

# DASHPERS

by Flora Thompson

## Chapter I The House

The village was long and straggling. Cottages in twos and threes were strung at intervals along the half mile or so of deeply-rutted road which passed through the place, some upon high banks with flights of stone steps leading up to the doors, others so flush with the road that passing waggoners from the top of their loads could look into the bedroom windows. One here and there had a honeysuckle covered porch, or a tall thicket of hollyhocks around the window, or a gable-end turned to the road, to redeem its plainness, but most of them were merely grey stone boxes with thatched or slated lids of the kind then thought good enough to house a farm labourers family. Only one, and that the inn, looked as if it had had a new coat of paint for years. The church and rectory which might otherwise have enriched the scene were round a turning and hidden by trees.

Yet, for all its plainness, the village of Warren had a mild charm. It came of its peace and quiet and utter seclusion in the mid'st of fields which, pale yellow with ripening corn and patterned with thick dark hedgerows, stretched around it for miles. Over the wide expanse tiny pale golden cloudlets floated, high up, against a marble coloured sky and the air was sleepy with the straw and pollen and wild-flower scents of approaching harvest.

From somewhere far away in the fields came the sound of children's voices. The only nearer sound was the *tap, tap*, made by a bird cracking a snail shell on a stone, for it was the time of the afternoon nap for the younger children and their mothers were either stretched beside them on the bed or quietly occupied down-stairs. A few of the cottage doors were open and cats sunned themselves on the whitened doorsteps, but there was no other sign of life when a young woman with a large marketing basket on her arm and her little daughter, a child of ten or eleven, climbed the stile which led to the footpath by which they had come and entered the village street.

They padded on through the thick soft dust of the road until they came to the last group of cottages at the end of the village, in the garden of one of which, they had been told, were red currants for sale, and it was from this garden while her mother bargained with the woman at her door that the little girl, looking around, beheld THE HOUSE.

Against the dingy greyness of the other houses it seemed to shine, for its smooth walls had been painted yellow and it had height and an air of having been built for other purposes than merely to house as many human beings as could be crowded within. It was but a cottage, but a cottage of a different order. Thought and a sense of beauty and fitness, as well as money, had gone to the building of it. In short, it was planned, while the honeysuckle porches and gable ends, which lent charm to a few of the other cottages, were happy accidents.

An older and more discriminating observer would have noticed the streaked and discoloured patches, due to choked water spouts, on the yellow walls, and the tangle of overgrown shrubs by the pathways

and the blistered green paint of the woodwork and roof of the long verandah; but from the child, surveying the house from among the currant bushes in the neighbouring garden, these defects were hidden, she thought it was perfect. She loved the row of sash windows above the long curved roof of the verandah and the one attic dormer winking above and the tall holly tree, the shape of the trees in her brother's Noah's Ark and the thick whitewashed wall with its arched doorway which shut in the side courtyard.

Altogether, the house was something new to her, for she had never before seen a dwelling which was not either a mansion or a labourer's cottage, excepting, of course the rows of villas with glass porches and bay windows which lined the road into the nearest market town. Even the Rectory had seventeen rooms and almost came into the mansion class. This house was much smaller, little more than the size of two cottages put end-to-end, but how different it looked to any cottage she had seen before? Had she tried to describe it in words, her vocabulary would only have run to "nice" or "pretty", but she had something within her which could recognise its quality.

Her mother was still bargaining with the women to whom the garden belonged. Were the red currants still twopence a pint if they picked them themselves? The woman said "Yes," that was the price, "take them or leave them", but her mother insisted that it was well worth a halfpenny a pint to pick them in that heat, could they not have them for three halfpence? And the woman seemed to have given way for she was talking now about her rheumatism and admitting that stooping over the bushes did make her back "that mortal bad" that she sometimes thought she would never get herself upright again. "What you want is to grow a hinge there", her mother was saying and while they were laughing at that the little girl ventured to tiptoe between the bean rows to get a nearer view of the house.

The wall which divided the garden from that in which she was standing was high near the houses and its coping bristled with fragments of bottle-glass, but the farther it went the lower it became, until, towards the bottom of the two gardens, it was not much higher than she was. After a little scrambling, she managed to get her toes into a crack and hang on to the top with her hands. From there she could see the whole of the front of the house. Beneath the projecting roof of the verandah was a wide, solid-looking front door with a sash window on each side and, beyond these, was the whitewashed wall with the door that must lead to the kitchen premises. Above the wall she could see one bedroom window beneath a lower roof than that of the other part of the house, for the attics did not cover the whole house.

The long floor of the verandah was paved with stone flags and its delicately patterned ironwork supported creepers. One cream rose was in bloom. All this, for some reason unknown to herself, gave her a deep sense of satisfaction. The house, she thought, looked just how a house ought to look, and she liked the garden with its fruit trees and lavender bushes and thickets of raspberry canes where the berries were dropping from over-ripeness. She reached over the wall and picked one raspberry, then, as it melted on her tongue, slipped down and hurried to meet her mother who was parting amicably from the woman at the door.

"She's come round all right," whispered her mother. "We are to fill the basket for a shilling; 't'll make us a nice bit of jam and jelly for the winter. I didn't like beating the poor old soul down, and her on Parish Pay and all; but fair's fair, and a shilling's a shilling to me, as well as to her. Here! These look the best bushes. You pick on that side and I'll pick on this and we'll

soon have our basket full. We mustn't be long, for it's a good step back over the fields, and your father's supper to see to."

"Mother, what house is that, over there?" the little girl asked later."

"Oh, that, said her mother, stripping a string of currants with teeth like milk as she looked up, 'Dashpers', I think they call it. There's an old quarry somewhere behind the house, I've been told, that used to be called Dashpers Quarry and that's how it got its name, I expect. I haven't set eyes on the place for years, though I often passed through as a child, may-garlanding and the like, and your grandfather used to buy eggs there at one time. I've heard him say that the stone to build the house was quarried on the spot, but I don't know how he knew, for it must have been long before his time, but he took an interest in such things."

"It's the nicest house I have ever seen," said her small daughter emphatically, and her mother laughed and told her she had not seen many, and what about Sherston Park, where they went to the Flower Show that time.

The country child thought Sherston Park very rich and grand, with its porticoed front and lawns and fountains and its window for every day in the year, but she could not imagine herself living there, she would be afraid to move in those gorgeous rooms for fear of breaking anything and when she wanted to go to bed she would lose her way in the passages. But this house, this Dashpers, was different. It was not so very much larger than their own small home in the neighbouring hamlet, though far more beautiful. She could easily imagine herself living there, and that thought led to her wondering who *had* lived there. There was no one there now, she thought, it was all so silent and the garden so overgrown, but it could not always have been so. "I wonder what kind of people have lived there," she said.

"Pretty well all sorts at different times, I expect," her mother replied, "for it must be an oldish house. If those old walls could speak they'd have some tales to tell, I'll warrant." It was what was known as a gentleman's cottage, she went on to explain. You often saw such houses in the larger villages, often a vicar's widow, or some maiden lady related to the squire lived in one, or the curate or the schoolmaster lodged in one. This one was a nice enough looking little place, she admitted; but, by the look of it, it wanted a lot of doing up. Damp, too, she expected. These old houses usually were damp; and she should think they'd never get a servant to stay in this dead-alive place, no shops, nor nothing but poor people's cottages anywhere handy.

But these considerations did not dampen her little daughter's admiration of the house or her desire to know about those whose home it had been. She could make up stories about them, she had already made up several while picking the currants, but she thirsted to know its true story. Its history, some older people would have said, but at that time history, to her, meant people painting their bodies with woad, dressing in skins, and cutting mistletoe with gold knives, for her studies at the village school had as yet taken her no farther than the Ancient Britons. There was an old man, a neighbour at home, who remembered the big war with Napoleon and had often told of her about the day when he, a small boy scaring rooks from the corn, had been called to the hedge by a passing horseman who told him there had been a great victory at the Battle of Waterloo.

"Here, my boy," he had said and flung him a shilling, "take

that towards your bonfire to-night, for of course you'll be making one, and never forget you're English, and that one Englishman is a match for half a dozen foreigners." But he had not spent the shilling on wood for a bonfire. Why should he, when furze could be had for the cutting? His mother had taken the money and bought barley meal to make extra bread and they'd all had as much as they could eat for once in their lives. All the old people could remember Queen Victoria coming to the Throne, and spoke of the Crimean War as of something that have happened yesterday, and she herself had taken part in the Queen's Golden Jubilee rejoicings the year before; but she did not think of these things as history.

"Can't you ask who the house belongs to, Mother?" she asked tentatively,

And her mother laughed and said, "Well, you are a queer one. Just as if it mattered!" However, when she handed in the shilling, with a penny over, for luck, at the cottage door, she enquired if anyone lived in that house over the wall.

One lady and a boy, she was told. The boy was away at school most of the time, and now, in the holidays, he'd be scavenging about the country seeing what mischief he could get into, she supposed, the young varmint, him! "Most times the place might as well stand empty for all I hears or sees or anybody. Not neighbourly at all, you understand. Set up with herself, I reckon; though why she should be, God knows, and her but the widow or old Jeremy Benson the 'oss doctor; him as fell off his 'oss one dark night and broke his neck, Oh! Long ago, before my husband died and I come to live here."

The mother remembered the horse doctor's death; she had read about it in the newspaper, but had not known before exactly where he lived. That seemed all they would be likely to gather about the house and its inhabitants, so, after listening a few more moments to the cottager's complaints: "I don't believe in folks making a sort of mystery of their selves. I believe in being neighbourly, I do". They took up their basket of fruit and made their way across fields, over stiles and through deep-rutted lanes to their own hamlet.

