TIGHT BINDING BOOK

APPLE ACRE

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CONTENTS

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YOU WOULD HARDLY NOTICE IT

One has pigs and a little wood. Another has an orchard and fowls. Another is a wheelwright, with a vine growing up his workshop and a fig-tree on his house. He also has four cows. Another has a horse, an ass, and (their offspring) a mule: with this team he ploughs an acre here, an acre there: on one acre he grew eighteen coombs of wheat. Another, old now, a wagoner in his day, has a double allotment on which he grows mangels, filling a hamper with them, harrowing them to the roadside where a farmer's cart collects them; forty hampers-full to a load.

Another has kept a family on *4½* acres.

Another who digs the graves tells of the multitudes buried in this earth. He knows the veins of soils, as he digs himself down out of sight into rock-like clay. Once, down there, he found the perfectly preserved body of a little girl.

The wheelwright's yard has flashing red ladders at harvest, while within a coffin is in preparation. It lies there like a person whom the wheelwright in his spectacles and with gentle hands is tending, filling every flaw in the clear flesh of planed wood. This to be lowered into the earth; the ladders to step strong men up to the tops of their stacks.

The corn stacks go up. 'Where's that thing for the bully-hole?' A niche half-way between unloader on wagon and stacker on stack, the bully-hole. A man stands in it like a statue in a facade, while the stack goes on building around and above him. The thing is fpund; a block of wood with three spikes to drive into the stack, the block for the man's feet. It came

from the notably well-ordered little farm of a farmer now retired.

A young fellow, who was a boy at school the other day, now drives a tractor, standing up masterful, disdaining the seat.

There is a sale on Maypole Green. Was there ever a maypole? Sea-booted fishermen are there as well as an old clergyman in an Inverness cape. It is like an indoor sale, auctioneer and clerk sitting up on a table, people ranged below, only under no roof. For brief hours we are given a better opinion of our chattels. A cheap dinner service becomes 'nice old blue ware'. A tea service with a few blue blobs on it is 'Ah—very nice old Wedgwood style of thing'.

A man with dogs in a cart tries to sell a Dalmatian to the same crowd at the same time, to the exasperation of the porters ('WILL you get your dog out of the way, please?'); then a pup held aloft ('Make a quid of him in London, easy'). Then he joins in the bidding for a gig, his horse and cart meanwhile straying away into a bog.

In the autumn the talk is of corn and potatoes. The church is full of sheaves. Then my daughter Anthea says that her fairy Rosebud puts on 'her frizzling dead-leaf shoes'.

At Christmas there is a carol service. Bob and Jim and Jeff and George swing two and two down the aisle, a light breeze in their surplices. Shepherd's sons, ploughman, stockman; they range themselves behind the girls in the choir stalls. Now one is Melchior, one Gaspar, one Balthazar. Out of their chests the bell-like voices break, powerful as their muscle with plough and iron. The girls answer, cool; and then all; 'Glorious now, behold—'

These are but a remnant: Joe is standing guard in

khaki on the hill: others are all over the world. These light, white, airy capes are a remnant of whiteness in a world of khaki, a rallying-place of return, put on themselves now by men who hurdle sheep, manage horses, climb stacks.

In the inn the talk is of the tender mouths, the subtle noses of dogs; memories of muzzle-loading guns, of brewing, of curing bacon. The newspaper lies on the bar. It remains there folded all this Sunday noon, while dogs, guns, and how the old keeper used to brew——.

In the spring the potato controversy breaks out afresh. In the first days after winter men stand looking at their empty ground and crying to one another, 'Epicure—you can't beat Epicure on this land.' Or, 'Majestic—I never grow anything but Majestic.' Suggesting that anyone who tries to grow anything other than Majestic (or Epicure) on this land is doomed to failure. Such words as 'mealy', 'waxy', 'watery', 'cook all to smash', fly about.

'Well, I *like* a waxy tater,' says another, and stamps off. And so on till the potatoes are all safely underground and beginning to sprout: then they become just 'my bit of taters'.

Our local merchant leans against a shop full of sacks of potatoes in the market town. He recommends every sort equally. A woman comes in and holds out three withered objects and demands to know what sort they are. The merchant glances at them with professional nonchalance, and pronounces them Sharpe's Express. They have done so well on her ground she will plant all Sharpe's Express.

But they are an early variety.

She will plant all early variety; why not?

'Well, you see, madam': the merchant's cigarette

dangles between his lips and dances to his words: 'Come to the end of the season they'll start shooting.'

'I can rub the shoots off.'

'But they've lost their aroma—'

'Lost their what?'

'Their aroma: they've spent their strength'—the cigarette wags up and down, up and down—'they've lost their virtue, madam.'

They look as though they have.

There is in this parish a wheelbarrow that is a hundred years old. It has had only the wheel renewed. It is at work for the fourth generation. Its owner says it is the best-balanced wheelbarrow he has ever handled: the handles are curved in such a way, and where you grip them, they are so thin that a child could grasp them. The weight is all on the wheel. It was the work of a local man.

There is a well at one end of the village which produces a reddish-brown water which has been pronounced officially to be non-poisonous. There is a pond at the other end about which no official opinion has been expressed. These are the drinking supply.

Electricity passes through the village; but none of the cottagers can afford to have it. There is no post-office, school, parish hall. Every cottage in the village, save about three, has been condemned. Two of them have, in addition, been empty awhile. A cheerful villager has just bought one and hung a bright green iron gate.

Sometimes you move a heavy stone and are surprised to see creatures living a hidden life underneath it, some small irregularity in the under-surface of the mass holding off its weight and giving them a home. So under the weight of mass-legislation an unregarded but persistent local life goes on.

It is not recorded in forms, it cannot be seen by the visitant or passer-by. As to this village—if you drove a car from the town situated five miles on one side of it to the town situated five miles on the other side, you would say, 'We passed a house here and there, yes, but there was no village.'

LEAVES IN THE FURROWS

This is the last harvest, the sugar-beet harvest. It is too late for a harvest really: the potatoes are up and the mangels clamped, the stubbles ploughed. Yet this last crop is ungathered. At least it is a fine start, a crisp wind and sunlight that makes the farm-houses stand out naive and clear, as in a child's picture. The lifter draws easily through the earth, which is dry and crumbly, and we who follow, clad in aprons of sacking, knocking the roots together and scattering the earth off them, agree that it might 'do' much worse. Of course nobody will admit to there being any pleasure in sugar-beet lifting ever—only under certain conditions it is more supportable than under others. The position is back-breaking, and the grit that flies off the roots impedes conversation: if you open your mouth too wide it flies in. But conversational it is, of course, like every other field operation; only when one comes on a beet that the horse-drawn lifter has missed, conversation is interrupted by a grunt and a 'blast'.

'I don't mind as long as the weather's fine,' old

Mr. Winch beside me says. 'But if it turns wet I shan't come no more. I'm not forced to do this, you understand.' Mr. Winch is proud of his independence, and who wouldn't be, at the age of seventy-three, to be able to retire from farming seventy acres to a neat cottage and live on his means?

In actual fact the whole of his retirement consists in that one phrase, 'I'm not forced to do this.' To occupy in the evening of life a theoretical easy chair is the proof of his success as a farmer; so he is keen to remind you of it, though actually he is working as hard as any of us in the field. I don't know quite why he comes to work; is it to oblige his former neighbour Mr. Camm, on whose field he is working; or is it to be in sight of his old farm still? Those fields which contain his life fascinate him, and he is followed out here each day by his white cat, who also has a strong homing instinct. Every morning, 'Here comes Dick Whittington.' says one of Mr. Camm's young labourers as the pair arrive. The cat sits under the shelter of a beet plant most of the day, with an occasional prowl round.

