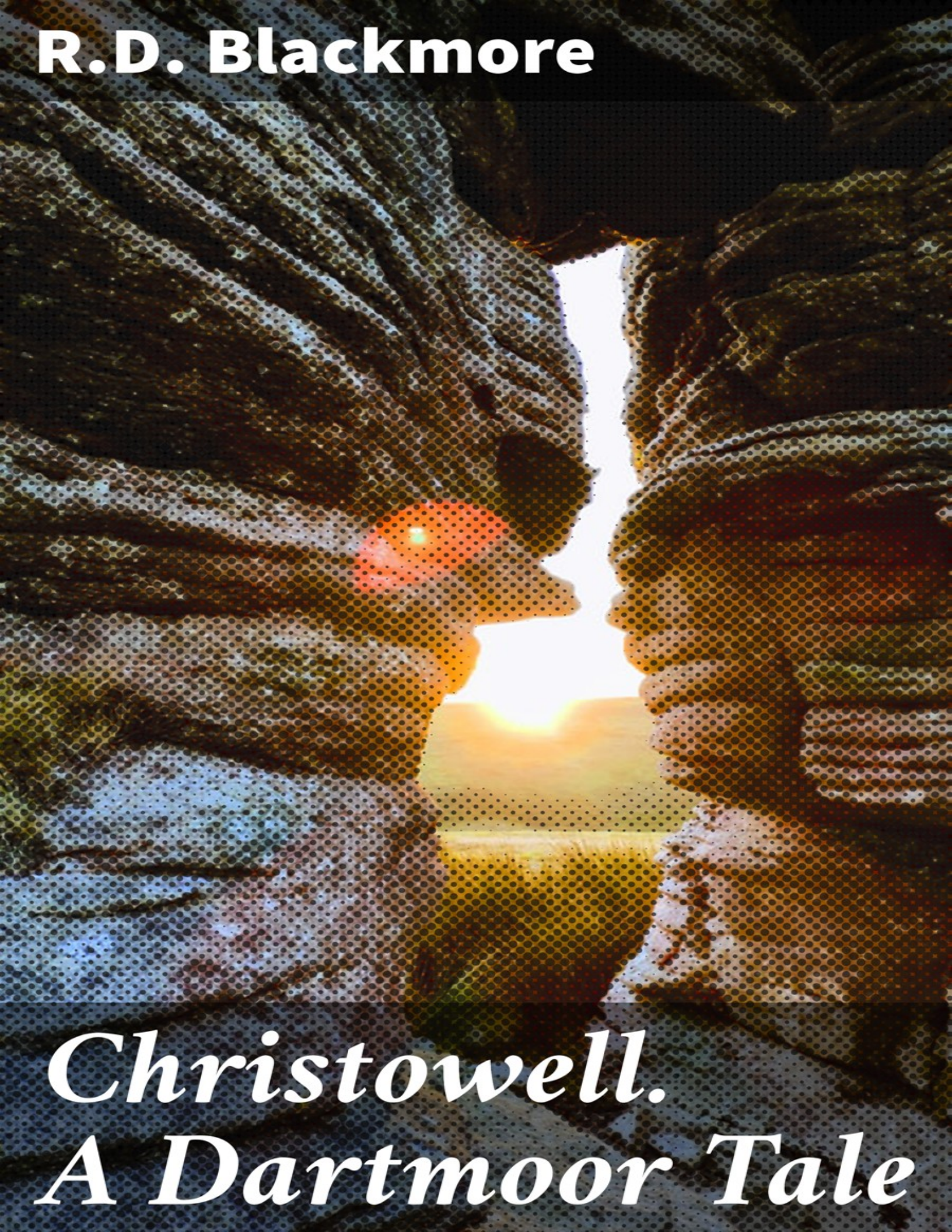
R.D. Blackmore



Christowell.
A Dartmoor Tale

R.D. Blackmore

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The Disputed Will

CHAPTER I. — FAIR FLOWERS

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In the fresh young vigour of an April sun, the world has a cheerful aspect, and is doubly bright, and vastly warmer, when beheld through good flint-glass. Especially while the east winds hold, which never now forget to hold the spring of England, heart and throat. But forty years ago, there were some springs of gentle quality.

Upon a pleasant April morning, of the sweet inconstant kind, such as we vainly sigh for now, a gardening man, with a quick step, came into his happy greenhouse. A door from his favourite sitting-room led into this still more favoured place; and the smile with which he entered showed that he expected to find pleasure here. It was a long, low, span-roof house, with no side-lights, and very simple, not even framed with rafters. Yet snug from violence of wind, and bright with every sunbeam; this humble house was rich with joy, for all who love good health, and peace.