For some days the house called Dashpers was much in the little girl's thoughts. She told her father about it and, although he did not remember seeing it himself, he seemed to grasp what it was like and to understand her feelings about it. He liked that style of house, he said, Georgian, they called it, because that kind of building came into fashion when King George was on the throne. He had, in the course of his work, helped to renovate several such cottages, walls two feet thick and good solid woodwork, good frontages, too, plain and good, without a lot of these stuck on dib-dabs. They knew how to build then. Yes, they knew how to build. Now the fashion was all for show. Dump a house down on the flimsiest foundations, with unseasoned timber which shrunk and poor-quality mortar which perished and the work scamped for want of time; then clap on a couple of bay windows in front and a glass porch over the door and you'd soon find a purchaser. But all this, though at ordinary times interesting enough to a child to whom everything was of interest, seemed rather to lead away from than to her particular cottage.

She might never have heard it mentioned again and it might have remained with her simply as something she had once seen and admired had it not been for a casual word dropped by her mother when discussing the red currant crop with a neighbour.

"Warren!" exclaimed the old woman with sudden interest. "Know it? I should think I do. Why, when I was a bit of a wench just leavin' home I took service there. Dashpers, the house was called; family o' th' name o' Fyfield. I looked after the children. There weren't no nurse, only me and the general, for they weren't what you might call gentry. They weren't trades people either, sort o' betwix an' between; but I liked 'em all right. Young Mr Fyfield's father, Lawyer Fyfield, they used to call him, had his office in the Market Square at Lewster, where the Methodist Chapel now stands, and he used to ride over a-horseback every morning to help him.

Let's see, that'd be gettin' on for forty years ago; but I ain't forgotten 'em. There wer' Master Edward, and Miss Connie, a proper sort of young miss with long curls, and the little one they used to call Madge, a wild little thing, but the best of the bunch to my way o' thinking. I did hear afterwards that she married that Benson, th' 'oss doctor as broke his neck that time; but whether she's alive herself now, or what happened to the others, I couldn't say. 'tis cross-country like from here and the news don't travel"

It was a treat to her to talk about old times, for she was a garrulous old woman and usually avoided by her busier neighbours on that account. Now she did not want for encouragement, and, every time they met, she would rake up old memories to entertain the child.

As she grew older and had more freedom of movement the child's blackberrying and nutting expeditions would take her far in the direction of Warren and she would find an opportunity of parting with her companions and go there and walk slowly past the house, picturing the scenes of which she had heard from her friend and filling in the gaps from her own imagination.

In these days such an obsession in a child would be frowned upon as unwholesome, and perhaps, even then, if her mother had known the extent of her small daughter's absorption in something quite outside her own range of interests it would have been checked. But it took all the time, thought, and energy of parents thereabouts to provide for the bodily needs of their offspring. Minds had to develop as they could and an imaginative child could therefore live a life of its own outside the family life it shared with others. This second, secret life had to find its own nourishment and the house served one child as a passionate friendship or an immature love affair may have served others.

When she grew up and for the best part of a lifetime had her home in a distant county the memory of the house faded, though it still remained somewhere in the dim inner recesses of her mind, ready to spring into conscious thought at the least reminder.

"I knew a house when I was a child --" she would say to her friends when, on some country walk, they passed some similar cottage, and sometimes at night, between sleeping and waking, she would see beneath her closed lids a picture of Dashpers in one of those series of such pictures we all see at such times.

It was as an elderly woman she at last returned to her own countryside and by what appeared the merest chance came to occupy the very house she had admired as a child.

The village had altered. Aeroplane works had been built two miles away and new houses for the workers there, squares of concrete with metal window frames and bungalows with roofs of pink artificial tiles, had been interspersed with the original stone cottages. There was a Bus Stop outside the *Fighting Cocks*, which still retained its

old name and sign, but was itself a recently built structure, replete with every picturesque feature known to the large firm of brewers now owning it. A row of shops catered for all ordinary requirements and one of the cottages had had its woodwork painted bright blue and been named "Elizabeth's Tea Cosy".

Amongst all these changes the house had changed little. The walls were still cream-coloured and the row of sash windows still spaced the front above the green roof of the verandah; but it was reached now by a side entrance for the long front garden had been sold and cut up for building plots and a row of six cottages faced the road. Young women with fashionably waved hair hung their "sets" of artificial silk garments to dry in gardens which came up to within a few feet of the verandah; but a screen of laurels enclosing a few flowerbeds preserved some semblance of privacy.

It more than sufficed. The clumps of bride-grass and ferns and lily-of-the-valley leaves appealed more than brilliant masses of colour to the taste of old age. Later in the season the jessamine that wreathed the iron stanchions of the verandah was starry with white bloom and an old-fashioned scented white rose came out in one of the flowerbeds. Nor, although the house had long been empty, was this green oasis unoccupied. On one of the first warm days a tortoise crept out of some crevice and lay with its long, withered-looking neck extended on the sun-baked flagstones. It was an incredibly old-looking creature whose lidless eyes seemed heavy with the accumulated wisdom of its long, silent years. To have attempted to adopt it as a pet would have been to insult it, for you cannot make a pet of an aged philosopher, and it remained rather as an example of all the stoic virtues, plus the absolute independence of one from whom nature has provided so well that it requires nothing whatever from its fellow creatures.

The house had by that time been standing well over a century. It must have been home to many in turn, their home to do as they would with; then they had died, or gone away, and others had taken their places, and they, too, had gone and left no trace. But had they left no trace? Apart from the alterations made by succeeding tenants, the closing of the huge, cement-walled rain water tank, large as a small room, when Company's water was laid on; the built up back staircase, no longer needed when to keep a maid in a house that size became an undreamed of luxury, and the partitioning of the end of a passage upstairs to make a bathroom, there were other, more intangible reminders, or so it seemed.

The house was not haunted in the ordinary sense of the term, although once when it had long stood empty it, had had that reputation. There were no apparitions. No noises, which commonsense could not attribute to the creaking of old floorboards, the gurgling of waterspouts, or the moaning of the wind round the tall upper story.

Yet there was something, evasive as the lingering odour of pot-pourri in the rooms, a sudden impression of watching eyes when a picture was hung or a bookshelf filled; a sound like the swish of a crinolined skirt on the landing, and was that a breath of air from the window, or the sound of a sigh on the stairs, or was it the deep breathing of men carrying a coffin on their shoulders? Whatever the cause, these sounds and others akin to them were often repeated, though never distinctly enough to alarm the new tenant. If there were ghosts, they were very gentle ghosts, considerate of the feelings of the living. The new occupant was only aware of a more humanised, lived-in atmosphere than she had hitherto known in her more modern homes.

All her old interest -- or curiosity -- revived. Who had lived in this house during the many years it had stood untouched by change while all around it had changed. In imagination she saw the first bride and bridegroom enter the door; the merry family party sitting round the loaded table where her own tray of tea and bread and butter now stood, and the newborn baby being taken from what was now her bedroom and carried up the attic stairs before going out for its first airing to ensure that its progress in life should be up, instead of downward. She knew these things must have happened. What she wanted to know was how life treated the bride and bridegroom, what particular baby it was, and what became of the family.

The longing to know grew upon her. She sometimes felt, as she had as a child, that, had she only the art of compelling them, the very walls could be made to speak. Not being in possession of the magic password, she had to have recourse to more laborious methods of enquiry.

She already knew something. A bundle of old deeds and other documents had come into her possession with the house, the earliest of which dealt with the conveyance of "that field, meadow, or parcel of land known as Dashpers" to Edward Fyfield, and was dated: "The Thirteenth Day of November in the Tenth Year of the Reign of Our Sovereign Lord George the Fourth by the Grace of God of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith," and so forth, "and in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty Nine."

The reminiscences of her childhood's friend, Mrs. Barby, helped to cast a light on some of these. Then she had the great good fortune to discover an aged man who had sometimes worked for the second generation of Fyfields: while, of more recent Fyfields; while, of more recent times, there was still common knowledge among the older inhabitants of the village. Notebooks were filled and the scraps of information they contained were sifted and fitted together. Then, in the quiet house and perhaps, who shall say? influenced by silent onlookers, she reconstructed its story as follows.

## Chapter II    A House is Built

The quarry in the field called Dashpers was being worked again, for the first time, people said, since Queen Anne's day. But that was because a boy, playing hide-and-seek there, had once, during a long wait, dug his toes in the turf and turned up a Queen Anne shilling, which had caused a sensation at the time, for the clergyman had given him a whole half-crown for it, nearly a third as much as his father earned in a week.

Nothing was really known about the quarry, excepting that it was situated in a small field at the end of the straggling village of Warren. An observant passer-by might have concluded that the grey limestone of which the cottages had been built had been quarried there and the quarry had then been deserted. It was still the custom of the countryside to build with local materials produced as close to the selected site as possible, for transport was difficult, even the best of country roads being more fitted for horseback traffic than for heavy loads.

But those who lived at Warren did not, as they would have said, "trouble their heads" with such speculations, having enough to

do in thinking how they could keep their cottages watertight and their families fed. To them the quarry was a natural feature of the landscape, which, as long as the oldest living could remember, had lain, a deep hollow filled with briars and elder and other dark greenery against the lighter green of the turf. Boys went bird nesting there in spring and sometimes in the dusk of a summer evening a pair of lovers would find seclusion among the bushes; at other times it was left to the birds and rabbits and field mice.

