rose steeply some twenty feet or more from the main road. Cartways of stiff gradient led down to the thoroughfare on either hand. A strong retaining wall, crowned with gooseberry bushes, marked the confines of the garden, which adjoined a row of cottages tenanted by laborers. Then came the White House itself, thatched, cleanly, comfortable-looking; beyond it, all fronting on the road, were stables and outbuildings.

Behind lay the remainder of the kitchen garden and an orchard, backed by a strip of meadowland that climbed rapidly toward the free moor with its whins and heather – a far-flung range of mountain given over to grouse and hardy sheep, and cleft by tiny ravines of exceeding beauty.

Across the village street stood some modern iron-roofed buildings, where Bolland kept his prize stock, and here was situated the real approach to the couple of hundred acres of rich arable land which he farmed. The house and rear pastures were his own; he rented the rest. Of late years he had ceased to grow

grain, save for the limited purposes of his stock, and had gone in more and more for pedigree cattle.

Pickering's words had hurt him sorely, since they held an element of truth. The actual facts were these: One of his best cows had injured herself by jumping a fence, and a calf was born prematurely. Oddly enough, a similar accident had occurred the following year. On the third occasion, when the animal was mated with Bainesse Boy III, Bolland thought it best not to tempt fortune again, but sold her for something less than the enhanced value which the circumstances warranted. From a similar dam and the same sire he bred a yearling bull which realized £250, or nearly the rent of his holding, so Pickering had really overstated his case, making no allowance for the lottery of stock-raising.

The third calf might have been normal and of great value. It was not. Bolland suspected the probable outcome and had acted accordingly. It was the charge of premeditated unfairness that rankled and caused him such heart-burning.

When Mrs. Bolland, turkey-red in face, and with eyes still glinting fire, came in and slammed the door, she told Martin, angrily, to be off, and not stand there with his ears cocked like a terrier's.

The boy went out. He did not follow his accustomed track. He hesitated whether or not to go rabbiting. Although far too young to attach serious import to the innuendoes he had heard, he could not help wondering what Pickering meant by that ironical congratulation on the subject of his paternity.

His mother, too, had not repelled the charge directly, but had gone out of her way to heap counter-abuse on the vilifier. It was odd, to say the least of it, and he found himself wishing heartily that either the unfortunate cow had not been sold or that his father had met Mr. Pickering's protests more reasonably.

A whistle came from the lane that led up to the moor. Perched on a gate was a white-headed urchin.

"Aren't ye coomin' te t' green?" was his cry, seeing that Martin heard him.

"Not this evening, thanks."

"Oah, coom on. They're playin' tig, an' none of 'em can ketch Jim Bates."

That settled it. Jim Bates's pride must be lowered, and ferrets were forgotten.

But Jim Bates had his revenge. If he could not run as fast as Martin, he made an excellent pawn in the hands of fortune. Had the boy gone to the rabbit warren, he would not have seen the village again until after eight o'clock, and, possibly, the current of his life might have entered a different runnel. In the event, however, he was sauntering up the village street, when he encountered a lady and a little girl, accompanied by a woman whose dress reminded him of nuns seen in pictures. The three were complete strangers, and although Martin was unusually well-mannered for one reared in a remote Yorkshire hamlet, he could not help staring at them fixedly.

The Normandy nurse alone was enough to draw the eyes of

the whole village, and Martin knew well it was owing to mere chance that a crowd of children was not following her already.

The lady was tall and of stately carriage. She was dressed quietly, but in excellent taste. Her very full face looked remarkably pink, and her large blue eyes stared out of puffy sockets. Beyond these unfavorable details, she was a handsome woman, and the boy thought vaguely that she must have motored over from the castle midway between Elmsdale and the nearest market town of Nottonby.

Yet it was on the child that his wondering gaze dwelt longest. She looked about ten years old. Her elfin face was enshrined in jet-black hair, and two big bright eyes glanced inquiringly at him from the depths of a wide-brimmed, flowered-covered hat. A broad blue sash girdled her white linen dress; the starched skirts stood out like the frills of a ballet dancer.

Her shapely legs were bare from above the knees, and her tiny feet were encased in sandals. At Trouville she would be pronounced "sweet" by enthusiastic admirers of French fashion, but in a north-country village she was absurdly out of place. Nevertheless, being a remarkably self-possessed little maiden, she returned with interest Martin's covert scrutiny.

He would have passed on, but the lady lifted a pair of mounted eyeglasses and spoke to him.

"Boy," she said in a flute-like voice, "can you tell me which is the White House?"

Martin's cap flew off.

"Yes, ma'am," he said, pointing. "That is it. I live there."

"Oh, indeed. And what is your name?"

"Martin Court Bolland, ma'am."

"What an odd name. Why were you christened Martin Court?"

"I really don't know, ma'am. I didn't bother about it at the time, and since then have never troubled to inquire."

Now, to be candid, Martin did not throw off this retort spontaneously. It was a little effusion built up through the years, the product of frequent necessity to answer the question. But the lady took it as a coruscation of rustic wit, and laughed. She turned to the nurse:

"Il m'a rendu la monnaie de ma pièce, Françoise."

"J'en suis bien sûr, madame, mais qu'est-ce qu'il a dit?" said the nurse.

The other translated rapidly, and the nurse grinned.

"Ah, il est naïf, le petit," she commented. "Et très gentil."

"Oh, maman," chimed in the child, "je serais heureuse si vous vouliez me permettre de jouer avec ce joli garçon."

"Attendez, ma belle. Pas si vite… Now, Martin Court, take me to your mother."

Not knowing exactly what to do with his cap, the boy had kept it in his hand. The foregoing conversation was, of course, so much Greek in his ears. He realized that they were talking about him, and was fully alive to the girl's demure admiration. The English words came with the more surprise, seeing that they

followed so quickly on some remark in an unknown tongue.

He led the way at once, hoping that his mother had regained her normal condition of busy cheerfulness.

Silence reigned in the front kitchen when he pressed the latch. The room was empty, but the clank of pattens in the yard revealed that the farmer's thrifty wife was sparing her skirts from the dirt while she crossed to the pig tub with a pailful of garbage.

"Will you take a seat, ma'am?" said Martin politely. "I'll tell mother you are here."

With a slight awkwardness he pulled three oaken chairs from the serried rank they occupied along the wall beneath the high-silled windows. Feeling all eyes fixed on him quizzically, he blushed.

"Ah, v'là le p'tit. Il rougit!" laughed the nurse.

"Don't tease him, nurse!" cried the child in English. "He is a nice boy. I like him."

Clearly this was for Martin's benefit. Already the young lady was a coquette.

Mrs. Bolland, hearing there were "ladies" to visit her, entered with trepidation. She expected to meet the vicar's aunt and one of that lady's friends. In a moment of weakness she had consented to take charge of the refreshment stall at a forthcoming bazaar in aid of certain church funds. But Bolland was told that the incumbent was adopting ritualistic practices, so he sternly forbade his better half to render any assistance whatsoever. The Established Church was bad enough; it was a positive scandal to

introduce into the service aught that savored of Rome.

Poor Mrs. Bolland therefore racked her brain for a reasonable excuse as she crossed the yard, and it is not to be wondered at if she was struck almost dumb with surprise at sight of the strangers.

"Are you Mrs. Bolland?" asked the lady, without rising, and surveying her through the eyeglasses with head tilted back.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Ah. Exactly. I – er – am staying at The Elms for some few weeks, and the people there recommended you as supplying excellent dairy produce. I am – er – exceedingly particular about butter and milk, as my little girl is so delicate. Have you any objection to allowing me to inspect your dairy? I may add that I will pay you well for all that I order."

The lady's accent, no less than the even flow of her words, joined to unpreparedness for such fashionable visitors, temporarily bereft Mrs. Bolland of a quick, if limited, understanding.

"Did ye say ye wanted soom bootermilk?" she cried vacantly.

"No, mother," interrupted Martin anxiously. For the first time in his life he was aware of a hot and uncomfortable feeling that his mother was manifestly inferior to certain other people in the world. "The lady wishes to see the dairy."

"Why?"

"She wants to buy things from you, and – er – I suppose she would like to see what sort of place we keep them in."

No manner of explanation could have restored Mrs. Bolland's normal senses so speedily as the slightest hint that uncleanliness could harbor its microbes in her house.

"My goodness, ma'am," she cried, "wheä's bin tellin' you that my pleäce hez owt wrong wi't?"

Now it was the stranger's turn to appeal to Martin, and the boy showed his mettle by telling his mother, in exact detail, the request made by the lady and her reference to the fragile-looking child.

Mrs. Bolland's wrath subsided, and her lips widened in a smile.

"Oah, if that's all," she said, "coom on, ma'am, an' welcome. Ye canna be too careful about sike things, an' yer little lass do look pukey, te be sure."

The lady, gathering her skirts for the perilous passage of the yard, followed the farmer's wife.

Martin and the girl sat and stared at each other. She it was who began the conversation.

"Have you lived here long?" she said.

"All my life," he answered. Pretty and well-dressed as she was, he had no dread of her. He regarded girls as spiteful creatures who scratched one another like cats when angry and shrieked hysterically when they played.

"That's not very long," she cried.

"No; but it's longer than you've lived anywhere else."

"Me! I have lived everywhere – in London, Berlin, Paris, Nice,

Montreux – O, je ne sais – I beg your pardon. Perhaps you don't speak French?"

"No."

"Would you like to learn?"

"Yes, very much."

"I'll teach you. It will be such fun. I know all sorts of naughty words. I learnt them in Monte Carlo, where I could hear the servants chattering when I was put to bed. Watch me wake up nurse. Françoise, mon chou! Cré nom d'un pipe, mais que vous êtes triste aujourd'hui!"

The *bonne* started. She shook the child angrily.

"You wicked girl!" she cried in French. "If madame heard you, she would blame me."

The imp cuddled her bare knees in a paroxysm of glee.

"You see," she shrilled. "I told you so."

"Was all that swearing?" demanded Martin gravely.

"Some of it."

"Then you shouldn't do it. If I were your brother, I'd hammer you."

"Oh, would you, indeed! I'd like to see any boy lay a finger on me. I'd tear his hair out by the roots."

Naturally, the talk languished for a while, until Martin thought he had perhaps been rude in speaking so brusquely.

"I'm sorry if I offended you," he said.

The saucy, wide-open eyes sparkled.

"I forgive you," she said. "How old are you?"

"Fourteen. And you?"

"Twelve."

He was surprised. "I thought you were younger," he said.

"So does everybody. You see, I'm tiny, and mamma dresses me in this baby way. I don't mind. I know your name. You haven't asked me mine."

"Tell me," he said with a smile.

"Angèle. Angèle Saumarez."

"I'll never be able to say that," he protested.

"Oh, yes, you will. It's quite easy. It sounds Frenchy, but I am English, except in my ways, mother says. Now try. Say 'An' – "

"Ang – "

"Not so much through your nose. This way – 'An-gèle.'"

