

Chapter XVIII - Church

'HETTY, Hetty, don't you know church begins at two, and it's gone half after one a'ready? Have you got nothing better to think on this good Sunday as poor old Thias Bede's to be put into the ground, and him drowned i' th' dead o' the night, as it's enough to make one's back run cold, but you must be 'dizening yourself as if there was a wedding i'stid of a funeral?'

'Well, Aunt,' said Hetty, 'I can't be ready so soon as everybody else, when I've got Totty's things to put on. And I'd ever such work to make her stand still.'

Hetty was coming downstairs, and Mrs. Poyser, in her plain bonnet and shawl, was standing below. If ever a girl looked as if she had been made of roses, that girl was Hetty in her Sunday hat and frock. For her hat was trimmed with pink, and her frock had pink spots, sprinkled on a white ground. There was nothing but pink and white about her, except in her dark hair and eyes and her little buckled shoes. Mrs. Poyser was provoked at herself, for she could hardly keep from smiling, as any mortal is inclined to do at the sight of pretty round things. So she turned without speaking, and joined the group outside the house door, followed by Hetty, whose heart was fluttering so at the thought of some one she expected to see at church that she hardly felt the ground she trod on.

And now the little procession set off. Mr Poyser was in his Sunday suit of drab, with a red-and-green waistcoat and a green watch-ribbon having a large cornelian seal attached, pendant like a plumb-line from that promontory where his watch-pocket was situated; a silk handkerchief of a yellow tone round his neck; and excellent grey ribbed stockings, knitted by Mrs. Poyser's own hand, setting off the proportions of his leg. Mr Poyser had no reason to be ashamed of his leg, and suspected that the growing abuse of top-boots and other fashions tending to disguise the nether limbs had their origin in a pitiable degeneracy of the human calf. Still less had he reason to be ashamed of his round jolly face, which was good humour itself as he said, 'Come, Hetty - come, little uns!' and giving his arm to his wife, led the way through the causeway gate into the yard.

The 'little uns' addressed were Marty and Tommy, boys of nine and seven, in little fustian tailed coats and knee-breeches, relieved by rosy cheeks and black eyes, looking as much like their father as a very small elephant is like a very large one. Hetty walked between them, and behind came patient Molly, whose task it was to carry Totty through the yard and over all the wet places on the road; for Totty, having speedily recovered from her threatened fever, had insisted on going to church to-day, and especially on wearing her red-and-black

necklace outside her tippet. And there were many wet places for her to be carried over this afternoon, for there had been heavy showers in the morning, though now the clouds had rolled off and lay in towering silvery masses on the horizon.

You might have known it was Sunday if you had only waked up in the farmyard. The cocks and hens seemed to know it, and made only crooning subdued noises; the very bull-dog looked less savage, as if he would have been satisfied with a smaller bite than usual. The sunshine seemed to call all things to rest and not to labour. It was asleep itself on the moss-grown cow-shed; on the group of white ducks nestling together with their bills tucked under their wings; on the old black sow stretched languidly on the straw, while her largest young one found an excellent spring-bed on his mother's fat ribs; on Alick, the shepherd, in his new smock-frock, taking an uneasy siesta, half-sitting, half-standing on the granary steps. Alick was of opinion that church, like other luxuries, was not to be indulged in often by a foreman who had the weather and the ewes on his mind. 'Church! Nay - I'n gotten summat else to think on,' was an answer which he often uttered in a tone of bitter significance that silenced further question. I feel sure Alick meant no irreverence; indeed, I know that his mind was not of a speculative, negative cast, and he would on no account have missed going to church on Christmas Day, Easter Sunday, and 'Whissuntide.' But he had a general impression that public worship and religious ceremonies, like other non-productive employments, were intended for people who had leisure.

'There's Father a-standing at the yard-gate,' said Martin Poyser. 'I reckon he wants to watch us down the field. It's wonderful what sight he has, and him turned seventy-five.'

'Ah, I often think it's wi' th' old folks as it is wi' the babbies,' said Mrs. Poyser; 'they're satisfied wi' looking, no matter what they're looking at. It's God A'mighty's way o' quietening 'em, I reckon, afore they go to sleep.'

Old Martin opened the gate as he saw the family procession approaching, and held it wide open, leaning on his stick - pleased to do this bit of work; for, like all old men whose life has been spent in labour, he liked to feel that he was still useful - that there was a better crop of onions in the garden because he was by at the sowing - and that the cows would be milked the better if he stayed at home on a Sunday afternoon to look on. He always went to church on Sacrament Sundays, but not very regularly at other times; on wet Sundays, or whenever he had a touch of rheumatism, he used to read the three first chapters of Genesis instead.

'They'll ha' putten Thias Bede i' the ground afore ye get to the churchyard,' he said, as his son came up. 'It 'ud ha' been better luck if they'd ha' buried him i' the forenoon when the rain was fallin'; there's no likelihoods of a drop now; an' the moon lies like a boat there, dost see? That's a sure sign o' fair weather - there's a many as is false but that's sure.'

'Aye, aye,' said the son, 'I'm in hopes it'll hold up now.'

'Mind what the parson says, mind what the parson says, my lads,' said Grandfather to the black-eyed youngsters in knee-breeches, conscious of a marble or two in their pockets which they looked forward to handling, a little, secretly, during the sermon.