On one side of it laid the village; on the other side stretched fields, good farmland, with here and there a farmhouse, or a barn and cowsheds, or another group of poor cottages similar to that called Warren. Human warrens, all of them, where children, often as many as eight or ten in a house, popped in and out of the doorways; where the father hurried out before dawn to scratch them a living from the soil, and the mother, like a human rabbit, stripped herself to warm and cover them.

The children did not remain children long. Boys of seven or eight went to work on the farms, scaring rooks from the crops, weeding turnips, or leading by the rein great carthorses whose mouths were on a level with their own small ears. Girl children of ten or eleven were sent out to service, to eat their meals alone in large, stone-flagged kitchens and to cry themselves to sleep at night because it was so cold, alone in a bed, after being used to cuddling down with their sisters.

In after life, when criticising the degenerate softness of their grandchildren, they would boast that such hardships had been the making of them; but they were hard to bear at the time and their parents knew it; but what could they do to prevent them, with a farm labourer's wages at seven or eight shillings a week. Hard-baked barley bread with a scratch of lard was their staple diet, with vegetables from their own gardens with dumplings, or a morsel of fat bacon if they were lucky for the one hot meal of the day.

It was a hard life, but, physically, they throve upon it, the men standing up well to the hard labour of the fields and the women, in addition to their washing, scrubbing, cooking and nursing, bearing a child almost annually. Some more refined, and more fortunate, people compared them to animals; but they were human enough. They had a capacity for suffering, a sense of humour, an appreciation of comfort, and an insatiable curiosity about each other's affairs which, though crude, were such as none of the lower animals know.

The nearest small town was five miles away, a long walk to do the Saturday night shopping. Those too encumbered with young children to attempt it bought their few necessities at the one village shop, kept by an old dame in the cottage room which also served as a schoolroom for the children whose parents thought it worth while to pay her fee of twopence a week. The mothers of most of her pupils did fieldwork and paid the twopence out of their own earnings, after well weighing up the advantages. "It keeps 'em from fallin' into the brook or setting 'emselves afire, and it won't do 'em no harm to learn their A.B.C." was their verdict.

Attendance at the Parish Church was not as essential as the purchase of lard and candles and soap. A few of the older people attended the Sunday afternoon service and the bigger children were sent there in a pack, to be out of the way while their parents enjoyed their Sunday afternoon snooze.

The clergyman did not worry the stay-at-homes. His only intercourse with that portion of his flock was a kindly "Good day,

my good man" or "good woman" if he met one of them face to face and happened to notice their presence. Often he did not, for he rode or walked in the lanes deep in thought, sometimes talking aloud to himself with curious gestures, which amused them mightily. Some said he was mad; others, a little better informed, attributed his eccentricities to learning.

"Books all over the place," said a man at the inn one night. "On the walls and the chairs and in gurt heaps piled up on the floor. You never did see such a mess in your life! and him keepin' his place in one with his finger all the time he was takin' to me about my poor old mother's burying."

"Yes," said another, "when our young Sal wer' undermaid there she told me as how he actually read while'a was eatin'. 'An' more fool he' says I, for how can'a read an' taste a's victuals. A bit o' bread and lard'd be good enough to read on, and I could do fine wi' a cut off' his leg o' mutton. S'pose you can't change 'em over without a's seein', our Sally, says I."

There was a laugh at this; then another spoke up; "The man's no fool, whatever he mid be. That I do know, for Farmer Brown's son what lives in London, printer or summat, told me they think a lot of our parson there. Greek and Latin's but child's play to him, seemingly, and he's even found out some new thing about the Bible."

"He ain't found out how to preach a good sermon," snapped a woman who attended church occasionally. "Only last Sunday was a fortnight he was spouting some heathen language in the pulpit and though he told us afterwards what it all meant, folks didn't like it. 'I want you to take notice of the sound,' says he, 'like a great roll of drums, isn't it?' and he out with it all over again. I'd a good mind to up and tell him there and then that what folks come to his church for was to hear the Gospel, not things what sounded like drums at fairs."

She had talked out her listeners' interest. There was no further comment. They were used to their parson's little ways, and parsons at that time were frequently queer. There was the one at Stockley who rode to hounds and swore at his groom like a trooper, and the one at Peamarsh who was too poor to keep a maid for his wife and whose nine children scoured the fields and lanes, climbing trees and throwing stones, like a lot of gypsies. Learning was no worse than drunkenness or poverty. Not so bad as the latter, for their parson did send a blanket or a length of flannel to every house in the parish at Christmas.

This discussion took place at the *Fighting Cock* where the men folk of Warren and some of the older women gathered on most evenings to sip their half-pints of small beer, price one penny, and discuss the weather, the crops, the unreasonableness of employers, the price of bread and the poorness of wages. Or a tasty tit-bit of local gossip would come as a god-send; some poor girl would have come home from service "expecting", as they called her condition; or some young fellow, under the influence of an extra pint, would have taken the King's Shilling at a Fair. But, although the last grain of interest was extracted from such events, they did not make conversation for ever, and often there was no more exciting news than that somebody's speckled hen had laid away from home: "Fifteen eggs in the nest and every jack one of 'em, cock and hen, as rotten as a 'oss- droppin'."

Or they would revert to the past and talk of the Napoleonic Wars when their "slap bang" local volunteers had been the pride of the countryside. Farmers' and tradesmen's sons, these had been; gay

young sparks who painted the market town red between the times of their drills and manoeuvres. The labouring folk had gone on with their fieldwork as usual, only working harder and for longer hours for no more wages. But they had had their fill of excitement, although Warren was too far inland for them to share in the invasion scares of the coastal areas.

Napoleon had been to them a devil incarnate, a monster that ordered his soldiers to hack off the right hands of prisoners of war, to mutilate small boys, and to roast babies on spits, three in a row, for his breakfast. As to the girls and women in the conquered lands ---well, "it wouldn't bear thinking about", they said. But they had thought about it a lot and done their full share of inventing gruesome details, and some of those stories were still repeated, although Waterloo was fifteen years back in the past and the archfiend himself had long been dead.

Since then nothing much had happened to strike the popular fancy but that "rumpus" at the King's coronation. "The dirty dog, him, to let his own lawful wife, our good Queen Caroline, be whipped away from the Abbey door like a common whore."

One man said boldly that she was one and he had a few backers, but the majority preferred the picture of an injured queen, "rolled in the mud in her silks and satins, her hair pulled down and her backside kicked, while that old devil himself sat inside with a golden crown on his head."

Queen Caroline had been dead nearly a decade, but the story of the coronation scene had been revived because they had lately been told that King George himself was getting "very shaky on the pins" and might not last much longer. When he died, they knew that the Duke of York was to reign over them, "him as they used to call Silly Billy," said one; "but they do say now that a's settled down and 'll make as good a king as another."

"And then, when God A'mighty sees fit to take *him*, we be to have a queen again," said one well primed with superior knowledge. Old Duke o' Kent's daughter. Our Ruth, as goes to Lunnon every year wi' Squire Dashwood's family 've actually seen her. A stocky little thing, as broad as she's long, wi' bow legs and a straw bonnet wi' blue ribbons. Ruth and another housemaid peeked through the palings at Kensington Palace, where she lives, and seen her throwing a stick to her little dog, as large as life and twice as natural."

A woman remarked here that having a queen would be a nice change. The country had had a bellyful of Georges, and queens were always better than kings, or why did they call them good. - - - Good Queen Bess and Good Queen Anne. "An' you mark my words", she concluded weightily, "this is going to be a good 'un, too. What did you say her name is?"

Nobody could answer that question. Some foreign name, her brother thought Ruth had said, but he couldn't remember just how it went. Somebody suggested Georgina, and at that they all laughed and said, "For God's sake, no! We don't want nothing with a George in it!"

Occasionally one of the men who was a thinker by nature and could read would produce an old newspaper, which his daughter, a servant at one of the farmhouses, had saved from her fire lighting. It was already frayed to a rag by many readings, having been passed from squire to parson and from parson to farmer, but its appearance at the inn always caused a little pleasurable excitement. There might

be news of a hanging, with a description of the crowds which had stood wedged together in the streets around the Prison all night in order to witness the miserable spectacle, and the criminal's last confession with gruesome details, a work of fancy, this latter, but they did not know this. Or two young bloods might have fought a duel, or a coach might have overturned with loss of life, or there might have been a big fire, or a flood, or the Thames might be frozen over.

They liked hearing of such events, but when Bob Allen came to the political news they were less attentive. This Parliamentary Reform there seemed to be so much talk about; what did it matter to them? They wouldn't get a vote, anyhow. The privilege of voting was still to be confined to the well to do. They didn't want votes, either. A vote wasn't going to raise wages or make bread any cheaper. What did it matter to them what Government was in power?

Bob, whose intelligence was more developed and who had studied the matter, told them that if once the working man got a vote he would be able to have some say himself in making the laws; but the others only laughed and said the less they had to do with the law the better they should be pleased. Those they had known who had meddled with it had generally been hung or transported.

As to this new idea of freeing Negro slaves, opinions were divided. A few of the more advanced thought that all mankind should be free. The majority held that money having been paid for the slave he rightly belonged to his owner; besides, were there not slaves in the Bible and not a word said against it?

Such discussions did very well to fill in the time between local events, but a change of Sovereigns or the most sensational overthrow of a Government created less stir at Warren than that caused when somebody's bucket fell in the well and had to be fished out, or a pig being killed, or a hayrick on fire.

