

## Chapter XX - Adam Visits The Hall Farm

ADAM came back from his work in the empty waggon - that was why he had changed his clothes - and was ready to set out to the Hall Farm when it still wanted a quarter to seven.

'What's thee got thy Sunday cloose on for?' said Lisbeth complainingly, as he came downstairs. 'Thee artna goin' to th' school i' thy best coat?'

'No, Mother,' said Adam, quietly. 'I'm going to the Hall Farm, but mayhap I may go to the school after, so thee mustna wonder if I'm a bit late. Seth 'ull be at home in half an hour - he's only gone to the village; so thee wutna mind.'

'Eh, an' what's thee got thy best cloose on for to go to th' Hall Farm? The Poyser folks see'd thee in 'em yesterday, I warrand. What dost mean by turnin' worki'day into Sunday a-that'n? It's poor keepin' company wi' folks as donna like to see thee i' thy workin' jacket.'

'Good-bye, mother, I can't stay,' said Adam, putting on his hat and going out.

But he had no sooner gone a few paces beyond the door than Lisbeth became uneasy at the thought that she had vexed him. Of course, the secret of her objection to the best clothes was her suspicion that they were put on for Hetty's sake; but deeper than all her peevisness lay the need that her son should love her. She hurried after him, and laid hold of his arm before he had got half-way down to the brook, and said, 'Nay, my lad, thee wutna go away angered wi' thy mother, an' her got nought to do but to sit by hersen an' think on thee?'

'Nay, nay, Mother,' said Adam, gravely, and standing still while he put his arm on her shoulder, 'I'm not angered. But I wish, for thy own sake, thee'dst be more contented to let me do what I've made up my mind to do. I'll never be no other than a good son to thee as long as we live. But a man has other feelings besides what he owes to's father and mother, and thee oughtna to want to rule over me body and soul. And thee must make up thy mind as I'll not give way to thee where I've a right to do what I like. So let us have no more words about it.'

'Eh,' said Lisbeth, not willing to show that she felt the real bearing of Adam's words, 'and' who likes to see thee i' thy best cloose better nor thy mother? An' when thee'st got thy face washed as clean as the smooth white pibble, an' thy hair combed so nice, and thy eyes a-sparklin' - what else is there as thy old mother should like to look at half so well? An' thee sha't put on thy Sunday cloose when thee lik'st for me - I'll ne'er plague thee no moor about'n.'

'Well, well; good-bye, mother,' said Adam, kissing her and hurrying away. He saw there was no other means of putting an end to the dialogue. Lisbeth stood still on the spot, shading her eyes and looking after him till he was quite out of sight. She felt to the full all the meaning that had lain in Adam's words, and, as she lost sight of him and turned back slowly into the house, she said aloud to herself - for it was her way to speak her thoughts aloud in the long days when her husband and sons were at their work - 'Eh, he'll be tellin' me as he's goin' to bring her home one o' these days; an' she'll be missis o'er me, and I mun look on, belike, while she uses the blue-edged platters, and breaks 'em, mayhap, though there's ne'er been one broke sin' my old man an' me bought 'em at the fair twenty 'ear come next Whissuntide. Eh!' she went on, still louder, as she caught up her knitting from the table, 'but she'll ne'er knit the lad's stockin's, nor foot 'em nayther, while I live; an' when I'm gone, he'll bethink him as nobody 'ull ne'er fit's leg an' foot as his old mother did. She'll know nothin' o' narrowin' an' heelin', I warrand, an' she'll make a long toe as he canna get's boot on. That's what comes o' marr'in' young wenches. I war gone thirty, an' th' feyther too, afore we war married; an' young enough too. She'll be a poor dratchell by then SHE'S thirty, a-marr'in' a-that'n, afore her teeth's all come.'

Adam walked so fast that he was at the yard-gate before seven. Martin Poyser and the grandfather were not yet come in from the meadow: every one was in the meadow, even to the black-and-tan terrier - no one kept watch in the yard but the bull-dog; and when Adam reached the house-door, which stood wide open, he saw there was no one in the bright clean house-place. But he guessed where Mrs. Poyser and some one else would be, quite within hearing; so he knocked on the door and said in his strong voice, 'Mrs. Poyser within?'