'Dood-bye, Dandad,' said Totty. 'Me doin' to church. Me dot my neklace on. Dive me a peppermint.'

Grandad, shaking with laughter at this 'deep little wench,' slowly transferred his stick to his left hand, which held the gate open, and slowly thrust his finger into the waistcoat pocket on which Totty had fixed her eyes with a confident look of expectation.

And when they were all gone, the old man leaned on the gate again, watching them across the lane along the Home Close, and through the far gate, till they disappeared behind a bend in the hedge. For the hedgerows in those days shut out one's view, even on the better-managed farms; and this afternoon, the dog-roses were tossing out their pink wreaths, the nightshade was in its yellow and purple glory, the pale honeysuckle grew out of reach, peeping high up out of a holly bush, and over all an ash or a sycamore every now and then threw its shadow across the path.

There were acquaintances at other gates who had to move aside and let them pass: at the gate of the Home Close there was half the dairy of cows standing one behind the other, extremely slow to understand that their large bodies might be in the way; at the far gate there was the mare holding her head over the bars, and beside her the liver-coloured foal with its head towards its mother's flank, apparently still much embarrassed by its own straddling existence. The way lay entirely through Mr Poyser's own fields till they reached the main road leading to the village, and he turned a keen eye on the stock and the crops as they went along, while Mrs. Poyser was ready to supply a running commentary on them all. The woman who manages a dairy has a large share in making the rent, so she may well be allowed to have her opinion on stock and their 'keep' - an exercise which strengthens her understanding so much that she finds herself able to give her husband advice on most other subjects.

'There's that shorthorned Sally,' she said, as they entered the Home Close, and she caught sight of the meek beast that lay chewing the cud and looking at her with a sleepy eye. 'I begin to hate the sight o' the cow; and I say now what I said three weeks ago, the sooner we get rid of her the better, for there's that little yallow cow as doesn't give half the milk, and yet I've twice as much butter from her.'

'Why, thee't not like the women in general,' said Mr Poyser; 'they like the shorthorns, as give such a lot o' milk. There's Chowne's wife wants him to buy no other sort.'

'What's it sinnify what Chowne's wife likes? A poor soft thing, wi' no more head-piece nor a sparrow. She'd take a big cullender to strain her lard wi', and then wonder as the scratchin's run through. I've seen enough of her to know as I'll niver take a servant from her house again - all higger-mugger - and you'd niver know, when you went in, whether it was Monday or Friday, the wash draggin' on to th' end o' the week; and as for her cheese, I know well enough it rose like a loaf in a tin last year. And then she talks o' the weather bein' i' fault, as there's folks 'ud stand on their heads and then say the fault was i' their boots.'

'Well, Chowne's been wanting to buy Sally, so we can get rid of her if thee lik'st,' said Mr Poyser, secretly proud of his wife's superior power of putting two and two together; indeed, on recent market-days he had more than once boasted of her discernment in this very matter of shorthorns. 'Aye, them as choose a soft for a wife may's well buy up the shorthorns, for if you get your head stuck in a bog, your legs may's well go after it. Eh! Talk o' legs, there's legs for you,' Mrs. Poyser continued, as Totty, who had been set down now the road was dry, toddled on in front of her father and mother. 'There's shapes! An' she's got such a long foot, she'll be her father's own child.'

'Aye, she'll be welly such a one as Hetty i' ten years' time, on'y she's got THY coloured eyes. I niver remember a blue eye i' my family; my mother had eyes as black as sloes, just like Hetty's.'

'The child 'ull be none the worse for having summat as isn't like Hetty. An' I'm none for having her so overpretty. Though for the matter o' that, there's people wi' light hair an' blue eyes as pretty as them wi' black. If Dinah had got a bit o' colour in her cheeks, an' didn't stick that Methodist cap on her head, enough to frighten the cows, folks 'ud think her as pretty as Hetty.'

'Nay, nay,' said Mr Poyser, with rather a contemptuous emphasis, 'thee dostna know the pints of a woman. The men 'ud niver run after Dinah as they would after Hetty.'

'What care I what the men 'ud run after? It's well seen what choice the most of 'em know how to make, by the poor draggle-tails o' wives you see, like bits o' gauze ribbin, good for nothing when the colour's gone.'

'Well, well, thee canstna say but what I knowed how to make a choice when I married thee,' said Mr Poyser, who usually settled little conjugal disputes by a compliment of this sort; 'and thee wast twice as buxom as Dinah ten year ago.'

'I niver said as a woman had need to be ugly to make a good missis of a house. There's Chowne's wife ugly enough to turn the milk an' save the rennet, but she'll niver save nothing any other way. But as for Dinah, poor child, she's niver likely to be buxom as long as she'll make her dinner o' cake and water, for the sake o' giving to them as want. She provoked me past bearing sometimes; and, as I told her, she went clean again' the Scriptor', for that says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself'; 'but,' I said, 'if you loved your neighbour no better nor you do yourself, Dinah, it's little enough you'd do for him. You'd be thinking he might do well enough on a half-empty stomach.' Eh, I wonder where she is this blessed Sunday! Sitting by that sick woman, I daresay, as she'd set her heart on going to all of a sudden.'