The next effort was better, but tuition halted abruptly when Martin discovered that Angèle's mother, instead of being "Mrs. Saumarez," was "the Baroness Irma von Edelstein."

"Oh, crikey!" he blurted out. "How can that be?"

Angèle laughed at his blank astonishment.

"Mamma is a German baroness," she explained. "My papa was a colonel in the British army, but mamma did not lose her courtesy title when she married. Of course, she is Mrs. Saumarez, too."

These subtleties of Burke and the Almanach de Gotha went over Martin's head.

"It sounds a bit like an entry in a stock catalogue," he said.

Angèle, in turn, was befogged, but saw instantly that the

village youth was not sufficiently reverent to the claims of rank.

"You can never be a gentleman unless you learn these things," she announced airily.

"You don't say," retorted Martin with a smile. He was really far more intelligent than this pert monitress, and had detected a curious expression on the stolid face of Françoise when the Baroness von Edelstein's name cropped up in a talk which she could not understand. The truth was that the canny Norman woman, though willing enough to take a German mistress's gold, thoroughly disliked the lady's nationality. Martin could only guess vaguely at something of the sort, but the mere guess sufficed.

Angèle, however, wanted no more bickering just then. She was about to resume the lesson when the Baroness and Mrs. Bolland re-entered the house. Evidently the inspection of the dairy had been satisfactory, and the lady had signified her approval in words that pleased the older woman greatly.

The visitor was delighted, too, with the old-world appearance of the kitchen, the heavy rafters with their load of hams and sides of bacon, the oaken furniture, the spotless white of the well-scrubbed ash-topped table, the solemn grandfather's clock, and the rough stone floor, over which soft red sandstone had been rubbed when wet.

By this time the tact of the woman of society had accommodated her words and utterance to the limited comprehension of her hearer, and she displayed such genuine

interest in the farm and its belongings that Mrs. Bolland gave her a hearty invitation to come next morning, when the light would be stronger. Then "John" would let her see his prize stock and the extensive buildings on "t' other side o' t' road… T' kye (the cows) were fastened up for t' neet" by this time.

The baroness was puzzled, but managed to catch the speaker's drift.

"I do not rise very early," she said. "I breakfast about eleven" – she could not imagine what a sensation this statement caused in a house where breakfast was served never later than seven o'clock – "and it takes me an hour to dress; but I can call about twelve, if that will suit."

"Ay, do, ma'am," was the cheery agreement. "You'll be able te see t' farmhands havin' their dinner. It's a fair treat te watch them men an' lads puttin' away a beefsteak pie."

"And this is your little boy?" said the other, evidently inclined for gossip.

"Yes, ma'am."

"He is a splendid little fellow. What a nice name you gave him – Martin Court Bolland – so unusual. How came you to select his Christian names?"

The question caused the farmer's wife a good deal of unnoticed embarrassment. The baroness was looking idly at an old colored print of York Castle, and the boy himself was far too taken up with Angèle to listen to the chat of his elders.

Mrs. Bolland laughed confusedly.

"Martin," she said. "Tak t' young leddy an' t' nurse as far as t' brig, an' show 'em t' mill."

The baroness was surprised at this order, but an explanation was soon forthcoming. In her labored speech and broad dialect, the farmer's wife revealed a startling romance. Thirteen years ago her husband's brother died suddenly while attending a show at Islington, and the funeral took John and herself to London. They found the place so vast and noisy that it overwhelmed them; but in the evening, after the ceremony at Abney Park, they strolled out from their hotel near King's Cross Station to see the sights.

Not knowing whither they were drifting, they found themselves, an hour later, gazing at St. Paul's Cathedral from the foot of Ludgate Hill. They were walking toward the stately edifice, when a terrible thing happened.

A young woman fell, or threw herself, from a fourth-floor window onto the pavement of St. Martin's Court. In her arms was an infant, a boy twelve months old. Providence saved him from the instant death met by his mother. A projecting signboard caught his clothing, tore him from the encircling arms, and held him a precarious second until the rent frock gave way.

But John Bolland's sharp eyes had noted the child's momentary escape. He sprang forward and caught the tiny body as it dropped. At that hour, nearly nine o'clock, the court was deserted, and Ludgate Hill had lost much of its daily crowd. Of course, a number of passers-by gathered; and a policeman took the names and address of the farmer and his wife, they being the

only actual witnesses of the tragedy.

But what was to be done with the baby? Mrs. Bolland volunteered to take care of it for the night, and the policeman was glad enough to leave it with her when he ascertained that no one in the house from which the woman fell knew anything about her save that she was a "Mrs. Martineau," and rented a furnished room beneath the attic.

The inquest detained the Bollands another day in town. Police inquiries showed that the unfortunate young woman had committed suicide. A letter, stuck to a dressing-table with a hatpin, stated her intention, and that her name was not Martineau. Would the lady like to see the letter?

"Oh, dear, no!" said the baroness hastily. "Your story is awfully interesting, but I could not bear to read the poor creature's words."

Well, the rest was obvious. Mrs. Bolland was childless after twenty years of married life. She begged for the bairn, and her husband allowed her to adopt it. They gave the boy their own name, but christened him after the scene of his mother's death and his own miraculous escape. And there he was now, coming up the village street, leading Angèle confidently by the hand – a fine, intelligent lad, and wholly different from every other boy in the village.

Not even the squire's sons equaled him in any respect, and the teacher of the village school gave him special lessons. Perhaps the lady had noticed the way he spoke. The teacher was proud

of Martin's abilities, and he tried to please her by not using the Yorkshire dialect.

"Ah, I see," said the baroness quietly. "His history is quite romantic. But what will he become when he grows up – a farmer, like his adopted father?"

"John thinks te mak' him a minister," said Mrs. Bolland with genial pride.

"A minister! Do you mean a preacher, a Nonconformist person?"

"Why, yes, ma'am. John wouldn't hear of his bein' a parson."

"Grand Dieu! Quelle bêtise! I beg your pardon. Of course, you will do what is best for him… Well, ma belle, have you enjoyed your little walk?"

"Oh, so much, mamma. The miller has such lovely pigs, so fat, so tight that you can't pinch them. And there's a beautiful dog, with four puppy dogs. I'm so glad we came here. J'en suis bien aise."

"She's a queer little girl," said Mrs. Bolland, as Martin and she watched the party walking back to The Elms. "I couldn't tell half what she said."

"No, mother," he replied. "She goes off into French without thinking, and her mother's a German baroness, who married an English officer. The nurse doesn't speak any English. I wish I knew French and German. French, at any rate."

CHAPTER III
THE SEEDS OF MISCHIEF

Preparations for the forthcoming "Feast" were varied by gossip concerning "the baroness," her daughter, and the Normandy *bonne*. Elmsdale had never before set eyes on any human beings quite so foreign to its environment. At first, the canny Yorkshire folk were much intrigued by the lady's title. A princess or a duchess they had read of; a marchioness and a countess they had seen, because the county of broad acres finds room for a great many noble houses; and baronets' wives, each a "Lady" by perspective right, were so plentiful as to arouse no special comment.

But a "baroness" was rather un-English, while Elmsdale frankly refused to pronounce her name other than "Eedelsteen." The village was ready to allude to her as "her ladyship," but was still doubtful whether or not to grant her the prefix "Lady," when the question was settled in a wholly unexpected way by the announcement that the baroness preferred to be addressed as "Mrs. Saumarez." In fact, she was rather annoyed that Angèle should have flaunted the title at all.

"I am English by marriage, and proud of my husband's name," she explained. "He was a gallant officer, who fell in the Boer War, and I have long since left the use of my German rank for

purely official occasions. It is no secret, of course, but Angèle should not have mentioned it."

Elmsdale liked this democratic utterance. It made these blunt Yorkshire folk far readier to address her as "your ladyship" than would have been the case otherwise, and, truth to tell, she never chided them for any lapse of the sort, though, in accordance with her wish, she became generally known as Mrs. Saumarez.

She rented a suite at The Elms, a once pretentious country mansion owned by a family named Walker. The males had died, the revenues had dwindled, and two elderly maiden ladies, after taking counsel with the vicar, had advertised their house in a society newspaper.

Mrs. Saumarez said she was an invalid. She required rest and good air. Françoise, since Angèle had outgrown the attentions of a nurse, was employed mainly as her mistress's confidential servant. Françoise either could not or would not speak English; Mrs. Saumarez gave excellent references and no information as to her past, while Angèle's volatile reminiscences of continental society had no meaning for Elmsdale.

But it was abundantly clear that Mrs. Saumarez was rich. She swept aside the arrangements made by the Misses Walker for her comfort, chose her own set of apartments, ordered things wholly her own way, and paid double the terms originally demanded.

The day following her visit to the White House she descended on the chief grocer, whose shop was an emporium of many articles outside his trade, but mostly of a cheap order.

"Mr. Webster," she said in her grand manner, "few of the goods you stock will meet my requirements. I prefer to deal with local tradesmen, but they must meet my wants. Now, if you are prepared to cater for me, you will not only save me the trouble of ordering supplies from London, but make some extra profit. You have proper agents, no doubt, so you must obtain everything of the best quality. You understand. I shall never grumble at the prices; but the least inferiority will lead me to withdraw my custom."

It was a sore point with Mr. Webster that "the squire" dealt with the Stores. He promised implicit obedience, and wrote such instructions to Leeds, his supply town, that the wholesale house there wondered who had come to live at Elmsdale.

The proprietress of the "Black Lion," hearing the golden tales that circulated through the village, dressed in her best one afternoon and called at The Elms in the hope of obtaining patronage for wines, bottled beer, and mineral waters. Mrs. Saumarez was resting. The elder Miss Walker conveyed Mrs. Atkinson's name and business. Some conversation took place between Mrs. Saumarez and Françoise, with the result that Mrs. Atkinson was instructed to supply Schweppe's soda water, but "no intoxicants."

So Mrs. Saumarez was a teetotaller. The secretary of the local branch of the Good Templars donned a faded black coat and a rusty tall hat and sent in a subscription list. It came out with a guinea. The vicar was at The Elms next day. Mrs. Saumarez

received him graciously and gave him a five-pound note toward the funds of the bazaar which would be opened next week. Most decidedly the lady was an acquisition. When Miss Martha Walker was enjoined by her sister, Miss Emmy, to find out how long Mrs. Saumarez intended to remain at Elmsdale – on the plausible pretext that the terms would be lowered for a monthly tenancy – she was given a curt reply.

"I am a creature of moods. I may be here a day, a year. At present the place suits me. And Angèle is brimming over with health. But it is fatal if I am told I must remain a precise period anywhere. That is why I never go to Carlsbad."

Miss Martha did not understand the reference to Carlsbad; but the nature of the reply stopped effectually all further curiosity as to Mrs. Saumarez's plans. It also insured unflagging service.