'Come in, Mr Bede, come in,' Mrs. Poyser called out from the dairy. She always gave Adam this title when she received him in her own house. 'You may come into the dairy if you will, for I canna justly leave the cheese.'

Adam walked into the dairy, where Mrs. Poyser and Nancy were crushing the first evening cheese.

'Why, you might think you war come to a dead-house,' said Mrs. Poyser, as he stood in the open doorway; 'they're all i' the meadow; but Martin's sure to be in afore long, for they're leaving the hay cocked to-night, ready for carrying first thing to-morrow. I've been forced t' have Nancy in, upo' 'count as Hetty must gether the red currants to-night; the fruit allays ripens so contrairy, just when every hand's wanted. An' there's no trustin' the children to gether it, for they put more into their own mouths nor into the basket; you might as well set the wasps to gether the fruit.'

Adam longed to say he would go into the garden till Mr Poyser came in, but he was not quite courageous enough, so he said, 'I could be looking at your spinning-wheel, then, and see what wants doing to it. Perhaps it stands in the house, where I can find it?'

'No, I've put it away in the right-hand parlour; but let it be till I can fetch it and show it you. I'd be glad now if you'd go into the garden and tell Hetty to send Totty in. The child 'ull run in if she's told, an' I know Hetty's lettin' her eat too many currants. I'll be much obliged to you, Mr Bede, if you'll go and send her in; an' there's the York and Lankester roses beautiful in the garden now - you'll like to see 'em. But you'd like a drink o' whey first, p'r'aps; I know you're fond o' whey, as most folks is when they hanna got to crush it out.'

'Thank you, Mrs. Poyser,' said Adam; 'a drink o' whey's allays a treat to me. I'd rather have it than beer any day.'

'Aye, aye,' said Mrs. Poyser, reaching a small white basin that stood on the shelf, and dipping it into the whey-tub, 'the smell o' bread's sweet t' everybody but the baker. The Miss Irwines allays say, 'Oh, Mrs. Poyser, I envy you your dairy; and I envy you your chickens; and what a beautiful thing a farm-house is, to be sure!' An' I say, 'Yes; a farm-house is a fine thing for them as look on, an' don't know the liftin', an' the stannin', an' the worritin' o' th' inside as belongs to't.'

'Why, Mrs. Poyser, you wouldn't like to live anywhere else but in a farm-house, so well as you manage it,' said Adam, taking the basin; 'and there can be nothing to look at pleasanter nor a fine milch cow, standing up to'ts knees in pasture, and the new milk frothing in the pail, and the fresh butter ready for market, and the calves, and the poultry. Here's to your health, and may you allays have strength to look after your own dairy, and set a pattern t' all the farmers' wives in the country.'

Mrs. Poyser was not to be caught in the weakness of smiling at a compliment, but a quiet complacency over-spread her face like a stealing sunbeam, and gave a milder glance than usual to her blue-grey eyes, as she looked at Adam drinking the whey. Ah! I think I taste that whey now - with a flavour so delicate that one can hardly distinguish it from an odour, and with that soft gliding warmth that fills one's imagination with a still, happy dreaminess. And the light music of the dropping whey is in my ears, mingling with the twittering of a bird outside the wire network window - the window overlooking the garden, and shaded by tall Guelder roses.

'Have a little more, Mr Bede?' said Mrs. Poyser, as Adam set down the basin.

'No, thank you; I'll go into the garden now, and send in the little lass.'

'Aye, do; and tell her to come to her mother in the dairy.'

Adam walked round by the rick-yard, at present empty of ricks, to the little wooden gate leading into the garden - once the well-tended kitchen-garden of a manor-house; now, but for the handsome brick wall with stone coping that ran along one side of it, a true farmhouse garden, with hardy perennial flowers, unpruned fruit-trees, and kitchen vegetables growing together in careless, half-neglected abundance. In that leafy, flowery, bushy time, to look for any one in this garden was like playing at 'hide-and-seek.' There were the tall hollyhocks beginning to flower and dazzle the eye with their pink, white, and yellow; there were the syringas and Guelder roses, all large and disorderly for want of trimming; there were leafy walls of scarlet beans and late peas; there was a row of bushy filberts in one direction, and in another a huge apple-tree making a barren circle under its low-spreading boughs. But what signified a barren patch or two? The garden was so large. There was always a superfluity of broad beans - it took nine or ten of Adam's strides to get to the end of the uncut grass walk that ran by the side of them; and as for other vegetables, there was so much more room than was necessary for them that in the rotation of crops a large flourishing bed of groundsel was of yearly occurrence on one spot or other. The very rose-trees at which Adam stopped to pluck one looked as if they grew wild; they were all huddled together in bushy masses, now flaunting with wide-open petals, almost all of them of the streaked pink-and-white kind, which doubtless dated from the union of the houses of York and Lancaster. Adam was wise enough to choose a compact Provence rose that peeped out half-smothered by its flaunting scentless neighbours, and held it in his hand - he thought he should be more at ease holding something in his hand - as he walked on to the far end of the garden, where he remembered there was the largest row of currant-trees, not far off from the great yew-tree arbour.