'Ah, it was a pity she should take such megrims into her head, when she might ha' stayed wi' us all summer, and eaten twice as much as she wanted, and it 'ud niver ha' been missed. She made no odds in th' house at all, for she sat as still at her sewing as a bird on the nest, and was uncommon nimble at running to fetch anything. If Hetty gets married, theed'st like to ha' Dinah wi' thee constant.'

'It's no use thinking o' that,' said Mrs. Poyser. 'You might as well beckon to the flying swallow as ask Dinah to come an' live here comfortable, like other folks. If anything could turn her, I should ha' turned her, for I've talked to her for a hour on end, and scolded her too; for she's my own sister's child, and it behoves me to do what I can for her. But eh, poor thing, as soon as she'd said us 'good-bye' an' got into the cart, an' looked back at me with her pale face, as is welly like her Aunt Judith come back from heaven, I begun to be frightened to think o' the set-downs I'd given her; for it comes over you sometimes as if she'd a way o' knowing the rights o' things more nor other folks have. But I'll niver give in as that's 'cause she's a Methodist, no more nor a white calf's white 'cause it eats out o' the same bucket wi' a black un.'

'Nay,' said Mr Poyser, with as near an approach to a snarl as his good-nature would allow; 'I'm no opinion o' the Methodists. It's on'y tradesfolks as turn Methodists; you niver knew a farmer bitten wi' them maggots. There's maybe a workman now an' then, as isn't overclever at's work, takes to preachin' an' that, like Seth Bede. But

you see Adam, as has got one o' the best head-pieces hereabout, knows better; he's a good Churchman, else I'd never encourage him for a sweetheart for Hetty.'

'Why, goodness me,' said Mrs. Poyser, who had looked back while her husband was speaking, 'look where Molly is with them lads! They're the field's length behind us. How COULD you let 'em do so, Hetty? Anybody might as well set a pictur' to watch the children as you. Run back and tell 'em to come on.'

Mr and Mrs. Poyser were now at the end of the second field, so they set Totty on the top of one of the large stones forming the true Loamshire stile, and awaited the loiterers Totty observing with complacency, 'Dey naughty, naughty boys - me dood.'

The fact was that this Sunday walk through the fields was fraught with great excitement to Marty and Tommy, who saw a perpetual drama going on in the hedgerows, and could no more refrain from stopping and peeping than if they had been a couple of spaniels or terriers. Marty was quite sure he saw a yellow-hammer on the boughs of the great ash, and while he was peeping, he missed the sight of a white-throated stoat, which had run across the path and was described with much fervour by the junior Tommy. Then there was a little greenfinch, just fledged, fluttering along the ground, and it seemed quite possible to catch it, till it managed to flutter under the blackberry bush. Hetty could not be got to give any heed to these things, so Molly was called on for her ready sympathy, and peeped with open mouth wherever she was told, and said 'Lawks!' whenever she was expected to wonder.

Molly hastened on with some alarm when Hetty had come back and called to them that her aunt was angry; but Marty ran on first, shouting, 'We've found the speckled turkey's nest, Mother!' with the instinctive confidence that people who bring good news are never in fault.

'Ah,' said Mrs. Poyser, really forgetting all discipline in this pleasant surprise, 'that's a good lad; why, where is it?'

'Down in ever such a hole, under the hedge. I saw it first, looking after the greenfinch, and she sat on th' nest.'

'You didn't frighten her, I hope,' said the mother, 'else she'll forsake it.'

'No, I went away as still as still, and whispered to Molly - didn't I, Molly?'

'Well, well, now come on,' said Mrs. Poyser, 'and walk before Father and Mother, and take your little sister by the hand. We must go straight on now. Good boys don't look after the birds of a Sunday.'

'But, Mother,' said Marty, 'you said you'd give half-a-crown to find the speckled turkey's nest. Mayn't I have the half-crown put into my money-box?'

'We'll see about that, my lad, if you walk along now, like a good boy.'

The father and mother exchanged a significant glance of amusement at their eldest-born's acuteness; but on Tommy's round face there was a cloud.

'Mother,' he said, half-crying, 'Marty's got ever so much more money in his box nor I've got in mine.'

'Munny, me want half-a-toun in my bots,' said Totty.

'Hush, hush, hush,' said Mrs. Poyser, 'did ever anybody hear such naughty children? Nobody shall ever see their money-boxes any more, if they don't make haste and go on to church.'

This dreadful threat had the desired effect, and through the two remaining fields the three pair of small legs trotted on without any serious interruption, notwithstanding a small pond full of tadpoles, alias 'bullheads,' which the lads looked at wistfully.

The damp hay that must be scattered and turned afresh to-morrow was not a cheering sight to Mr Poyser, who during hay and corn harvest had often some mental struggles as to the benefits of a day of rest; but no temptation would have induced him to carry on any field-work, however early in the morning, on a Sunday; for had not Michael Holdsworth had a pair of oxen 'sweltered' while he was ploughing on Good Friday? That was a demonstration that work on sacred days was a wicked thing; and with wickedness of any sort Martin Poyser was quite clear that he would have nothing to do, since money got by such means would never prosper.

'It a'most makes your fingers itch to be at the hay now the sun shines so,' he observed, as they passed through the 'Big Meadow.' 'But it's poor foolishness to think o' saving by going against your conscience. There's that Jim Wakefield, as they used to call 'Gentleman Wakefield,' used to do the same of a Sunday as o' weekdays, and took no heed to right or wrong, as if there was nayther God nor devil. An' what's he come to? Why, I saw him myself last market-day a-carrying a basket wi' oranges in't.'