Then after we have lifted a good many rows of beet and flung them on heaps, we take special little bill-hooks and scrape more earth off them and cut the tops off, and make a heap of the roots and another of the tops.

All the while we stand each at our heaps, we talk. There is no sense of being static; we seem to be travelling through the day. It is, I think, due in part to the brisk-moving broken sky; in part to the high ground on which we work with a view of the road and other farms and their work. By dinner-time the carts are going to and fro to the road with cleaned beet; we load them with big, blunt-pronged forks; the

young labourers are quick and strong at it. The few last beet of a heap are teasing to pick up—one flings down his fork impatiently and takes them up in his hands.

Mr. Winch and I sit and have our dinner on a bank beside a pond on the border of this farm and his. We talk of what is before us—food, field-paths, the pond. There is a half-rotted plank over the ditch and the remains of a stile can be seen in the hedge, overgrown and almost hidden. 'There's not many people in the village know of that path now.' Mr. Winch says, 'but once it used to be a lot used—before bicycles.' He traces the course of the path to me—how it leaves the road just opposite the Barley Mow that used to be. The pub is no more—only an iron bracket on the wall of a house shows where the sign used to hang. Thence, the path skirted fields (paths seldom cross fields in this arable country), ran round the big wood, came to the brook, followed it right through the grounds of The Hall, passing within a hundred yards of the mansion itself, and so by devious ways to another road within sight of the market town. I think, while he tells me this, that though the word democracy does a lot of work just now, that derelict path was an artery of something more than departmental government allows us to-day—for every Tom, Dick, and Harry had been able to walk past the squire's coverts and through his grounds for centuries, and successive landlords either would not or could not close the path. And other paths Mr. Winch speaks of, saying that he could get up from this spot and walk to the sea without going on a highway at all, except to cross it. These tracks were much used, he remembers, for smuggling. There were few farmhouses hereabout that **did** not **have**

their supply of smuggled tobacco and spirits. Only last year Mr. Brett and his men were demolishing a condemned dwelling house when he fell right through the floor—a brick floor laid apparently on solid earth. Underneath they found a beautifully built little vault of brick arches and one or two old barrels—alas, empty.

.'But I never drank spirits—though I could have had plenty, cheap. Home-brewed beer—all the years I was in Magpie Farm I was never without home-brewed beer and home-made bread. And 1 do wholly miss 'em. We haven't got the conveniences where we live now—and the missis, like me, is getting old.' It is curious to hear him classing as conveniences the bakehouse with its brick oven and brewing copper at Magpie Farm, whereas his present neat dwelling contains more of what are usually meant by that term to-day.

The pond at our feet, one of those sudden, small, and bottomless-looking Suffolk ponds that occur in out-of-the-way corners—that has a memory, too, a tragic one. 'That's where poor old Jimmy Trousler—' Mr. Wisden now appears (he comes out and works in the sugar beet field after dinner). 'Remember poor old Jimmy Trousler?'

'Ah—he drowned himself in this pond.' says Mr. Wisden, 'left his stick lying up against that todd tree. This is it.'

'Yes—that's it.' The very stick that Mr. Wisden is carrying apparently.

'I wonder what he did that for—' still looking at the stick as though it were a clue. 'I was thinking of he the other day,' says Mr. Winch. 'Now I've no farming to think of I often cast back in my mind, sitting at home. Jimmy and me, I remember us sliding on this pond in the winter when we were boys.

'He hadn't no missis.' says Mr. Wisden who also is a bachelor—'he hadn't no worries that I know of. Booze as much as he liked.'

'Ah.' assents Mr. Winch.

'The best man with a stallion that ever travelled these roads.'

'Ah—that big Suffolk stallion of Lord Petter's he went with. I was in Stambury market that day when he was arrested. There he stood drunk with the horse at the cross-roads. They arrested him because they said he weren't fit to have control of a stallion. They took him off to the lock-up. But then nobody couldn't move the stallion. So they had to fetch him out to take it away. Another day policeman finds Jimmy lying drunk under the stallion by the roadside; but he dursn't arrest him because the stallion wouldn't let him come near him. That horse was proper fond of he.'

Then Mr. Prinker comes along and we start work again. He has twenty pigs and a nut wood; and has just been stood off from a big estate near by. The estate had to pay £40,000 in death duties when the landlord was killed in the service of his country in the last War. His son is fighting in this war. Crushing war taxation has meant the dismissal of twelve of the estate workmen—all skilled men, who kept the farms repaired and the woods a model of forestry. Mr. Prinker vouches for the story that one of the men dropped an empty cigarette packet in the wood and the master saw it and made the man go back and pick it up.

'I've worked fifteen years on the estate, and I've never heard him raise his voice to a man. But if he thought you'd been long enough on a job he'd come

and shift you on to another, or tell you to start on something else next week—you knew then without any telling that he thought it was about time that job you were on was done.'

As we go up and down the rows discussing the war—'I know what I'd do to Hitler and Gobbles and Lis lot (whanging a Hitler beet against a Goebbels beet till the earth flies like shrapnel), I'd—' But then a drove of bombers and fighters go over, and the men stand a moment, and a different, deeper feeling comes over them about the war. 'Such a thing never ought to be.' This is beyond a flesh-and-blood anger. From our immersion in the kindly mysteries of the earth we apprehend that roaring overhead as a diabolical cunning—a sort of blasphemous extreme of mind-knowledge.

Now again talking of the estate; Mr. Prinker has stories to tell of meticulousness of management, of care of buildings, of hedges, of cottages, water-supply; until you realize that the man has no deeper loyalty in him than to that organism, and not through any abject dependence, but simply and solely for it being run in a way that satisfies his fundamental feelings about his surroundings. By that token he feels the master as a person to be trusted in all his dealings, even in standing him, Prinker, off—through the agent. It is not he who has done it, but this catastrophe, and in that context the war is in the character of Fate, to which the banging of two beet together, as also the speeches of politicians, are irrelevant.

He loves his nut-wood, indeed, and his pigs, but the impending loss of the latter is only a personal matter, in which he can feel aggrieved and angry at what he considers official short-sightedness; and anger—whether against a personal Hitler or an English official—is a relief.

'Have you ever seen a pig crack a nut and eat it?' he asked me once. He assured me that a pig could do so and eat just the kernel and leave the shell. I was rather disbelieving until that autumn we went gathering nuts in his wood and came upon the pigs there and saw them actually picking up fallen nuts, cracking them in their jaws, and letting the fragments of shell go; eating only the kernel. They do it so neatly. Pigs are in their element roaming such a wood, and Mr. Prinker has been a sort of pig-centre for the village. He supplied cottagers with single pigs from his litters, and his pigs were always hardy and thriving on account of being woodland-bred. At one time he used to be an unofficial pork-butcher, killing a pig occasionally and selling it in the village; in fact the village hardly relied on bacon from outside at all. There was no need to—the people cured their own, and you could not get better pork for curing than from Mr. Prinker's pigs. But latterly the whole subject of pigs has become hedged round with so many restrictions, particularly difficult for people unused to the written word and unused to writing (for them words without the sound of the voice and its inflexions are almost meaningless; hence the reputation for stupidity), that it has become a matter of fattening and selling *en bloc.* Now feeding stuffs are dwindling; Mr Prinker is distracted by the sight and sound of hungry pigs. 'I can't stand it,' he says. 'I shan't have no more.'

'I never did like this bought food—**you** don't know what's in it.' And then as we reach the ends of our rows and straighten our backs and face each other—all this time we have been talking to beet plants - 'I believe,' says Mr. Prinker facing to the sun, 'in home-fed pork. I mean barley like I used to **buy** off

Mr. Carnm—and then you've got something that'll stand up to your knife.'