But he had not gone many steps beyond the roses, when he heard the shaking of a bough, and a boy's voice saying, 'Now, then, Totty, hold out your pinny - there's a duck.'

The voice came from the boughs of a tall cherry-tree, where Adam had no difficulty in discerning a small blue-pinafored figure perched in a commodious position where the fruit was thickest. Doubtless Totty was below, behind the screen of peas. Yes - with her bonnet hanging down her back, and her fat face, dreadfully smeared with red juice, turned up towards the cherry-tree, while she held her little round hole of a mouth and her red-stained pinafore to receive the promised downfall. I am sorry to say, more than half the cherries that fell were hard and yellow instead of juicy and red; but Totty spent no time in

useless regrets, and she was already sucking the third juiciest when Adam said, 'There now, Totty, you've got your cherries. Run into the house with 'em to Mother - she wants you - she's in the dairy. Run in this minute - there's a good little girl.'

He lifted her up in his strong arms and kissed her as he spoke, a ceremony which Totty regarded as a tiresome interruption to cherry-eating; and when he set her down she trotted off quite silently towards the house, sucking her cherries as she went along.

'Tommy, my lad, take care you're not shot for a little thieving bird,' said Adam, as he walked on towards the currant-trees.

He could see there was a large basket at the end of the row: Hetty would not be far off, and Adam already felt as if she were looking at him. Yet when he turned the corner she was standing with her back towards him, and stooping to gather the low-hanging fruit. Strange that she had not heard him coming! Perhaps it was because she was making the leaves rustle. She started when she became conscious that some one was near - started so violently that she dropped the basin with the currants in it, and then, when she saw it was Adam, she turned from pale to deep red. That blush made his heart beat with a new happiness. Hetty had never blushed at seeing him before.

'I frightened you,' he said, with a delicious sense that it didn't signify what he said, since Hetty seemed to feel as much as he did; 'let ME pick the currants up.'

That was soon done, for they had only fallen in a tangled mass on the grass-plot, and Adam, as he rose and gave her the basin again, looked straight into her eyes with the subdued tenderness that belongs to the first moments of hopeful love.

Hetty did not turn away her eyes; her blush had subsided, and she met his glance with a quiet sadness, which contented Adam because it was so unlike anything he had seen in her before.

'There's not many more currants to get,' she said; 'I shall soon ha' done now.'

'I'll help you,' said Adam; and he fetched the large basket, which was nearly full of currants, and set it close to them.

Not a word more was spoken as they gathered the currants. Adam's heart was too full to speak, and he thought Hetty knew all that was in it. She was not indifferent to his presence after all; she had blushed when she saw him, and then there was that touch of sadness about her which must surely mean love, since it was the opposite of her

usual manner, which had often impressed him as indifference. And he could glance at her continually as she bent over the fruit, while the level evening sunbeams stole through the thick apple-tree boughs, and rested on her round cheek and neck as if they too were in love with her. It was to Adam the time that a man can least forget in after-life, the time when he believes that the first woman he has ever loved betrays by a slight something - a word, a tone, a glance, the quivering of a lip or an eyelid - that she is at least beginning to love him in return. The sign is so slight, it is scarcely perceptible to the ear or eye - he could describe it to no one - it is a mere feather-touch, yet it seems to have changed his whole being, to have merged an uneasy yearning into a delicious unconsciousness of everything but the present moment. So much of our early gladness vanishes utterly from our memory: we can never recall the joy with which we laid our heads on our mother's bosom or rode on our father's back in childhood. Doubtless that joy is wrought up into our nature, as the sunlight of long-past mornings is wrought up in the soft mellowness of the apricot, but it is gone for ever from our imagination, and we can only BELIEVE in the joy of childhood. But the first glad moment in our first love is a vision which returns to us to the last, and brings with it a thrill of feeling intense and special as the recurrent sensation of a sweet odour breathed in a far-off hour of happiness. It is a memory that gives a more exquisite touch to tenderness, that feeds the madness of jealousy and adds the last keenness to the agony of despair.