'Ah, to be sure,' said Mrs. Poyser, emphatically, 'you make but a poor trap to catch luck if you go and bait it wi' wickedness. The money as is got so's like to burn holes i' your pocket. I'd niver wish us to leave our lads a sixpence but what was got i' the rightful way. And as for the weather, there's One above makes it, and we must put up wi't: it's nothing of a plague to what the wenches are.'

Notwithstanding the interruption in their walk, the excellent habit which Mrs. Poyser's clock had of taking time by the forelock had secured their arrival at the village while it was still a quarter to two, though almost every one who meant to go to church was already within the churchyard gates. Those who stayed at home were chiefly mothers, like Timothy's Bess, who stood at her own door nursing her baby and feeling as women feel in that position - that nothing else can be expected of them.

It was not entirely to see Thias Bede's funeral that the people were standing about the churchyard so long before service began; that was their common practice. The women, indeed, usually entered the church at once, and the farmers' wives talked in an undertone to each other, over the tall pews, about their illnesses and the total failure of doctor's stuff, recommending dandelion-tea, and other home-made specifics, as far preferable - about the servants, and their growing exorbitance as to wages, whereas the quality of their services declined from year to year, and there was no girl nowadays to be trusted any further than you could see her - about the bad price Mr Dingall, the Treddleston grocer, was giving for butter, and the reasonable doubts that might be held as to his solvency, notwithstanding that Mrs. Dingall was a sensible woman, and they were all sorry for HER, for she had very good kin. Meantime the men lingered outside, and hardly any of them except the singers, who had a humming and fragmentary rehearsal to go through, entered the church until Mr Irwine was in the desk. They saw no reason for that premature entrance - what could they do in church if they were there before service began? - and they did not conceive that any power in the universe could take it ill of them if they stayed out and talked a little about 'bus'ness.'

Chad Cranage looks like quite a new acquaintance to-day, for he has got his clean Sunday face, which always makes his little granddaughter cry at him as a stranger. But an experienced eye would have fixed on him at once as the village blacksmith, after seeing the humble deference with which the big saucy fellow took off his hat and stroked his hair to the farmers; for Chad was accustomed to say that a working-man must hold a candle to a personage understood to be as black as he was himself on weekdays; by which evil-sounding rule of conduct he meant what was, after all, rather virtuous than otherwise, namely, that men who had horses to be shod must be treated with respect. Chad and the rougher sort of workmen kept aloof from the

grave under the white thorn, where the burial was going forward; but Sandy Jim, and several of the farm-labourers, made a group round it, and stood with their hats off, as fellow-mourners with the mother and sons. Others held a midway position, sometimes watching the group at the grave, sometimes listening to the conversation of the farmers, who stood in a knot near the church door, and were now joined by Martin Poyser, while his family passed into the church. On the outside of this knot stood Mr Casson, the landlord of the Donnithorne Arms, in his most striking attitude - that is to say, with the forefinger of his right hand thrust between the buttons of his waistcoat, his left hand in his breeches pocket, and his head very much on one side; looking, on the whole, like an actor who has only a mono-syllabic part entrusted to him, but feels sure that the audience discern his fitness for the leading business; curiously in contrast with old Jonathan Burge, who held his hands behind him and leaned forward, coughing asthmatically, with an inward scorn of all knowingness that could not be turned into cash. The talk was in rather a lower tone than usual to-day, hushed a little by the sound of Mr Irwine's voice reading the final prayers of the burial-service. They had all had their word of pity for poor Thias, but now they had got upon the nearer subject of their own grievances against Satchell, the Squire's bailiff, who played the part of steward so far as it was not performed by old Mr Donnithorne himself, for that gentleman had the meanness to receive his own rents and make bargains about his own timber. This subject of conversation was an additional reason for not being loud, since Satchell himself might presently be walking up the paved road to the church door. And soon they became suddenly silent; for Mr Irwine's voice had ceased, and the group round the white thorn was dispersing itself towards the church.

They all moved aside, and stood with their hats off, while Mr Irwine passed. Adam and Seth were coming next, with their mother between them; for Joshua Rann officiated as head sexton as well as clerk, and was not yet ready to follow the rector into the vestry. But there was a pause before the three mourners came on: Lisbeth had turned round to look again towards the grave! Ah! There was nothing now but the brown earth under the white thorn. Yet she cried less to-day than she had done any day since her husband's death. Along with all her grief there was mixed an unusual sense of her own importance in having a 'burial,' and in Mr Irwine's reading a special service for her husband; and besides, she knew the funeral psalm was going to be sung for him. She felt this counter-excitement to her sorrow still more strongly as she walked with her sons towards the church door, and saw the friendly sympathetic nods of their fellow-parishioners.

The mother and sons passed into the church, and one by one the loiterers followed, though some still lingered without; the sight of Mr

Donnithorne's carriage, which was winding slowly up the hill, perhaps helping to make them feel that there was no need for haste.

But presently the sound of the bassoon and the key-bugles burst forth; the evening hymn, which always opened the service, had begun, and every one must now enter and take his place.