'Victuals.' murmurs Mr. Wisden as though to himself, standing chopping the top off beet after beet. The juicy crunch of the knife through the beet, and the dropping of the top back to earth. 'The pulp'11 come back, too, and that'll make dung. This old field needs feeding after a crop like this. Twelve men stood off did you say, Mr. Prinker? All repairs stopped to farms?'

A storm blows up suddenly—a spring-like storm. We shelter where we can. Winch and Prinker have disappeared into the farther ditch; I find the girth of the todd tree friendly—the one that Jimmy Trousler leaned his stick against before plunging into the pond. The many-coloured landscape has turned grey and seems all bowed away from the wind. The young labourers crouch under the cart; the white cat under a beet-plant. Only the horse and Mr. Wisden have no shelter. He just wraps his dun-coloured coat around him and turns away from the pelting shower, patiently letting it beat on him, as the horse does.

Waiting for the storm to spend itself I think of that fine estate and its beautiful woods, and of its owner who was killed in the last War, who filled his park with trees, of his son who has cared for those trees, of the great walled vegetable garden with its wistaria arbour that is a kind of Eden. It is only to pavement minds that such things are class-war themes; the peasant does not envy, he understands them. His own cottage garden is based on that red-walled acre; it, too, has its arbour. The same standards govern the great place and the small. I am cheered by the tenacity with which these countrymen cling to the values of things when the things themselves are lost.

That phrase about meat standing up to your knife, for instance; a whole rule of husbandry is hidden in it. And Mr. Prinker's pleasure in watching a pig crack a nut—sensibilities there that the church has mourned as dead.

I, too, cling to certain friendly ghosts, even to my own land that has gone ghostly like this sunny landscape of five minutes ago in the storm. My two horses are dead; my plough is broken, burnt. It was a wooden plough, such as is hardly ever used now. I can still feel the way it went, feeling the earth through it. My old farm lies under the concrete runways of an aerodrome.

But I stare at the strong straight furrows of newly ploughed stubble, and know physically in my body that my kind of farming will come back again, organic and intensive. I will often argue about agriculture and the future with scientific people. But this I know beyond argument; I feel it as I felt the earth through my plough.

Meanwhile we cultivate by hand the few acres we can afford. We supply ourselves with much of our food. We plant fruit trees yearly: we care for them and for the trees that shade our meadows. We have three children, who will learn what England was and yet shall be.

Yes, it is done, and it is the only hopeful thing in November, that new square of turned earth. The freshness of turned earth is comparable to the bloom on a plum; it does not stay rough and crumbly like that for long, with the energy expressed upon it, so look at it while you may. Half the beauty of it is that it is so perfectly drained, it lies up light as a newly

made bed above the water-level of a very rainy November.

After harvest, after harvest-festival actually, I started it; started to break new ground. It was hard, the grass summer-thick and upstanding. Great mats of it I pared off and laid face-down in the trench, and then the dark brown earth that dug out in squares, just like a diagram of how to dig in a gardening book.

Anthea used to stand and watch in her summer frock; she immediately recognized the brown squares my spade cut out as chocolate eake. Such a profusion of chocolate cake, there was one for everybody; Father, Mummy, Anthea, the babies, grandfather, grandmother, Ada. All the dolls had one each, even the dog and the two cats. Still more and more chocolate cake. We had to rack our brains at every spadeful, casting around for relatives and friends, till even imaginary people had to come and receive. them.

'And whose chocolate cake is that?'

I paused and wiped my brow. The day was hot and golden, with a cooling stream of air among the trees, which occasionally dipped and touched the grass. I had on my old summer shoes that creaked because they were broken in the middle. It was my foot as much as anything that held them together; they had grown used to my feet. I looked at them and remembered wearing them for the first time. Flowery May on a holiday in the West Country: an inn where Norad an I had stopped for bread and cheese and cider, kept by a Cornishwoman and her husband. He had been huntsman to a Devon pack: he looked like a huntsman still. At half-past five one cubbing morning, she told us, he had said to her on a hill, 'Whaffe so good in life as this?'

The tables in the inn tap-room were scrubbed bright as new breadcrust. Our prismy glass mugs of cider stood up like solid gold. Outside there was a little garden and a yard of fowls. The yard seemed to expect horses: the cobbles, the rings let into the wall, the mounting block.

Afterwards we walked by the deserted canal and the swirling river. After living so long in Suffolk the differences of the West—the rocks, the rushing streams, and above all the cold stone echo, made it unreal yet more than real, like a dream.

That evening as we limped tired and happy down into Bath, which lay in its hill-bowl as in some blue fluid, the shoes made themselves felt. The steep downhill was worse than uphill; there is something about the inability to brace the knees that makes one laugh. We had to stop every now and then, seeing Bath still a long way beneath us. Every time I lifted my feet the shoes, the then new shoes, discovered tender places. But I would not mind feeling those pains again, to stumble down that hill again, in an England at peace again, to a city that beautifies, and does not befoul, its countryside.

Now there is no other pang to be had from the shoes; they have fitted themselves to my feet. Now they are thoroughly decayed, bald, and the stitches all frayed out. It is doubtful if they will see another summer. They lie mildewing in a shed.

The first rain came—too early—and the digging was taken over by a pair of big black boots. They clanged down upon the spade; a heavy unhandy spade that had broken the poor old shoes just under the instep. It finished them, trying to break new ground.

Still it dug well—better really for a little softening. Moist rather heavy days; apples shining boldly in the

trees. Anthea came in her mackintosh to look for worms. They were wonderful to her, suddenly showing pink and naked against the turned earth, then their slow elastic disappearance.

'Where's that worm going?'

'Into its house.'

'What sort of a house?'

Describe a worm's house. Ever let the fancy roam. Not when you are digging heavy clay, it won't.

'I think it's going shopping,' Anthea says. 'It's going to buy some cheese; it carries its basket on its tail.'

Digging is quite a complex process really. A fairly powerful machine would be needed to turn earth to the depth of a spade. As for trenching it—when it is a matter of breaking up the subsoil you get into the realm of great agricultural engines, to do on a large scale (and rather clumsily) what the spade does so neatly.

The spade is the microcosm of husbandry; and when you get spade multiplied by spade—. A man I know used to be employed at an institution where they had five acres of vegetable ground. This he and five other men used to dig together. They started in rotation, as men do who set out to scythe a field, and when they were all going they got into a swing which carried them on, so they talked and worked together all the day, and in the evening they had the satisfaction of seeing a big piece dug, denied to the solitary digger. 'Those acres grew for everlasting of stuff,' said the man.

.Then the institution got rid of the men and bought a little one-horse plough that only scratched over the surface of the ground, and they couldn't grow anything.

One day as Anthea was watching me dig she had

the idea that she must feed her children on this rich stuff, this chocolate earth. The dolls were all upstairs, but she brought half a dozen stones as proxy. 'These are my pretend children.' That was all right, but there weren't quite enough, so the old kitchen spoon used for the feeding had to be the pretend seventh—Topsy. The difficulty arose when it came to 'pretend' Topsy's turn to be fed. How to feed pretend Topsy with pretend Topsy? Anthea was not long at a loss. One of the stones—pretend Susie by name—had to deputise; pretend Susie became pretend pretend Topsy and so released the spoon. It seemed quite simple and natural to Anthea and only took a moment to arrange.

