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Preface

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This work is called a 'romance,' because the incidents, characters, time, and scenery, are alike romantic. And in shaping this old tale, the Writer neither dares, nor desires, to claim for it the dignity or cumber it with the difficulty of an historic novel.

And yet he thinks that the outlines are filled in more carefully, and the situations (however simple) more warmly coloured and quickened, than a reader would expect to find in what is called a 'legend.'

And he knows that any son of Exmoor, chancing on this volume, cannot fail to bring to mind the nurse-tales of his childhood—the savage deeds of the outlaw Doones in the depth of Bagworthy Forest, the beauty of the hapless maid brought up in the midst of them, the plain John Ridd's Herculean power, and (memory's too congenial food) the exploits of Tom Faggus.

March, 1869.



CHAPTER I

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ELEMENTS OF EDUCATION

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If anybody cares to read a simple tale told simply, I, John Ridd, of the parish of Oare, in the county of Somerset, yeoman and churchwarden, have seen and had a share in some doings of this neighborhood, which I will try to set down in order, God sparing my life and memory. And they who light upon this book should bear in mind not only that I write for the clearing of our parish from ill fame and calumny, but also a thing which will, I trow, appear too often in it, to wit—that I am nothing more than a plain unlettered man, not read in foreign languages, as a gentleman might be, nor gifted with long words (even in mine own tongue), save what I may have won from the Bible or Master William Shakespeare, whom, in the face of common opinion, I do value highly. In short, I am an ignoramus, but pretty well for a yeoman.

My father being of good substance, at least as we reckon in Exmoor, and seized in his own right, from many generations, of one, and that the best and largest, of the three farms into which our parish is divided (or rather the cultured part thereof), he John Ridd, the elder, churchwarden, and overseer, being a great admirer of learning, and well able to write his name, sent me his only son to be schooled at Tiverton, in the county of Devon. For the chief boast of that ancient town (next to its woollen staple) is a worthy grammar-school, the largest in the west

of England, founded and handsomely endowed in the year 1604 by Master Peter Blundell, of that same place, clothier.

Here, by the time I was twelve years old, I had risen into the upper school, and could make bold with Eutropius and Caesar—by aid of an English version—and as much as six lines of Ovid. Some even said that I might, before manhood, rise almost to the third form, being of a perservering nature; albeit, by full consent of all (except my mother), thick-headed. But that would have been, as I now perceive, an ambition beyond a farmer's son; for there is but one form above it, and that made of masterful scholars, entitled rightly 'monitors'. So it came to pass, by the grace of God, that I was called away from learning, whilst sitting at the desk of the junior first in the upper school, and beginning the Greek verb [Greek word].

My eldest grandson makes bold to say that I never could have learned [Greek word], ten pages further on, being all he himself could manage, with plenty of stripes to help him. I know that he hath more head than I—though never will he have such body; and am thankful to have stopped betimes, with a meek and wholesome head-piece.

But if you doubt of my having been there, because now I know so little, go and see my name, 'John Ridd,' graven on that very form. Forsooth, from the time I was strong enough to open a knife and to spell my name, I began to grave it in the oak, first of the block whereon I sate, and then of the desk in front of it, according as I was promoted from one to other of them: and there my grandson reads it now, at this present time of writing, and hath fought a boy for scoffing at it—'John Ridd his name'—and done again in 'winkeys,' a mischievous but cheerful device, in which we took great pleasure.

This is the manner of a 'winkey,' which I here set down, lest child of mine, or grandchild, dare to make one on my premises; if he does, I shall know the mark at once, and

score it well upon him. The scholar obtains, by prayer or price, a handful of saltpetre, and then with the knife wherewith he should rather be trying to mend his pens, what does he do but scoop a hole where the desk is some three inches thick. This hole should be left with the middle exalted, and the circumference dug more deeply. Then let him fill it with saltpetre, all save a little space in the midst, where the boss of the wood is. Upon that boss (and it will be the better if a splinter of timber rise upward) he sticks the end of his candle of tallow, or 'rat's tail,' as we called it, kindled and burning smoothly. Anon, as he reads by that light his lesson, lifting his eyes now and then it may be, the fire of candle lays hold of the petre with a spluttering noise and a leaping. Then should the pupil seize his pen, and, regardless of the nib, stir bravely, and he will see a glow as of burning mountains, and a rich smoke, and sparks going merrily; nor will it cease, if he stir wisely, and there be a good store of petre, until the wood is devoured through, like the sinking of a well-shaft. Now well may it go with the head of a boy intent upon his primer, who betides to sit thereunder! But, above all things, have good care to exercise this art before the master strides up to his desk, in the early gray of the morning.