I cannot say that the interior of Hayslope Church was remarkable for anything except for the grey age of its oaken pews - great square pews mostly, ranged on each side of a narrow aisle. It was free, indeed, from the modern blemish of galleries. The choir had two narrow pews to themselves in the middle of the right-hand row, so that it was a short process for Joshua Rann to take his place among them as principal bass, and return to his desk after the singing was over. The pulpit and desk, grey and old as the pews, stood on one side of the arch leading into the chancel, which also had its grey square pews for Mr Donnithorne's family and servants. Yet I assure you these grey pews, with the buff-washed walls, gave a very pleasing tone to this shabby interior, and agreed extremely well with the ruddy faces and bright waistcoats. And there were liberal touches of crimson toward the chancel, for the pulpit and Mr Donnithorne's own pew had handsome crimson cloth cushions; and, to close the vista, there was a crimson altar-cloth, embroidered with golden rays by Miss Lydia's own hand.

But even without the crimson cloth, the effect must have been warm and cheering when Mr Irwine was in the desk, looking benignly round on that simple congregation - on the hardy old men, with bent knees and shoulders, perhaps, but with vigour left for much hedge-clipping and thatching; on the tall stalwart frames and roughly cut bronzed faces of the stone-cutters and carpenters; on the half-dozen well-to-do farmers, with their apple-cheeked families; and on the clean old women, mostly farm-labourers' wives, with their bit of snow-white cap-border under their black bonnets, and with their withered arms, bare from the elbow, folded passively over their chests. For none of the old people held books - why should they? Not one of them could read. But they knew a few 'good words' by heart, and their withered lips now and then moved silently, following the service without any very clear comprehension indeed, but with a simple faith in its efficacy to ward off harm and bring blessing. And now all faces were visible, for all were standing up - the little children on the seats peeping over the edge of the grey pews, while good Bishop Ken's evening hymn was being sung to one of those lively psalm-tunes which died out with the last generation of rectors and choral parish clerks. Melodies die out, like the pipe of Pan, with the ears that love them and listen for them. Adam was not in his usual place among the singers to-day, for he sat with his mother and Seth, and he noticed with surprise that Bartle Massey was absent too - all the more agreeable for Mr Joshua Rann, who gave out his bass notes with unusual complacency and threw an

extra ray of severity into the glances he sent over his spectacles at the recusant Will Maskery.

I beseech you to imagine Mr Irwine looking round on this scene, in his ample white surplice that became him so well, with his powdered hair thrown back, his rich brown complexion, and his finely cut nostril and upper lip; for there was a certain virtue in that benignant yet keen countenance as there is in all human faces from which a generous soul beams out. And over all streamed the delicious June sunshine through the old windows, with their desultory patches of yellow, red, and blue, that threw pleasant touches of colour on the opposite wall.

I think, as Mr Irwine looked round to-day, his eyes rested an instant longer than usual on the square pew occupied by Martin Poyser and his family. And there was another pair of dark eyes that found it impossible not to wander thither, and rest on that round pink-and-white figure. But Hetty was at that moment quite careless of any glances - she was absorbed in the thought that Arthur Donnithorne would soon be coming into church, for the carriage must surely be at the church-gate by this time. She had never seen him since she parted with him in the wood on Thursday evening, and oh, how long the time had seemed! Things had gone on just the same as ever since that evening; the wonders that had happened then had brought no changes after them; they were already like a dream. When she heard the church door swinging, her heart beat so, she dared not look up. She felt that her aunt was curtsying; she curtsied herself. That must be old Mr Donnithorne - he always came first, the wrinkled small old man, peering round with short-sighted glances at the bowing and curtsying congregation; then she knew Miss Lydia was passing, and though Hetty liked so much to look at her fashionable little coal-scuttle bonnet, with the wreath of small roses round it, she didn't mind it to-day. But there were no more curtsies - no, he was not come; she felt sure there was nothing else passing the pew door but the house-keeper's black bonnet and the lady's maid's beautiful straw hat that had once been Miss Lydia's, and then the powdered heads of the butler and footman. No, he was not there; yet she would look now - she might be mistaken - for, after all, she had not looked. So she lifted up her eyelids and glanced timidly at the cushioned pew in the chancel - there was no one but old Mr Donnithorne rubbing his spectacles with his white handkerchief, and Miss Lydia opening the large gilt-edged prayer-book. The chill disappointment was too hard to bear. She felt herself turning pale, her lips trembling; she was ready to cry. Oh, what SHOULD she do? Everybody would know the reason; they would know she was crying because Arthur was not there. And Mr Craig, with the wonderful hothouse plant in his button-hole, was staring at her, she knew. It was dreadfully long before the General Confession began, so that she could kneel down. Two great drops WOULD fall then, but no one saw them except good-natured Molly, for

her aunt and uncle knelt with their backs towards her. Molly, unable to imagine any cause for tears in church except faintness, of which she had a vague traditional knowledge, drew out of her pocket a queer little flat blue smelling-bottle, and after much labour in pulling the cork out, thrust the narrow neck against Hetty's nostrils. 'It donna smell,' she whispered, thinking this was a great advantage which old salts had over fresh ones: they did you good without biting your nose. Hetty pushed it away peevishly; but this little flash of temper did what the salts could not have done - it roused her to wipe away the traces of her tears, and try with all her might not to shed any more. Hetty had a certain strength in her vain little nature: she would have borne anything rather than be laughed at, or pointed at with any other feeling than admiration; she would have pressed her own nails into her tender flesh rather than people should know a secret she did not want them to know.