Here, were the sweet obedience, and the gay luxuriance of the vine; than which no lovelier creature grows. Broad leaves, spreading into pointrels, waved and cut with crisp indenture, coving into, or overlapping, the ripple of each other; clear round shoots, cresting up like swans, and sparkling with beads of their own breath; infant bunches, on the bend as yet, but promising to straighten, as the berries got their weight; some bravely announcing grapes already, some hoping to do so before nightfall, through the misty web of bloom; others only just awaking into eyes of golden

dust; yet all alike rejoicing, shining, meeting the beauty of the early sun, and arousing their own to answer it.

And here was a multitude of pretty things as well, that will not be chambered with the vine too long, yet gladly accept a kind lift upon the road from winter to summer, which her auspice yields. Boxes, and little tubs, and pots, and pans, and frames of willow, and biscuit-cases, were cropped with growth in different stages, and of divers orders, through all the innumerable tones of green, and all the infinite variety of form. But all, to the keenest human eye, brisk, and clean, and in their duty.

The man, who had shaped these things, and led them (under the Maker's loftier will) was coming to them now, with a cheerful heart, and faith in his own handiwork. The finest gardener, that ever grew, knows well that he cannot command success, and has long survived young arrogance. Still he continues to hope for the best; for the essence of the gentle craft is hope, rooted in labour, and trained by love. So this man took a short taste of the air, glanced at the glass, and the glitter of the vines, and felt the climate of the house, as keenly as if he were a plant therein. For the moment, there was no fault to find. Genial warmth was in the air, and gentle dew on every leaf; in the slope of early sun through glass, no harsh heat quivered, and no fierce light glared; but morning-tide spread all soft herbage with a silvery tissue.

"Now I like to see things look like this," said the man, as he very well might say; "but here are at least a score of bunches crying aloud for the thinning scissors. And where is

Rose, who ought to be at them, before the sun gets up too high? Rose of roses, where are you?"

To his cheerful shout no answer came; and being of a well-contented mind, he went on to his own business. His happy nature found its province in promoting happiness, whether of beast, or bird, or life whose growth is its only movement. To all of these he felt that loving-kindness, which is nature's gift; not the brightest of her graces, but the largest, and the best. Without that one redeeming gift, of which grand intellects often fail, this man being sorely tried in life, would have passed into the bitter vein, so miserable to itself, and all. His face had the lines of resolute will, and of strenuous energy; and his bodily force was but little abated by three score years of exercise. For his back was as straight as a soldier's on drill; his legs were stout and steadfast; and although he fed well, and without anxiety, none but envious whipper-snappers would have dared to call him fat.

For the other part, his mind was not disagreeably large or noble; but just in front, by the proper peg, of the general mind it met with. The general mind, that is to say, of educated people, at any rate in that part of the world, which is as wise as any other. "Captain Larks" (as this good stranger had been called by the native voice, when first he came to Christowell) was a simple, unpretentious man, who gave himself no title. His only desire seemed to be for plain life, and retirement.

These he surely might here obtain, to the utmost of all heart's desire; so far away was Christowell from busy mart, or town, or street, or even road of carriage power. No better

place could have been discovered by a man sincerely desirous of dealing as little as possible with mankind. For here were people enough to make a single head no rarity; yet not enough to force any sort of head into grievous eminence. All the inhabitants, without exertion, were important enough to feel satisfied; or at any rate to feel the duty of it; while universal opinion stopped any man from indulging in his own. It may be denied by young spread-eagles, of competitive and unruly mind, that this is the highest form of human life. But such an one should soar aloft, and perch upon some higher one.

To Christowell, ambition was no more than a longer name for itch. Every village-man grew wiser by due seniority; and no mind, while its father lived, succeeded to authority. Youth was kept in its place, and taught that the ear must take the seed of thought, until the white hair shows it ripe; and women were allowed their proper weight.

"Christowell is all very well," the gardener went on thinking; "but if ever there was a slow place under the sun, it is one of the slowest. Pugsley will never bring my pots."

Making up his mind to the manner of mankind, with a cultivator's patience, he passed beneath clusters encroaching on the headway, and went into a tiny transept, parted from the rest of the house, by a narrow door of glass. Here was a separate shrine for flowers, intolerant of heat, and demanding air, beyond the young vine's capacity. Choice geraniums lived here, and roses, heaths, and epacrids, and double violets, lilies of the valley (sweetest of all bloom), Daphne, and the graceful deutzia, pansies also, freaked with velvet braid, the double black polyanthus, and

the white chalice of azalea. But best, and dearest of all to him, and set in a separate nook—as in a glazed bureau with lifting glass—that exquisite flower of exclusive worship, that gorgeous instance of nature and art combined to do their utmost, the magically beautiful auricula.