Other customs, no less worthy, abide in the school of Blundell, such as the singeing of nightcaps; but though they have a pleasant savour, and refreshing to think of, I may not stop to note them, unless it be that goodly one at the incoming of a flood. The school-house stands beside a stream, not very large, called Lowman, which flows into the broad river of Exe, about a mile below. This Lowman stream, although it be not fond of brawl and violence (in the manner of our Lynn), yet is wont to flood into a mighty head of waters when the storms of rain provoke it; and most of all when its little co-mate, called the Taunton Brook—where I have plucked the very best cresses that ever man put salt

on—comes foaming down like a great roan horse, and rears at the leap of the hedgerows. Then are the gray stone walls of Blundell on every side encompassed, the vale is spread over with looping waters, and it is a hard thing for the day-boys to get home to their suppers.

And in that time, old Cop, the porter (so called because he hath copper boots to keep the wet from his stomach, and a nose of copper also, in right of other waters), his place is to stand at the gate, attending to the flood-boards grooved into one another, and so to watch the torrents rise, and not be washed away, if it please God he may help it. But long ere the flood hath attained this height, and while it is only waxing, certain boys of deputy will watch at the stoop of the drain-holes, and be apt to look outside the walls when Cop is taking a cordial. And in the very front of the gate, just without the archway, where the ground is paved most handsomely, you may see in copy-letters done a great P.B. of white pebbles. Now, it is the custom and the law that when the invading waters, either fluxing along the wall from below the road-bridge, or pouring sharply across the meadows from a cut called Owen's Ditch—and I myself have seen it come both ways—upon the very instant when the waxing element lips though it be but a single pebble of the founder's letters, it is in the license of any boy, soever small and undoctrined, to rush into the great school-rooms, where a score of masters sit heavily, and scream at the top of his voice, 'P.B.'

Then, with a yell, the boys leap up, or break away from their standing; they toss their caps to the black-beamed roof, and haply the very books after them; and the great boys vex no more the small ones, and the small boys stick up to the great ones. One with another, hard they go, to see the gain of the waters, and the tribulation of Cop, and are prone to kick the day-boys out, with words of scanty compliment. Then the masters look at one another, having

no class to look to, and (boys being no more left to watch) in a manner they put their mouths up. With a spirited bang they close their books, and make invitation the one to the other for pipes and foreign cordials, recommending the chance of the time, and the comfort away from cold water.

But, lo! I am dwelling on little things and the pigeons' eggs of the infancy, forgetting the bitter and heavy life gone over me since then. If I am neither a hard man nor a very close one, God knows I have had no lack of rubbing and pounding to make stone of me. Yet can I not somehow believe that we ought to hate one another, to live far asunder, and block the mouth each of his little den; as do the wild beasts of the wood, and the hairy outrangs now brought over, each with a chain upon him. Let that matter be as it will. It is beyond me to unfold, and mayhap of my grandson's grandson. All I know is that wheat is better than when I began to sow it.

CHAPTER II

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AN IMPORTANT ITEM

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Now the cause of my leaving Tiverton school, and the way of it, were as follows. On the 29th day of November, in the year of our Lord 1673, the very day when I was twelve years old, and had spent all my substance in sweetmeats, with which I made treat to the little boys, till the large boys ran in and took them, we came out of school at five o'clock, as the rule is upon Tuesdays. According to custom we drove the day-boys in brave rout down the causeway from the school-porch even to the gate where Cop has his dwelling and duty. Little it recked us and helped them less, that they were our founder's citizens, and haply his own grand-nephews (for he left no direct descendants), neither did we much inquire what their lineage was. For it had long been fixed among us, who were of the house and chambers, that these same day-boys were all 'caddes,' as we had discovered to call it, because they paid no groat for their schooling, and brought their own commons with them. In consumption of these we would help them, for our fare in hall fed appetite; and while we ate their victuals, we allowed them freely to talk to us. Nevertheless, we could not feel, when all the victuals were gone, but that these boys required kicking from the premises of Blundell. And some of them were shopkeepers' sons, young grocers, fellmongers, and poulterers, and these to their credit seemed to know how righteous it was to kick them. But others were of high family, as any need be, in

Devon—Carews, and Bouchiers, and Bastards, and some of these would turn sometimes, and strike the boy that kicked them. But to do them justice, even these knew that they must be kicked for not paying.