Hetty bending over the red bunches, the level rays piercing the screen of apple-tree boughs, the length of bushy garden beyond, his own emotion as he looked at her and believed that she was thinking of him, and that there was no need for them to talk - Adam remembered it all to the last moment of his life.

And Hetty? You know quite well that Adam was mistaken about her. Like many other men, he thought the signs of love for another were signs of love towards himself. When Adam was approaching unseen by her, she was absorbed as usual in thinking and wondering about Arthur's possible return. The sound of any man's footstep would have affected her just in the same way - she would have FELT it might be Arthur before she had time to see, and the blood that forsook her cheek in the agitation of that momentary feeling would have rushed back again at the sight of any one else just as much as at the sight of Adam. He was not wrong in thinking that a change had come over Hetty: the anxieties and fears of a first passion, with which she was trembling, had become stronger than vanity, had given her for the first time that sense of helpless dependence on another's feeling which awakens the clinging deprecating womanhood even in the shallowest girl that can ever experience it, and creates in her a sensibility to kindness which found her quite hard before. For the first time Hetty

felt that there was something soothing to her in Adam's timid yet manly tenderness. She wanted to be treated lovingly - oh, it was very hard to bear this blank of absence, silence, apparent indifference, after those moments of glowing love! She was not afraid that Adam would tease her with love-making and flattering speeches like her other admirers; he had always been so reserved to her; she could enjoy without any fear the sense that this strong brave man loved her and was near her. It never entered into her mind that Adam was pitiable too - that Adam too must suffer one day.

Hetty, we know, was not the first woman that had behaved more gently to the man who loved her in vain because she had herself begun to love another. It was a very old story, but Adam knew nothing about it, so he drank in the sweet delusion.

'That'll do,' said Hetty, after a little while. 'Aunt wants me to leave some on the trees. I'll take 'em in now.'

'It's very well I came to carry the basket,' said Adam 'for it 'ud ha' been too heavy for your little arms.'

'No; I could ha' carried it with both hands.'

'Oh, I daresay,' said Adam, smiling, 'and been as long getting into the house as a little ant carrying a caterpillar. Have you ever seen those tiny fellows carrying things four times as big as themselves?'

'No,' said Hetty, indifferently, not caring to know the difficulties of ant life.

'Oh, I used to watch 'em often when I was a lad. But now, you see, I can carry the basket with one arm, as if it was an empty nutshell, and give you th' other arm to lean on. Won't you? Such big arms as mine were made for little arms like yours to lean on.'

Hetty smiled faintly and put her arm within his. Adam looked down at her, but her eyes were turned dreamily towards another corner of the garden.

'Have you ever been to Eagledale?' she said, as they walked slowly along.

'Yes,' said Adam, pleased to have her ask a question about himself. 'Ten years ago, when I was a lad, I went with father to see about some work there. It's a wonderful sight - rocks and caves such as you never saw in your life. I never had a right notion o' rocks till I went there.'

'How long did it take to get there?'

'Why, it took us the best part o' two days' walking. But it's nothing of a day's journey for anybody as has got a first-rate nag. The captain 'ud get there in nine or ten hours, I'll be bound, he's such a rider. And I shouldn't wonder if he's back again to-morrow; he's too active to rest long in that lonely place, all by himself, for there's nothing but a bit of a inn i' that part where he's gone to fish. I wish he'd got th' estate in his hands; that 'ud be the right thing for him, for it 'ud give him plenty to do, and he'd do't well too, for all he's so young; he's got better notions o' things than many a man twice his age. He spoke very handsome to me th' other day about lending me money to set up i' business; and if things came round that way, I'd rather be beholding to him nor to any man i' the world.'

Poor Adam was led on to speak about Arthur because he thought Hetty would be pleased to know that the young squire was so ready to befriend him; the fact entered into his future prospects, which he would like to seem promising in her eyes. And it was true that Hetty listened with an interest which brought a new light into her eyes and a half-smile upon her lips.