Hardly a day passed that the newcomer did not call at the White House. She astounded John Bolland by the accuracy of her knowledge concerning stock, and annoyed him, too, by remarking that some of his land required draining.

"Your lower pastures are too rank," she said. "So long as there is a succession of fine seasons it does not matter, but a wet spring and summer will trouble you. You will have fifty acres of water-sodden meadows, and nothing breeds disease more quickly."

"None o' my cattle hev had a day's illness, short o' bein' a trifle overfed wi' oil cake," he said testily.

"Quite so. You told me that in former years you raised wheat and oats there. I'm talking about grass."

Martin and Angèle became close friends. The only children of the girl's social rank in the neighborhood were the vicar's daughter, Elsie Herbert, and the squire's two sons, Frank and Ernest Beckett-Smythe. Mr. Beckett-Smythe was a widower. He lived at the Hall, three-quarters of a mile away, and had not as yet met Mrs. Saumarez. Angèle would have nothing to do with Elsie.

"I don't like her," she confided to Martin. "She doesn't care for boys, and I adore them. She's trop reglée for me."

"What is that?"

"Well, she holds her nose – so."

Angèle tilted her head and cast down her eyes.

"Of course, I don't know her, but she seems to be a nice girl," said Martin.

"Why do you say, 'Of course, I don't know her'? She lives here, doesn't she?"

"Yes, but my father is a farmer. She has a governess, and goes to tea at the Hall. I've met her driving from the Castle. She's above me, you see."

Angèle laughed maliciously.

"O là là! c'est pour rire! I'm sorry. She is – what do you say – a little snob."

"No, no," protested Martin. "I think she would be very nice, if I knew her. You'll like her fine when you play with her."

"Me! Play with her, so prim, so pious. I prefer Jim Bates. He winked at me yesterday."

"Did he? Next time I see him I'll make it hard for him to

wink."

Angèle clapped her hands and pirouetted.

"What," she cried, "you will fight him, and for me! What joy! It's just like a story book. You must kick him, so, and he will fall down, and I will kiss you."

"I will not kick him," said the indignant Martin. "Boys don't kick in England. And I don't want to be kissed."

"Don't boys kiss in England?"

"Well … anyhow, I don't."

"Then we are not sweethearts. I shan't kiss you, and you must just leave Jim Bates alone."

Martin was humiliated. He remained silent and angry during the next minute. By a quick turn in the conversation Angèle had placed him in a position of rivalry with another boy, one with whom she had not exchanged a word.

"Look here," he said, after taking thought, "if I kiss your cheek, may I lick Jim Bates?"

This magnanimous offer was received with derision.

"I forbid you to do either. If you do, I'll tell your father."

The child had discovered already the fear with which Martin regarded the stern, uncompromising Methodist yeoman – a fear, almost a resentment, due to Bolland's injudicious attempts to guide a mere boy into the path of serious and precise religion. Never had Martin found the daily reading of Scripture such a burden as during the past few days. The preparations for the feast, the cricket-playing, running and jumping of the boys practicing

for prizes – these disturbing influences interfered sadly with the record of David's declining years.

Even now, with Angèle's sarcastic laughter ringing in his ears, he was compelled to leave her and hurry to the front kitchen, where the farmer was waiting with the Bible opened. At the back door he paused and looked at her. She blew him a kiss.

"Good boy!" she cried. "Mind you learn your lesson."

"And mind you keep away from those cowsheds. Your nurse ought to have been here. It's tea time."

"I don't want any tea. I'm going to smell the milk. I love the smell of a farmyard. Don't you? But, there! You have never smelt anything else. Every place has its own smell. Paris smells like smoky wood. London smells of beer. Here there is always the smell of cows…"

"Martin!" called a harsh voice from the interior, and the boy perforce brought his wandering wits to bear on the wrongdoing of David in taking a census of the people of Israel.

He read steadily through the chapter which described how a pestilence swept from Dan to Beersheba and destroyed seventy thousand men, all because David wished to know how many troops he could muster.

He could hear Angèle talking to the maids and making them laugh. A caravan lumbered through the street; he caught a glimpse of carved wooden horses' heads and gilded moldings. His quick and retentive brain mastered the words of the chapter, but to-day there was no mysterious and soul-awakening glimpse

of its spirit.

"What did David say te t' Lord when t' angel smote t' people?" said Bolland when the moment came to question his pupil.

"He said, 'Lo, I have sinned; but what have these sheep done?'"

"And what sin had he deän?"

"I don't know. I think the whole thing was jolly unfair."

"What!" John Bolland laid down the Bible and rested both hands on the arms of the chair to steady himself. Had he heard aright? Was the boy daring to criticize the written word?

But Martin's brain raced ahead of the farmer's slow-rising wrath. He trembled at the abyss into which he had almost fallen. What horror if he lost an hour on this Saturday, the Saturday before the Feast, of all days in the year!

"I didn't quite mean that," he said, "but it doesn't say why it was wrong for a census to be taken, and it does say that when the angel stretched his hand over Jerusalem the Lord repented of the evil."

Bolland bent again over the book. Yes, Martin was right. He was letter perfect.

"It says nowt about unfairness," growled the man slowly.

"No. That was my mistake."

"Ye mun tak' heed ageän misteäks o' that sort. On Monday we begin t' Third Book o' Kings."

So, not even the Feast would be allowed to interfere with the daily lesson.

Angèle had departed with the belated Françoise. Martin,

running through the orchard like a hare, doubled to the main road along the lane. In two minutes he was watching the unloading of the roundabout in front of the "Black Lion." Jim Bates was there.

"Here, I want you," said Martin. "You winked at Angèle Saumarez yesterday."

"Winked at wheä?" demanded Jim.

"At the young lady who lives at The Elms."

"Not afore she pulled a feäce at me."

"Well, if you wink at her again I'll lick you."

"Mebbe."

"There's no 'mebbe' about it. Come down to the other end of the green now, if you think I can't."

Jim Bates was no coward, but he was faced with the alternative of yielding gracefully and watching the showmen at work or risking a defeat in a needless battle. He chose the better part of valor.

"It's neän o' my business," he said. "I deän't want te wink at t' young leddy."

At the inn door Mrs. Atkinson's three little girls were standing with Kitty Thwaites, the housemaid. The eldest, a bonnie child, whose fair skin was covered with freckles, ran toward Martin.

"Where hae ye bin all t' week?" she inquired. "Are ye always wi' that Saumarez girl?"

"No."

"I heerd tell she was at your pleäce all hours. What beautiful frocks she has, but I should be asheämed te show me legs like

her."

"That's the way she dresses," said Martin curtly.

"How funny. Is she fond of you?"

"How do I know?" He tried to edge away.

Evelyn tossed her head.

"Oh, I don't care. Why should I?"

"There's no reason that I can tell."

"You soon forget yer friends. On'y last Whit Monday ye bowt me a packet of chocolates."

There was truth in this. Martin quitted her sheepishly. He drew near some men, one of whom was Fred, the groom, and Fred had been drinking, as a preliminary to the deeper potations of the coming week.

"Ay, there she is!" he muttered, with an angry leer at Kitty. "She thinks what's good eneuf fer t' sister is good eneuf fer her. We'll see. Oad John Bollan' sent 'im away wiv a flea i' t' lug a-Tuesday. I reckon he'll hev one i' t' other ear if 'e comes after Kitty."

One of the men grinned contemptuously.

"Gan away!" he said. "George Pickerin' 'ud chuck you ower t' top o' t' hotel if ye said 'Booh' to 'im."

But Fred, too, grinned, blinking like an owl in daylight.

"Them as lives t' longest sees t' meäst," he muttered, and walked toward the stables, passing close to Kitty, who looked through him without seeing him.

Suddenly there was a stir among the loiterers. Mrs. Saumarez

was walking through the village with Mr. Beckett-Smythe. Behind the pair came the squire's two sons and Angèle. The great man had called on the new visitor to Elmsdale, and together they strolled forth, while he explained the festivities of the coming week, and told the lady that these "feasts" were the creation of an act of Charles II. as a protest against the Puritanism of the Commonwealth.

Martin stood at the side of the road. Mrs. Saumarez did not notice him, but Angèle did. She lifted her chin and dropped her eyelids in clever burlesque of Elsie Herbert, the vicar's daughter, but ignored him otherwise. Martin was hurt, though he hardly expected to be spoken to in the presence of distinguished company. But he could not help looking after the party. Angèle turned and caught his glance. She put out her tongue.

He heard a mocking laugh and knew that Evelyn Atkinson was telling her sisters of the incident, whereupon he dug his hands in his pockets and whistled.

A shooting gallery was in process of erection, and its glories soon dispelled the gloom of Angèle's snub. The long tube was supported on stays, the target put in place, the gaudy front pieced together, and half a dozen rifles unpacked. The proprietor meant to earn a few honest pennies that night, and some of the men were persuaded to try their prowess.

Martin was a born sportsman. He watched the competitors so keenly that Angèle returned with her youthful cavaliers without attracting his attention. Worse than that, Evelyn Atkinson,

scenting the possibility of rustic intrigue, caught Martin's elbow and asked quite innocently why a bell rang if the shooter hit the bull's-eye.

Proud of his knowledge, he explained that there was a hole in the iron plate, and that no bell, but a sheet of copper, was suspended in the box at the back where the lamp was.

Both Angèle and Evelyn appreciated the situation exactly. The boy alone was ignorant of their tacit rivalry.

Angèle pointed out Martin to the Beckett-Smythes.

"He is such a nice boy," she said sweetly. "I see him every day. He can fight any boy in the village."

"Hum," said the heir. "How old is he?"

"Fourteen."

"I am fifteen."

Angèle smiled like a seraph.

"Regardez-vous donc!" she said. "He could twiddle you round – so," and she spun one hand over the other.

"I'd like to see him try," snorted the aristocrat. The opportunity offered itself sooner than he expected, but the purring of a high-powered car coming through the village street caused the pedestrians to draw aside. The car, a new and expensive one, was driven by a chauffeur, but held no passengers.

Mr. Beckett-Smythe gazed after it reflectively.

"Well, I thought I knew every car in this district," he began.

"It is mine, I expect," announced Mrs. Saumarez. "I've ordered one, and it should arrive to-day. I need an automobile

for an occasional long run. For pottering about the village lanes, I may buy a pony cart."

"What make is your car?" inquired the Squire.

"A Mercedes. I'm told it is by far the best at the price."

"It's the best German car, of course, but I can hardly admit that it equals the French, or even our own leading types."

"Oh, I don't profess to understand these things. I only know that my banker advised me to buy none other. He explained the matter simply enough. The German manufacturers want to get into the trade and are content to lose money for a year or so. You know how pushful they are."