After these 'charity-boys' were gone, as in contumely we called them—'If you break my bag on my head,' said one, 'how will feed thence to-morrow?'—and after old Cop with clang of iron had jammed the double gates in under the scruff-stone archway, whereupon are Latin verses, done in brass of small quality, some of us who were not hungry, and cared not for the supper-bell, having sucked much parliament and dumps at my only charges—not that I ever bore much wealth, but because I had been thrifting it for this time of my birth—we were leaning quite at dusk against the iron bars of the gate some six, or it may be seven of us, small boys all, and not conspicuous in the closing of the daylight and the fog that came at eventide, else Cop would have rated us up the green, for he was churly to little boys when his wife had taken their money. There was plenty of room for all of us, for the gate will hold nine boys close-packed, unless they be fed rankly, whereof is little danger; and now we were looking out on the road and wishing we could get there; hoping, moreover, to see a good string of pack-horses come by, with troopers to protect them. For the day-boys had brought us word that some intending their way to the town had lain that morning at Sampford Peveril, and must be in ere nightfall, because Mr. Faggus was after them. Now Mr. Faggus was my first cousin and an honour to the family, being a Northmolton man of great renown on the highway from Barum town even to London. Therefore of course, I hoped that he would catch the packmen, and the boys were asking my opinion as of an oracle, about it.

A certain boy leaning up against me would not allow my elbow room, and struck me very sadly in the stomach part, though his own was full of my parliament. And this I felt so

unkindly, that I smote him straightway in the face without tarrying to consider it, or weighing the question duly. Upon this he put his head down, and presented it so vehemently at the middle of my waistcoat, that for a minute or more my breath seemed dropped, as it were, from my pockets, and my life seemed to stop from great want of ease. Before I came to myself again, it had been settled for us that we should move to the 'Ironing-box,' as the triangle of turf is called where the two causeways coming from the school-porch and the hall-porch meet, and our fights are mainly celebrated; only we must wait until the convoy of horses had passed, and then make a ring by candlelight, and the other boys would like it. But suddenly there came round the post where the letters of our founder are, not from the way of Taunton but from the side of Lowman bridge, a very small string of horses, only two indeed (counting for one the pony), and a red-faced man on the bigger nag.

'Plaise ye, worshipful masters,' he said, being feared of the gateway, 'carn 'e tull whur our Jan Ridd be?'

'Hyur a be, ees fai, Jan Ridd,' answered a sharp little chap, making game of John Fry's language.

'Zhow un up, then,' says John Fry poking his whip through the bars at us; 'Zhow un up, and putt un aowt.'

The other little chaps pointed at me, and some began to hallo; but I knew what I was about.

'Oh, John, John,' I cried, 'what's the use of your coming now, and Peggy over the moors, too, and it so cruel cold for her? The holidays don't begin till Wednesday fortnight, John. To think of your not knowing that!'

John Fry leaned forward in the saddle, and turned his eyes away from me; and then there was a noise in his throat like a snail crawling on a window-pane.

'Oh, us knaws that wull enough, Maister Jan; reckon every Oare-man knaw that, without go to skoo-ull, like you doth.'

Your moother have kept arl the apples up, and old Betty toorned the black puddens, and none dare set trap for a blagbird. Arl for thee, lad; every bit of it now for thee!'

He checked himself suddenly, and frightened me. I knew that John Fry's way so well.

'And father, and father—oh, how is father?' I pushed the boys right and left as I said it. 'John, is father up in town! He always used to come for me, and leave nobody else to do it.'

'Vayther'll be at the crooked post, tother zide o' telling-house.* Her coodn't lave 'ouze by raison of the Chirstmas bakkon comin' on, and zome o' the cider walted.'

* The 'telling-houses' on the moor are rude cots where the shepherds meet to 'tell' their sheep at the end of the pasturing season.