No gardener is worth his manure, who has not a fine conceit of his own skill. "I should like to have some of those Lancashire fellows, or a few of those Kentish braggarts here," this man said aloud, being apt to encourage his thoughts, when alone, with the company of words; "if I know anything of the matter, this green-edged seedling, beautifully named 'Dartmoor Oasis,' by my Rose; and this grand self, one could gaze at all the day; and above all this white-edge, this glorious white-edge, worthily entitled 'Cream of Devon,'—have they anything fit to hold a candle to them? Consider the paste, take the measure of the thrum, dwell upon the band; can you spy a single slur? Above all, if you have a particle of judgment, observe the equality of the pips, the perfection of fulness, and true circle of the truss, and the grand, columnar, mealy, magnificent, staunchly upright, and splendidly proportioned—really you might say, pillar of the stalk!"

Overpowered, alike by his eloquence, and the beauty that produced it, he stopped for a moment, with some gravel in his hand (with which he was going to top-dress his pots), when the little door was opened, and his Rose came in; whose presence, might compel the wildest gardener to despise his own auriculas.

CHAPTER II. — POTTER'S VESSELS

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To a mind with limited powers of inquiry, such as most of us are blest with, a great truth stands forth in robust relief, without being bound to show what it stands on, or where it came from, or anything else. In this frank spirit must be accepted the incontestable fact that "Latham" (an ancient and very good surname) takes, upon the ordinary tongue of Devon, the brief, but still excellent form of "Larks." It made no difference, from their lofty point of view, that the Captain's name was not "Latham" at all, any more than he called himself a captain; but when he first appeared among the natives of this part—some fifteen years ago perhaps—his rather scanty luggage was ticketed "L. Arthur," in flowing and free manuscript. The leading genius of Christowell—a premature intellect now removed from the stabs of contumely, to higher claims—pronounced at a glance that the word spelled "Latham;" whilst some, almost equally capable of reading, confessed, and some denied it.

The landlord of the *Three Horse-shoes,* who could not sign his name (though he drew three horse-shoes, at the bottom of a bill, more correctly than many an artist could), at once backed up the decision of the wit, and settled the question, by declaring that his guest had the very same walk, all over the world, as Corporal Larks to Teigncombe had. So before Mr. Arthur was one dinner-time older, he came forth upon the public as "Captain Larks;" and finding that people only shook their heads, and looked very

knowing, if he said another word, he let them have their way, until his ears and mind grew used to it.

Through an agent at Exeter, whose name was "Tucker," a neat little cottage, and some twenty acres of land near the moor, had been bought for him cheaply. Then the cottage was furnished very simply; and here he hoped to spend in peace, and solitude, his remaining days.

As yet, there was not a grey hair on his head, though his face bore marks of evil climate, and uncourteous usage, in deep-grained sunburn, and scar of steel, permanent in three places. This, and a pair of shaggy eyebrows, gave him a formidable aspect, much against the meaning of his mind. But eyes of a soft bright blue, as clear as a child's, and a nose of genial turn, and a really pleasant and hearty smile, showed plenty of good-will towards mankind, whatever man might have done to him. Moreover, his large and well-knit frame, active step, and resolute bearing, commanded the good word of womankind, the better half of the entirety.

Then Parson Short, becoming now prime minister of Christowell, said his say about Captain Larks, which was to the purpose, as usual. "Under a cloud—fine fellow by his face—gentleman, according to his speech and manner. He wants to be quiet; it is none of our business. Let him alone, till he comes to us."

The settler asked for nothing better than this course of treatment. The stir of his arrival soon settled, like himself, into gentle quietude; the men of the village were kind and respectful—as men still are in Devonshire—and the women, though longing to know more about him, felt for him deeply

as "the lonely gentleman," and hoped he would get over it, and have another wife.

Whatever his trouble, he sought no pity, nor even appeared despondent; but lived upon his bit of land, and worked, and whistled among his trees, as sweetly as the blackbirds that came to answer. In spite of his maturity, or perhaps by reason of it, many a village girl, too young to dream of any courting—except in dim wonder at the number of the babies—resolved to be his wife, as soon as time should qualify her, and came up the steep hill, every fine evening, to peep through the hedge at him, and perhaps to get an apple. He, having love of children, as of all things that are natural, would rest from his work, and come out at the stile, and pat their curly heads, and ask the history of the babies, and cut for them chips, with his pruning-knife, from a big stick of liquorice in his waistcoat pocket.