Beckett-Smythe saw the point clearly. He was even then hesitating between a Panhard and an Austin. He decided to wait a little longer and ascertain the facts about the Mercedes. A month later he purchased one. Mrs. Saumarez's chauffeur, a smart young mechanic from Bremen, who spoke English fluently, demonstrated that the buyer was given more than his money's worth. The amiable Briton wondered how such things could be, but was content to benefit personally. He, in time, spread the story. German cars enjoyed a year's boomlet in that part of Yorkshire. With nearly every car came a smart young chauffeur mechanic. Surely, this was wisdom personified. They knew the engine, could effect nearly all road repairs, demanded less wages than English drivers, and were always civil and reliable.

"Go-ahead people, these Germans!" was the general verdict.

CHAPTER IV
THE FEAST

An Elmsdale Sunday was a day of rest for man and beast alike. There could be no manner of doubt that the horses and dogs were able to distinguish the Sabbath from the workaday week. Prince, six-year-old Cleveland bay, the strongest and tallest horse in the stable, when his headstall was taken off on Sunday morning, showed his canny Yorkshire sense by walking past the row of carts and pushing open a rickety gate that led to a tiny meadow kept expressly for odd grazing. After him, in Indian file, went five other horses; yet, on any other day in the week they would stand patiently in the big yard, waiting to be led away singly or in pairs.

Curly and Jim, the two sheep-dogs – who never failed between Monday and Saturday to yawn and stretch expectantly by the side of John Bolland's sturdy nag in the small yard near the house – on the seventh day made their way to the foreman's cottage, there attending his leisure for a scamper over the breezy moorland.

For, Sunday or weekday, sheep must be counted. If any are missing, the almost preternatural intelligence of the collie is invoked to discover the hollow in which the lost ones are reposing helplessly on their backs. They will die in a few hours if not placed on their legs again. Turn over unaided they cannot. Man

or dog must help, or they choke.

Even the cocks and hens, the waddling geese and ducks, the huge shorthorns, which are the pride of the village, seemed to grasp the subtle distinction between life on a quiet day and the well-filled existence of the six days that had gone before. At least, Martin thought so; but he did not know then that the windows of the soul let in imageries that depend more on mood than on reality.

Personally he hated Sunday, or fancied he did. He had Sunday clothes, Sunday boots, Sunday food, a Sunday face, and a Sunday conscience. Things were wrong on Sunday that were right during the rest of the week. Though the sky was as bright, the grass as green, the birds as tuneful on that day as on others, he was supposed to undergo a metamorphosis throughout all the weary waking hours. His troubles often began the moment he quitted his bed. As his "best" clothes and boots were so little worn, they naturally maintained a spick-and-span appearance during many months. Hence, he was given a fresh assortment about once a year, and the outfit possessed three distinct periods of use, of which the first tortured his mind and the third his body.

He being a growing lad, the coat was made too long in the sleeves, the trousers too long in the legs, and the boots too large. At the beginning of this epoch he looked and felt ridiculous. Gradually, the effect of roast beef and suet dumplings brought about a better fit, and during four months of the year he was fairly smart in appearance. Then there came an ominous shrinkage. His

wrists dangled below the coat cuffs, there was an ever-widening rim of stocking between the tops of the boots and the trousers' ends, while Mrs. Bolland began to grumble each week about the amount of darning his stockings required. Moreover, there were certain quite insurmountable difficulties in the matter of buttons, and it was with a joy tempered only by fear of the grotesque that he beheld the "best" suit given away to an urchin several sizes smaller than himself.

Happily for his peace of mind, the Feast occurred in the middle stage of the current supply of raiment, so he was as presentable as a peripatetic tailor who worked in the house a fortnight at Christmas could make him.

But this Sunday dragged terribly. The routine of chapel from 10:30 A.M. to noon, Sunday-school from 3 P.M. to 4:30 P.M., and chapel again from 6:30 P.M. to 8 P.M., was inevitable, but there were compensations in the whispered confidences of Jim Bates and Tommy Beadlam, the latter nicknamed "White Head," as to the nature of some of the shows.

The new conditions brought into his life by Angèle Saumarez troubled him far more than he could measure. Her mere presence in the secluded village carried a breath of the unknown. Her talk was of London and Paris, of parks, theatres, casinos, luxurious automobiles, deck-cabins, and Pullman cars. She seemed to have lived so long and seen so much. Yet she knew very little. Her ceaseless chatter in French and English, which sounded so smart at first, would not endure examination.

She had read nothing. When Martin spoke of "Robinson Crusoe" and "Ivanhoe," of "Treasure Island" and "The Last of the Mohicans" – a literary medley devoured for incident and not for style – she had not even heard of them, but produced for inspection an astonishingly rude colored cartoon, the French comments on which she translated literally.

He was a boy aglow with dim but fervent ideals; she, a girl who had evidently been allowed to grow up almost wild in the midst of fashionable life and flippant servants, all exigencies being fulfilled when she spoke nicely and cleverly and wore her clothes with the requisite chic. The two were as opposed in essentials as an honest English apple grown in a wholesome garden and a rare orchid, the product of some poisonous equatorial swamp.

He tried to interest her in the sights and sounds of country life. She met him more than halfway by putting embarrassing questions as to the habits of animals. More than once he told her plainly that there were some things little girls ought not to know, whereat she laughed scornfully, but switched the conversation to a topic on which she could vex him, as was nearly always the case in her references to Elsie Herbert or John Bolland's Bible teaching.

Yet he was restless and irritable because he did not see her on the Sunday. Mrs. Saumarez, it is true, sped swiftly through the village about three o'clock, and again at half-past seven. On each occasion the particular chapel affected by the Bollands was resounding with a loud-voiced hymn or echoing the vibrant tones

of a preacher powerful beyond question in the matter of lungs and dogmatism. The whir of the Mercedes shut off these sounds; but Martin heard the passing of the car and knew that Angèle was in it.

It was a novel experience for the Misses Walker to find that their lodgers recognized no difference between Sunday and the rest of the week. Mrs. Saumarez dined at 6:30 P.M., a concession of an hour and a half to rural habits, but she scouted the suggestion that a cold meal should be served to enable the "girls" to go to church. The old ladies dared not quarrel with one who paid so well. They remained at home and cooked and served the dinner.

As Françoise, to a large extent, waited on her mistress, this development might not have been noticed had not Angèle's quick eyes seen Miss Emmy Walker carrying a chicken and a dish of French beans to a small table in the hall.

She told her mother, and Mrs. Saumarez was annoyed. She had informed Miss Martha that if the servants required a "night out," the addition of another domestic to the household at her expense would give them a good deal more liberty, but this ridiculous "Sunday-evening" notion must stop forthwith.

"It gets on my nerves, this British Sabbath," she exclaimed peevishly. "In London I entertain largely on a Sunday and have never had any trouble. Do you mean to say I cannot invite guests to dinner on Sunday merely to humor a cook or a housemaid? Absurd!"

Miss Martha promised reform.

"Let her have her way," she said to Miss Emmy. "Another servant will have nothing to do, and all the girls will grow lazy; but we must keep Mrs. Saumarez as long as we can. Oh, if she would only remain a year, we'd be out of debt, with the house practically recarpeted throughout!"

Unfortunately, Mrs. Saumarez's nerves were upset. She was snappy all the evening. Françoise tried many expedients to soothe her mistress's ruffled feelings. She brought a bundle of illustrated papers, a parcel of books, the scores of a couple of operas, even a gorgeous assortment of patterns of the new autumn dress fabrics, but each and all failed to attract. For some reason the preternaturally acute Angèle avoided her mother. She seemed to be afraid of her when in this mood. The Misses Walker, seeing the anxiety of the maid and the unwonted retreat of the child to bed at an early hour, were miserable at the thought that such a trivial matter should have given their wealthy tenant cause for dire offense.

So Sunday passed irksomely, and everyone was glad when the next morning dawned in bright cheerfulness.

From an early hour there was evidence in plenty that the Elmsdale Feast would be an unqualified success, though shorn of many of its ancient glories.

Time was when the village used to indulge in a week's saturnalia, but the march of progress had affected rural Yorkshire even so long ago as 1906. The younger people could visit Leeds,

York, Scarborough, or Whitby by Saturday afternoon "trips" – special excursion trains run at cheap rates – while "week-ends" in London were not unknown luxuries, and these frequent opportunities for change of scene and recreation had lessened the scope of the annual revels. Still, the trading instinct kept alive the commercial side of the Feast; the splendid hospitality of the north country asserted itself; church and chapels seized the chance of reaching enlarged congregations, and a number of itinerant showmen regarded Elmsdale as a fixture in the yearly round.

So, on the Monday, every neighboring village and moorland hamlet poured in its quota. The people came on foot from the railway station, distant nearly two miles, on horseback, in every sort of conveyance. The roads were alive with cattle, sheep, and pigs. The programme mapped out bore a general resemblance on each of the four days. The morning was devoted to business, the afternoon and evening to religion or pleasure.

The proceedings opened with a horse fair. An agent of the German Government snapped up every Cleveland bay offered for sale. George Pickering, in sporting garb, and smoking a big cigar, was an early arrival. He bid vainly for a couple of mares which he needed to complete his stud. Germany wanted them more urgently.

A splendid mare, the property of John Bolland, was put up for auction. The auctioneer read her pedigree, and proved its authenticity by reference to the Stud Book.

"Is she in foal?" asked Pickering, and a laugh went around. Bolland scowled blackly. If a look could have slain the younger man he would assuredly have fallen dead.

The bidding commenced at £40 and rose rapidly to £60.

Then Pickering lost his temper. The agent for Germany was too pertinacious.

"Seventy," he shouted, though the bids hitherto had mounted by single sovereigns.

"Seventy-one," said the agent.

"Eighty!" roared Pickering.

"Eighty-one!" nodded the agent.

"The reserve is off," interposed the auctioneer, and again the surrounding farmers guffawed, as the mare had already gone to twenty pounds beyond her value.

Pickering swallowed his rage with an effort. He turned to Bolland.

"That's an offset for my hard words the other day," he said.

But the farmer thrust aside the proffered olive branch.

"Once a fule, always a fule," he growled. Pickering, though anything but a fool in business, took the ungracious remark pleasantly enough.

"He ought to sing a rare hymn this afternoon," he cried. "I've put a score of extra sovereigns in his pocket, and he doesn't even say 'Thank you.' Well, it's the way of the world. Who's dry?"

This invitation caused an adjournment to the "Black Lion." The auctioneer knew his clients.

Pickering's allusion to the hymn was not made without knowledge. At three o'clock, on a part of the green farthest removed from the thronged stalls and the blare of a steam-driven organ, Bolland and a few other earnest spirits surrounded the stentorian preacher and held an open-air service. They selected tunes which everybody knew and, as a result, soon attracted a crowd of older people, some of whom brought their children. Martin, of course, was in the gathering.