Then the rains came in earnest. Day and night followed day and night. There was no more drying after that. The trench became full of water. It stayed full; it started an aquatic life of its own. Frogs found it a long long swim. Some even died there. Leaves made a black, rotting floor to it. Every time I passed it on my way to feed the animals I looked sadly at the pale belly of a dead frog looming through a stagnant scum, and thought of summer and tea under the oak in hay-time. My spade as I had left it one evening ready to start again standing in the trench, rusty, blade-high in water. I took it out, dried it, and put it away.

Nothing more could be done unless the water could be got away.

When you begin to look at a level field with a view to getting the water off it, it suddenly ceases to be level. It lifts a little here, dips a little there. That deep boundary ditch becomes a thing difficult to reach. To get a furrow from this trench to that ditch, falling all the time. It is done at last, but still it

only takes half the water, a slight depression at this end holds it up. By taking out a whole spit more at the ditch end, it is possible to deepen the furrow through the depression by a few inches. A little worn spade does this last spit, narrower than the other, sharpening to the edge. When this spade bites the last bit of earth between the furrow and the trench, all the water in it that has lain stagnant for weeks suddenly wakes up and goes slipping away.

Then a bright morning and the spade is brought out, the clumsy digging spade. The rust is soon gone: the dead frog disappears for ever under a spit of earth. Under the grass, now flat and matted wet, the earth is still dry, chocolate-cakey; but I am alone now: it is too cold for Anthea to stand. I hear her starting off for a walk with Nora and the twins. It is winter now; the trees are bare. It is dark at four. It will soon be Christmas. 'You can dig what you like before Christmas, but after Christmas it don't do to touch this heavy land.' I dig and dig, for Christmas is coming. I look up occasionally to see the sky reddening. A pink cloud over the oak looks calm as I toil. Sky reddening, fowls walking up their plank to roost. On and on. I reach the boundary line.

At last it is done; a clean trench, a straight edge. I clean my fork and spade in almost dark, cleaning fork on spade, then spade on fork. Our squat house is a black silhouette against the sunset sky. A thrush is singing far off. I sit on a log by the wood-pile under the oak and unclog my boots slowly, with a rotten stick that breaks and breaks till I am almost doing it with my thumb, too lazy to look for another. The air is frosty, but I have enough heat from my

work to make it pleasant to sit here, tired, by the bare tidy earth.

Seven-fifteen: it is a bitter dark day. For five minutes I lie awake, feeling the tug of lethargy; not mere laziness, but a vast cosmic lethargy, as of all the hibernating creatures and all the leafless trees. But hens do not hibernate: I hear the crow of a cockerel. Then I remember those dawns I should not have seen but for the animals to be fed, and climb out.

A splash—it is a little splash- -in cold water makes a difference.

My scythe hibernates by the window in the store-shed, and its blade curves right across the view of the orchard through the old leaded panes. There is something pleasant about that view of the orchard as I mix the meal—cobwebbed, softened at the edges with winter jasmine, a few of whose yellow stars have already burst out, and the strong tapering shape of the scythe blade stretching across it. A composite memory of flowers and fruit and labour. Apple boughs cross it too: the apples are in open boxes here, the nearest dusty on top with the meal. Yellow-red, rather soft apples; then some green ones that turn golden after Christmas, and will keep till spring.

The wife of a man of the village said, coming out of her hot kitchen one hot day, 'Oh, I should like a nice English apple now!' She had no more thought of her wish being granted than if she had asked (he said), for a bottle of champagne. 'But I said to her, "I believe you shall have one." I remembered what I'd forgotten for months, a box of apples I had laid in my

gig-house, meaning to take to a friend. I hadn't gone after all, and there those apples lay, as sound as on the day I put them there. My wife was thunder-struck when 1 brought her one. That was the first day of June.'

I do not remember how the man's miraculous escape from a shell in the last War came into the apple story, but I can still see the little leap he gave, demonstrating it; and knowing the way of country stories, have no doubt that there was some valid connection between the two.

In another box are the little russet apples, so small and so sweet, that took such a long time to pick.

On the other wall hangs the old flail, that was made by the grandfather of my old ploughman. Its parts had once grown in the hedge. Staring at it as I mix the meal, 1 don't think the flail looks as though it has gone up on that nail for good: no, it hasn't that look about it somehow. Perhaps boy Martin as an elderly man will be using it some day on the farther side of civilization, saying to his son, 'This, my boy, is a relic of the time before the machines; before my father's time, that is. Lucky there were a few of these left for us to go by.'

The meal is mixed: I go out into the yard with it. There, through the kitchen window Nora is already' having her steam bath of dishing out the porridge. The light is on: it has become a shock to see a brightly lit, uncurtained window. But officially the black-out has been over for five minutes. Going out into the field I am faced with a greater brightness, a dawn of rolling fiery clouds, and underneath it all a jet of real wild fire. It is William's bonfire of hedge cuttings, leaping to meet the conflagration of the sky; the two identical in colour. It is difficult to believe they are

not vitally connected, but merely together through an angle of vision. Vision anyhow it might easily be interpreted, with . William's body silhouetted against his fire, a little black twig of energy, struggling between darkness and day

Toad-in-the-hole for dinner; a good dinner for a raw day in November less than ten miles from the east coast. My belly is comforted. Passing Mr. Barron's holding I stop in the east wind to let Mr. Barron's son pass, who comes riding out of his gate on a cycle, dangling a dead rat on a piece of string.

'They're worth tuppence now,' he cries as he pedals off, 'and tuppence is worth running about after these days.'

It is ten days ago now since I met Mrs. Barron escorted by what seemed all the village children with their hoops, soap-box chariots, whatever they had in hand when the old lady set out. This troop of children, when not at school, is always waiting to follow anyone who looks as though they are on an interesting errand. They wait for Mrs. Brett at milking time, then all come home with the red cows in a little festival.

For some days the children have been acting as scouts for Mrs. Barron's lost cat. Two had just brought news of its being seen in the vicinity of my place; so freshly as to bring Mrs. Barron out—a rare thing. They wandered up and down the road once or twice, and then stopped and became a sort of deputation at my gate. Mrs. Barron made her request: if I had seen that cat, or should see it—? With so **many** apologies for bothering me; but it was such **a** special cat, had never strayed before, been gone

now several days. Had it been an ordinary cat she would not have dreamed of troubling me—. I promised to keep a look-out for the cat, for which I was thanked as much as if I had already discovered it.

I gathered little about Mrs. Barron's cat but that it had a white front. A white-fronted cat, image of my white-fronted kitten, has appeared from time to time, glared wildly, and fled at sight of me. Would that, I ask Mr. Barron, be his cat? Ah, no, they know that cat—no, theirs is more of a cypress cat, as you might say. He wouldn't mind if only he knew what had become of it. The affection for the cat is deep. 'I've never had a rat about my place till just lately: why, I've known him sit all night on the neat-house roof waiting for a rat.'

'This war—ah, that's a bad business. Nobody can tell what's coming. We can only pray to God.'

'Come and see my pigs: I've just whitewashed all the places inside.'

First a path scraped of mud, then a door and a long narrow aisle with a glimpse of grass at the other end. On either side pig pens built of hedge-poles, young trees, variously boarded; all a whitewashed dimness, and the white pigs inside looking anything but white; pink and butter-coloured rather, among clean straw. The place looks to have grown as much as to have been built. A gale is blowing down the passage, but the toad-in-the-hole is still with me, and I wear two jackets, an old and an older one. As we stand talking—'You see there's just the old-age pension, so one wants to do something. Besides, I've never been used to sitting about. The pigs keep me well: I'm over seventy. I've swung a scythe from five in the morning to seven at night in my time, like my father did. We sold £140 worth of pigs from here

last year. My wife keeps account of everything in a book. If we was to make but a shilling profit on each sovereign's worth—well, that's something. Then there's the fowls in the orchard, too.'