Whether he had kith or kin, or any soft belongings, was a moot point at the Churchyard gate, and by many smouldering peat-fires; until, about four years after his coming, a lively, and lovely, little girl was delivered at his gate, by Tim Pugsley, the carrier. Tim went round about it, as a fox goes to his hole, and avoided the village on his way from Moreton; but in spite of all that, they were spied by a woman with a bundle of furze at the top of the cleve; and when human nature, with five shillings in its pocket, compelled Master Pugsley to pull up and bait, at the *Three Horse-shoes,* upon his homeward course, he had no call so much as to change his crown; so liberal was the desire to treat him, for the sake of the light that he could shed. The grateful carrier first drank his beer, then shook his head, as

vehemently as if it had been labelled "glass with care;" and then enlightened the company with a piece of news beyond all price—"Every man should first tend his own business."

For nine or ten years, every summer, and weighing more upon each delivery, this consignment came to pass; and Pugsley (like his cart-tilt, which was of some high new patent stuff) grew dryer and dryer, every time he was wetted; till Christowell understood at last, that if anybody was to blame, for keeping the parish so unsettled, it was no less a person than the famous Bishop of Exeter. For Pugsley told them to go to the bishop, if they wanted to know all the rights; and the next confirmation in that neighbourhood was largely attended by fathers and mothers. It did them good to be confirmed again, because of their principles wearing out; and the landlord of the inn was pleased with the evening they spent after it.

Thus when Rose came down at last, "to have holiday for ever" (as she told Mr. Pugsley, every time he stopped to put a stone behind the wheel), there was scarcely any one in Christowell old enough to rejoice, who failed of that most Christian duty. The captain for once came out of his garden, and made a great bonfire of his weeds upon the beacon, and with his own hands rolled up a great barrel of cider unknown to the natives, whose ignorance culminated towards their heads. For he now grew apples of a lordly kind, which they (having faith in their grandsires only) disdained, till it turned the tables on them.

Almost everybody said, that night, or else on the following morning, that for certain sure, such a lively maid could never abide in a place like that. Or if she did, she must

soon go doiled—so tarble weist, and crule unkid as it was. For according to the way Captain Larks held his head up, in spite of demeaning himself now lately, his daughter must count upon having to behave like a lady, and not going to and fro, and in and out with the other young folk, as the butcher's, and grocer's girls might do.

And who was there likely to ask her in marriage, or to take her to dance, or a fairing, or a club, comely as she was, and so nice-spoken? Why, Parson Tom Short was the only gentry-man, unless you went so far as Touchwood Park; and if ever there was a set bachelor in the world, Parson Short was one of them; let alone that his hair was all going from his poll, and his cook, Mrs. Aggett, would have no young doings.

Up to the present time, however, though nearly two years were gone by, Rose Arthur had complained to no one, of discontent, or loneliness. Her father, and her work, and books, sufficed to her for company; and her lively nature filled itself with interest in all things. She knew everybody in the village now, and every flower in the garden; and her father's lonely life was blessed by her young enjoyment of the world.

Pugsley (who lived at Moreton, and traded twice a week from Exeter, when the weather and the roads encouraged him) now began to find his horse wink one eye, at the turn towards Christowell. So many trifles went to and fro, and some boxes that made the axle creak, and some quite large enough to sit upon. Even before this, he had taken mauns of plants, and baskets of choice pears, and grapes, to Exeter; when the captain began to "demean" himself in the village

esteem by traffic. But now the commerce increased, and throve, as Rose threw her young life into it.

If Pugsley had been a small-minded man, he must have gone promptly to Tavistock fair, and bought a new horse, to attend to this traffic; for his ancient nag, whose name was "Teddy," began to find the hills grow steeper, as the weight of years increased. But the carrier was of gentle tone, and largely generous sentiments; and hours of reflection made him wipe his head with loftier feeling. Therefore he would not deny his good neighbours the pleasure of benevolence, but allowed them to lend him a horse as often as they wished, and sometimes oftener.

Now Teddy was crawling up the hill, that beautiful April morning, with the long-desired load of pots. Three-quarters of a mile of jagged lane, or sometimes of roaring watercourse, led from the village to "Larks' Cot," as irreverent people called it. At best, and even for a fresh young horse, it was a tough piece of collarwork; but Teddy, ancient though he was, would never have grumbled, if the lane had been wide enough for corkscrew. But in this part of Devon, the rule of the road is, to make it just wide enough for one cart, and a cow to go past it without losing milk. If two carts meet, one must back to a gateway; and whether of the twain shall back, depends upon the issue which of the drivers is "the better man."

Therefore this Teddy had a hard time of it—a long pull, a strong pull, and worst of all, a straight pull. And while he was pausing, to pant, and to think, and his master whistled softly, Jem Trickey the cobbler came merrily down a steep place, and stopped to look at them.