Meanwhile, along the line of booths, a couple of leather-lunged men were singing old-time ballads, dealing for the most part with sporting incidents. They soon became the centers of two packed audiences, mainly young men and boys, but containing more than a sprinkling of girls. The ditties were couched in "broad Yorkshire" – sometimes too broad for modern taste. Whenever a particularly crude stanza was bawled forth a chuckle would run through the audience, and coppers in plenty were forthcoming for printed copies of the song, which, however, usually fell short of the blunt phraseology of the original. The raucous ballad singers took risks feared by the printer.

Mrs. Saumarez, leading Angèle by the hand, thought she would like to hear one of these rustic melodies, and halted. Instantly the vendor changed his cue. The lady might be the wife of a magistrate. Once he got fourteen days as a rogue and a vagabond at the instance of just such another interested spectator, who put the police in action.

Quickly surfeited by the only half-understood humor of a song

describing the sale of a dead horse, she wandered on, and soon came across the preacher and his lay helpers.

To her surprise she saw John Bolland standing bareheaded in the front rank, and with him Martin. She had never pictured the keen-eyed, crusty old farmer in this guise. It amused her. The minister began to offer up a prayer. The men hid their faces in their hats, the women bowed reverently, and fervent ejaculations punctuated each pause in the preacher's appeal.

"I do believe!"

"Amen! Amen!"

"Spare us, O Lord!"

Mrs. Saumarez stared at the gathering with real wonderment.

"C'est incroyable!" she murmured.

"What are they doing, mamma?" cried Angèle, trying to guess why Martin had buried his eyes in his cap.

"They are praying, dearest. It reminds one of the Covenanters. It really is very touching."

"Who were the Covenanters?"

"When you are older, ma belle, you will read of them in history."

That was Mrs. Saumarez's way. She treated her daughter's education as a matter for governesses whom she did not employ and masters to whose control Angèle would probably never be entrusted.

The two entered the White House. There they found Mrs. Bolland, radiant in a black silk dress, a bonnet trimmed with

huge roses, and a velvet dolman, the wings of which were thrown back over her portly shoulders to permit her the better to press all comers to partake of her hospitality.

Several women and one or two men were seated at the big table, while people were coming and going constantly.

It flustered and gratified Mrs. Bolland not a little to receive such a distinguished visitor.

"Eh, my leddy," she cried, "I'm glad to see ye. Will ye tek a chair? And t' young leddy, too? Will ye hev a glass o' wine?"

This was the recognized formula. There was a decanter of port wine on the sideboard, but most of the visitors partook of tea or beer. One of the men drew himself a foaming tankard from a barrel in the corner.

Mrs. Saumarez smiled wistfully.

"No wine, thank you," she said; "but that beer looks very nice. I'll have some, if I may."

Not until that moment did Mrs. Bolland remember that her guest was a reputed teetotaller. So, then, Mrs. Atkinson, proprietress of the "Black Lion," was mistaken.

"That ye may, an' welcome," she said in her hearty way.

Angèle murmured something in French, but her mother gave a curt answer, and the child subsided, being, perhaps, interested by the evident amazement and admiration she evoked among the country people. To-day, Angèle was dressed in a painted muslin, with hat and sash of the same material, long black silk stockings, and patent-leather shoes. She looked elegantly old-fashioned, and

might have walked bodily out of one of Caran d'Ache's sketches of French society.

Suddenly she bounced up like an india-rubber ball.

"Tra la!" she cried. "V'là mon cher Martin!"

The prayer meeting had ended, and Martin was speeding home, well knowing who had arrived there.

Angèle ran to meet him.

"She's a rale fairy," whispered Mrs. Summersgill, mistress of the Dale End Farm. "She's rigged out like a pet doll."

"Ay," agreed her neighbor. "D'ye ken wheer they coom frae?"

"Frae Lunnon, I reckon. They're staying wi' t' Miss Walkers. That's t' muther, a Mrs. Saumarez, they call her, but they say she's a Jarman baroness."

"Well, bless her heart, she hez a rare swallow for a gill o' ale."

This was perfectly true. The lady had emptied her glass with real gusto.

"I was so hot and tired," she said, with an apologetic smile at her hostess. "Now, I can admire your wonderful store of good things to eat," and she focussed the display through gold-rimmed eyeglasses.

Truly, the broad kitchen table presented a spectacle that would kill a dyspeptic. A cold sirloin, a portly ham, two pairs of chickens, three brace of grouse – these solids were mere garnishings to dishes piled with currant cakes, currant loaves and plain bread cut and buttered, jam turnovers, open tarts of many varieties, "fat rascals," Queen cakes, sponge cakes – battalions

and army corps of all the sweet and toothsome articles known to the culinary skill of the North.

"I'm feared, my leddy, they won't suit your taste," began Mrs. Bolland, but the other broke in eagerly:

"Oh, don't say that! They look so good, so wholesome, so different from the French cooking we weary of in town. If I were not afraid of spoiling my dinner and earning a scolding from Françoise I would certainly ask for some of that cold beef and a slice of bread and butter."

"Tek my advice, ma'am, an' eat while ye're in t' humor," cried Mrs. Bolland, instantly helping her guest to the eatables named.

Mrs. Saumarez laughed delightedly and peeled off a pair of white kid gloves. She ate a little of the meat and crumbled a slice of bread. Mrs. Bolland refilled the glass with beer.

Then the lady made herself generally popular by asking questions. Did they use lard or butter in the pastry? How was the sponge cake made so light? What a curious custom it was to put currants into plain dough; she had never seen it done before. Were the servants able to do these things, or had they to be taught by the mistress of the house? She amused the women by telling of the airs and graces of London domestics, and evoked a feeling akin to horror by relating the items of the weekly bills in her town house.

"Seven pund o' beäcan for breakfast i' t' kitchen!" exclaimed Mrs. Summersgill. "Wheä ivver heerd tell o' sike waste?"

"Eh, ma'am," cried another, "but ye mun addle yer money aisy

t' let 'em carry on that gait."

Martin, who found Angèle in her most charming mood – unconsciously pleased, too, that her costume was not so *outré* as to run any risk of caustic comment by strangers – came in and asked if he might take her along the row of stalls. Mrs. Bolland had given him a shilling that morning, and he resolved magnanimously to let the shooting gallery wait; Angèle should be treated to a shilling's worth of aught she fancied.

But Mrs. Saumarez rose.

"Your mother will kill me with kindness, Martin, if I remain longer," she said. "Take me, too, and we'll see if the fair contains any toys."

She emptied the second glass of ale, drew on her gloves, bade the company farewell with as much courtesy as if they were so many countesses, and walked away with the youngsters.

At one stall she bought Martin a pneumatic gun, a powerful toy which the dealer never expected to sell in that locality. At another she would have purchased a doll for Angèle, but the child shrugged her shoulders and declared that she would greatly prefer to ride on the roundabouts with Martin. Mrs. Saumarez agreed instantly, and the pair mounted the hobby-horses.

Among the children who watched them enviously were Jim Bates and Evelyn Atkinson. When the steam organ was in full blast and the horses were flying round at a merry pace, Mrs. Saumarez bent over Jim Bates and placed half a sovereign in his hand.

"Go to the 'Black Lion,'" she said, "and bring me a bottle of the best brandy. See that it is wrapped in paper. I do not care to go myself to a place where there are so many men."

Jim darted off. The roundabout slackened speed and stopped, but Mrs. Saumarez ordered another ride. The whirl had begun again when Bates returned with a parcel.

"It was four shillin's, ma'am," he said.

"Thank you, very much. Keep the change."

Even Evelyn Atkinson was so awed by the magnitude of the tip that she forgot for a moment to glue her eyes on Angèle and Martin.

But Angèle, wildly elated though she was with the sensation of flight, and seated astride like a boy, until the tops of her stockings were exposed to view, did not fail to notice the conclusion of Jim Bates's errand.

"Mamma will be ill to-night," she screamed in Martin's ear. "Françoise will be busy waiting on her. I'll come out again at eight o'clock."

"You must not," shouted the boy. "It will be very rough here then."

"C'la va – I mean, I know that quite well. It'll be all the more jolly. Meet me at the gate. I'll bring plenty of money."

"I can't," protested Martin.

"You must!"

"But I'm supposed to be home myself at eight o'clock."

"If you don't come, I'll find some other boy. Frank Beckett-

Smythe said he would try and turn up every evening, in case I got a chance to sneak out."

"All right. I'll be there."

Martin intended to hurry her through the fair and take her home again. If he received a "hiding" for being late, he would put up with it. In any case, the squire's eldest son could not be allowed to steal his wilful playmate without a struggle. Probably Adam reasoned along similar lines when Eve first offered him an apple. Be that as it may, it never occurred to Martin that the third chapter of Genesis could have the remotest bearing on the night's frolic.

CHAPTER V
"IT IS THE FIRST STEP THAT COUNTS"

Mrs. Saumarez and Angèle returned to The Elms, but Martin had to forego accompanying them. He knew that – with Bible opened at the Third Book of Kings – John Bolland was waiting in a bedroom, every downstairs apartment being crowded.

He ran all the way along the village street and darted upstairs, striving desperately to avoid even the semblance of undue haste. Bolland was thumbing the book impatiently. He frowned over his spectacles.

"Why are ye late?" he demanded.

"Mrs. Saumarez asked me to walk with her through the village," answered Martin truthfully.

"Ay. T' wife telt me she was here."

The explanation served, and Martin breathed more freely. The reading commenced:

> "Now king David was old and stricken in years; and they covered him with clothes, but he gat no heat.
>
> "Wherefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a young virgin: and let her stand before the king, and let her cherish him, and let her lie in thy bosom, that my lord the king may get heat."

Martin, with his mind in a tumult on account of the threatened escapade, did not care a pin what method was adopted to restore the feeble circulation of the withered King so long as the lesson passed off satisfactorily.

With rare self-control, he bent over the, to him, unmeaning page, and acquitted himself so well in the parrot repetition which he knew would be pleasing that he ventured to say:

"May I stay out a little later to-night, sir?"

"What for? You're better i' bed than gapin' at shows an' listenin' te drunken men."

"I only ask because – because I'm told that Mrs. Saumarez's little girl means to see the fair by night, and she – er – would like me to be with her."

John Bolland laughed dryly.

"Mrs. Saumarez'll soon hev more'n eneuf on't," he said. "Ay, lad, ye can stay wi' her, if that's all."

Martin never, under any circumstances, told a downright lie, but he feared that this was sailing rather too near the wind to be honest. The nature of Angèle's statement was so nebulous. He could hardly explain outright that Mrs. Saumarez was not coming – that Angèle alone would be the sightseer. So he flushed, and felt that he was obtaining the required permission by false pretense. He could have pulled Angèle's pretty ears for placing him in such a dilemma, but with a man so utterly unsympathetic as Bolland it was impossible to be quite candid.