Excitement ran high when, one Monday morning, wild-looking strangers in fustian jackets and knotted red neckerchief arrived in a covered wagon with their tools and appliances for working the quarry and put up at the *Fighting Cocks* where they slept in the hayloft and ate in the taproom, "Like lords," it was rumoured, "meat every day and pickles for supper."

"Furriners", the Warren folk called them at first and took care to padlock outhouse doors and keep an eye on hen-roosts after dark; but they were soon reassured. In the close association of the taproom in the evenings the quarrymen proved to be decent enough chaps, ready to listen, as well as to talk, to sing a song, or even to stand treat occasionally. Their work took them about the countryside and their experiences seemed richly varied to the farm labourers, many of whom had travelled no farther than the nearest market town.

Their generosity in the matter of half-pints was not entirely disinterested. Some of the younger ones enjoyed a little poaching after the inn had closed and they were supposed to be sleeping in their hayloft. Nothing on earth could have prevailed upon the villagers to join them in this; but, apart from the mugs of ale, they could be relied upon to be deaf and blind to it. "I ain't never seen nor heard nothing", would have been their response to the questioning of authority, for there was nothing they dreaded as much as "being mixed up" with poachers or poaching, or indeed with anything which might bring them in contact with the law. The grandfather of one of them had been hung in chains for sheep stealing and the great-uncle of another had been convicted and transported to Botany Bay. Both were innocent men, as their descendants still maintained, but,

nevertheless, a warning.

But they admired the quarrymen for their daring and were not above giving a whispered hint as to where snares might best be set for hares and the way to the copse where game birds roosted.

It was generally agreed that the coming of the quarrymen had livened up the place. The women, hanging out their washing in the gardens, would pause, clothes-peg in mouth, to listen to the *clang, clang*, of picks, the trundling of wheelbarrows, or the occasional loud report of a charge of gunpowder; or take out the peg to smile at the, "G'marnin' Missus", of one who happened to pass. If she were young and he not too old, her smile would linger on her lips as she went back to her washtub, for to see and speak to a stranger was an event in their secluded lives, and these big, fierce-looking men had certainly a way with them. They looked at you as if they saw you and found you worth looking at, not as if you were a cabbage, or the gatepost, as some nearer home they could name.

Everybody by that time knew that the small field with the quarry had been sold and that a house was to be built there. Not a gentleman's house exactly, and yet not a small cottage such as they themselves inhabited. That puzzled them, for nothing between the two types of dwelling had so far been seen in their neighbourhood. "A gentleman's cottage", Farmer Brown had said, but that made it no easier to imagine, for what gentleman who was a gentleman would live in a cottage? And then it turned out that the house was not to belong to a gentleman at all, not what they would call a gentleman. Young Mr. Fyfield, son of lawyer Fyfield in Sherton Market Square, had bought the plot. Someone had left him a lot of money, five hundred pounds, it was rumoured, and on the strength of it he was going to build the house and get married to a young lady from up-country somewhere.

Some of those who lived at that end of the village recollected seeing a young man pacing the field with Sir Perigrine's agent, and, afterwards, he had passed through the village one day with a young lady on his arm. Going to inspect the site of their new home, no doubt, though, unfortunately, no one had thought to watch them beyond the end of the houses. That was the day Jimmy White had been gored by the bull and they had just got him home in the cart at the time. "Queer how things do seem to happen all of a heap! You mid go for a year and see naught in this god-forsaken hole, then things do happen so fast you want eyes front and back to keep count of 'em."

Still, there were those who had noticed the young couple, the lady a wispy little bit of a thing, no taller than sixpen'orth of ha'pence, with yellow hair done in curls over her ears and wearing a green pelisse trimmed with grey fur. The young man? Well, you'd hardly know him from real gentry by his looks -- blue cloth coat with bright buttons and a cane -- sort of inward cast of countenance. Pale, too, looked as if he stayed indoors counting his father's money, instead of getting out on horseback in all weathers, as a young gentleman should. Still, he looked all right and the young lady, too. She smiled quite friendly like at old Nanny Moss with her buckets of water. Nanny didn't know if she ought to curtsy or not, but she thought she's better. "Ah! Ah! trust Nanny! she knew, gentry or half-gentry, there'd be a bit of dripping out of their joint and maybe a few half-spent tea leaves from their pot, and the first to curtsy might get 'em belike. Trust Nanny! But it's a corker to me why they be coming here to live at all, when they might have built their house near the town where they'd have found folks of their own sort."

That was what puzzled everybody. Why come to live at Warren of all places? Warren had always belonged to the poor and its one great advantage had been that there were no better-off neighbours to interfere with its inhabitants. The women hoped that the young miss, as she still was, didn't think of visiting them. They had heard of the antics of some ladies in other parishes who went round telling folks what they ought to eat and how to bring up their children. A fat lot they knew about being a labourer's wife, with six or eight or ten to keep on a weekly eight shillings!

But she didn't look that sort, said one who had seen her. A shy-looking childish sort of little piece, and, now she came to think of it, mesh looking. Looked as if a good puff of wind might blow her away.

Ah! Perhaps that was it. Delicate-like, she might be, and her husband-to-be thought the air of the place might do her good. "'Tis well known to be the best air in the country here", said one, and nobody contradicted him, for had not the doctor on one of his rare visits said: "This fine fresh air would bring the dead to life", and urged them to keep their windows wide open.

The few facts they had, filled in and rounded off by imagination, made quite a good story to repeat. What they did not know was that Edward Fyfield was a poet, as well as a budding solicitor and that his present desire was for a retreat to escape to after business hours. A retreat where, as he fondly hoped, callers would be non-existent and other distractions few; where, with an adoring young wife as his only companion, he could devote his leisure to the major work he had in mind. A business acquaintance with the estate agent of the owner had led to the field known as Dashpers at a moderate price. It was the extreme point of a tongue of land wedged between other estates and its owner wished to straighten his boundaries. So, with a small legacy, which had lately come to him, making his early marriage possible, Edward had decided to purchase the plot and to build upon it.

At first the young bride-to-be had made some faint protest. She would have preferred to live in or near the town; but at present her Edward's will was law to her, and although she was not particularly struck with the kind of poetry Edward wrote, preferring that of "L.E.L." or Mrs. Hemans, she was impressed by seeing his name beneath verse in one of the "Keepsakes", as the annual anthologies of the day were called. She had heard of the tremendous sums paid to Byron and Sir Walter Scott for their poems and based her dreams upon these.

She was also impressed by Edward's account of his visit to Abbotsford. With all the self-confidence of youth he had at nineteen written to Sir Walter, enclosing some of his own poems, and that generous giant, then at the height of his fame, had, at the end of a letter of advice, written: "If at any time you should find yourself in this neighbourhood I shall be delighted to see you."

Edward had found himself at Abbotsford before many months were over, having travelled from London by boat and from Leith by coach and on foot. He had the good fortune to find the master of that baronial pile in residence and was kindly received. Actually, Scott had forgotten his letter, for it was but one of hundreds of the kind addressed to him; but, with almost royal tact which distinguished him, he managed to conceal the fact and, after reading some more specimens of his work which Edward had brought with him he was able to pronounce it promising. The boy himself he liked well enough to ask him to stay a day or two and generously devoted some hours of his own precious time to making the stay a memorable one.

Since that time the young poet had worked through a Byron craze, discovered Coleridge, and, finally, come to rest as a Wordsworthian. Scott's poetry, though still beloved by him, was no longer his model; but for Scott, the man, and the novelist, his passion was unabated. Probably no one on this side of the Tweed grieved more sincerely than he did when it became known that the great author of Waverley was in failing health, complicated by money difficulties.

Meanwhile at Dashpers the piles of stone were growing, long piles of sizeable stones for the walls, piles of large blocks to be squared for use in more important positions, and carefully handled stacks of wide, thin, flat stones for paving. Alongside these massive oak beams were laid. Waterloo oak, it was called locally, for it had been felled for shipbuilding towards the end of the war and then was not required because of the victory. Since then it had been maturing in the builder's yard and was now guaranteed by him as everlasting. More than a century later, it was still so hard and solid that workmen renovating the house declared that they had to use iron-cutting tools to saw through it.

When sufficient stone had been obtained the rubble was carted away and the quarry bed squared and walled round on three sides leaving the natural cliff on the fourth. The square so enclosed was to be reached by a flight of stone steps and to be known as the upper garden, away, out of sight, at the side of the house. For that tons and tons of field mould had to be brought. Men and horses sweated and tolled at that for a week. It would have been a costly business in later days, but no one thought then of charging for a few loads of earth and the cartage cost but a pound or two.

Then came the masons to build the walls and carpenters to fix the beams and make doors and window-frames, and, to the sounds of trowel and hammer and saw, the work went merrily. The walls were already higher than the roofs of the neighbouring cottages when, one fine blowy March morning, a small red flag made of a grimy pocket handkerchief tied to a lath might have been seen fluttering at the highest point.

The workmen had gathered outside the building to survey the effect of this and to enjoy what they called a breather. Some had lighted pipes; others had hunks of bread and cheese in their hands. There was only water to drink, for it was near payday, but they had hurried to get up their flag, hoping to remedy this, and were cheerfully cursing the master builder who happened to have offended them recently, when one of them nodded towards the end of the field nearest the gate and exclaimed: "Who' the something hell's this?"

All eyes turned to where an elderly gentleman was hitching his horse's bridle to the gatepost and there were whispers of, "Dunno". "Looks a rummy old bloke". "Never set eyes on him in me life; but he's coming here, seemingly".