"Marnin' to 'e, Tim," shouted Trickey, for his breath was as "plim" as a football newly filled; "what have 'e got then, this time, carryer?"

"No consarn of thine, Cobbler Trickey;" Pugsley made stout answer, being cross, and short-fetched in the wind; "cobblers is not excisemen yet."

"Potses, and panses again, as sure as I be a zinner! Cappen Larks ought to be shamed of hiszelf. Lor' A'mighty never made his works to grow in crockery. And you'm a gwain outside your trade. Backard and forrard is your proper coorse. Let me conzeider of they potses."

"Ye be welcome to conzeider of them, cobbler. A niver zeed sich coorous cloam. Look'e yeer, they little holes hurneth all round 'em! Cappen's own diskivry, I do hear tell."

The carrier loosened the cord of one crate, and allowed the intelligent Trickey to gaze, while he drew it towards the cart-tail. Trickey, though large enough of mind, was small of body; and he lifted himself by the lade, to see things justly.

"You be bound by my advice," he cried, retreating hastily; "you take the next turn down to brook, and heft they into the watter. They was made for the witches, and no mistakk about 'em."

"Zo I wull," Tim Pugsley answered, pretending to share his neighbour's fright, for he was a dry man, and full of book-learning. "Thank'e kindly for thy counsel, Jem. Into the watter they gooth, zure enough. Only thou must pay for the vally of 'em, and the carryage too, Cobbler Trickey."

"Go thy way with thy witchcraft," the other replied. "Do 'e know what I call thee, Carryer Pugsley? I call thee a poor time-sarver, and a carryer of no conzistency."

"I carry better stuff than thou dost," Pugsley shouted after him; as the shoe-maker, with a springy step, set off down the hill, for fear of worse. "Do I zwindle the public with brown papper? Do I putt 'ooden pegsin, and zwear they be stitched? Do I clam on the heel-ball, to hide my scamping? Do I—"

Master Pugsley cut short his list of libels, as he saw Master Trickey, at a decent distance, deliver a gesture of supreme contempt, by turning up his coat-tail, and administering a slap to the quarter of his body which was latest in retreat.

"Do 'e do the like of that to I?" the carrier inquired superfluously. "If it twadn't for business, and the blessed law —howsomever, a bain't worth thinking on; Teddy, gee wugg! It be your vault mainly."

The old horse, wont as he was to bear the blame of troubles far outside of his own shafts, rallied with a shiver and a rattle of his chains, and threw himself forward upon the strain. For a very stiff tug arose just here, for a horse who had been to Exeter and back, with a tidy load, only yesterday; and whose knowledge of corn was too superficial, getting more of the husk than the kernel for its study. And the manner of a Devonshire lane is such, that dogmatic humps stand up, in places, where nothing seems to warrant them. The meadows, to the right and left, may be as pleasant as you please to walk upon, with a sleek benevolence, a velvet pile, and a spring of supple freshness. And yet, within a landyard the lane is jumping scraggily, with ribs of solid rock, and pits and jags of bold abruptness. The nag, being born to such conditions, plodded on without

repining; but in spite of all spirit, and skill, and care, he suddenly fell into sad disgrace.

For just as the near wheel was creaking, on the verge of a steep slide of granite, where his turn-about was due—for the lane there allowed him chance of a little bit of slanting—Teddy did a thing that any other horse might do, or even a man in his position. He mistook a large stone-fly, just arisen from the Christow, for a genuine æstrus, a bot-fly, whame, or tabanus. If he had thought of the present time of year, he must have known better; but instead of thinking, he acted on his nerves, which struck into him like a spur. Up went his head, as if he were four years old, instead of going on for forty; and his old bones shook with indignation, at the pestilent state the world was come to. "Steady, you old fool! Who'm a-gwain for to kill'e?" the carrier exclaimed with a little friendly thump; but the mischief was done, while he was speaking. For the jump of the horse gave a jerk to the shaft, and this ran amiss into the axle-tree, gave a lollop to the near wheel, already on the wamble; and down went the felly, with a blue grind of iron, into the very hole they meant to shun. The hole was more than deep enough to hold a good nine gallons; and the wheel ground down into its deepest depth, while the other took advantage of the position for a holiday, and proved itself the off-wheel, by going off towards heaven.

"Wull now!" said the carrier, without much haste, for his mind travelled slowly up the obstacles of thought; "this be a tarble dickyment; and here coom'th arl the cloam! Drat that old cobbler chap, 'twor arl his doings."