He looked at the nag's ears as he said it; and, being up to John Fry's ways, I knew that it was a lie. And my heart fell like a lump of lead, and I leaned back on the stay of the gate, and longed no more to fight anybody. A sort of dull power hung over me, like the cloud of a brooding tempest, and I feared to be told anything. I did not even care to stroke the nose of my pony Peggy, although she pushed it in through the rails, where a square of broader lattice is, and sniffed at me, and began to crop gently after my fingers. But whatever lives or dies, business must be attended to; and the principal business of good Christians is, beyond all controversy, to fight with one another.

'Come up, Jack,' said one of the boys, lifting me under the chin; 'he hit you, and you hit him, you know.'

'Pay your debts before you go,' said a monitor, striding up to me, after hearing how the honour lay; 'Ridd, you must go through with it.'

'Fight, for the sake of the junior first,' cried the little fellow in my ear, the clever one, the head of our class, who had mocked John Fry, and knew all about the aorists, and tried to

make me know it; but I never went more than three places up, and then it was an accident, and I came down after dinner. The boys were urgent round me to fight, though my stomach was not up for it; and being very slow of wit (which is not chargeable on me), I looked from one to other of them, seeking any cure for it. Not that I was afraid of fighting, for now I had been three years at Blundell's, and foughten, all that time, a fight at least once every week, till the boys began to know me; only that the load on my heart was not sprightly as of the hay-field. It is a very sad thing to dwell on; but even now, in my time of wisdom, I doubt it is a fond thing to imagine, and a motherly to insist upon, that boys can do without fighting. Unless they be very good boys, and afraid of one another.

'Nay,' I said, with my back against the wrought-iron stay of the gate, which was socketed into Cop's house-front: 'I will not fight thee now, Robin Snell, but wait till I come back again.'

'Take coward's blow, Jack Ridd, then,' cried half a dozen little boys, shoving Bob Snell forward to do it; because they all knew well enough, having striven with me ere now, and proved me to be their master—they knew, I say, that without great change, I would never accept that contumely. But I took little heed of them, looking in dull wonderment at John Fry, and Smiler, and the blunderbuss, and Peggy. John Fry was scratching his head, I could see, and getting blue in the face, by the light from Cop's parlour-window, and going to and fro upon Smiler, as if he were hard set with it. And all the time he was looking briskly from my eyes to the fist I was clenching, and methought he tried to wink at me in a covert manner; and then Peggy whisked her tail.

'Shall I fight, John?' I said at last; 'I would an you had not come, John.'

'Chraist's will be done; I zim thee had better faight, Jan,' he answered, in a whisper, through the gridiron of the gate;

'there be a dale of faighting avore thee. Best wai to begin gude taime laike. Wull the geatman latt me in, to zee as thee hast vair plai, lad?'

He looked doubtfully down at the colour of his cowskin boots, and the mire upon the horses, for the sloughs were exceedingly mucky. Peggy, indeed, my sorrel pony, being lighter of weight, was not crusted much over the shoulders; but Smiler (our youngest sledder) had been well in over his withers, and none would have deemed him a piebald, save of red mire and black mire. The great blunderbuss, moreover, was choked with a dollop of slough-cake; and John Fry's sad-coloured Sunday hat was indued with a plume of marish-weed. All this I saw while he was dismounting, heavily and wearily, lifting his leg from the saddle-cloth as if with a sore crick in his back.

By this time the question of fighting was gone quite out of our discretion; for sundry of the elder boys, grave and reverend signors, who had taken no small pleasure in teaching our hands to fight, to ward, to parry, to feign and counter, to lunge in the manner of sword-play, and the weaker child to drop on one knee when no cunning of fence might baffle the onset—these great masters of the art, who would far liefer see us little ones practise it than themselves engage, six or seven of them came running down the rounded causeway, having heard that there had arisen 'a snug little mill' at the gate. Now whether that word hath origin in a Greek term meaning a conflict, as the best-read boys asseverated, or whether it is nothing more than a figure of similitude, from the beating arms of a mill, such as I have seen in counties where are no waterbrooks, but folk make bread with wind—it is not for a man devoid of scholarship to determine. Enough that they who made the ring intituled the scene a 'mill,' while we who must be thumped inside it tried to rejoice in their pleasantry, till it turned upon the stomach.