Coming across the field towards them was a tall old man with stooping shoulders and an unkempt appearance, caused chiefly by the ragged fringe of grey hair which hung below the small black, three-cornered hat he was wearing and almost reached his shoulders. His clothes were good; the long, full-skirted coat was of fine cloth and the stockings below the tight knee breeches were silk, although one of them was loosely gartered and hung in wrinkles over his buckled shoes. His gait was leisurely. At one point he paused and stood still for a moment with his eyes on the workmen's flag, as though lost in thought.

In spite of his somewhat peculiar appearance the men in their own minds had already decided he was a gentleman and, as such, to be treated civilly, when a boy who had been engaged locally to run errands came out of the house and whispered to those nearest him: "Why, 'tis our old parson", and his "Good morning, men," was acknowledged by touching of forelocks.

"Come to have a look at our work, Sir?" asked one of the workmen affably.

The clergyman replied that he had, "And to ask you about your flag. What is it supposed to signify?"

"'Tis what we call the beer flag, Sir. When the walls of a house are up and before the roof is begun it is our old ancient custom that drinks should be stood all round. We be waiting now for young Muster Fyfield, who's building the place, or some other kind gentleman to come along; but it's dry work waiting with our throats like a kiln from the lime."

This broad hint had the desired effect. The old clergyman felt in his breeches pocket and brought out a shilling. "That's for the drinks," he said. "Good ale never did man any harm yet -- in moderation -- in moderation. But your flag is older than your old ancient custom. It was once believed that when the walls of a house were completed, before they were roofed over, the household gods arrived and took possession. Until that happened, the building was but a building, but then it became a house, a home, and took upon it its own character. It had found its soul, so to speak, for a house has a soul, you know. It is not merely a mass of stone and wood put together in a certain manner."

Most of his listeners smiled indulgently, wishing him gone, so that the boy might be dispatched with the beer-can to *The Cocks*; but one more thoughtful than the rest ventured: "That is so, I believe, Sir. There's a rare lot of difference in houses. Some seems to have a comfortable homely feeling from the time they shape, while others'd give you the cold shivers."

"And some feels so dreary that you're glad to get shut of the job," put in another who had seized on the fancy. "We be a family of masons and I've heard my ole granfer say that it all depends what's going to happen in 'em."

"Coming events cast their shadows before", quoted the clergyman as he stepped inside the unfinished building. The men gathered around the doorway winked at each other behind his back and one of them tapped his own forehead. The man who still held the shilling in his hot palm pointed to the beer-can and made signs to the boy who, thereupon, seized shilling and can and fled like a hare. And all this time the clergyman stood, bareheaded, gazing up through the beams and joists at the bright March sky with its hurrying clouds. His long silence was becoming embarrassing to the lookers-on; when, suddenly, he raised his hand and said solemnly: "May God's blessing be on this house and on all who are to dwell in it"; then, turning abruptly, went back to his horse.

### Chapter III The Fyfields Arrive

The house was finished and looked as complete and all of apiece as if it had grown there. The builder's remnants of wood and sand and

paint-pots and whitewash pails had been cleared from the verandah and its long stone floor swept clean. Its wrought iron stanchions, innocent as yet of the masses of greenery, which later were to festoon them, patterned with dark lines and curves and spirals the pale yellow stucco of the front. Beside the paths lavender, laurel and sweetbriar had been planted and what were to be flowerbeds had been edged with stones, ready for planting.

Indoors, the smell of wood-shavings and fresh paint prevailed over the fresh outer air from the open windows. The newly planed floorboards were the colour of straw and light from the large clear glass windows flooded every room. Soon this clean bareness would be padded with curtains and carpets and the odours of hearth-smoke and cooking and furniture polish and soap and hairwash and books and clothes would mingle to create the atmosphere of a human home.

Then the years would gather the vibrations of laughter and sobs and sighs, of tense expectation and thwarted hopes, of the urgencies of love and the groans of birth and death to make up its spiritual atmosphere.

All that was still in the future when, one morning in May, a little, low pony chaise drew up at the green-painted gate and Edward Fyfield handed out his Lydia with all the elaborate courtesy then fashionable. He was a tall, thoughtful-looking young man; dark, compared to his bride-to-be, whose yellow ringlets fell upon cheeks of the then much envied lily and rose complexion. She was esteemed as a beauty in her home circle, but outsiders denied the claim, for, according to the strict rules of feminine beauty then in vogue her features were too indeterminate and her admittedly fine complexion was marred by a light sprinkling of freckles on the bridge of her nose. Still, she made a pretty enough picture as she alighted from her mother-in-law's pony chaise on that bright May morning.

The huge, puffed-out sleeves of her blue and white striped muslin gown made her waist appear tiny; an effect which was emphasised by the full skirt, stiffened to almost bell-shape about the ankles. Hoops had been out of date for many years and their reappearance as crinolines was still in the future, but there was, according to *The Ladies Journal*, a tendency to the hoop effect, and the new fashion suited Lydia's neat little figure. Until new clothes had been bought for her visit to her future relatives she had worn skimpy, tight-clinging gowns of the older fashion and the new buoyant, floating feeling caused by the billowing skirt delighted her.

Below the skirt a glimpse was permitted of black sandal shoes set off by white silk stockings. Those little feet, her lover had often declared, looked too ethereal to tread common earth. But here she was, at nineteen, about to fulfil his dearest wish by undertaking the laborious life of a country housewife and to bear and rear as many children as it should please providence to send them.

"How do you like the outside of your new home?" he whispered as he wrapped a white cashmere shawl, one of his own presents to her, about her shoulders. His tone was low from consideration of the many listeners, the women and children from the cottages near having gathered around as soon as the pony stopped at the gate.

She turned to smile upon them as she answered, "Oh, Edward, 'tis lovely!" and they decided there and then that they had nothing to fear from her. "A little bit of a thing like that, like a rasher of bacon between two hams with them great big sleeves" could not, they thought, prove very formidable.

Arm in arm the lovers went up the path, stopping here and there to examine recent plantings, or to plan further ones. Sweet William, Lydia said she must have, it was all the rage, and lots and lots of pinks and some moss roses; and that adorable verandah, why should they not have swinging wire baskets suspended from its roof with ferns and creeping jenny and these new pink pelargoniums?

In her eagerness she had run on before him and now stood at the top of the verandah steps while he remained below, and, as he saw her at that moment, her fair face framed in the poke bonnet with roses under the brim and her wide skirt swaying as she pointed up to where her wire baskets were to hang, a picture of her remained with him which still stood in his mind for Lydia even when his physical eyes beheld her increased in bulk and with fading prettiness as the mother of his children.

He drew her over the threshold they were both to cross so many thousands of times and were, at last, to be carried over. The first thing that would have struck a detached observer, who cared for such, was the light graceful proportion of the little interior. The hall in which they stood was but a few feet square, but the staircase had been cunningly contrived to give the impression of space. Six broad steps, then, where the slender unornamented banisters curved, a long sash window on the first little landing flooded the place with light. Beyond the glass green treetops swayed, and these, with the white walls of the staircase and the long dark curve of the banister rail, formed a picture, which, though simple, was satisfying.

Edward thought so now; but Lydia, who had not seen the inside of the house since it had been finished, was too eager to take in details. She had sprung forward into the room, which was to be her parlour, a square room with two windows, a high basket shaped grate with hobs and the latest thing in bright chintz-patterned wallpaper. The tallboy would stand in that corner, she thought, and the long sofa between the two windows, and that recess on one side of the fireplace would be just the thing for Edward's bookshelves. The brass-inlaid chairs with modish cane seats could stand here and there about the room. All they require now was a piano, and that might come later, Edward said, which she took for a promise and turned and rubbed her face against his shoulder, which caused a diversion for some moments.

On the other side of the front door was a smaller parlour they intended using as a dining room, and, beyond that, the large, stone floored kitchen with its coal-devouring, labour-making cooking range and racks beneath the ceiling to hold their flitches of bacon and dresser large enough to hold enough crockery to serve a regiment. The window looked out upon a little cobbled courtyard surrounded by a high whitewashed wall, from which a flight of stone steps led to the upper garden.

Lydia, never having heard the word labour-saving applied to domestic work, was delighted with her kitchen and ran hither and thither opening cupboards and looking into drawers and trying the knobs which controlled the heat of the oven, while Edward stood, one knee resting on the stone window-seat, picturing her in a white linen apron making cakes at the table with a little maid in attendance.

Lydia looked with approval at the bell-board above the mantel-piece with its two bells, one labelled "Front Door" and the other "Parlour". There were no bells in the curate's cottage at home, no maid, either, unless the woman who came in to do the washing and scrub the floors could be called a maid. Her mother cooked and did

most of the housework with such assistance, as she would permit from her daughters, upon whom she impressed the supreme duty of caring well for their hands. When the beds were made and the rooms dusted she preferred them to practice their pieces on the piano, or to take a gentle walk for the benefit of their complexions, saying, as plainly as she dared, that such diversions were far more likely "to lead to something" than the best household training in the world. Not that the training was wholly neglected, they were allowed to try their hands at most household duties at one time or another, but always in secret, as it were. In public, she wished them to appear as young ladies of leisure, though everyone who knew them must have known there was little margin for paid help on a curate's stipend of one hundred and twenty pounds a year.