What fluctuations there were in her busy thoughts and feelings, while Mr Irwine was pronouncing the solemn 'Absolution' in her deaf ears, and through all the tones of petition that followed! Anger lay very close to disappointment, and soon won the victory over the conjectures her small ingenuity could devise to account for Arthur's absence on the supposition that he really wanted to come, really wanted to see her again. And by the time she rose from her knees mechanically, because all the rest were rising, the colour had returned to her cheeks even with a heightened glow, for she was framing little indignant speeches to herself, saying she hated Arthur for giving her this pain - she would like him to suffer too. Yet while this selfish tumult was going on in her soul, her eyes were bent down on her prayer-book, and the eyelids with their dark fringe looked as lovely as ever. Adam Bede thought so, as he glanced at her for a moment on rising from his knees.

But Adam's thoughts of Hetty did not deafen him to the service; they rather blended with all the other deep feelings for which the church service was a channel to him this afternoon, as a certain consciousness of our entire past and our imagined future blends itself with all our moments of keen sensibility. And to Adam the church service was the best channel he could have found for his mingled regret, yearning, and resignation; its interchange of beseeching cries for help with outbursts of faith and praise, its recurrent responses and the familiar rhythm of its collects, seemed to speak for him as no other form of worship could have done; as, to those early Christians who had worshipped from their childhood upwards in catacombs, the torch-light and shadows must have seemed nearer the Divine presence than the heathenish daylight of the streets. The secret of our emotions never lies in the bare object, but in its subtle relations to our own past: no wonder the secret escapes the unsympathizing observer, who might as well put on his spectacles to discern odours.

But there was one reason why even a chance comer would have found the service in Hayslope Church more impressive than in most other village nooks in the kingdom - a reason of which I am sure you have not the slightest suspicion. It was the reading of our friend Joshua Rann. Where that good shoemaker got his notion of reading from remained a mystery even to his most intimate acquaintances. I believe, after all, he got it chiefly from Nature, who had poured some of her music into this honest conceited soul, as she had been known to do into other narrow souls before his. She had given him, at least, a fine bass voice and a musical ear; but I cannot positively say whether these alone had sufficed to inspire him with the rich chant in which he delivered the responses. The way he rolled from a rich deep forte into a melancholy cadence, subsiding, at the end of the last word, into a sort of faint resonance, like the lingering vibrations of a fine violoncello, I can compare to nothing for its strong calm melancholy but the rush and cadence of the wind among the autumn boughs. This may seem a strange mode of speaking about the reading of a parish clerk - a man in rusty spectacles, with stubbly hair, a large occiput, and a prominent crown. But that is Nature's way: she will allow a gentleman of splendid physiognomy and poetic aspirations to sing woefully out of tune, and not give him the slightest hint of it; and takes care that some narrow-browed fellow, trolling a ballad in the corner of a pot-house, shall be as true to his intervals as a bird.

Joshua himself was less proud of his reading than of his singing, and it was always with a sense of heightened importance that he passed from the desk to the choir. Still more to-day: it was a special occasion, for an old man, familiar to all the parish, had died a sad death - not in his bed, a circumstance the most painful to the mind of the peasant - and now the funeral psalm was to be sung in memory of his sudden departure. Moreover, Bartle Massey was not at church, and Joshua's importance in the choir suffered no eclipse. It was a solemn minor strain they sang. The old psalm-tunes have many a wail among them, and the words -

Thou sweep'st us off as with a flood; We vanish hence like dreams -

seemed to have a closer application than usual in the death of poor Thias. The mother and sons listened, each with peculiar feelings. Lisbeth had a vague belief that the psalm was doing her husband good; it was part of that decent burial which she would have thought it a greater wrong to withhold from him than to have caused him many unhappy days while he was living. The more there was said about her husband, the more there was done for him, surely the safer he would be. It was poor Lisbeth's blind way of feeling that human love and pity are a ground of faith in some other love. Seth, who was easily touched, shed tears, and tried to recall, as he had done continually since his father's death, all that he had heard of the

possibility that a single moment of consciousness at the last might be a moment of pardon and reconciliation; for was it not written in the very psalm they were singing that the Divine dealings were not measured and circumscribed by time? Adam had never been unable to join in a psalm before. He had known plenty of trouble and vexation since he had been a lad, but this was the first sorrow that had hemmed in his voice, and strangely enough it was sorrow because the chief source of his past trouble and vexation was for ever gone out of his reach. He had not been able to press his father's hand before their parting, and say, 'Father, you know it was all right between us; I never forgot what I owed you when I was a lad; you forgive me if I have been too hot and hasty now and then!' Adam thought but little to-day of the hard work and the earnings he had spent on his father: his thoughts ran constantly on what the old man's feelings had been in moments of humiliation, when he had held down his head before the rebukes of his son. When our indignation is borne in submissive silence, we are apt to feel twinges of doubt afterwards as to our own generosity, if not justice; how much more when the object of our anger has gone into everlasting silence, and we have seen his face for the last time in the meekness of death!