Moreover, I felt upon me now a certain responsibility, a dutiful need to maintain, in the presence of John Fry, the manliness of the Ridd family, and the honour of Exmoor. Hitherto none had worsted me, although in the three years of my schooling, I had fought more than threescore battles, and bedewed with blood every plant of grass towards the middle of the Ironing-box. And this success I owed at first to no skill of my own; until I came to know better; for up to twenty or thirty fights, I struck as nature guided me, no wiser than a father-long-legs in the heat of a lanthorn; but I had conquered, partly through my native strength, and the Exmoor toughness in me, and still more that I could not see when I had gotten my bellyful. But now I was like to have that and more; for my heart was down, to begin with; and then Robert Snell was a bigger boy than I had ever encountered, and as thick in the skull and hard in the brain as even I could claim to be.

I had never told my mother a word about these frequent strivings, because she was soft-hearted; neither had I told by father, because he had not seen it. Therefore, beholding me still an innocent-looking child, with fair curls on my forehead, and no store of bad language, John Fry thought this was the very first fight that ever had befallen me; and so when they let him at the gate, 'with a message to the headmaster,' as one of the monitors told Cop, and Peggy and Smiler were tied to the railings, till I should be through my business, John comes up to me with the tears in his eyes, and says, 'Doon't thee goo for to do it, Jan; doon't thee do it, for gude now.' But I told him that now it was much too late to cry off; so he said, 'The Lord be with thee, Jan, and turn thy thumb-knuckle inwards.'

It was not a very large piece of ground in the angle of the causeways, but quite big enough to fight upon, especially for Christians, who loved to be cheek by jowl at it. The great boys stood in a circle around, being gifted with strong

privilege, and the little boys had leave to lie flat and look through the legs of the great boys. But while we were yet preparing, and the candles hissed in the fog-cloud, old Phoebe, of more than fourscore years, whose room was over the hall-porch, came hobbling out, as she always did, to mar the joy of the conflict. No one ever heeded her, neither did she expect it; but the evil was that two senior boys must always lose the first round of the fight, by having to lead her home again.

I marvel how Robin Snell felt. Very likely he thought nothing of it, always having been a boy of a hectoring and unruly sort. But I felt my heart go up and down as the boys came round to strip me; and greatly fearing to be beaten, I blew hot upon my knuckles. Then pulled I off my little cut jerkin, and laid it down on my head cap, and over that my waistcoat, and a boy was proud to take care of them. Thomas Hooper was his name, and I remember how he looked at me. My mother had made that little cut jerkin, in the quiet winter evenings. And taken pride to loop it up in a fashionable way, and I was loth to soil it with blood, and good filberds were in the pocket. Then up to me came Robin Snell (mayor of Exeter thrice since that), and he stood very square, and looking at me, and I lacked not long to look at him. Round his waist he had a kerchief busking up his small-clothes, and on his feet light pumpkin shoes, and all his upper raiment off. And he danced about in a way that made my head swim on my shoulders, and he stood some inches over me. But I, being muddled with much doubt about John Fry and his errand, was only stripped of my jerkin and waistcoat, and not comfortable to begin.

'Come now, shake hands,' cried a big boy, jumping in joy of the spectacle, a third-former nearly six feet high; 'shake hands, you little devils. Keep your pluck up, and show good sport, and Lord love the better man of you.'

Robin took me by the hand, and gazed at me disdainfully, and then smote me painfully in the face, ere I could get my fence up.

'Whutt be 'bout, lad?' cried John Fry; 'hutt un again, Jan, wull 'e? Well done then, our Jan boy.'

For I had replied to Robin now, with all the weight and cadence of penthemimeral caesura (a thing, the name of which I know, but could never make head nor tail of it), and the strife began in a serious style, and the boys looking on were not cheated. Although I could not collect their shouts when the blows were ringing upon me, it was no great loss; for John Fry told me afterwards that their oaths went up like a furnace fire. But to these we paid no heed or hap, being in the thick of swinging, and devoid of judgment. All I know is, I came to my corner, when the round was over, with very hard pumps in my chest, and a great desire to fall away.