'How pretty the roses are now!' Adam continued, pausing to look at them. 'See! I stole the prettiest, but I didna mean to keep it myself. I think these as are all pink, and have got a finer sort o' green leaves, are prettier than the striped uns, don't you?'

He set down the basket and took the rose from his button-hole.

'It smells very sweet,' he said; 'those striped uns have no smell. Stick it in your frock, and then you can put it in water after. It 'ud be a pity to let it fade.'

Hetty took the rose, smiling as she did so at the pleasant thought that Arthur could so soon get back if he liked. There was a flash of hope and happiness in her mind, and with a sudden impulse of gaiety she did what she had very often done before - stuck the rose in her hair a little above the left ear. The tender admiration in Adam's face was slightly shadowed by reluctant disapproval. Hetty's love of finery was just the thing that would most provoke his mother, and he himself disliked it as much as it was possible for him to dislike anything that belonged to her.

'Ah,' he said, 'that's like the ladies in the pictures at the Chase; they've mostly got flowers or feathers or gold things i' their hair, but somehow I don't like to see 'em they allays put me i' mind o' the painted women outside the shows at Treddles'on Fair. What can a woman have to set her off better than her own hair, when it curls so, like yours? If a woman's young and pretty, I think you can see her good looks all the better for her being plain dressed. Why, Dinah Morris looks very nice,



for all she wears such a plain cap and gown. It seems to me as a woman's face doesna want flowers; it's almost like a flower itself. I'm sure yours is.'

'Oh, very well,' said Hetty, with a little playful pout, taking the rose out of her hair. 'I'll put one o' Dinah's caps on when we go in, and you'll see if I look better in it. She left one behind, so I can take the pattern.'

'Nay, nay, I don't want you to wear a Methodist cap like Dinah's. I daresay it's a very ugly cap, and I used to think when I saw her here as it was nonsense for her to dress different t' other people; but I never rightly noticed her till she came to see mother last week, and then I thought the cap seemed to fit her face somehow as th 'acorn-cup fits th' acorn, and I shouldn't like to see her so well without it. But you've got another sort o' face; I'd have you just as you are now, without anything t' interfere with your own looks. It's like when a man's singing a good tune - you don't want t' hear bells tinkling and interfering wi' the sound.'

He took her arm and put it within his again, looking down on her fondly. He was afraid she should think he had lectured her, imagining, as we are apt to do, that she had perceived all the thoughts he had only half-expressed. And the thing he dreaded most was lest any cloud should come over this evening's happiness. For the world he would not have spoken of his love to Hetty yet, till this commencing kindness towards him should have grown into unmistakable love. In his imagination he saw long years of his future life stretching before him, blest with the right to call Hetty his own: he could be content with very little at present. So he took up the basket of currants once more, and they went on towards the house.

The scene had quite changed in the half-hour that Adam had been in the garden. The yard was full of life now: Marty was letting the screaming geese through the gate, and wickedly provoking the gander by hissing at him; the granary-door was groaning on its hinges as Alick shut it, after dealing out the corn; the horses were being led out to watering, amidst much barking of all the three dogs and many 'whups' from Tim the ploughman, as if the heavy animals who held down their meek, intelligent heads, and lifted their shaggy feet so deliberately, were likely to rush wildly in every direction but the right. Everybody was come back from the meadow; and when Hetty and Adam entered the house-place, Mr Poyser was seated in the three-cornered chair, and the grandfather in the large arm-chair opposite, looking on with pleasant expectation while the supper was being laid on the oak table. Mrs. Poyser had laid the cloth herself - a cloth made of homespun linen, with a shining checkered pattern on it, and of an agreeable whitey-brown hue, such as all sensible housewives like to

see - none of your bleached 'shop-rag' that would wear into holes in no time, but good homespun that would last for two generations. The cold veal, the fresh lettuces, and the stuffed chine might well look tempting to hungry men who had dined at half-past twelve o'clock. On the large deal table against the wall there were bright pewter plates and spoons and cans, ready for Alick and his companions; for the master and servants ate their supper not far off each other; which was all the pleasanter, because if a remark about to-morrow morning's work occurred to Mr Poyser, Alick was at hand to hear it.