An avalanche of pots, from the unroped crate, fell around him and upon him, while he reasoned thus. Like a quick shower of acorns from the shaken oak, but alas, much heavier, and more valuable, they rattled on the carrier, and thumped his poor chest, and a far more tender and impassioned part of man, till he fairly turned back, and let them roll upon his spine.

"Jem, neighbour Jem, do'e come back, that's a dear;" he shouted, as loud as his drummed condition furnished, to the cobbler in the distance at the bottom of the hill. That good neighbour not only heard him, but replied right pleasantly, with a gladsome laugh, and a smart repetition of his gay defiance; then hastened on his course, with a step more nimble than his customers generally could compass from his shoes.

"All men is clay," said the carrier, recovering his native equanimity, and wiping the red dust from his fustian suit; "all men is clay; and the Lord hath not intended us to putt His material into these here shapes, with a C. R. upon 'em, maning carrier's risk. Wull, a carn't brak' no more of 'un nor there be, now can 'e, Teddy? Smarl blame to thee, old chap. We'll both of us toorn to our brexass. This hosebird job hath coom, I rackon, 'long of doing of despite to the gifts of the Lord."

Beholding a very nice place to sit down, and content with the cart in its present firm fixture, he pulled out the nosebag, and buckled it for Teddy, so that he might cast one eye down at his lip-service. Then he drew forth his own provender, and seasoned it, by dwelling on its beauties with his broad brown thumb. "Nation good, nation good!" he

could not help exclaiming; "a good waife is the making of a man's front-piece. A vartuous woman laveth no occasion for a man to think twice of his vitteling, or zeek to read the papper. Best use of papper is to putt up bakkon in 'un."

Sorrow, and breakage, and the other plagues of life, began to use less and less of pressure on his heart, as he sat upon a lady-fern (not yet plumed for dancing, but rich with soft beauty for a heavy man to sit upon) and biting out the cork from a flat stone bottle, moistened down the roadway for the bread and meat to follow. Then he fell to very heartily, and in less than half an hour began to feel nicely refreshed, and fit to encounter the issue before him.

CHAPTER III. — PARSON SHORT

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"I am almost sure that he must have broken down," said the fairest of his flowers to the gardener; "he is the most punctual man in the county, and scarcely ever more than three days late. I saw him not more than three miles off, on the top of the hill above Lustleigh, before the sun was three yards high; and he must have been here, wiping his head, as a delicate hint for cider, two hours ago, if he had gone on well."

"Perhaps he has gone on too well, my dear, by taking the turn to the *Three Horse-shoes.* Not that I would cast any slur upon your pet; but still such things will happen."

"To other people perhaps they might. But never to him—I am quite sure of that. The last time I saw him, he lamented cordially 'the mischief of them publics.'"

"That was very good of him, and showed high principle, as well as a tender conscience," Mr. Arthur replied, while he took good care that his daughter should not observe his smile; for life enough was before her yet, for correction of faith in human nature. "Pugsley has the elements of a lofty character, industry, honesty, philosophy—in the sense of that word at present."

"Father," cried Rose, having finished her bunch, and running up to him, with the long grape-scissors in her hand, and a trail of bast around her neck; "have I got the elements of a lofty character—industry, certainly, just look at those ten bunches; honesty, perhaps to a reasonable extent; but scarcely a bit of philosophy, I'm afraid?"

"Certainly not too much of that," her father answered quietly; "but run in, and see about the breakfast, darling; or perhaps you may discover some defects in mine."

"How I wish that I could! But I shall never do that, if philosophy means good temper. Now come and see my work, sir, and say if it is good."

"It is good sound work; far better than Lord Bicton's head-gardener, at any money, could produce, in vineries like a cathedral. However it is not faultless yet; though I don't mean to say, that I could do it better, even if my eyes were as young as yours. You understand thoroughly the bunch, as it is; and you shape it beautifully for the time; nothing could be neater, or more justly placed. But you have yet to learn the fine perception of the future, the bending of the footstalk, as the berries grow in weight, and the probable drop of the shoulders. And practice alone can teach you the different ins and outs of each kind of grape, in swelling."

"The subject appears to me to be endless. How shall I ever attain to such knowledge?"

"By watching the results of your own work, and by never giving over."

"Till old experience do attain to something like prophetic strain. But father, how did you thus attain it? Have you ever been apprenticed to a gardener?"

"Little pitchers may have long ears; but they must not have curious tongues!" he replied, with a kiss on her forehead, to heal the rebuke. "Now let us go to breakfast; and then seek Pugsley."

Hence it came to pass that while the good carrier was still regarding the position of his cart, and the attitude of his

ancient horse, with calm eyes, and well-kindled pipe, a spirited young lady stood before him, and did not share his patience.