'Time is up,' cried head-monitor, ere ever I got my breath again; and when I fain would have lingered awhile on the knee of the boy that held me. John Fry had come up, and the boys were laughing because he wanted a stable lanthorn, and threatened to tell my mother.

'Time is up,' cried another boy, more headlong than head-monitor. 'If we count three before the come of thee, thwacked thou art, and must go to the women.' I felt it hard upon me. He began to count, one, too, three—but before the 'three' was out of his mouth, I was facing my foe, with both hands up, and my breath going rough and hot, and resolved to wait the turn of it. For I had found seat on the knee of a boy sage and skilled to tutor me, who knew how much the end very often differs from the beginning. A rare ripe scholar he was; and now he hath routed up the Germans in the matter of criticism. Sure the clever boys and men have most love towards the stupid ones.

'Finish him off, Bob,' cried a big boy, and that I noticed especially, because I thought it unkind of him, after eating of my toffee as he had that afternoon; 'finish him off, neck and crop; he deserves it for sticking up to a man like you.'

But I was not so to be finished off, though feeling in my knuckles now as if it were a blueness and a sense of chilblain. Nothing held except my legs, and they were good to help me. So this bout, or round, if you please, was foughten warily by me, with gentle recollection of what my tutor, the clever boy, had told me, and some resolve to earn his praise before I came back to his knee again. And never, I think, in all my life, sounded sweeter words in my ears (except when my love loved me) than when my second and backer, who had made himself part of my doings now, and would have wept to see me beaten, said—

'Famously done, Jack, famously! Only keep your wind up, Jack, and you'll go right through him!'

Meanwhile John Fry was prowling about, asking the boys what they thought of it, and whether I was like to be killed, because of my mother's trouble. But finding now that I had foughten three-score fights already, he came up to me woefully, in the quickness of my breathing, while I sat on the knee of my second, with a piece of spongy coralline to ease me of my bloodshed, and he says in my ears, as if he was clapping spurs into a horse—

'Never thee knock under, Jan, or never coom naigh Hexmoor no more.'

With that it was all up with me. A simmering buzzed in my heavy brain, and a light came through my eyeplaces. At once I set both fists again, and my heart stuck to me like cobbler's wax. Either Robin Snell should kill me, or I would conquer Robin Snell. So I went in again with my courage up, and Bob came smiling for victory, and I hated him for smiling. He let at me with his left hand, and I gave him my

right between his eyes, and he blinked, and was not pleased with it. I feared him not, and spared him not, neither spared myself. My breath came again, and my heart stood cool, and my eyes struck fire no longer. Only I knew that I would die sooner than shame my birthplace. How the rest of it was I know not; only that I had the end of it, and helped to put Robin in bed.

CHAPTER III

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THE WAR-PATH OF THE DOONES

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From Tiverton town to the town of Oare is a very long and painful road, and in good truth the traveller must make his way, as the saying is; for the way is still unmade, at least, on this side of Dulverton, although there is less danger now than in the time of my schooling; for now a good horse may go there without much cost of leaping, but when I was a boy the spurs would fail, when needed most, by reason of the slough-cake. It is to the credit of this age, and our advance upon fatherly ways, that now we have laid down rods and fagots, and even stump-oaks here and there, so that a man in good daylight need not sink, if he be quite sober. There is nothing I have striven at more than doing my duty, way-warden over Exmoor.

But in those days, when I came from school (and good times they were, too, full of a warmth and fine hearth-comfort, which now are dying out), it was a sad and sorry business to find where lay the highway. We are taking now to mark it off with a fence on either side, at least, when a town is handy; but to me this seems of a high pretence, and a sort of landmark, and channel for robbers, though well enough near London, where they have earned a race-course.

We left the town of the two fords, which they say is the meaning of it, very early in the morning, after lying one day to rest, as was demanded by the nags, sore of foot and

founded. For my part, too, I was glad to rest, having aches all over me, and very heavy bruises; and we lodged at the sign of the White Horse Inn, in the street called Gold Street, opposite where the souls are of John and Joan Greenway, set up in gold letters, because we must take the homeward way at cockcrow of the morning. Though still John Fry was dry with me of the reason of his coming, and only told lies about father, and could not keep them agreeable, I hoped for the best, as all boys will, especially after a victory. And I thought, perhaps father had sent for me because he had a good harvest, and the rats were bad in the corn-chamber.