He had clear ideas of right and wrong. He knew it was wrong

for Angèle to come out unattended and mix in the scene of rowdyism which the village would present until midnight. If she really could succeed in leaving The Elms unnoticed, the most effectual way to stop her was to go now to her mother or to one of the Misses Walker and report her intention. But this, according to the boy's code of honor, was to play the sneak, than which there is no worse crime in the calendar. No. He would look after her himself. There was a spice of adventure, too, in acting as the chosen squire of this sprightly damsel. Strong-minded as he was, and resolute beyond his years, Angèle's wilfulness, her quick tongue, the diablerie of her glance, the witchery of her elegant little person, captivated heart and brain, and benumbed the inchoate murmurings of conscience.

Oddly enough, he often found himself comparing her with Elsie Herbert, a girl with whom he had never exchanged a word, and Angèle Saumarez invariably figured badly in the comparison. The boy did not know then that he must become a man, perhaps soured of life, bitter with experience, before he would understand the difference between respect and fascination.

With housewife prudence, Mrs. Bolland hailed him as he was passing through the back kitchen.

"Noo, then, Martin, don't ye go racketin' about too much in your best clothes. And mind your straw hat isn't blown off if ye go on one o' them whirligigs."

"All right, mother," he said cheerfully, and was gone in a flash.

Two hours must elapse before Angèle could appear. Jim

Bates, who bore no malice, stood treat in gingerbread and lemonade out of the largesse bestowed by Mrs. Saumarez. Martin, carried away by sight of a champion boxer who offered a sovereign to any local man under twelve stone who stood up to him for three two-minute rounds, spent sixpence in securing seats for himself and Jim when the gage of combat was thrown down by his gamekeeper friend.

There was a furious fight with four-ounce gloves. The showman discovered quickly that Velveteens "knew a bit." Repeated attempts to "out" him with "the right" on the "point" resulted in heavy "counters" on the ribs, and a terrific uppercut failed because of the keeper's quick sight.

The proprietor of the booth, who acted as timekeeper, gave every favor to his henchman, but at the end of the third round the professional was more blown than the amateur. The sovereign was handed over with apparent good will, both showmen realizing that it might be money well spent. And it was, as the black eyes and swollen lips among the would-be pugilists of Elmsdale testified for many days thereafter.

Martin, who had never before seen a real boxing match, was entranced. With a troop of boys he accompanied the two combatants to the door of the "Black Lion," where a fair proportion of the sovereign was soon converted into beer.

George Pickering had witnessed the contest. Generous to a fault, he started a purse to be fought for in rounds inside the booth. Wanting a pencil and paper, he ran upstairs to his room

– he had resolved to stay at the inn for a couple of nights – and encountered Kitty Thwaites on the stairs.

She carried a laden tray, so he slipped an arm around her waist, and she was powerless to prevent him from kissing her unless she dropped the tray or risked upsetting its contents. She had no intention of doing either of these things.

"Oh, go on, do!" she cried, not averting her face too much.

He whispered something.

"Not me!" she giggled. "Besides, I won't have a minnit to spare till closin' time."

Pickering hugged her again. She descended the stairs, laughing and very red.

The boys heard something of the details of the proposed Elmsdale championship boxing competition. Entries were pouring in, there being no fee. George Pickering was appointed referee, and the professional named as judge. The first round would be fought at 3 P.M. next day.

The time passed more quickly than Martin expected; as for his money, it simply melted. Tenpence out of the shilling had vanished before he realized how precious little remained wherewith to entertain Angèle. She said she would have "plenty of money," but he imagined that a walk through the fair and a ride on the roundabout would satisfy her. Not even at fourteen does the male understand the female of twelve.

A few minutes before eight he escaped from his companions and strolled toward The Elms. The house was not like the

suburban villa which stands in the center of a row and proudly styles itself Oakdene. It was hidden in a cluster of lordly elms, and already the day was so far spent that the entrance gate was invisible save at a few yards' distance.

The nearest railway station was situated two miles along this very road. A number of slow-moving country people were sauntering to the station, where the north train was due at 9:05 P.M. Another train, that from the south, arrived at 9:20, and would be the last that night. A full moon was rising, but her glories were hidden by the distant hills. There was no wind; the weather was fine and settled. The Elmsdale Feast was lucky in its dates.

Martin waited near the gate and heard the church clock chime the hour. Two boys on bicycles came flying toward the village. They were the Beckett-Smythes. They slackened pace as they neared The Elms.

"Wonder if she'll get out to-night?" said Ernest, the younger.

"There's no use waiting here. She said she'd dodge out one evening for certain. If she's not in the village, we'd better skip back before we're missed," said the heir.

"Oh, that's all right. Pater thinks we're in the grounds, and there won't be any bother if we show up at nine."

They rode on. The quarter-hour chimed, and Martin became impatient.

"She was humbugging me, as usual," he reflected. "Well, this time I'm pleased."

An eager voice whispered:

"Hold the gate! It'll rattle when I climb over. They've not heard me. I crept here on the grass."

Angèle had changed her dress to a dark-blue serge and sailor hat. This was decidedly thoughtful. In her day attire she must have attracted a great deal of notice. Now, in the dark, neither the excellence of her clothing nor the elegance of her carriage would differentiate her too markedly from the village girls.

She was breathless with haste, but her tongue rattled on rapidly.

"Mamma *is* ill. I knew she would be. I told Françoise I had a headache, and went to bed. Then I crept downstairs again. Miss Walker nearly caught me, but she's so upset that she never saw me. As for Fritz, if I meet him – poof!"

"What's the matter with Mrs. Saumarez?" asked Martin.

"Trop de cognac, mon chéri."

"What's that?"

"It means a 'bit wobbly, my dear.'"

"Is her head bad?"

"Yes. It will be for a week. But never mind mamma. She'll be all right, with Françoise to look after her. Here! You pay for everything. There's ten shillings in silver. I have a sovereign in my stocking, if we want it."

They were hurrying toward the distant medley of sound. Flaring naptha lamps gave the village street a Rembrandt effect. Love-making couples, with arms entwined, were coming away

from the glare of the booths. Their forms cast long shadows on the white road.

"Ten shillings!" gasped Martin. "Whatever do we want with ten shillings?"

"To enjoy ourselves, you silly. You can't have any fun without money. Why, when mamma dines at the Savoy and takes a party to the theater afterwards, it costs her as many pounds. I know, because I've seen the checks."

"That has nothing to do with it. We can't spend ten shillings here."

"Oh, can't we? You leave that to me. Mais, voyez-vous, imbécile, are you going to be nasty?" She halted and stamped an angry foot.

"No, I'm not; but – "

"Then come on, stupid. I'm late as it is."

"The stalls remain open until eleven."

"Magnifique! What a row there'll be if I have to knock to get in!"

Martin held his tongue. He resolved privately that Angèle should be home at nine, at latest, if he dragged her thither by main force. The affair promised difficulties. She was so intractable that a serious quarrel would result. Well, he could not help it. Better a lasting break than the wild hubbub that would spring up if they both remained out till the heinous hour she contemplated.

In the village they encountered Jim Bates and Evelyn

Atkinson, surrounded by seven or eight boys and girls, for Jim was disposing rapidly of his six shillings, and Evelyn bestowed favor on him for the nonce.

"Hello! here's Martin," whooped Bates. "I thowt ye'd gone yam (home). Where hev ye – "

Jim's eloquence died away abruptly. He caught sight of Angèle and was abashed. Not so Evelyn.

"Martin's been to fetch his sweetheart," she said maliciously.

Angèle simpered sufficiently to annoy Evelyn. Then she laughed agreement.

"Yes. And won't we have a time! Come on! Everybody have a ride."

She sprang toward the horses. Martin alone followed.

"Come on!" she screamed. "Martin will pay for the lot. He has heaps of money."

No second invitation was needed. Several times the whole party swung round with lively yelling. From the roundabouts they went to the swings; from the swings to the cocoanut shies. Here they were joined by the Beckett-Smythes, who endeavored promptly to assume the leadership.

Martin's blood was fired by the contest. He was essentially a boy foredoomed to dominate his fellows, whether for good or evil. He pitched restraint to the winds. He could throw better than either of the young aristocrats; he could shoot straighter at the galleries; he could describe the heroic combat between the boxer and Velveteens; he would swing Angèle higher than any,

until they looked over the crossbar after each giddy swirl.

The Beckett-Smythes kept pace with him only in expenditure, Jim Bates being quickly drained, and even they wondered how long the village lad could last.

The ten shillings were soon dissipated.

"I want that sovereign," he shouted, when Angèle and he were riding together again on the hobby-horses.

"I told you so," she screamed. She turned up her dress to extricate the money from a fold of her stocking. The light flashed on her white skin, and Frank Beckett-Smythe, who rode behind with one of the Atkinson girls, wondered what she was doing.

She bent over Martin and whispered:

"There are *two*! Keep the fun going!"

The young spark in the rear thought that she was kissing Martin; he was wild with jealousy. At the next show – that of a woman grossly fat, who allowed the gapers to pinch her leg at a penny a pinch – he paid with his last half-crown. When they went to refresh themselves on ginger-beer, Martin produced a sovereign. The woman who owned the stall bit it, surveyed him suspiciously, and tried to swindle him in the change. She failed badly.

"Eleven bottles at twopence and eleven cakes at a penny make two-and-nine. I want two more shillings, please," he said coolly.

"Be aff wid ye! I gev ye seventeen and thruppence. If ye thry anny uv yer tricks an me I'll be afther askin' where ye got the pound."

"Give me two more shillings, or I'll call the police."

Mrs. Maguire was beaten; she paid up.

The crowd left her, with cries of "Irish Molly!" "Where's Mick?" and even coarser expressions. Angèle screamed at her:

"Why don't you stick to ginger-beer? You're muzzy."

The taunt stung, and the old Irishwoman cursed her tormentor as a black-eyed little witch.

Angèle, seeing that Martin carried all before him, began straightway to flirt with the heir. At first the defection was not noted, but when she elected to sit by Frank while they watched the acrobats the new swain took heart once more and squeezed her arm.

Evelyn Atkinson, who was in a smiling temper, felt that a crisis might be brought about now. There was not much time. It was nearly ten o'clock, and soon her mother would be storming at her for not having taken herself and her sisters to bed, though, in justice be it said, the girls could not possibly sleep until the house was cleared.

Ernest Beckett-Smythe was her cavalier at the moment.

"We've seen all there is te see," she whispered. "Let's go and have a dance in our yard. Jim Bates can play a mouth-organ."

Ernest was a slow-witted youth.

"Where's the good?" he said. "There's more fun here."

"You try it, an' see," she murmured coyly.

The suggestion caught on. It was discussed while Martin and Jim Bates were driving a weight up a pole by striking a lever with

a heavy hammer. Anything in the shape of an athletic feat always attracted Martin.

Angèle was delighted. She scented a row. These village urchins were imps after her own heart.

"Oh, let's," she agreed. "It'll be a change. I'll show you the American two-step."

Frank had his arm around her waist now.

"Right-o!" he cried. "Evelyn, you and Ernest lead the way."

The girl, flattered by being bracketed publicly with one of the squire's sons, enjoined caution.