"Good morning, Master Pugsley; and you seem to think it good. But I always have understood, that a cart ought to stand upon both wheels."

"So her did. You'm right there, Miss," the carrier answered, with a quiet grin. "But there be times when her doth'nt do her dooty, but go'oth contrairy, like the wominvolk."

"And you mean to let her stay like that, for ever! And my father's pots lying in a heap upon the road!"

"Cappen is a just man, and a' wull look auver it. Partikler now you've zeed it, Miss, and can sartify 'twor no hooman doin's."

"All I can certify is, that you seem content to stay here for the rest of the day. Do please to get out of that hole at once, and bring all the pots you have managed not to break."

"Lor', how natteral you do spake! It doth a man good to hear'e, Miss. Here us must baide, nolum wolum, till sich taime as Farmer Willum coom'th."

"Farmer William may not come at all, or at any rate not till twelve o'clock. Now do put your shoulder to the wheel yourself. I am very strong, and I will help you."

The carrier was too polite to laugh, though he cherished that disdain of female prowess, against which the chivalrous author of "Dorothy" couches his elegiac lance. But this man only puffed the pipe of silence.

"You fancy that I can do nothing, I suppose," cried Rose, who was as prickly as a moss-rose, when provoked; "but I can do a whole quantity of things, such as would quite surprise you. I can milk a cow, and pot a vine, and bed down a pony, and salt a silverside, and store apples, and fry potatoes, and fill a pipe. And if all that is nothing, as you might be apt to think, because of being a man, Mr. Pugsley, I can answer for taking a hive of bees, without hurting one of them. Can you do that?"

"The Lord forbid! He hath made 'em to be smoked, zoon as ever they a' done their work. But, Missy, it amooseth me to hear you tell up. You tell up a sight of things as a well-inventioned man can do, or if not one, mebbe then anither of 'em. But you never tak' no count on the hardest thing of arl, the like of which no man can do in this here county. You knows what I mane, Miss Rose; and winderful it is to me, for sich a babe and suckling!"

"Oh! I know what you mean quite well. You have made me do it in the cart so often. But I do assure you that it is quite easy."

"Aisy a' can never be," said the carrier decisively; "although a' zimth as some can do 'un, droo years of arly lanin'. To play the piander is winderful; but a varmer's datter may coom to that, bein' outside of her dooty; but niver can her coom to spakin' of the bad Vrench langoowich."

"I tell you, Master Pugsley, that every one can do it, in my proper rank of life. You are not stupid enough to suppose that because I pot vines—"

"Noo, noo, Miss; axing of your pardon for breaking in upon you. I knows as well as the Royal mail doth, that you

be one of the karlity. None but a vule could look twice at you, and veel any doubt whatsomdever about that, my dear. And Cappen Larks, though he dooth quare things, is the very same; at any rate to my mind."

"And to everybody's mind, I should hope, Mr. Pugsley. But he must not, and he shall not be called 'Captain Larks;' as you know, if nobody else does. Now please to get out of your rut, and come on."

The nature truly noble, and the mind of lofty power, reluctant as they always are to make disclosure of themselves, and shunning as they always do the frippery of random praise, unwittingly are revealed sometimes by the conduct of tobacco-smoke. Shallow men, or hasty fellows, or small sons of discontent, labour hard with restless puffs, and vex the air with turbid fumes, promiscuously tossed from lip or bowl. How different is the process of the large, self-balanced, contemplative pipe! No swirling tempest battles round the brow, no waste of issue clouds the air; but blue wreaths hover far asunder, circling placidly as they soar, like haloes round the head of peace; the cool bowl shines without exuding, like the halcyon of the charm and calm, and sweet rest satisfies the spirit of the man, gratefully ministering the gift divine.

In a state of mind thus serene and lofty, Master Pugsley smoked his pipe. Maiden impatience stirred him not, nor the casual shords of a slight mishap, nor the general fragility of human kind. If his cart was not upon a level axle, should that disturb his own equipoise? So he sat down again, in a courteous manner, and delivered very sound advice; while

the young lady ran away, and left him to enjoy it, for she saw that help was near at hand.

Now a man of good sense, and strong will, led the simple people of Christowell. In any trouble or turning of the mind, as well as in bodily ailments, there was not a grown-up man, or woman, who sought to go further than Parson Short. The Rev. Tom Short, vicar of the parish, coming to an utterly neglected place, had quietly made his way, by not insisting upon it unduly. Resolute good-will, plain speech, and fair allowance for adverse minds, together with a comfortable income of his own, enabled him to go on well, and to make his flock do likewise. He addressed them "on papper" only once a week, which was quite as much as they required; and that they did with diffidence. He, however, was well convinced of the mutual duty thereby discharged. No other preacher in the diocese could say so much in the time allowed, which was never more than five minutes; and no other congregation listened with attention so close, and yawns so few.