Just then the son returns with the twopence for the rat which he offers to his father who refuses it. 'Go on, that was your rat,' says the son. 'Go on, you killed it.' 'No, that's yours.'

A sow is to be let out on to the little plat of grass while her sty is re-littered. 'Ready?' 'Let her come then.' She comes trotting along the dim tunnel-way towards the grass: she fits it like a bullet a gun-barrel.

'That was nothing only old bog-grass when we came here.' (In the spring, now, it comes up like a lawn, thick and shining.) 'That's the pigs do it. I don't cut it: they eat it all down.'

A thing I like to stop and look at in the spring is that plat of grass, so thriving, responding so vigorously to the sun.

The sow is called back: she comes sidling along the chicken wire. Another little lawn there. 'Before we wired that in, the old sow she would meddle with the chicken coops. One day she got one stuck on her head. What a sight, her running about with that on her head, bumping into everything! A job I had to get it off. At last I managed to get on to the coop: I sat on it, and called to my missis to bring the saw.

'This butter rationing: if I had a bit more meadow I'd get a cow. But it's no good having one cow: you must have two.'

The grocer's van draws up by the yard. Eyeing the van—'They say, how did the chaps have the strength to do the work they did in the old days, with so little money to live on? My father, do you

know, when he was sixteen he weighed sixteen stone. He got into a good farm. If you could eat fat bacon, there was as much of that as you liked, and flat cheese and beer and skimmed milk -not separated mind, just once-skimmed. If you could get into a good old farmhouse. But I mustn't keep you standing in the cold. . . .'

Inside, in the dim whiteness, the ting of pails on troughs, squeals of pigs and slop-slop of those feeding. Late afternoon village sound, sort of curfew of November.

Outside, the shed is black-tarred and abuts on the road. Visitors see only the black blot of a shed, hear the noise and smell the smell. 'A very piggy corner of the village that. Pooh!'

Turning into my own gate I glance at the left-hand paddock, too often hayed. That it could ever come to look like Mr. Barron's. Put pigs in it? Pleasant to loiter for ten minutes, too late to do anything more now but watch a small rift of red where the sun is setting, and wait for the fowls to go to roost, and think of the pigs. A portable shelter? I look indoors. Grandfather is blacking-out, Anthea running to and fro telling an excited story, while Nora is getting tea ready. Anthea gets tied up with her words, and looks as if she is going to burst.

I speak about the pigs.

'They'd run off with the portable shelters,' Nora says, 'and arrive, shelters and all, at the back door in the end.' Everything comes to the back door, cats, hens, calves when they break out; and so would the pigs. They are safer, perhaps, in their brush-wood sty.

I go out again: hens at roost, still murmuring, pigs deep in their straw. I pick three roses; memory of

summer; and gather some oak twigs for my fire; close the hen-house, go indoors.

The kitchen and scullery seem full of people: washing being damped down and rolled into a sausage, kettles steaming, cups clattering. A mass of dark-red and yellow chrysanthemums in a bucket, picked for fear of frost.

Filling being put into a new cake. Anthea has got on to a chair to see.

'I want a piece.' Occasionally she tries something quite obviously unpermissible. 'I want a piece now.'

'Whoever heard of such a thing!' It has worked: she begins her chuckle. 'I want a piece now.'

Taking off my boots, feeling warm and cheerful beside the chrysanthemums, I begin, 'Do you know, when father was a little boy—' That always makes Anthea look. 'Yes?'

'—When father was a little boy he always had to have two slices of bread and butter before he was allowed to have a piece of cake.'

'Yes. And did your mummy make you a chocolate cake, with fillin' in it?'

'No, it was just a plain sponge cake: (I do remember a lot of that plain sponge cake) and no filling in it.'

'Yes.' A small voice. I look up sharply. The head is lowered, the face red. The thought of father getting only plain sponge after the dutiful two slices is almost too much.

I hasten to add, 'But if he had been a good boy he used to have a chocolate biscuit sometimes.'

'Yes.' A whisper.

'But then,' crescendo, 'when it was his birthday he used to have a lovely cake, all sugar icing, and Happy Returns of the Day written in pink, and candles—'

'Yes.' The head higher.

'And he used to have lots of little boys to tea with him, and they played all sorts of games.'

A smile.

'Why, look at pussy—she's trying to catch her tail.' She is having a whirling fit on the floor. Relief and joy.

After tea I take the three roses and oak twigs into my room. I have just put them on the mantelpiece when all the lights go out. Soon the house is peopled by candles and assumes an air of vigil. 1 light the two candles on my mantelpiece in the old wooden sticks. I blow up my fire, putting on the twigs. It flickers on the walls: there is a mingling of lights. Some of the twigs have leaves on them, dry but greenish still. 1 look at the shape of the leaves in the candlelight. I cannot burn them. Something has happened: something long forgotten has reawakened out of the shapes of the oak leaves. Alone in the soul of a room I hang the oak leaves on the picture above the mantelpiece, which is an old dim oil-painting of the Crucifixion.

The light cut off—life, civilization cut off; leaving one alone in firelight with three roses, some oak leaves, that picture, and the wind in the chimney.

ANKLE-DEEP AND AXLE-DEEP

And still the sugar-beet are not all lifted; and still Mr. Winch comes daily, or on such days as any of us come, when it does not pour all day. Looking at the

field now it is impossible to believe in that fine start and the earth powdering off the beet. All is mud now. Little Mr. Winch, immersed in it, looks a dwarf. Yet he comes every day well provided, with a piece of clean dry sacking for apron, and two other pieces to wrap round his legs. Sometimes he changes these at dinner-time for another set he has stowed away. 'I do detest mud.' he says more than once. I know he means it, yet think it odd that a man should farm successfully on some of the heaviest land of Suffolk for two generations and then say that. But on reflection it does not seem so odd, rather the mark of the good farmer; for what is mud but earth misused? His former neighbours have told me, 'Yes, Mr. Winch, when he had Magpie Farm, would always be out with his scraper in the winter in his yard. He couldn't bear a lot of mud about.' His gateways were made firm with pounded brick. He pulled and shaved the sides of his stacks: a tidy farmer.

'Mind you.' he says to me as we straighten our aching backs a minute to look at the storm clouds, 'this is a good farm of Mr. Camm's, but I wouldn't live up here for anything.' It has an old plaster and tiled house right away by itself in the fields, among its buildings and paddocks full of stock. An agent out to sell the farm would describe it as approached by a good private road. It is good as far as it goes, which is roughly half-way. When we started the sugar-beet the whole road was as hard and smooth as the highway. By now the second half, which has no bottom of stones, is a mire. Wheel tracks diverge from the main track, and other tracks from those tracks, in an attempt to find a bit of solid ground; so the road becomes a sweep many yards wide. There is a shed at the end of the stone road, and that

is the depot for all goods in the winter. Yesterday an unwary lorry tried to go through, and where it plunged in and was finally extricated is now a fair-sized pond formed by broken land-drains, which one of the young labourers is to-day trying to unblock. It makes a desperate-looking mess, his digging among ruts and water. 'No, that would drive me mad to live up here.' Mr. Winch says.

Mr. Camm is used to it. He took his farm for a lifetime, and has put a great deal into the land; yet could not bring himself somehow to spend a lot of money just on stones for the road, preferring to get used to winter isolation. And his wife is quite used to the routine of setting out on foot in gum boots, and changing into shoes at the shed, and getting into the little car for market. Mrs. Camm is the embodiment of good management, neat, compact. In fact, expressing like one of her husband's round stacks solid goodness and nothing wasted.