"Once we're past t' stables it's all right," she said. "I don't suppose Fred'll hear us, anyhow."

Fred was at the front of the hotel watching the road, watching Kitty Thwaites as she flitted upstairs and down, watching George Pickering through the bar window, and grinning like a fiend when he saw that somewhat ardent wooer, hilarious now, but sober enough according to his standard, glancing occasionally at his watch.

There was a gate on each side of the hotel. That on the left led to the yard, with its row of stables and cart-sheds, and thence to a spacious area occupied by hay-stacks, piles of firewood, hen-houses, and all the miscellaneous lumber of an establishment half inn, half farm. The gate on the right opened into a bowling-green and skittle-alley. Behind these lay the kitchen garden and orchard. A hedge separated one section from the other, and entrance could be obtained to either from the back door of the

hotel.

The radiance of a full moon now decked the earth in silver and black; in the shade the darkness was intense by contrast. The church clock struck ten.

Half a dozen youngsters crept silently into the stable yard. Angèle kicked up a dainty foot in a preliminary *pas seul*, but Evelyn stopped her unceremoniously. The village girl's sharp ears had caught footsteps on the garden path beyond the hedge.

It was George Pickering, with his arm around Kitty's shoulders. He was talking in a low tone, and she was giggling nervously.

"They're sweetheartin'," whispered a girl.

"So are we," declared Frank Beckett-Smythe. "Aren't we, Angèle?"

"Sapristi! I should think so. Where's Martin?"

"Never mind. We don't want him."

"Oh, he will be furious. Let's hide. There will be such a row when he goes home, and he daren't go till he finds me."

Master Beckett-Smythe experienced a second's twinge at thought of the greeting he and his brother would receive at the Hall. But here was Angèle pretending timidity and cowering in his arms. He would not leave her now were he to be flayed alive.

The footsteps of Pickering and Kitty died away. They had gone into the orchard.

Evelyn Atkinson breathed freely again.

"Even if Kitty sees us now, I don't care," she said. "She daren't

tell mother, when she knows that we saw her and Mr. Pickerin'. He ought to have married her sister."

"Poof!" tittered Angèle. "Who heeds a domestic?"

Someone came at a fast run into the yard, running in desperate haste, and making a fearful din. Two boys appeared. The leader shouted:

"Angèle! Angèle! Are you there?"

Martin had missed her. Jim Bates, who knew the chosen rendezvous of the Atkinson girls, suggested that they and their friends had probably gone to the haggarth.

"Shut up, you fool!" hissed Frank. "Do you want the whole village to know where we are?"

Martin ignored him. He darted forward and caught Angèle by the shoulder. He distinguished her readily by her outline, though she and the rest were hidden in the somber shadows of the outbuildings.

"Why did you leave me?" he demanded angrily. "You must come home at once. It is past ten o'clock."

"Don't be angry, Martin," she pouted. "I am just a little tired of the noise. I want to show you and the rest a new dance."

The minx was playing her part well. She had read Evelyn Atkinson's soul. She felt every throb of young Beckett-Smythe's foolish heart. She was quite certain that Martin would find her and cause a scene. There was deeper intrigue afoot now than the mere folly of unlicensed frolic in the fair. Her vanity, too, was gratified by the leading rôle she filled among them all.

The puppets bore themselves according to their temperaments. Evelyn bit her lip with rage and nearly yielded to a wild impulse to spring at Angèle and scratch her face. Martin was white with determination. As for Master Frank, he boiled over instantly.

"You just leave her alone, young Bolland," he said thickly. "She came here to please herself, and can stay here, if she likes. I'll see to that."

Martin did not answer.

"Angèle," he said quietly, "come away."

Seeing that he had lived in the village nearly all his life, it was passing strange that this boy should have dissociated himself so completely from its ways. But the early hours he kept, his love of horses, dogs, and books, his preference for the society of grooms and gamekeepers – above all, a keen, if unrecognized, love of nature in all her varying moods, an almost pagan worship of mountain, moor, and stream – had kept him aloof from village life. A boy of fourteen does not indulge in introspection. It simply came as a fearful shock to find the daughter of a lady like Mrs. Saumarez so ready to forget her social standing. Surely, she could not know what she was doing. He was undeceived, promptly and thoroughly.

Angèle snatched her shoulder from his grasp.

"Don't you dare hold me," she snapped. "I'm not coming. I won't come with you, anyhow. Ma foi, Frank is far nicer."

"Then I'll drag you home," said Martin.

"Oh, will you, indeed? I'll see to that."

Beckett-Smythe deemed Angèle a girl worth fighting for. In any case, this clodhopper who spent money like a lord must be taught manners.

Martin smiled. In his bemused brain the idea was gaining ground that Angèle would be flattered if he "licked" the squire's son for her sake.

"Very well," he said, stepping back into the moonlight. "We'll settle it that way. If *you* beat *me*, Angèle remains. If *I* beat *you*, she goes home. Here, Jim. Hold my coat and hat. And, no matter what happens, mind you don't play for any dancing."

Martin stated terms and issued orders like an emperor. In the hour of stress he felt himself immeasurably superior to this gang of urchins, whether their manners smacked of Elmsdale or of Eton.

Angèle's acquaintance with popular fiction told her that at this stage of the game the heroine should cling in tears to the one she loved, and implore him to desist, to be calm for her sake. But the riot in her veins brought a new sensation. There were possibilities hitherto unsuspected in the darkness, the secrecy, the candid brutality of the fight. She almost feared lest Beckett-Smythe should be defeated.

And how the other girls must envy her, to be fought for by the two boys pre-eminent among them, to be the acknowledged princess of this village carnival!

So she clapped her hands.

"O là là!" she cried. "Going to fight about poor little me! Well,

I can't stop you, can I?"

"Yes, you can," said one.

"She won't, anyhow," scoffed the other. "Are you ready?"

"Quite!"

"Then 'go.'"

And the battle began.

CHAPTER VI
WHEREIN THE RED BLOOD FLOWS

They fought like a couple of young bulls. Frank intended to demolish his rival at the outset. He was a year older and slightly heavier, but Martin was more active, more sure-footed, sharper of vision. Above all, he had laid to heart the three-pennyworth of tuition obtained in the boxing booth a few hours earlier.

He had noted then that a boxer dodged as many blows with his head as he warded with his arms. He grasped the necessity to keep moving, and thus disconcert an adversary's sudden rush. Again, he had seen the excellence of a forward spring without changing the relative positions of the feet. Assuming you were sparring with the left hand and foot advanced, a quick jump of eighteen inches enabled you to get the right home with all your force. You must keep the head well back and the eye fixed unflinchingly on your opponent's. Above all, meet offense with offense. Hit hard and quickly and as often as might be.

These were sound principles, and he proceeded to put them into execution, to the growing distress and singular annoyance of Master Beckett-Smythe.

Ernest acted as referee – in the language of the village, he "saw fair play" – but was wise enough to call "time" early in the

first round, when his brother drew off after a fierce set-to. The forcing tactics had failed, but honors were divided. The taller boy's reach had told in his favor, while Martin's newly acquired science redressed the balance.

Martin's lip was cut and there was a lump on his left cheek, but Frank felt an eye closing and had received a staggerer in the ribs. He was aware of an uneasy feeling that if Martin survived the next round he (Frank) would be beaten, so there was nothing for it but to summon all his reserves and deliver a Napoleonic attack. The enemy must be crushed by sheer force.

He was a plucky lad and was stung to frenzy by seeing Angèle offer Martin the use of a lace handkerchief for the bleeding lip, a delicate tenderness quietly repulsed.

So, when the rush came, Martin had to fight desperately to avoid annihilation. He was compelled to give way, and backed toward the hedge. Behind lay an unseen stackpole. At the instant when Beckett-Smythe lowered his head and endeavored to butt Martin violently in the stomach, the latter felt the obstruction with his heel. Had he lost his nerve then or flickered an eyelid, he would have taken a nasty fall and a severe shaking. As it was, he met the charge more than halfway, and delivered the same swinging upper stroke which had nearly proved fatal to his gamekeeper friend.

It was wholly disastrous to Beckett-Smythe. It caught him fairly on the nose, and, as the blow was in accord with the correct theory of dynamics as applied to forces in motion, it knocked

him silly. His head flew up, his knees bent, and he dropped to the ground with a horrible feeling that the sky had fallen and that stars were sparkling among the rough paving-stones.

"That's a finisher. He's whopped!" exulted Jim Bates.

"No, he's not. It was a chance blow," cried Ernest, who was strongly inclined to challenge the victor on his own account. "Get up, Frank. Have another go at him!"

But Frank, who could neither see nor hear distinctly, was too groggy to rise, and the village girls drew together in an alarmed group. Such violent treatment of the squire's son savored of sacrilege. They were sure that Martin would receive some condign punishment by the law for pummeling a superior being so unmercifully.

Angèle, somewhat frightened herself, tried to console her discomfited champion.

"I'm so sorry," she said. "It was all my fault."

"Oh, go away!" he protested. "Ernest, where's there a pump?"

Assisted by his brother, he struggled to his feet. His nose was bleeding freely and his face was ghastly in the moonlight. But he was a spirited youngster. He held out a hand to Martin.

"I've had enough just now," he said, with an attempt at a smile. "Some other day, when my eye is all right, I'd like to – "

A woman's scream of terror, a man's cry of agony, startled the silent night and nearly scared the children out of their wits.

Someone came running up the garden path. It was Kitty Thwaites. She swayed unsteadily as she ran; her arms were lifted

in frantic supplication.

"Oh, Betsy, Betsy, you've killed him!" she wailed. "Murder! Murder! Come, someone! For God's sake, come!"

She stumbled and fell, shrieking frenziedly for help. Another woman – a woman whose extended right hand clutched a long, thin knife such as is used to carve game – appeared from the gloom of the orchard. Her wan face was raised to the sky, and a baleful light shone in her eyes.

"Ay, I'll swing for him," she cried in a voice shrill with hysteria. "May the Lord deal wi' him as he dealt wi' me! And my own sister, too! Out on ye, ye strumpet! 'Twould sarve ye right if I stuck ye wi' t' same knife."

With a clatter of ironshod boots, most of the frightened children stampeded out of the stable yard. Martin, to whom Angèle clung in speechless fear, and the two Beckett-Smythes alone were left.

The din of steam organ and drums, the ceaseless turmoil of the fair, the constant fusillade at the shooting gallery, and the bawling of men in charge of the various sideshows, had kept the women's shrieks from other ears thus far. But Kitty Thwaites, though almost shocked out of her senses, gained strength from the imminence of peril. Springing up from the path just in time to avoid the vengeful oncoming of her sister, she staggered toward the hotel and created instant alarm by her cries of "Murder! Help! George Pickering has been stabbed!"

A crowd of men poured out from bar and smoking-room.