In other matters, his style was dry, and terse, and quick to the purpose; yet seldom rough, and never arrogant or overbearing. Steadfast Tory as he was, he respected everybody's rights, and felt due sympathy for their wrongs, whenever he could see them. His education had been good at Winchester, and New College; whence he had taken high classical honours, though his college was then exempt from test. For his manner of sticking to the point at issue, and knowing nothing—unless he knew it well—was just what Oxford then encouraged. His bodily appearance was not grand, nor large, nor at all imposing; and the principal

weakness of his mind was a morbid perception of that defect. Not that he could be called a dwarf, or plain, or at all unsightly; only that his spirit, being very great had a hankering for larger tenement. This feeling perhaps had saved his freedom, by making him shy of long-bodied ladies, while it kept him from admiring short ones. So now he was nearing his fortieth year, with a prospect of nothing but bachelorhood, which his cook was determined to maintain on his behalf. Yet many a young lady of exalted stature would gladly enough have become Mrs. Short.

For this was a ruddy, brisk, and very cheerful man, bald it is true, on the top of his head, but plenteously whiskered, largely capable of beard—if clerical principles should ever close the razor, which they were beginning even now to do in London—gifted moreover with a very pleasant smile, a short waggish nose, and keen blue eyes. No better man could fill his shoes, or at any rate could get into them, so well compressed was his material, and so good the staple.

It was not only this, nor yet the graceful increment of his income, nor even the possession of a spiritual turn, that led the young ladies to be thinking of him, whenever any settlement in life was mentioned. He inspired large interest by his own merit, but a feeling yet larger and deeper, by his present sad position. To rescue him from the despotism of Mrs. Aggett, his widowed cook, was the lofty aim of almost every other female. But he bore his yoke with patience, and preferred the known to the unknown ill.

"How now, Pugsley? Stuck fast like this, and the captain's pots smashed up like that!" this bachelor shouted, as he

marched up briskly, saw the position, and understood the large resignation of the native mind.

"Stuck slow, I karls it, Passon Shart. And thicky cloam be smashed, more down than oop. If her baided oop, her wud 'a been all zound."

"Come, Master Tim, get out your levers, instead of argifying."

"Passon, I wull; if so be I've got 'un. The Lord know'th, whether they be here, or to home."

"Here they are, more peart than you be;" Mr. Short replied, turning up some old rubbish from the bottom of the cart, and drawing forth two spars of ash; "now wugg on, Teddy, when I give the word."

"No man as ever I see yet," said the carrier, through a blue ring of smoke, "hath received the power to make Teddy wugg, when a' hath his nosebag on; avore such time, as his tongue have been into the uttermost corners of the zame."

Parson Short, without any answer, unbuckled the strap of the hairy wallet, gently withdrew it from the old fellow's nose (though he put up one foot to protect it), and marching sternly up the hill, hung this fine temptation upon a hazel bush, at the first corner. Teddy, with a whinny of soft remonstrance, pricked up his ears, and looked anxious to proceed.

"Passons has no conscience whativer," said the carrier, pocketing his pipe; "they distresses all the hanimals, like the better sort, on Zindays. Niver lets nobody baide at peace."

"Cease from weak reflections, and take to action," the inexorable Short replied. "If your time is worthless, mine is not. Stir him up, Pugsley, while I start the wheel."

"I vear your reverence be a'most too small," said Pugsley, with much good will, but touching the vicar in his most tender part. Mr. Short took off his coat, folded it carefully, and laid it on a rock-moot, because it was a very good one; then turning up shirt-sleeves of fair white linen, he showed a pair of arms as well-complexioned as a lady's, but thick-set, bossy, and substantial. "Lor' a' mussy," cried the carrier, "thou should'st niver have a goon on!"

Deigning no answer, the sturdy parson seized the bigger of the two ash staves, and laying the butt of the other for a fulcrum, gave the stuck wheel such a powerful heft, that the whole cart rattled, and the crates began to dance.

"Zober, passon, zober! Or ee'll heft 'un over tother zide," said Pugsley, running up to the horse's head; "now, Teddy, taste thy legs, and strive at 'un."

At a touch of the whip on his legs, the old nag threw his chest out, and grappled the ground with his hoofs. Then he cast his weight forward, and strained to the tug, with his back on the stretch, and his ribs like hoops, and even his tail stiffened up like a hawser.

"Heave-oh!" shouted Parson Short, suiting the action to the word; "well done then, old horse, we are out of the hole!"