There is nothing to choose between this and Magpie Farm for goodness, yet to Mr. Winch the one is a home, the other anathema.

'I'm glad this isn't my field.' he says, as the loaded cart goes lurching off, bogged to the axle in the struggle roadward. Standing loading the beet we found ourselves stuck: we had to down our forks and pull on our gum boots, or we should have left them behind. This we had to do at every heap. The field is spouting water from broken drains everywhere. The beet-lifter will no longer work; it merely anchors the horses. We have to lift the beet by hand entirely, levering them out with a two-pronged sort of fork—a laborious business.

It is an orgy of mud. No good waiting; the beet all have to be in by Christmas, and it will not get

any drier till next spring. To stand in one place for ten minutes is to take root. Birds look incredibly light and free.

'I shan't come no more; it's getting too bad.' Mr. Winch says. I'm not out to get the rheumatism. I'm getting old: I shall sit back now for the rest of the winter.'

All day it is the story of his farm just over there. Every field that he tells of is in view: a fascinating story. Yesterday it was how he had to buy or quit, after the last war. He bought. The price was high: it was like starting all over again. This morning it was how his wife saved the farm one critical year with her fowls. Now he is telling me how his son one day ploughed two acres with a colt that was difficult to break in, using the other two horses in relays.

'But he wanted to get on to this mechanized work,' he added.

The present owner of Magpie Farm is a young man from overseas. Mr. Winch suspends judgment; but he looks anxiously in that direction. He has not seen the mud-scraper at work yet.

'This machinery,' he says, puzzled; 'I thought it was to *save* labour. But my son Tom works twice as hard as ever I did.'

I, too, have seen Tom on some contract job of cultivating, lurching and bumping over a field of clods on his tractor, from dawn till dusk, and after.

'Sometimes he comes home too tired to eat, too tired to sleep: he's so stiff the wife has to rub him with oil. What sort of a life is that for a man? Why should a man work like that?'

Indeed, the inexorable activity of the machine seems to have entered into his blood. I can hardly think of him as a being alone, in silent air: the motor

din has become his aura. I never see him out of the seat of his machine, except for certain curiously quiet days when he is doing swift repairs. He is successful with the machine: the standard is, 'keep her running.' Even before the emergency of war the price of the machinery made that imperative.

But to-day I think of a different Tom, in the light of the story his father has just told me of the colt. Tom on the two-horse farm ('The boy always was a worker'), Tom determined to master the horse, breaking it to the plough.

The father's bewilderment: 'Machinery should *save* labour.' How peaceable and smiling appears his lifetime of hard hand labour on Magpie Farm by contrast. I, too, feel happy in the mud here trying to slice the top off a beet with one chop, without wasting any of the beet—by no means easy: trying to scrape off the glutinous mud, thinking, that's good earth to be washed down a factory drain. I hate to think of it going down the factory drain, when it ought to be fostering barley seed here next spring—if ever the field can be reconditioned by then.

But I am wistful over Magpie Farm. I know every field of it by now: I feel as though I have worked for a lifetime beside Mr. Winch on it. I should like to take Magpie Farm and work it in the way he worked it. What has happened to that colt, I wonder, which promised so well? One of his cows I know Mr. Cardwell has: he stood in a gale to buy it. Gale or no gale, bidding was keen for it: the cow was well known. He continues to praise it.

Oh, I should like to carry on Magpie Farm now, before there is a possibility of it becoming a lesser thing than it was. And at seventy-five I should retire—. No, I am not as clever as Mr. Winch.

Another storm. We shelter as we can; but the hedges are thin now. 'No, I shan't come no more,' Mr. Winch says, unwrapping his sacking. He emerges surprisingly neat and clean, and mounts his bicycle. There is a tone of finality in his words this time. I think the story of Magpie Farm is over.

I am teaching Anthea the days of the week. 'What is it to-day? What is it after Friday?'

'Why,' she cries, 'you know what it is to-day—it's party-day.'

Which is true. There is a children's party at the Hall; she has not forgotten.

It is sunny and frosty. It occurs to me that Nora is having an even more thorough turn-out than usual of the bedroom. Bump, bump, bump. Really, what is she up to? Then I realize it is not Nora but guns. Outside, these deep bubbles of sound burst in the clear air and make the windows rattle. There, across the sky, lies as it were a long bar of pure white cloud, spreading at its base and thinning out into a curly mesh. It vanishes to a point in the north. It lies there in the blue, calm as a feather, while another series of thuds shakes the house.

That is all. Anthea meets me again. She says, 'I've been readin' a picture in a book, about a wolf who says " I 'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down." '

'Shall we go for a walk, Anthea? I want to see Mr. Brett.'

'Yes,' running off. 'Mummy, please put on my hat and coat quickly.'

Out on the road Anthea looks back. 'What long shadows we've got. My shadow looks like a big girl:

and there is yours.' Pause for the contemplation of shadows. She tries to unstick her feet from her shadow and finds she cannot.

We meet two little boys near the village shop. Hallo, Anthea, we're rich; we've got one, two, three half-crowns. I know a boy who goes to our school he's ever so rich, he's got twelve and sixpence.' says Simon.

Only a penny is actually in evidence, which they take into the shop, whose bow window has a red paper chain draped across it. They are too excited to-day even to follow us. I am quite thankful, because they have large sticks with which they do war dances, flinging them to and fro like javelins, to everybody's danger.

As we walk along Anthea speculates on the party. 'I wonder who will eat the quickest?'

'I expect Ralph will. Little boys often do.'

'No, I think I will. I'll race at eating.'

Knowing Anthea's habit of reverie, slice in hand, I think it extremely unlikely.

'We mustn't be late,' she says. And then, as though fearing to get too far from home on party-day, she stops. 'Now we'll go back.'

However, I persuade her as far as Mr. Brett's. Mr. Brett is busy rebuilding the front of his workshop. I ask him about some hay he is going to cart for me; then we talk of bricks, of the old local bricks, dug from those spots hereabout that are now ponds. 'The old people got very clever at burning them.' These bricks are as much local materials as plaster and beams. Perhaps that is why on these winter afternoons a haze seems to rise from the newly-ploughed earth and claim the old red-brick cottages as part of itself. Each, as dusk falls, seems to acquire

the character of the other: brick-colour deepens, earth glows.

The different kinds of bricks: those big, variously-shaped flooring bricks, called 'grass-bricks', very hard, and with the pattern of grass impressed on them. Because, Mr. Brett thinks, they were laid on the grass to dry. He shows me one: there is a curious beauty about the fresh shapes of growing grass there on the face of the brick, a pressure of the past.

This workshop used to be a cottage. It is tiny, yet it used to be a double cottage. A family of seven sons lived in one end. 'The youngest of them.' says Mr. Brett, 'will be ninety in January.'

I approached Mr. Brett's yard as he went to show me the grass-brick; Anthea mutely resistant. All this talk of bricks. As we move on, she says to me, 'I believe you've made us late for dinner—stoppin' there all that time.'

After dinner, about three o'clock, Anthea and Nora appear dressed to go out. Nora in the green suit, five years old, but so manipulated as to the skirt, whose length and shape have been cleverly altered, as to look quite new. Anthea is stiff under the spell of a new coat. But outside she remembers the party again and sets off at a little trot.

I follow an hour later, after feeding the animals. The cold is intense: a rime is forming on everything. Of all the population of the hedges, only a solitary blackbird and a wisp of old-man's-beard remain. Yet there is something exceedingly beautiful about this walk between flat meadows and ploughland in winter dusk. The way the white ducks of the farm sit placid in the grass, while a few fowls are already roosting in a tree, heavy black shapeless blobs against the sky. The pond is ice, its verge is scored where

horses have slipped. Manure heaps are steaming: cattle stand like monuments.