One, who took thought, rushed through the front door and snatched a naphtha lamp from a stall. Meanwhile, the three boys and the girl on the other side of the hedge, seeing and hearing everything, but unseen and unheard themselves, took counsel in some sort.

"I say," Ernest Beckett-Smythe urged his brother, "let's get out of this. Father will thrash us to death if we're mixed up in this business."

The advice was good. Frank forgot his dizziness for the moment, and the two raced to secure their bicycles from a stall-holder's care. They rode away to the Hall unnoticed.

Martin remained curiously quiet. All the excitement had left him. If Elmsdale were rent by an earthquake just then, he would have watched the toppling houses with equanimity.

"I suppose you don't wish to stop here now?" he said to Angèle.

The girl was sobbing bitterly. Her small body shook as though each gulp were a racking cough. She could not answer. He placed his arm around her and led her to the gate. While they were crossing the yard the people from the hotel crowded into the garden. The man with the lamp had reached the back of the house across the bowling green, and a stalwart farmer had caught Betsy Thwaites by the wrist. The blood-stained knife fell from her fingers. She moaned helplessly in disjointed phrases.

"It's all overed now. God help me! Why was I born?"

Already a crowd was surging into the hotel through the front

door. Martin guided his trembling companion to the right; in a few strides they were clear of the fair, only to run into Mrs. Saumarez's German chauffeur.

He was not in uniform; in a well-fitting blue serge suit and straw hat, he looked more like a young officer in mufti than a mechanic. He was the first to recognize Angèle, and was so frankly astonished that he bowed to her without lifting his hat.

"*You*, mees?" he cried, seemingly at a loss for other words.

Angèle recovered her wits at once. She said something which Martin could not understand, though he was sure it was not in French, as the girl's frequent use of that language was familiarizing his ears with its sounds. As a matter of fact, she spoke German, telling the chauffeur to mind his own business, and she would mind hers; but if any talking were done her tongue might wag more than his.

At any rate, the man did then raise his hat politely and walk on. The remainder of the road between Elmsdale and The Elms was deserted. Martin hardly realized the pace at which he was literally dragging his companion homeward until she protested.

"Martin, you're hurting my arm! What's the hurry?.. Did she really kill him?"

"She said so. I don't know," he replied.

"Who was she?"

"Kitty Thwaites's sister, I suppose. I never saw her before. They were not bred in this village."

"And why did she kill him?"

"How can I tell?"

"She had a knife in her hand."

"Yes."

"Perhaps she killed him because she was jealous."

"Perhaps."

"Martin, don't be angry with me. I didn't mean any harm. I was only having a lark. I did it just to tease you – and Evelyn Atkinson."

"That's all very fine. What will your mother say?"

The quietude, the sound of her own voice, were giving the girl courage. She tossed her head with something of contempt.

"She can say nothing. You leave her to me. You saw how I shut Fritz's mouth. What was the name of the man who was killed?"

"George Pickering."

"Ah. He walked down the garden with Kitty Thwaites."

"Indeed?"

"Yes. When I get in I can tell Miss Walker and Françoise all about it. They will be so excited. There will be no fuss about me being out. V'là la bonne fortune!"

"Speak English, please."

"Well, it is good luck I was there. I can make up such a story."

"Good luck that a poor fellow should be stabbed!"

"That wasn't my fault, was it? Good-night, Martin. You fought beautifully. Kiss me!"

"I won't kiss you. Run in, now. I'll wait till the door opens."

"Then *I'll* kiss *you*. There! I like you better than all the world

– just now."

She opened the gate, careless whether it clanged or not. Martin heard her quick footsteps on the gravel of the short drive. She rattled loudly on the door.

"Good-night, Martin – dear!" she cried.

He did not answer. There was some delay. Evidently she had not been missed.

"Are you there?" She was impatient of his continued coldness.

"Yes."

"Then why don't you speak, silly?"

The door opened with the clanking of a chain. There was a woman's startled cry as the inner light fell on Angèle. Then he turned.

Not until he reached the "Black Lion" and its well-lighted area did he realize that he was coatless and hatless. Jim Bates had vanished with both of these necessary articles. Well, in for a penny, in for a pound! There would be a fearful row, and the thrashing would be the same in any case.

He avoided the crowd, keeping to the darker side of the street. A policeman had just come out of the inn and was telling the people to go away. All the village seemed to have gathered during the few minutes which had elapsed since the tragedy took place. He felt strangely sorry for Betsy Thwaites. Would she be locked up, handcuffed, with chains on her ankles? What would they do with the knife? Why should she want to kill Mr. Pickering? Wouldn't he marry her? Even so, that was no reason he should be

stabbed. Where did she stick him? Did he quiver like Absalom when Joab thrust the darts into his heart?

At last he ran up the slight incline leading to the White House; there was a light in the front kitchen. For one awful moment he paused, with a finger on the sneck; then he pressed the latch and entered.

John Bolland, grim as a stone gargoyle, wearing his Sunday coat and old-fashioned tall hat, was leaning against the massive chimneypiece. Mrs. Bolland, with bonnet awry, was seated. She had been crying. A frightened kitchenmaid peeped through the passage leading to the back of the house when the door opened to admit the truant. Then she vanished.

There was a period of chill silence while Martin closed the door. He turned and faced the elderly couple, and John Bolland spoke:

"So ye've coom yam, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"An' at a nice time, too. Afther half-past ten! An hour sen yer muther an' me searched high and low for ye. Where hev ye bin? Tell t' truth, ye young scamp. Every lie'll mean more skin off your back."

Mrs. Bolland, drying her eyes, now that Martin had returned, noticed his disheveled condition. His face was white as his shirt, and both were smeared with blood. A wave of new alarm paled her florid cheeks. She ran to him.

"For mercy's sake, boy, what hev ye bin doin'? Are ye hurt?"

"No, mother, not hurt. I fought Frank Beckett-Smythe. That is all."

"T' squire's son. Why on earth – "

"Go to bed, Martha," said John, picking up a riding whip. But Mrs. Bolland's sympathies discerned a deeper reason for Martin's escapade than a mere boyish frolic which deserved a thrashing. He was unnaturally calm. Something out of the common had happened. He did not flinch at the sight of the whip.

"John," she said sternly, "ye shan't touch him t'-night."

"Stand aside, Martha. If all my good teachin' is of no avail – "

"Mebbe t' lad's fair sick o' yer good teachin'. You lay a hand on him at yer peril. If ye do, I don't bide i' t' house this night!"

Never before, during thirty years of married life, had Martha Bolland defied her husband. He glowered with anger and amazement.

"Would ye revile the Word te shield that spawn o' Satan?" he roared. "Get away, woman, lest I do thee an injury."

But his wife's temper was fierce as his own when roused. She was a Meynell, and there have been Meynells in Yorkshire as long as any Bollands.

"Tak' yer threats te those who heed 'em," she retorted bitterly. "D'ye think folk will stand by an' let ye raise yer hand te me?.. David, William, Mary, coom here an' hold yer master. He's like te have a fit wi' passion."

There was a shuffling in the passage. The men servants, such as happened to be in the house, came awkwardly at

their mistress's cry. The farmer stood spellbound. What devil possessed the household that his authority should be set at naught thus openly?

It was a thrilling moment, but Martin solved the difficulty. He wrenched himself free of Mrs. Bolland's protecting arms.

"Father, mother!" he cried. "Don't quarrel on my account. If I must be beaten, I don't care. I'll take all I get. But it's only fair that I should say why I was not home earlier."

Now, John Bolland, notwithstanding his dealing in the matter of the pedigree cow, prided himself on his sense of justice. Indeed, the man who does the gravest injury to his fellows is often cursed with a narrow-minded certainty of his own righteousness. Moreover, this matter had gone beyond instant adjustment by the unsparing use of a whip. His wife, his servants, were arrayed against him. By the Lord, they should rue it!

"Aye," he said grimly. "Tell your muther why you've been actin' t' blackguard. Mebbe she'll understand."

Mrs. Bolland had the sense to pass this taunt unheeded. Her heart was quailing already at her temerity.

"Angèle Saumarez came out without her mother," said Martin. "Mrs. Saumarez is ill. I thought it best to remain with her and take her home again. Frank Beckett-Smythe joined us, and he – he – insulted her, in a way. So I fought him, and beat him, too. And then George Pickering was murdered – "

"What?"

Bolland dropped the whip on the table. His wife sank into

a chair with a cry of alarm. The plowmen and maids ventured farther into the room. Even the farmer's relentless jaw fell at this terrific announcement.

"Yes, it is quite true. Frank and I fought in the yard of the 'Black Lion.' George Pickering and Kitty Thwaites went down the garden – at least, so I was told. I didn't see them. But, suddenly, Kitty came screaming along the path, and after her a woman waving a long knife in the air. Kitty called her 'Betsy,' and said she had killed George Pickering. She said so herself. I heard her. Then some men came with a light and caught hold of Betsy. She was going to stab Kitty, too, I think; and Jim Bates ran away with my coat and hat, which he was holding."

The effect of such a narration on a gathering of villagers, law-abiding folk who lived in a quiet nook like Elmsdale, was absolutely paralyzing. John Bolland was the first to recover himself. A man of few ideas, he could not adjust his mental balance with sufficient nicety to see that the tragedy itself in no wise condoned Martin's offense.

"Are ye sure of what ye're sayin', lad?" he demanded, though indeed he felt it was absurd to imagine that such a tale would be invented as a mere excuse.

"Quite sure, sir. If you walk down to the 'Black Lion,' you'll see all the people standing round the hotel and the police keeping them back."

"Well, well, I'll gan this minit. George Pickerin' was no friend o' mine, but I'm grieved te hear o' sike deeds as these in oor

village. I was maist angered wi' you on yer muther's account. She was grievin' so when we failed te find ye. She thowt sure you were runned over or drownded i' t' beck."

This was meant as a graceful apology to his wife, and was taken in that spirit. Never before had he made such a concession.

"Here's yer stick, John," she said. "Hurry and find out what's happened. Poor George! I wish my tongue hadn't run so fast t' last time I seed him."

Bolland and the other men hastened away, and Martin was called on to recount the sensational episode, with every detail known to him, for the benefit of the household. No one paid heed to the boy's own adventures. All ears were for the vengeance taken by Betsy Thwaites on the man who jilted her. Even to minds blunted almost to callousness, the *crime passionel* had a vivid, an entrancing interest. The women were quick to see its motive, a passive endurance stung to sudden frenzy by the knowledge that the faithless lover was pursuing the younger sister. But how did Betsy Thwaites, who lived in far-off Hereford, learn that George Pickering was "making up" to Kitty? The affair was of recent growth. Indeed, none of those present was aware that Pickering and the pretty maid at the "Black Lion" were so much as acquainted with each other. And where did Betsy spring from? She could not have been staying in the village, or someone aware of her history must have seen her. Did Kitty know she was there? If so, how foolish of the younger woman to be out gallivanting in the moonlight with Pickering.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.