'Well, Adam, I'm glad to see ye,' said Mr Poyser. 'What! ye've been helping Hetty to gether the curran's, eh? Come, sit ye down, sit ye down. Why, it's pretty near a three-week since y' had your supper with us; and the missis has got one of her rare stuffed chines. I'm glad ye're come.'

'Hetty,' said Mrs. Poyser, as she looked into the basket of currants to see if the fruit was fine, 'run upstairs and send Molly down. She's putting Totty to bed, and I want her to draw th' ale, for Nancy's busy yet i' the dairy. You can see to the child. But whatever did you let her run away from you along wi' Tommy for, and stuff herself wi' fruit as she can't eat a bit o' good victual?'

This was said in a lower tone than usual, while her husband was talking to Adam; for Mrs. Poyser was strict in adherence to her own rules of propriety, and she considered that a young girl was not to be treated sharply in the presence of a respectable man who was courting her. That would not be fair-play: every woman was young in her turn, and had her chances of matrimony, which it was a point of honour for other women not to spoil - just as one market-woman who has sold her own eggs must not try to balk another of a customer.

Hetty made haste to run away upstairs, not easily finding an answer to her aunt's question, and Mrs. Poyser went out to see after Marty and Tommy and bring them in to supper.

Soon they were all seated - the two rosy lads, one on each side, by the pale mother, a place being left for Hetty between Adam and her uncle. Alick too was come in, and was seated in his far corner, eating cold broad beans out of a large dish with his pocket-knife, and finding a flavour in them which he would not have exchanged for the finest pineapple.

'What a time that gell is drawing th' ale, to be sure!' said Mrs. Poyser, when she was dispensing her slices of stuffed chine. 'I think she sets the jug under and forgets to turn the tap, as there's nothing you can't believe o' them wenches: they'll set the empty kettle o' the fire, and then come an hour after to see if the water boils.'

'She's drawin' for the men too,' said Mr Poyser. 'Thee shouldst ha' told her to bring our jug up first.'

'Told her?' said Mrs. Poyser. 'Yes, I might spend all the wind i' my body, an' take the bellows too, if I was to tell them gells everything as their own sharpness wanna tell 'em. Mr Bede, will you take some vinegar with your lettuce? Aye you're i' the right not. It spoils the flavour o' the chine, to my thinking. It's poor eating where the flavour o' the meat lies i' the cruets. There's folks as make bad butter and trusten to the salt t' hide it.'

Mrs. Poyser's attention was here diverted by the appearance of Molly, carrying a large jug, two small mugs, and four drinking-cans, all full of ale or small beer - an interesting example of the prehensile power possessed by the human hand. Poor Molly's mouth was rather wider open than usual, as she walked along with her eyes fixed on the double cluster of vessels in her hands, quite innocent of the expression in her mistress's eye.

'Molly, I niver knew your equils - to think o' your poor mother as is a widow, an' I took you wi' as good as no character, an' the times an' times I've told you....'

Molly had not seen the lightning, and the thunder shook her nerves the more for the want of that preparation. With a vague alarmed sense that she must somehow comport herself differently, she hastened her step a little towards the far deal table, where she might set down her cans - caught her foot in her apron, which had become untied, and fell with a crash and a splash into a pool of beer; whereupon a tittering explosion from Marty and Tommy, and a serious 'Ello!' from Mr Poyser, who saw his draught of ale unpleasantly deferred.

'There you go!' resumed Mrs. Poyser, in a cutting tone, as she rose and went towards the cupboard while Molly began dolefully to pick up the fragments of pottery. 'It's what I told you 'ud come, over and over again; and there's your month's wage gone, and more, to pay for that jug as I've had i' the house this ten year, and nothing ever happened to't before; but the crockery you've broke sin' here in th' house you've been 'ud make a parson swear - God forgi' me for saying so - an' if it had been boiling wort out o' the copper, it 'ud ha' been the same, and you'd ha' been scalded and very like lamed for life, as there's no knowing but what you will be some day if you go on; for anybody 'ud think you'd got the St. Vitus's Dance, to see the things you've throwed down. It's a pity but what the bits was stacked up for you to see, though it's neither seeing nor hearing as 'ull make much odds to you - anybody 'ud think you war case-hardened.'

Poor Molly's tears were dropping fast by this time, and in her desperation at the lively movement of the beer-stream towards Alick's legs, she was converting her apron into a mop, while Mrs. Poyser, opening the cupboard, turned a blighting eye upon her.