I enter the park, and the trees make a maze of bare boughs meeting above, through which a star seems to precede me like a needle-point going through lace. I slacken my pace for the sheer variety of the boughs; ever some new curve. Beneath the bridge the stream runs under a lip of ice, and makes a loud tinkle among the motionless trees.

The Hall is blacked-out so thoroughly that approaching it through the silent park is like coming to a deserted house in a fairy tale. Not a sound, not a soul, not a glimmer. Only the red sunset bars in the west, and a star—Venus—bright and low.

Suddenly then I burst into a room glowing and scintillating with candles, with children in bright frocks like flowers, sitting round a long table. The wave of warmth, the brightness, the rosy children eating cakes and pulling crackers, is like a fairy-tale transformation indeed. Long and long the old Hall has stood empty, winter after winter. So recently has it become a home again that one half expected to find only darkness, cold, and a scuttling rat.

The fairy godmother of it all greets me, while small hands continue to help themselves from the plate in her hand. I am so stiffened with the cold walk that my face muscles will not work, and my mind also is paralysed by the shock of brightness, so I can say hardly a word. A chair and a cup of tea and a plate of jam sandwiches are before me: jam sandwiches, thin and patchy, with the jam soaking through: I have not had such since I was a child myself. I eat all the jam sandwiches. There is Anthea, solemn with enjoyment, her hair golden in the light. AH the

children sitting round; the strange child-quiet, staring. This sitting round of children before candles is somehow out of time, eternal.

I find myself next to two mothers, and catch on to their conversation. It is of how to keep their fowls now there is so little corn. We discuss potato peelings, old crusts, cheese rinds.

Another father arrives; he is in khaki. Everybody is moving into another room for the Christmas tree. Parents congregate. 'Did you see that aeroplane brought down this morning?'

'Was it brought down? I'm glad: I only saw the smoke.'

'It went straight up into the air, then down.'

'Like a towering pheasant.'

'I'm told it came down in the sea.'

This goes on over the heads of the children. Their eyes are fixed on the coloured lights: small hands move with determination towards various objectives. Anthea stretches for Ralph's drum: Geraldine's arm crosses hers and extracts the blue tea-pot from her doll's tea-set. Anthea gently but firmly reclaims the tea-pot, and puts it back in the box. She puts the lid on. She tries to hold it high above everybody's head. 'In case it gets broken.' An auburn-haired girl comes to the rescue and holds it safely, being the tallest, and takes Anthea by the hand.

At last it is time to go. All the children have their coats and hats on. Anthea stands in the hall with auburn-haired Janet. 'Anthea says she is going home with Janet.' We laugh. But out there in the hall Anthea is perfectly solemn. She stands in her coat and gaiters holding Janet's hand and facing the big door, waiting for it to be opened. She has formed in an hour such a perfect speechless friendship with

Janet that she would walk straight out into the night with her anywhere.

In church this morning there were chrysanthemums —deep honey-coloured chrysanthemums. Outside misty thaw: here chrysanthemums and four candle-flames made a warm glow. Just a handful of people to-day: the psalms and hymns were all harmonium. A kind of ghost of a service: the robust old words of the Reformation sounding on mostly to children. The boy behind me spluttering and coughing, 'And our mouth shall show forth Thy praise.'

Yet what it must have been when the. villagers brought their flute and fiddle, and the pews were full. What it might be—but it is no good blaming the people; you must blame the mammon of industrialism that has rotted the old forms and put nothing in their place.

When you listen to the words of the old collects and prayers and blessings—stout-hearted, no sentimental cringing about them—the tiny handful of you on a dark winter day in the little church in the fields, and you cast your mind to and fro across the present world with its great hide of armour plate, and receive its embattled neo-paleolithic stare—you know then that there is nothing, absolutely nothing left, no integrating atom, but this small church in the fields where the old blessings are still pronounced, and four candle-flames conspire with chrysanthemums to make a glow of faith.

As we were lifting sugar-beet the man beside me said, 'Do you know if it's to-day they're burying

Tim Dukes? Because I'd go to the church if that be so, as him and me were mates; we worked together.'

It happened he had been buried the day before. But it would have been fitting for his mate to have walked in straight out of the beet-field, with muddy buskins.

Dukes hailed me one day as I was passing, seeming to burst his small casement window out with his body wedged in it. 'Hey, sir, just a minute, sir, if you don't mind.'

So I went up the garden path and he led me into his room with a 'Come in, sir, please sit down.' The room was crowded, because his wife's bed was in a corner; she was half paralysed by a recent stroke and could not get upstairs. She wept for a minute with sheer vexation and despair that she could not do the things she wanted to do. 'Don't you mind her, sir, she do feel it, having been a active woman all her life. There now, don't you take on so.'

There I sat, plunged into the daily life of the ageing labourer and his wife, a thing which I almost *felt* in the air, by the shadowiness of the room and the crowd of chattels, a few old simple pieces polished with use and handed down; a beautiful old chair to which he had botched a new and staring leg, things of use, and an odd assortment of decorated biscuit tins and seaside ornaments. And the iron bed in one corner, taking up a third of the room, and the maimed woman, her worried-looking hair, and her husband, his face rather like a gleam of sun, his voice hard with the out-of-doors, his whole body and movement too big for this cave of a room. It was one of three cottages: the other two were empty and tumbledown. The two did not seem so much to be living here as to be confined here, caged-in.

Dukes was pouring me out a whole tumblerful of raspberry wine with which to drink to Christmas, and I drank it all down, while the woman wept again at something her husband had said, stirring a recollection of herself when she had command of her body. What it meant I well understood; and why her nerves were like a bolting horse; because it was not just a matter of resigning herself to being waited on; who would there be to do the waiting? For the time her husband made shift.

But she did not only cry: next minute she laughed, telling a story against herself; how our place had stood empty once for a long time, and the village being very badly off for water she had gone up there and found the well full of water. Only it was not the drinking-water well but the dead-well into which she had let down her bucket; rain water running through had cleared it. Her husband discovered her mistake in time.

Dukes meanwhile showed me mementoes of former masters. One a red Paisley handkerchief of great size. Another thing was a cup and saucer handed down, china that shadowed against your hand I could guess how it must have been prized when wooden trenchers and earthenware mugs were the cottage utensils.

Dukes was out of a job, and he seemed cut off from the village and the fields, sitting there staring out of the window.

Outside he opened the door of his shed and it was lined with implements, all the blades of husbandry; bill-hooks, reap-hooks, slashers, blades of varying and subtle curves. All these tools were polished and greased; I should not think there was a speck of rust on one. King of all was a heavy cavalry

sabre which Dukes took down and drew from its sheath, shining like new and the blade murderously sharp.

'I got it at a sale.' he said. 'I thought it might come in handy for a rough old hedge.'

Someone to whom I mentioned this array of tools said, 'Tim Dukes, he always was a one to have the right tool for a job.' An expert hedger, he goes down as. There, too, was his bicycle; old but as polished as the rest. The opening of the door of that shed was a revelation after the rather haphazard room, and the ruinous state of the cottages. It was like a glimpse of culture. 1 thought with shame of the state of my own sheds.

I met him one day later near the pub. I was glad of the opportunity to invite him to have a drink with me. He had on a new pair of gloves. He offered me a hand like iron, like a claw. He had a pair of these gloves every year; the gauntlets reached half-way up his fore-arm. 'There's nothing will go through them. There's only one man I know who can make them. They're expensive; there's plenty cheaper got up to look like them, but they're no good.' He had thick buskins on too; he was armed against all hedges. But he had no hedging to do. He was over seventy, though he did not look it.