'Ah! I was always too hard,' Adam said to himself. 'It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against 'em, so as I can't bring myself to forgive 'em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul, for I could sooner make a thousand strokes with th' hammer for my father than bring myself to say a kind word to him. And there went plenty o' pride and temper to the strokes, as the devil WILL be having his finger in what we call our duties as well as our sins. Mayhap the best thing I ever did in my life was only doing what was easiest for myself. It's allays been easier for me to work nor to sit still, but the real tough job for me 'ud be to master my own will and temper and go right against my own pride. It seems to me now, if I was to find Father at home to-night, I should behave different; but there's no knowing - perhaps nothing 'ud be a lesson to us if it didn't come too late. It's well we should feel as life's a reckoning we can't make twice over; there's no real making amends in this world, any more nor you can mend a wrong subtraction by doing your addition right.'

This was the key-note to which Adam's thoughts had perpetually returned since his father's death, and the solemn wail of the funeral psalm was only an influence that brought back the old thoughts with stronger emphasis. So was the sermon, which Mr Irwine had chosen with reference to Thias's funeral. It spoke briefly and simply of the words, 'In the midst of life we are in death' - how the present moment is all we can call our own for works of mercy, of righteous dealing, and of family tenderness. All very old truths - but what we thought the oldest truth becomes the most startling to us in the week when we

have looked on the dead face of one who has made a part of our own lives. For when men want to impress us with the effect of a new and wonderfully vivid light, do they not let it fall on the most familiar objects, that we may measure its intensity by remembering the former dimness?

Then came the moment of the final blessing, when the forever sublime words, 'The peace of God, which passeth all understanding,' seemed to blend with the calm afternoon sunshine that fell on the bowed heads of the congregation; and then the quiet rising, the mothers tying on the bonnets of the little maidens who had slept through the sermon, the fathers collecting the prayer-books, until all streamed out through the old archway into the green churchyard and began their neighbourly talk, their simple civilities, and their invitations to tea; for on a Sunday every one was ready to receive a guest - it was the day when all must be in their best clothes and their best humour.

Mr and Mrs. Poyser paused a minute at the church gate: they were waiting for Adam to Come up, not being contented to go away without saying a kind word to the widow and her sons.

'Well, Mrs. Bede,' said Mrs. Poyser, as they walked on together, 'you must keep up your heart; husbands and wives must be content when they've lived to rear their children and see one another's hair grey.'

'Aye, aye,' said Mr Poyser; 'they wanna have long to wait for one another then, anyhow. And ye've got two o' the strapping'st sons i' th' country; and well you may, for I remember poor Thias as fine a broad-shouldered fellow as need to be; and as for you, Mrs. Bede, why you're straighter i' the back nor half the young women now.'

'Eh,' said Lisbeth, 'it's poor luck for the platter to wear well when it's broke i' two. The sooner I'm laid under the thorn the better. I'm no good to nobody now.'

Adam never took notice of his mother's little unjust complaints; but Seth said, 'Nay, Mother, thee mustna say so. Thy sons 'ull never get another mother.'

'That's true, lad, that's true,' said Mr Poyser; 'and it's wrong on us to give way to grief, Mrs. Bede; for it's like the children cryin' when the fathers and mothers take things from 'em. There's One above knows better nor us.'

'Ah,' said Mrs. Poyser, 'an' it's poor work allays settin' the dead above the livin'. We shall all on us be dead some time, I reckon - it 'ud be better if folks 'ud make much on us beforehand, i'stid o' beginnin'

when we're gone. It's but little good you'll do a-watering the last year's crop.'

'Well, Adam,' said Mr Poyser, feeling that his wife's words were, as usual, rather incisive than soothing, and that it would be well to change the subject, 'you'll come and see us again now, I hope. I hanna had a talk with you this long while, and the missis here wants you to see what can be done with her best spinning-wheel, for it's got broke, and it'll be a nice job to mend it - there'll want a bit o' turning. You'll come as soon as you can now, will you?'

Mr Poyser paused and looked round while he was speaking, as if to see where Hetty was; for the children were running on before. Hetty was not without a companion, and she had, besides, more pink and white about her than ever, for she held in her hand the wonderful pink-and-white hot-house plant, with a very long name - a Scotch name, she supposed, since people said Mr Craig the gardener was Scotch. Adam took the opportunity of looking round too; and I am sure you will not require of him that he should feel any vexation in observing a pouting expression on Hetty's face as she listened to the gardener's small talk. Yet in her secret heart she was glad to have him by her side, for she would perhaps learn from him how it was Arthur had not come to church. Not that she cared to ask him the question, but she hoped the information would be given spontaneously; for Mr Craig, like a superior man, was very fond of giving information.

Mr Craig was never aware that his conversation and advances were received coldly, for to shift one's point of view beyond certain limits is impossible to the most liberal and expansive mind; we are none of us aware of the impression we produce on Brazilian monkeys of feeble understanding - it is possible they see hardly anything in us. Moreover, Mr Craig was a man of sober passions, and was already in his tenth year of hesitation as to the relative advantages of matrimony and bachelorhood. It is true that, now and then, when he had been a little heated by an extra glass of grog, he had been heard to say of Hetty that the 'lass was well enough,' and that 'a man might do worse'; but on convivial occasions men are apt to express themselves strongly.