Her management of her daughters had been justified. Louisa had married a gentleman farmer, not the advancement in the social scale her mother had hoped for, but a marriage with many compensations in the way of solid comfort. And now Lydia was about to be a bride. Again not fulfilling all her mother's ambitions for her, but not doing too badly for herself. It sounded well to say to friends that Edward's father was a banker, which indeed he was, though his was but a small private bank in a country town, practically a one-man affair, though long established and generally respected.

The young people had met at the annual Hunt Ball at Westham, for which the curate's patron had sent tickets for the mother and daughter. The first time he had done so, and providentially, for it had been a case of love at first sight, on Edward's side at least, and of considerable liking on Lydia's. When, a few weeks later, Edward proposed to her - - - men used to propose in form then, after an interview with the father of their beloveds - - - she had observed all the conventions of saying "No" before saying "Yes", but his ardour had soon lighted a small answering flicker in her breast and she now loved him sufficiently to look forward with a subdued excitement to their lives together.

The house delighted her. "What I like best about it is that it is all so modern, so up-to-date!" she exclaimed again and again. "Even water laid on!" There was, although in what would now be considered a primitive style. Half an hour's hard pumping a day filled a cistern in the roof from the well and there was one tap, cold water only, over the sink, and an upstairs Water Closet, a great luxury. She explored the upper rooms alone. The age of prudery, now called Victorian, had not begun, but already it was not thought "quite nice" for a young unmarried couple to view together the bedroom they were to occupy as man and wife. So Edward took a turn in the garden while Lydia ran lightly upstairs.

Lydia looked down from an attic window on the upper garden where Edward was prodding a weed with his cane. Come up and see the attics," she called, and, a few moments later, he stood by her side.

The room in which they were standing was large, but low, the ceiling on both sides sloping to the floor. There was a similar, but smaller room on the other side of the little landing with its dormer window, and Edward had thought they could be used for storing things, or for drying clothes in wet weather. But Lydia though the smaller room would make a good bedroom for the maid and when Edward objected that there would be barely room for her to stand upright excepting in the centre of the room and pointed out the smallness of the window and the likelihood that a room so near the roof would be hot in summer and cold in winter she was genuinely puzzled.

"But, Edward," she said, "she won't want to stand upright; she

will be in bed, and her bed will go nicely under the slope there. I will put a little table with a looking-glass by the window, there will be just room enough for her to dress there, and a row of pegs on the wall for her clothes, and she will have far more comfort than she would in her own home."

"But the nice room over the kitchen will be empty," he protested, and, at that, Lydia looked coy and murmured something about probably requiring it for their own purposes later, which he interpreted as reserving it for a nursery and immediately gave in.

Lydia was bringing the maid, one of her mother's choosing, from her native village. She was seventeen and had been in service before, so her wages were to be ten pounds a year. A large sum for a newly married couple to pay a maid; but Edward had agreed that it would be better for Lydia not to have a raw young girl to train while she herself was inexperienced.

"I wish she had a more suitable name, " she sighed when the bedroom question was settled. Charity, they named her at the font; Cherry, her friends call her. Poor people, I vow, never think when they christen a girl that the time will come when she'll go out to service and need a good sensible name. Mamma and I thought of re-naming her Sarah or Betsy. I like the idea, don't you? of calling all your maids by one name; but it would have been difficult to remember, after having known her all her life as Charity."

"Charity seems quite a good name to me. What better thing could you have in a home than Charity? But rename her if you like, love; you understand these little points of domestic rule better than I. Now, could we not have just a peep at the best bedroom below? The walls, you may have noticed, have been done pale blue, your favourite colour."

One evening a fortnight later Mr. and Mrs. Edward Fyfield came home. The maid Charity had arrived earlier in a carrier's cart, which had come a mile out of its way to oblige a family of prospective customers. She brought with her Edward's fox terrier puppy, Lydia's white kitten, Snow, and a flat cardboard box containing a tortoise. These, with a plate basket containing the forks and spoons and a band-box and two paper parcels containing the whole of her wardrobe had caused quite a sensation among the villagers when deposited at the Dashpers gate.

Once indoors, she had sat down and had a good cry. The cat and dog had not been good travelling companions and one of her own bundles had burst and had had to be repacked with the eyes of the other passengers in the carrier's cart on its contents. Worse still, she had left those at home in trouble. Her eldest brother had not been home all night and he might have gone to 'list in the Army, as he had often threatened, or have been caught poaching and shot by a game-keeper, or taken to prison, for he was the black sheep of the family. Hers were the first tears to be shed in the new house.

But, long before her employers arrived, she had recovered, made ready the rooms, set out a dainty little supper, and put on her best cap with the cherry coloured ribbons in readiness to welcome them in the doorway.

They came in state, Lydia driving in a hired conveyance and Edward riding his own grey horse, Dapple. A riding horse was a necessity then to one who had to go into a town every day and was no more regarded as a luxury than the modern bicycle or motorcycle. A little grey stable had been built as a matter of course at the back

of the house, with a miniature coach house beside it to hold the chaise, or the gig, which he hoped some day to purchase for the benefit of Lydia.

There is something touching in the picture of a young married couple sitting down to their first meal in their new home, with all life has in store for them unknown and unsuspected. Our young people sat, not one at the head and one at the foot of the table, as they were to sit in after years, but together on one side; not talking much, for they were tired after the wedding festivities, but both full of a deep satisfaction because the strain of the last few weeks was over and they were at home and alone.

Before they ate, Edward carved a plate of cold chicken and ham and Lydia, who had forgotten the bell she was to tinkle often enough later, went to the door and called to Charity to come for her supper. "This is a special occasion", she told her as she placed the plate of food in her hands, remembering, like a good little housewife, that the maid's supper would usually be bread and dripping, or cheese, and her mother's parting advice, "Begin as you mean to go on".

Then Edward, remembering his parents' custom at Christmas and other festivities, poured Charity a glass of wine, and she, equally well instructed, sipped it once before carrying it away and said shyly: "The best of good luck to you, Sir and Ma'am. I hope you'll be happy, always." Not long afterwards, Edward had wound up the grandfather's clock in the hall and seen to the doors and windows; Lydia had counted the forks and spoons and seen to the stowing away of the food they had brought in the larder, and the lights were out.

Edward and Lydia snuggled closely in their new French bed with its damask curtains; Charity lay on her clean, new, but rather prickly, chaff-filled mattress in the attic; Dapple had become resigned to the strangeness of his new stable and ceased stamping; cat and dog had forgotten their enmity in sleep; while outside, the yellow walls of Dashpers still glimmered faintly in the long June twilight. The Fyfields had arrived.

#### Chapter IV Michaelmas

It was Michaelmas Day and a fat goose was roasting before the fire in the Dashpers kitchen. The table was spread with pastry-making materials and Charity, in a big white apron and frilled mobcap, with a dab of flour on one rosy cheek, was paring apples to make a pie.

The new range was roaring away fuel at a rate that would have distracted Edward could he have heard it; but the warmth and glow it cast forth was pleasant on that cool grey autumn day. Upon the high mantelshelf stood tin canisters scoured to a silvery brightness a set of highly polished metal discovers hung on the wall, and the dresser shelves held plates and dishes of the willow-pattern dinner service. Charity's kitchen did her credit.

It had been a delightful surprise to Lydia to find how well her young maid could cook. Only plain dishes, certainly, for she had been but under-maid in her previous situation, which meant housemaid and scullery maid and general maid of all work. But Charity was an intelligent girl and had served under an indolent upper maid who had been quite willing to let her try her hand at the cooking while she herself "rested". The experience thus gained had been useful to Lydia whose own cooking at first was of an uncertain nature. On some days her cakes and tartlets would turn out what Charity greeted

enthusiastically as "a Pictur' ", on others a deplorable sight which had to be hidden from Edward.

Charity's success with the simpler dishes was less fluctuating. When Edward and Lydia returned, arm in arm, from church on a Sunday morning they could depend upon finding their roast beef and batter pudding done to a turn. Lydia seldom praised a dish, for it had been impressed upon her by more experienced housewives that to praise the work of a maid was only to invite a falling off in excellence; but when she was especially pleased she would address Charity as Cherry, as she had in the days when Charity had called her Miss Lydia.

They made some mistakes. As on that first morning when Charity, at the parlour door announced, "Th' butcher 'm, and what would you please to be wantin?"

And Lydia said, "Oh, beef, I suppose".

After a few moments Charity had returned to ask, " What joint would you like, and what weight, please'?" A question which Lydia had hesitated so long to answer that Charity had suggested sirloin ---the last family she had lived with had always had sirloin for Sunday --- but as to the weight, she had no more idea than her mistress. At a venture Lydia had said ten pounds and the butcher had sent nearly twelve, which resulted in hot beef and cold beef and hashed beef and minced beef for nearly a week.

They were learning rapidly and had good material to go on. Michaelmas goose in the country could have given forth a more savoury smell than that, well stuffed with sage and onions, rotated now on the brass roasting-jack before the Dashpers fireplace. Presently a face appeared at the window, a young, broad, honest looking face, well peppered with freckles and surmounted by tow- coloured hair. "Where's th' missis?" it mouthed, almost silently. "Gone to Wellspring Lane to get some spindleberries," replied Charity in a natural tone. She wants 'em for the big epergne. Company comin' to dinner, Mr. Aggiss, the estate agent, and his lady, and dinner's at three. Is there anything else you's like to know, Mr. Busybody? If not, get back to your work. I've got this pie to bake and a tureen of apple sauce to see to and it's a quarter to two now."

But, instead of returning to his work, William made for the back door where he could he heard scraping the mud of the stable yard off his shoes before coming into the kitchen. He was what Edward and Lydia called "our man", or "groom-gardener", and the rest of the village "th' odd-job-man up to Dashpers".