'Ah,' she went on, 'you'll do no good wi' crying an' making more wet to wipe up. It's all your own wilfulness, as I tell you, for there's nobody no call to break anything if they'll only go the right way to work. But wooden folks had need ha' wooden things t' handle. And here must I take the brown-and-white jug, as it's niver been used three times this year, and go down i' the cellar myself, and belike catch my death, and be laid up wi' inflammation....'

Mrs. Poyser had turned round from the cupboard with the brown-and-white jug in her hand, when she caught sight of something at the other end of the kitchen; perhaps it was because she was already trembling and nervous that the apparition had so strong an effect on her; perhaps jug-breaking, like other crimes, has a contagious influence. However it was, she stared and started like a ghost-seer, and the precious brown-and-white jug fell to the ground, parting for ever with its spout and handle.

'Did ever anybody see the like?' she said, with a suddenly lowered tone, after a moment's bewildered glance round the room. 'The jugs are bewitched, I think. It's them nasty glazed handles - they slip o'er the finger like a snail.'

'Why, thee'st let thy own whip fly i' thy face,' said her husband, who had now joined in the laugh of the young ones.

'It's all very fine to look on and grin,' rejoined Mrs. Poyser; 'but there's times when the crockery seems alive an' flies out o' your hand like a bird. It's like the glass, sometimes, 'ull crack as it stands. What is to be broke WILL be broke, for I never dropped a thing i' my life for want o' holding it, else I should never ha' kept the crockery all these 'ears as I bought at my own wedding. And Hetty, are you mad? Whativer do you mean by coming down i' that way, and making one think as there's a ghost a-walking i' th' house?'

A new outbreak of laughter, while Mrs. Poyser was speaking, was caused, less by her sudden conversion to a fatalistic view of jug-breaking than by that strange appearance of Hetty, which had startled her aunt. The little minx had found a black gown of her aunt's, and pinned it close round her neck to look like Dinah's, had made her hair as flat as she could, and had tied on one of Dinah's high-crowned borderless net caps. The thought of Dinah's pale grave face and mild grey eyes, which the sight of the gown and cap brought with it, made it a laughable surprise enough to see them replaced by Hetty's round

rosy cheeks and coquettish dark eyes. The boys got off their chairs and jumped round her, clapping their hands, and even Alick gave a low ventral laugh as he looked up from his beans. Under cover of the noise, Mrs. Poyser went into the back kitchen to send Nancy into the cellar with the great pewter measure, which had some chance of being free from bewitchment.

'Why, Hetty, lass, are ye turned Methodist?' said Mr Poyser, with that comfortable slow enjoyment of a laugh which one only sees in stout people. 'You must pull your face a deal longer before you'll do for one; mustna she, Adam? How come you put them things on, eh?'

'Adam said he liked Dinah's cap and gown better nor my clothes,' said Hetty, sitting down demurely. 'He says folks looks better in ugly clothes.'

'Nay, nay,' said Adam, looking at her admiringly; 'I only said they seemed to suit Dinah. But if I'd said you'd look pretty in 'em, I should ha' said nothing but what was true.'

'Why, thee thought'st Hetty war a ghost, didstna?' said Mr Poyser to his wife, who now came back and took her seat again. 'Thee look'dst as scared as scared.'

'It little sinnifies how I looked,' said Mrs. Poyser; 'looks 'ull mend no jugs, nor laughing neither, as I see. Mr Bede, I'm sorry you've to wait so long for your ale, but it's coming in a minute. Make yourself at home wi' th' cold potatoes: I know you like 'em. Tommy, I'll send you to bed this minute, if you don't give over laughing. What is there to laugh at, I should like to know? I'd sooner cry nor laugh at the sight o' that poor thing's cap; and there's them as 'ud be better if they could make theirselves like her i' more ways nor putting on her cap. It little becomes anybody i' this house to make fun o' my sister's child, an' her just gone away from us, as it went to my heart to part wi' her. An' I know one thing, as if trouble was to come, an' I was to be laid up i' my bed, an' the children was to die - as there's no knowing but what they will - an' the murrain was to come among the cattle again, an' everything went to rack an' ruin, I say we might be glad to get sight o' Dinah's cap again, wi' her own face under it, border or no border. For she's one o' them things as looks the brightest on a rainy day, and loves you the best when you're most i' need on't.'