Martin Poyser held Mr Craig in honour, as a man who 'knew his business' and who had great lights concerning soils and compost; but he was less of a favourite with Mrs. Poyser, who had more than once said in confidence to her husband, 'You're mighty fond o' Craig, but for my part, I think he's welly like a cock as thinks the sun's rose o' purpose to hear him crow.' For the rest, Mr Craig was an estimable gardener, and was not without reasons for having a high opinion of himself. He had also high shoulders and high cheek-bones and hung his head forward a little, as he walked along with his hands in his

breeches pockets. I think it was his pedigree only that had the advantage of being Scotch, and not his 'bringing up'; for except that he had a stronger burr in his accent, his speech differed little from that of the Loamshire people about him. But a gardener is Scotch, as a French teacher is Parisian.

'Well, Mr Poyser,' he said, before the good slow farmer had time to speak, 'ye'll not be carrying your hay to-morrow, I'm thinking. The glass sticks at 'change,' and ye may rely upo' my word as we'll ha' more downfall afore twenty-four hours is past. Ye see that darkish-blue cloud there upo' the 'rizon - ye know what I mean by the 'rizon, where the land and sky seems to meet?'

'Aye, aye, I see the cloud,' said Mr Poyser, "rizon or no 'rizon. It's right o'er Mike Holdsworth's fallow, and a foul fallow it is.'

'Well, you mark my words, as that cloud 'ull spread o'er the sky pretty nigh as quick as you'd spread a tarpaulin over one o' your hay-ricks. It's a great thing to ha' studied the look o' the clouds. Lord bless you! Th' met'orological almanecks can learn me nothing, but there's a pretty sight o' things I could let THEM up to, if they'd just come to me. And how are you, Mrs. Poyser? - thinking o' getherin' the red currants soon, I reckon. You'd a deal better gether 'em afore they're o'erripe, wi' such weather as we've got to look forward to. How do ye do, Mistress Bede?' Mr Craig continued, without a pause, nodding by the way to Adam and Seth. 'I hope y' enjoyed them spinach and gooseberries as I sent Chester with th' other day. If ye want vegetables while ye're in trouble, ye know where to come to. It's well known I'm not giving other folks' things away, for when I've supplied the house, the garden s my own spekilation, and it isna every man th' old squire could get as 'ud be equil to the undertaking, let alone asking whether he'd be willing I've got to run my kalkilation fine, I can tell you, to make sure o' getting back the money as I pay the squire. I should like to see some o' them fellows as make the almanecks looking as far before their noses as I've got to do every year as comes.'

'They look pretty fur, though,' said Mr Poyser, turning his head on one side and speaking in rather a subdued reverential tone. 'Why, what could come truer nor that pictur o' the cock wi' the big spurs, as has got its head knocked down wi' th' anchor, an' th' firin', an' the ships behind? Why, that pictur was made afore Christmas, and yit it's come as true as th' Bible. Why, th' cock's France, an' th' anchor's Nelson - an' they told us that beforehand.'

'Pee - ee-eh!' said Mr Craig. 'A man doesna want to see fur to know as th' English 'ull beat the French. Why, I know upo' good authority as it's a big Frenchman as reaches five foot high, an' they live upo' spoon-meat mostly. I knew a man as his father had a particular

knowledge o' the French. I should like to know what them grasshoppers are to do against such fine fellows as our young Captain Arthur. Why, it 'ud astonish a Frenchman only to look at him; his arm's thicker nor a Frenchman's body, I'll be bound, for they pinch theirsells in wi' stays; and it's easy enough, for they've got nothing i' their insides.'

'Where IS the captain, as he wasna at church to-day?' said Adam. 'I was talking to him o' Friday, and he said nothing about his going away.'

'Oh, he's only gone to Eagledale for a bit o' fishing; I reckon he'll be back again afore many days are o'er, for he's to be at all th' arranging and preparing o' things for the comin' o' age o' the 30th o' July. But he's fond o' getting away for a bit, now and then. Him and th' old squire fit one another like frost and flowers.'

Mr Craig smiled and winked slowly as he made this last observation, but the subject was not developed farther, for now they had reached the turning in the road where Adam and his companions must say 'good-bye.' The gardener, too, would have had to turn off in the same direction if he had not accepted Mr Poyser's invitation to tea. Mrs. Poyser duly seconded the invitation, for she would have held it a deep disgrace not to make her neighbours welcome to her house: personal likes and dislikes must not interfere with that sacred custom. Moreover, Mr Craig had always been full of civilities to the family at the Hall Farm, and Mrs. Poyser was scrupulous in declaring that she had 'nothing to say again' him, on'y it was a pity he couldna be hatched o'er again, an' hatched different.'

So Adam and Seth, with their mother between them, wound their way down to the valley and up again to the old house, where a saddened memory had taken the place of a long, long anxiety - where Adam would never have to ask again as he entered, 'Where's Father?'

And the other family party, with Mr Craig for company, went back to the pleasant bright house-place at the Hall Farm - all with quiet minds, except Hetty, who knew now where Arthur was gone, but was only the more puzzled and uneasy. For it appeared that his absence was quite voluntary; he need not have gone - he would not have gone if he had wanted to see her. She had a sickening sense that no lot could ever be pleasant to her again if her Thursday night's vision was not to be fulfilled; and in this moment of chill, bare, wintry disappointment and doubt, she looked towards the possibility of being with Arthur again, of meeting his loving glance, and hearing his soft words with that eager yearning which one may call the 'growing pain' of passion.