"Have you asked her?" he said, coming so close to Charity that her cap-frill brushed his chin.

"I've a good mind not to tell you," she retorted, "comin' into my clean kitchen all mucky, like that! But if you must know, I have, and, after a lot of fuss, she said I could have next Sunday off from three to eight. I had to tell her where I wanted to go, and she didn't like that much. Said it was against her rules for a man and a maid working at the same place to keep company."

"She would!" he exclaimed.

" Well. The upshot of it is that she said I might go over to Balcombe and see your mother, just this once. I had to tell her that her and me mother at home was in service together and I do so hate telling lies. Howsoever, I've got leave and I hope you're satisfied."

"I'll be at the stile at three," he said, and turned smartly with the air of one who would not dream of wasting the precious time of another. Then came back to the table and whispered: "I s'pose you u'd'nt let me give you one little kiss to go on with?"

"We'll see about that on Sunday," said Charity, popping the pie into the oven, and whether he would have been contented with this vague promise or not is unknown, for, at that moment there was a knock on the back door.

"You'd better get into the larder," whispered Charity and William spent the next five minutes surveying the whole boiled ham, roast chickens, pastries and jellies prepared for the festive supper. It was a fine array which had been intended for the dinner as well, before the coming guests had sent the goose as their contribution to the feast. Although he had already dined on bread and fat bacon, William's mouth watered as he gazed. He thought for a moment of helping himself to a cheesecake, of which there were so many that one would not have been missed. But honesty was William's policy, due as much to his integrity of nature as to the teaching of his elders who, from his earliest days had assured him that hell fire awaited the one who stole so much as a pin. He tiptoed across the kitchen and escaped by way of the window.

At the door stood a little old woman in a red and black check shawl. "I be come for me few tea leaves, me dear," she said, handing a tin can to Charity. "I know it ain't the day, but if I might have the few you've got together a cup o' tay 'd go down good wi' me morsel o' bread this coldish day."

Charity took the can and spooned into it the spent tea leaves which had accumulated since old Nanny's last visit. "What a fine rich smell!" remarked the old lady as she took back the can.

"'Tis the goose roasting for the Michaelmas dinner," Charity told her, holding the door in her hand. Nanny, sensing that she wanted to get rid of her, put her foot on the sill; she was not ready to go yet. "Goose, is it?" she exclaimed, sniffing appreciatively, "And after goose comes goose grease. Do you ax your mis'is, me dear, when she's strainin' and pottin' up that goose grease for her own winter aches and pains and for them of the master to remember old Nanny and her brownkitis. I likes it on me bread, too, when it's fresh, so if you've got a basinful to spare you knows who could do w'it."

Charity promised to put in a word with her mistress for her and declared she must go, or the goose would be scorching. But Nanny followed her inside the doorway. "I s'pose you don't happen to have an old flannel petticoat of your own, or a pair of old drawers, or anythink?" she whispered hoarsely. "I've got nothink but what you can see on me an' th' weather's a-gettin' cold. Here, look! I tell you th' truth," and she lifted her threadbare skirt of lindsey-woolsey. There was nothing, nothing whatever, between the skirt and her poor shrunken old thighs.

Charity's own stout underwear tasted her for years and was patched and darned and worn by her mother for years after that. She had nothing to give away; but the sight of those thin, dark, veiny old thighs filled her eyes with tears. Nanny's old rheumy washed-out blue eyes watered, too, as she said: "I be but a poor old body, kept alive on parish pay. Half a crown a week, an' afraid o' losin' that an' bein' forced into th' workh'us if they knowed I'd a-asked anybody for anythink. 'T wa'nt always so. Time was I'd a good husband an' a fine son to work for me; but my good man's under th' mould an' my

son's got hisself a wife an' a brood o' young children. He does what he can, many 's the half loaf, or th' bundle o' sticks, or th' basket garden-stuff he's brought me; but wi' twelve mouths at home to feed --"

"But don't you get the flannel at Christmas?" asked Charity, who had already heard of the eccentric parson's benefactions.

"I do, But ten little childern -- ten innocent little backs an' bums to be covered. How could I wear the fine warm flannel an' let them go a-cold? But you get back to your cookin', me dear. I fancies I hear a splutterin'. P'raps I didn't oughter've told you; but you seemed such a tender-hearted little wench, an' I knows as you wanna forget old Nanny."

Charity said she would not and escaped. She had barely time to baste the goose before Lydia came in, her cheeks pink from the wind and her arms loaded with the pink and orange spindleberries. She, too, sniffed the rich odours of cooking appreciatively as she threw aside her bonnet and pelise and prepared to arrange the spindle berries in the tall crystal epergne.

The dinner table in the small dining room had been laid before she went out and a fire had been lighted. In its sudden spurts of flame, spoons and forks and glasses sparkled and the wine in the two sturdy cut glass decanters on the chiffonier held flickering lights of ruby. The epergne of berries, flanked by dishes of oranges and filberts, put the finishing touch to the centre of the table. The berries left over she arranged in the two vases, surrounded by dangling, light-catching lustres, which stood one at each end of the mantelpiece.

She stepped back and surveyed her work with deep satisfaction. For the first time she was about to receive guests who were not relations in her own home. How often she had dreamed of this moment and longed for it, for Lydia, unlike Edward, loved company, and anything in the way of a party delighted her.

They had met Mr. and Mrs. Agiss after church once or twice and, as she had vowed to Edward, they were the only possible friends for them in the parish. The farmers and their wives were very well in their way, decent, kindly people, but with no idea of what she, Lydia, called society manners. The Agiss's were different. Since Sir Peregrine had grown old and infirm and unable to see people, Mr Agiss, as his agent, was the most important man in the parish. To him the farmers looked for improvements and repairs, and to him the humbler tenants went, cap in hand, when they had anything to request, or hoped for indulgence. So when, last week, they had invited Edward and her to the Home Farm to supper Lydia had dressed with care and exerted herself to charm and had now taken the first opportunity of asking them to dine, hoping the friendship would be cemented. At the Home Farm they had played cards and laughed and joked and sat round the fire and cracked nuts. The time had gone so quickly that she had been quite pettish when Edward had said it was time to go home.

At home, the evenings seemed long to Lydia. It was, of course, very nice of dear Edward to read *The Heart of Midlothian* aloud to her while she sewed and she tried very hard to listen, or to appear to listen, because she knew it was the fashion for the head of the house to read aloud and that *The Waverley Novels* were all the rage for such readings. But she did not like sewing well enough to want to do it every evening, and she was not interested in the lives of Scottish peasants. She thought the part about Effie Deane's baby was indelicate, while Jeanie's heroism left her untouched. Her own choice of reading would have been one of the new mystery and horror

stories, or a few pages from the Ladies' Journal.

But a very little reading of any kind sufficed for Lydia, and, usually, before the evening was half over, she would make some irrelevant remark about the tendency of the butcher to send larger joints than she had ordered, or about some change in the fashion of hairdressing, or repeat something old Nanny had said, and Edward would close his book and suggest one of the childish card games of which she was fond.

Over Bold David, or Strip Jack Naked, her spirits would revive; but, even with this distraction, the time seemed long, and she would go to bed early, only to lie wondering what Edward was doing and why he did not come.

Sometimes she went to the top of the stairs and called to him. The first time he had been amused and teased her about being afraid of the dark; but, after two or three repetitions, he had said, quite crossly, for him, that she grudged him an hour's peace and quiet with his books.

"You and your old books!" she had retorted, "I declare you think more of them than you do of me!" and, instead of lovingly reassuring her, he had told her not to be silly and got stiffly into bed without saying another word. That was as near as they had so far got to a quarrel; but she thought it was time to make friends and visit and be visited. It would take Edward out of himself.

Edward carved the goose, quite competently, for learning to carve at table was then part of a young man's social education, but without the flourishes of a more experienced host. Lydia supplied these from her own end of the table. "The other wing, Mrs. Agiss. Do, to please me!" "Just a weeny scrap more of the crackly skin, Mr. Agiss, or the parson's nose, if you like it, some gentlemen do, and more apple sauce and stuffing". "Charity, pass the mashed turnips and gravy to Mr. Agiss, and I think Mrs. Agiss requires more gravy, too. Oh, you must, Mrs. Agiss, you must! You are eating scarcely enough to keep a sparrow alive, I declare!"

Between her attempts to persuade her guests to eat more than they required, Lydia looked round her table with pride. Mr. Agiss was a tall, broad man with the weather-beaten face and reddened hands of a practical farmer and he plied his knife and fork in the businesslike way of one who spent most of his life in the open air. While the serious business of dining lasted, he had little to say beyond a few remarks on the weather and the present state of Sir Peregrine's health, since he had passed his eightieth birthday, had come to rank equally with the weather locally as a conversational opening.

When the solid food was disposed of and the nut cracking, began, he became quite eloquent on the subject of turnips, which vegetable had only recently been adopted as a field crop in that district. Not only was the root valuable as a food for sheep, it appeared, but also the tops made excellent cover for partridge, and he then and there invited Edward to shoot with him when he went out, as he said, to pot a few birds for Sir Peregrine's larder. Some farmers, he went on, were complaining that the turnip was a vegetable that had a way of walking by night and even went to the length of having their fields watched and hauling pilferers up before the Bench; but he, for his part, did not begrudge the labourers a turnip or two, they had little enough for their pots, poor devils! That led to the subject of poaching (his ideas on that were stricter) and the Game Laws led to the wider field of general politics. Edward and he

were soon talking of - - - and - - -. Men's subjects, of course, but Lydia expected no more of them than to interest each other; light general conversation was rare at middle-class dinner tables.