Mrs. Poyser, you perceive, was aware that nothing would be so likely to expel the comic as the terrible. Tommy, who was of a susceptible disposition, and very fond of his mother, and who had, besides, eaten so many cherries as to have his feelings less under command than usual, was so affected by the dreadful picture she had made of the possible future that he began to cry; and the good-natured father,

indulgent to all weaknesses but those of negligent farmers, said to Hetty, 'You'd better take the things off again, my lass; it hurts your aunt to see 'em.'

Hetty went upstairs again, and the arrival of the ale made an agreeable diversion; for Adam had to give his opinion of the new tap, which could not be otherwise than complimentary to Mrs. Poyser; and then followed a discussion on the secrets of good brewing, the folly of stinginess in 'hopping,' and the doubtful economy of a farmer's making his own malt. Mrs. Poyser had so many opportunities of expressing herself with weight on these subjects that by the time supper was ended, the ale-jug refilled, and Mr Poyser's pipe alight she was once more in high good humour, and ready, at Adam's request, to fetch the broken spinning-wheel for his inspection.

'Ah,' said Adam, looking at it carefully, 'here's a nice bit o' turning wanted. It's a pretty wheel. I must have it up at the turning-shop in the village and do it there, for I've no convenience for turning at home. If you'll send it to Mr Burge's shop i' the morning, I'll get it done for you by Wednesday. I've been turning it over in my mind,' he continued, looking at Mr Poyser, 'to make a bit more convenience at home for nice jobs o' cabinet-making. I've always done a deal at such little things in odd hours, and they're profitable, for there's more workmanship nor material in 'em. I look for me and Seth to get a little business for ourselves i' that way, for I know a man at Rosseter as 'ull take as many things as we should make, besides what we could get orders for round about.'

Mr Poyser entered with interest into a project which seemed a step towards Adam's becoming a 'master-man,' and Mrs. Poyser gave her approbation to the scheme of the movable kitchen cupboard, which was to be capable of containing grocery, pickles, crockery, and house-linen in the utmost compactness without confusion. Hetty, once more in her own dress, with her neckerchief pushed a little backwards on this warm evening, was seated picking currants near the window, where Adam could see her quite well. And so the time passed pleasantly till Adam got up to go. He was pressed to come again soon, but not to stay longer, for at this busy time sensible people would not run the risk of being sleepy at five o'clock in the morning.

'I shall take a step farther,' said Adam, 'and go on to see Mester Massey, for he wasn't at church yesterday, and I've not seen him for a week past. I've never hardly known him to miss church before.'

'Aye,' said Mr Poyser, 'we've heard nothing about him, for it's the boys' hollodays now, so we can give you no account.'

'But you'll niver think o' going there at this hour o' the night?' said Mrs. Poyser, folding up her knitting.

'Oh, Mester Massey sits up late,' said Adam. 'An' the night-school's not over yet. Some o' the men don't come till late - they've got so far to walk. And Bartle himself's never in bed till it's gone eleven.'

'I wouldna have him to live wi' me, then,' said Mrs. Poyser, 'a-dropping candle-grease about, as you're like to tumble down o' the floor the first thing i' the morning.'

'Aye, eleven o'clock's late - it's late,' said old Martin. 'I ne'er sot up so i' MY life, not to say as it warn a marr'in', or a christenin', or a wake, or th' harvest supper. Eleven o'clock's late.'

'Why, I sit up till after twelve often,' said Adam, laughing, 'but it isn't t' eat and drink extry, it's to work extry. Good-night, Mrs. Poyser; good-night, Hetty.'

Hetty could only smile and not shake hands, for hers were dyed and damp with currant-juice; but all the rest gave a hearty shake to the large palm that was held out to them, and said, 'Come again, come again!'

'Aye, think o' that now,' said Mr Poyser, when Adam was out of on the causeway. 'Sitting up till past twelve to do extry work! Ye'll not find many men o' six-an' twenty as 'ull do to put i' the shafts wi' him. If you can catch Adam for a husband, Hetty, you'll ride i' your own spring-cart some day, I'll be your warrant.'

Hetty was moving across the kitchen with the currants, so her uncle did not see the little toss of the head with which she answered him. To ride in a spring-cart seemed a very miserable lot indeed to her now.