It was high noon before we were got to Dulverton that day, near to which town the river Exe and its big brother Barle have union. My mother had an uncle living there, but we were not to visit his house this time, at which I was somewhat astonished, since we needs must stop for at least two hours, to bait our horses thorough well, before coming to the black bogway. The bogs are very good in frost, except where the hot-springs rise; but as yet there had been no frost this year, save just enough to make the blackbirds look big in the morning. In a hearty black-frost they look small, until the snow falls over them.

The road from Bampton to Dulverton had not been very delicate, yet nothing to complain of much—no deeper, indeed, than the hocks of a horse, except in the rotten places. The day was inclined to be mild and foggy, and both nags sweated freely; but Peggy carrying little weight (for my wardrobe was upon Smiler, and John Fry grumbling always), we could easily keep in front, as far as you may hear a laugh.

John had been rather bitter with me, which methought was a mark of ill taste at coming home for the holidays; and yet I made allowance for John, because he had never been at school, and never would have chance to eat fry upon condition of spelling it; therefore I rode on, thinking that he

was hard-set, like a saw, for his dinner, and would soften after tooth-work. And yet at his most hungry times, when his mind was far gone upon bacon, certes he seemed to check himself and look at me as if he were sorry for little things coming over great.

But now, at Dulverton, we dined upon the rarest and choicest victuals that ever I did taste. Even now, at my time of life, to think of it gives me appetite, as once and awhile to think of my first love makes me love all goodness. Hot mutton pasty was a thing I had often heard of from very wealthy boys and men, who made a dessert of dinner; and to hear them talk of it made my lips smack, and my ribs come inwards.

And now John Fry strode into the hostel, with the air and grace of a short-legged man, and shouted as loud as if he was calling sheep upon Exmoor—

'Hot mooton pasty for twoo trarv'lers, at number vaive, in vaive minnits! Dish un up in the tin with the grahvy, zame as I hardered last Tuesday.'

Of course it did not come in five minutes, nor yet in ten or twenty; but that made it all the better when it came to the real presence; and the smell of it was enough to make an empty man thank God for the room there was inside him. Fifty years have passed me quicker than the taste of that gravy.

It is the manner of all good boys to be careless of apparel, and take no pride in adornment. Good lack, if I see a boy make to do about the fit of his crumpler, and the creasing of his breeches, and desire to be shod for comeliness rather than for use, I cannot 'scape the mark that God took thought to make a girl of him. Not so when they grow older, and court the regard of the maidens; then may the bravery pass from the inside to the outside of them; and no bigger fools are they, even then, than their fathers were before

them. But God forbid any man to be a fool to love, and be loved, as I have been. Else would he have prevented it.

When the mutton pasty was done, and Peggy and Smiler had dined well also, out I went to wash at the pump, being a lover of soap and water, at all risk, except of my dinner. And John Fry, who cared very little to wash, save Sabbath days in his own soap, and who had kept me from the pump by threatening loss of the dish, out he came in a satisfied manner, with a piece of quill in his hand, to lean against a door-post, and listen to the horses feeding, and have his teeth ready for supper.

Then a lady's-maid came out, and the sun was on her face, and she turned round to go back again; but put a better face upon it, and gave a trip and hitched her dress, and looked at the sun full body, lest the hostlers should laugh that she was losing her complexion. With a long Italian glass in her fingers very daintily, she came up to the pump in the middle of the yard, where I was running the water off all my head and shoulders, and arms, and some of my breast even, and though I had glimpsed her through the sprinkle, it gave me quite a turn to see her, child as I was, in my open aspect. But she looked at me, no whit abashed, making a baby of me, no doubt, as a woman of thirty will do, even with a very big boy when they catch him on a hayrick, and she said to me in a brazen manner, as if I had been nobody, while I was shrinking behind the pump, and craving to get my shirt on, 'Good leetle boy, come hither to me. Fine heaven! how blue your eyes are, and your skin like snow; but some naughty man has beaten it black. Oh, leetle boy, let me feel it. Ah, how then it must have hurt you! There now, and you shall love me.'

All this time she was touching my breast, here and there, very lightly, with her delicate brown fingers, and I understood from her voice and manner that she was not of this country, but a foreigner by extraction. And then I was