Mrs. Agiss and Lydia drew their chairs closer and began talking in subdued tones on more feminine topics. The lady had needed more pressing than her husband to do what her hostess considered full justice to the Michaelmas fare, less from smallness of appetite than a desire to appear fashionable. According to her favourite three volume novels, it was the mark of a lady to toy with the food on her plate; but, being a healthy, hearty, country housewife, she had toyed so long and to such good purpose that, in the end, she had made an excellent meal. That and the warmth of a large fire in a small room had flushed her round, good-natured-looking face the colour of a full-blown pink rose. It had been a pretty face and was still a comely one, framed, as it was, by her closely quilled cap-frill of blond lace set with tiny blue velvet forget-me-nots. Lydia thought that cap "the darlinest thing" and had asked and been granted permission to try it on in the bedroom. It became her so well that, for a moment, she had thought of procuring one like it for her own wear. But, no, she decided, and Mrs. Agiss agreed with her that it would be a pity to hide her hair. Time enough to take to wearing a cap when that grew faded and thin. Mrs. Agiss herself was but thirty, but she was of the plump and comfortable type and a cap suited her. Otherwise, she said, she would have gone capless to forty for she did not believe in young girls taking to caps and mittens and shawls indoors just because they happened to be married. After forty, of course, a capless woman looked indecent, though some imagined they could hide their age by dressing like their daughters.

After dinner, in their parlour, they played Loo and set each other forfeits for their penalties. Edward was best at giving these, for Mrs. Agiss and Lydia could only remember such ordinary ones as, "Sing in the corner of the room, dance in another, laugh in another and cry in another", or "bite an inch off a red-hot poker." Mr. Agiss could remember none at all, while Edward had all kinds of novel ideas, some of them of his own invention. When it came to his own turn and he was commanded to "Bow to the wittiest, kneel to the prettiest, and kiss the one you love best in the room." He bowed to Mr. Agiss, which was pure compliment, for, with all his good qualities, that gentleman had no pretensions to brilliance. He knelt, with a little more reason to Mrs. Agiss, and then kissed his own wife with all the grace imaginable. Then Mr. Agiss fell asleep in his chair and, after his wife had made a paper fools cap and put it on his head, the others, without Mr. Agiss, asked riddles in whispers, roasted chestnuts and had such a pleasant time that Lydia exclaimed in amazement when nine o'clock came and Charity knocked at the door and announced: "Supper, if you please, M'um."

After they had helped to light their visitors' lantern and seen them off at the gate, Lydia was still in high spirits. "Aren't they quite charming, Edward?" she cried, "and how fortunate we are to find such friends!" and Edward agreed. How could he do otherwise after entering so wholeheartedly into the fun? But the new friendship did not appeal to him in quite the same way as it did to Lydia, and all he said was: "They seem very kind, and I am glad you should have a friend of your own sex, my dear," which chilled Lydia a little until upstairs, before her looking-glass she had the idea of making herself a cap out of two lace handkerchiefs and going downstairs in it to surprise Edward.

When, after laughter and kisses, she returned to the bedroom, he sat down by the dying fire. How silent the house was and how peaceful! It had been a pleasant enough evening in its way. Mr.

Agiss seemed a good sort of fellow, sound, though limited in his ideas and rather heavy-going as a talker and his lady, no doubt was charming and obviously kind. Lydia might be glad to have such a friend when her time of trial came and an occasional evening such as this had been was a small price for a husband to pay for the privilege of a young wife having an older woman to turn to. But he did wish the older woman could have been a little more intelligent. Positively stupid, some of her remarks had been, and the prospect of seeing a great deal of her was to Edward appalling, and he was likely to see her a great deal, for, not content with arranging a similar meeting at the home farm that day week, they had pressed each other to look in at any time.

"Our evenings are so quiet", Lydia had pleaded, "you must take pity upon us, you must! I declare if I hear your knock at the door I'll jump with joy!" and Mrs. Agiss had told her that she did not know what a really quiet evening was as she had always her husband for company.

Mrs. Agiss sighed, "But pity poor me! with my lord and master deep in his letter-writing or accounts five evenings out of the seven. After the children have gone to bed I often fall asleep over my needlework!"

"Bring your work here then," Lydia had exclaimed, "and we will work together while Edward reads to us, or we might have a game of cards, and Mr. Agiss could fetch you at bedtime." It sounded well enough, but it would mean the end of their quiet evenings, which he enjoyed, if Lydia did not. The Archangel Gabriel himself would not have been welcome as a permanent fixture at his fireside.

## CHAPTER V The New Arrival

The time soon came when a stranger sat at the breakfast table with Edward and Lydia, a rosy-cheeked, substantial bodied elderly woman in the snowiest of starched white aprons and indoor felt shoes in which she glided about noiselessly in spite of her size. This was Mrs. Frogley, the monthly nurse, engaged well before the expected event, as was the custom in those days. For nearly a month she shepherded Lydia indoors and out, appropriably calling her 'my lamb'. "Drink this, my lamb" she would coax when presenting a cup of hot sweetened milk or a basin of gruel between breakfast and dinner or pressed her at table to "eat just a tiddy bit more" or a dish, because, as she never failed to remind her she now had to eat and drink for two. Or she would wrap the patient's shawl around her as around something infinitely precious and, taking her arm, lead her out for a slow walk in the fields. That was always at twilight for no pregnant woman of Lydia's class cared then to be seen abroad in the full light of day.

Sometimes Edward offered to take Mrs. Frogley's place as guardian for these twilight walks, hoping to have his wife to himself for half an hour, but more often the midwife would say, "No. I think not, sir, if you don't mind. She might be took with her pains, or stumble or summat. Better, I think, if I don't take my eyes off her." Every day the two women went through the drawer containing what they called "the little things", a set of which was always kept aired. The basket, complete with all that a newborn baby could require, down to a gaily ornamented paper mache pot of fullers earth with a swansdown puff and a small pincushion stuck with pins to form the word "Welcome".

Edward, exiled from his bedroom where Mrs. Frogley now slept on his side of the bed with her patient and occupying at meals the mere office of a carver, seldom saw Lydia alone. Although cut off from her company having more leisure to write, his mind was far too unsettled to attempt it. Every morning he set out for his work in the town hoping that, by the time he returned at night, all would be over. But such things seldom happen as a loving husband may wish. When, at last the baby arrived it was after a night or wild riding to fetch the doctor from the town and hours, which seemed to him years, of intense anxiety.

But joy came in the morning when Mrs. Frogley, pink and placid as ever after her vigil, came into the room where he had been pacing restlessly and, drawing the white embroidered head-flannel back from the tiny red lace, demanded: "Did you ever see such a beautiful boy in your life, sir?" With the air of bestowing a great favour, she placed the small bundle of cambric and flannel and lace on his knee for a moment and Edward looked down on the tiny red, puckered lace with the mixed feelings which every young father feels on first beholding, what must ever seem to the thoughtful, a miracle.

Mushrooms grew in the paddock. Little pearly white button mushrooms clustered around certain grass tufts in places they soon came to know well. But others, too, knew the exact spots where the mushrooms grew and when William was sent before breakfast to find them he came back empty-handed. "Paddocks as bare as the back o me hand", he would say and point out long dark trails on the dewy grass made by the feet of trespassers. So when Lydia fancied mushrooms fried with the breakfast bacon, Edward would wake early and flinging a light overcoat over his nightshirt and thrusting his bare feet into slippers, steal silent out to the paddock by way of the little door in the wall which led to the stable.

He had been out one morning before sunrise while the sky was still grey with little rosy cloud flecks and the dew was so thick that he kicked off his slippers and walked barefoot on the turf. The trees in the dark leafage of late summer stood out like thick, bosky silhouettes against the bright sky tints and the hips and haws of the hedgerow, freshly dew-washed, shone scarlet and crimson. The morning chorus of birdsong of spring and early summer was over. Somewhere in the hedgerow a robin trilled a few silvery notes and a party of rooks passed cawing overhead, but those were the only sounds. In the house and in the cottages beyond, the inhabitants still slept. Edward seemed to himself to stand alone, the only human being to greet the new day.

Before he returned to the house with his full platter, he stood and marvelled at the silence and freshness of the earth at that hour. How peaceful it was, he thought, how unsullied. Yet, soon, the world of men would awake, the old noise and strife of their activities would begin, and the dewy peace of nature would be shattered. One man was there already, himself, and after his first rapturous moments he became conscious of something within that was out of harmony with the peaceful earth. He, too, had his cares, his disillusionments, his unworthy pleasures, and his longings, which could not be gratified. His thoughts turned to his wife, and their first child, fears for her safety and his own, shrinking from the idea of an event, which for a time upset the ordered life of their little household, occupied his mind.

Close upon those thoughts came the question of ways and

means, then the remembrance of some troublesome business to be transacted that day in his father's office. But, through it all, one part of him was still conscious of his surroundings. As he reached the little door in the wall and turned and surveyed the scene again, he recaptured something of his former detached awareness of its beauty.

He still saw himself in relation to it; "A little human point of hopes and fears against the grey immensity of dawn" suggested the subconscious voice which had lately been mute. Edward scribbled the line on a leaf of his notebook beneath, "Get Walters to repair water-spout". It was but a line and not as yet a perfect one, but a poem might follow. He could but try.