His voice seemed to have receded into him, deep down, when 1 met him again. He had had an attack of some kind, which the doctor had told him was nerves. A strange diagnosis, I thought. He woke in the night and found he could not move. He had just got out again; his former corn-coloured complexion looked leaden and he complained of a constriction in his chest. But he had dug his garden. He had taken days over it, resting every quarter of an hour.

When I saw him again (he spent much of his time now leaning on his garden gate) he said, 'I've been worrying, that's the trouble. I can't help being worried, no use pretending I can.'

It was not difficult to see what he was worrying about. He and his wife were now equal to about half an active person between them.

Dukes died quite soon after that. His wife still lives on in the cottage. Another woman of the village—one of the busiest—goes and sees to her every day; takes her to see her husband's grave, gives her dinner at her house. Yesterday she was sawing up wood for her in her garden, a bough of that old apple tree of which Dukes said to me, 'That's a King Pippin, that never did bear; but then I dug a trench all round it and emptied my closet pail into it. After that we had lovely apples.'

It is just a year ago I passed him cutting a roadside hedge. I think it was the last job he did. Going down that road yesterday I saw the cuts he had made, clean, no slivering, and thought of the greased hooks hung up, and Tim Dukes in his grave.

CHRISTMAS CANDLES

'You can't call that an orchard.' my mother said, on a visit to us, as I used that word referring to the meadow in front. She did not think much of my home; I don't know why, for it is convenient and

stoutly built. To her artist's eye it lacks something. I am not sure how many trees a meadow must have in it to merit the name of orchard. I suppose I had been seeing more in it than there were; I had seen my intention of trees. In the same way country people will refer to a grove of trees long since felled. 'Down by the willows.' You may look in vain for the willows.

To have an acre of kitchen garden surrounded by a red brick wall: that is a thing I dream about, but shall never have, because with it go always a mansion and park. My other ambition, to plant an orchard, I have now begun to realize. I have never planted fruit trees before; only bushes, and they do not count. When I say plant an orchard I mean an orchard of standard trees on proper trunks that will live for a century. There are always so many arguments against standard trees, when it comes to the point. It has always been, ' Bushes are cheaper, are easier to control; the fruit is more easily picked.' and so on. So it has been bushes: but I never felt like calling that an orchard. It had no longevity in it to my eye.

But here I have an unanswerable argument in favour of standard trees—they will allow of stock grazing the meadow beneath. And I am here, I hope, for life. So it was with real pleasure I ordered standard trees. 'Half-standards or full-standards?' asked the devil in the shape of the nurseryman, tempting me yet again. 'Full standards.' I said firmly.

And here they are, embedded in an enormous bundle of Norfolk reeds.

I do not know what machine-age meanness it is that makes one think that six shillings is a lot of money to spend on an apple tree. I blush to think

of the number of times I have spent that on some manufactured thing, and thought nothing of it. But for a fruit tree to live in one's view for life—. There is a popular feeling that something that has grown should be almost a gift, has cost nothing; I don't know why.

It is only the beginning of an orchard. I have learnt, at last, to begin slowly. I am not so old but I shall pick plenty of fruit from my trees, and still leave tons and tons for my children and grandchildren.

It is a mild, sunny day. William and I set to work. I have marked out the places with sticks. We plant as we dig, knowing better than to dig all the holes first and then come and find we have ponds to plant in. I profit by William's experience on this land. He planted some apple trees years back, and they have never grown and never borne. This is dour soil for fruit; heavy and wet. Yet, as I told him, I have walked through Herefordshire orchards in the spring, when at every step the turf sank down like a sponge and the water came up to one's ankles. Yet their trees bear. Anyhow, we plant very shallow, each tree in a couple of barrow-loads of compost earth wheeled from my manure heaps; residue of burnings, trimmings, ditchings, and muckings-out.

We have just got the first tree planted when the air-raid siren sounds from the town. No noise could be more eloquent of mechanical death: it seems to grip life by the throat and congeal the free wind. The tree stands slim and insouciant in the din, the sun glinting on its clean bark. There is Time hidden in a young tree; it has a look of to-morrow. William's hat on a stake is twisting and turning.

'I think that's a pretty noise,' Anthea says, cocking her ear as she comes out tc me with her little trowel.

'I'm goin' to help you, so I've brought my travel. Where shall I dig?'

'You dig here.' I tell her, as I firm the earth round the tree while William is digging another hole.

'I *do* like helpin' you plant trees.' she says, scattering a few ceremonial grains of earth round the trunk.

'And when I've daggen this, then where shall I dig?

'Now what are you doin'?'

'I'm cutting this old stump down, dear, so I can plant another tree in its place.' One has to squat at it half sideways: the sappy wood grips the saw. Orange-coloured particles fall on a cushion of moss.

'When will it fall down?'

'Soon.'

'What are you stoppin' for?'

I (puffed): 'To have a rest.'

'When will it fall down?'

'In a minute now.'

'You must saw it off soon, because then I want to see you saw another tree down.'

They must be well staked. Only yesterday I came across two iron rods that had once supported a curtain. I thought, as I shifted them from one corner of the shed to another—as one does, thinking that is tidying up—'These, I suppose, will lie about here for years.' And to-day I have found a use for them, to stake two apple trees.

Then we hear the guns. Dull and sullen, they sound all the afternoon, while we plant trees in the sun. Nora takes the children to the post, walking slowly along the sunlit road in the boom of the guns.

William has a way with tools. I had a pair of clippers, but they are lost. They will turn up in a manure heap. Then an old knife which I tried to revive,

sharpening it on a stone of Nora's little rock garden. A real rock garden, not a slag and brick one. Nora's is an ecclesiastical rock garden, full of sculpt fragments. I am sure in the beginning the churchyard must have been plundered for it. Ferns grow out of broken oriels; sea-pinks couch in ogees. Some day I shall find a noseless angel among the primroses.

I never lose faith that I can revive an old blade, patiently honing it on steps and stones as I go about. Sometimes it seems to get sharper; then again blunter. William's tools are always sharp; they are worn fine and sharp; they never have that stubborn appearance of a new blade, thick-looking.

William has a way of tying a tree to its stake so that it does not rub, making a stiff little arm of twisted cord between them. An affair of many twists and knacks of the fingers.

'Of course, I reckon half-standards would do best on this land.' William says.

I don't care: I want trees that the next generation will have to take a ladder to. And they will have to learn the management of ladders: how to foot them round and coax them deep into a tree without breaking the branches. And how to carry a forty-staver in a wind, making a pause between lifting on the shoulder and starting to walk, to get the balance of it. And how to carry a ladder up a ladder, when you want to mend a roof. In fact, the whole art of the management of ladders, about which a book could be written.

I am not afraid that my trees will not grow. I have a feeling that I can make them grow. There they are now planted, and the moon is up. Their first evening in the orchard. They look beautiful among the few old trees. Yes, I *can* call that an orchard.

'A hurdle, quick!' I cried, as the pigs came scampering into the backyard, against all the rules. Such things will happen. We penned them in a corner, caught them (ear-splittingly), and returned them to their brushwood hovel. What a handy bit of fencing a hurdle is. How we should miss it in a host of ways. Farmers who lightly talk of sheep wire and electric fencing as complete substitutes—what but a hurdle, I should like to ask them, will make a pig go where it does not want to? Two or three people with one each make a sort of travelling pen round him. And to pen a calf up from its mother in a corner, or stop a gap in the fence temporarily; why, I should be lost without hurdles. But they melt away—old sows have powerful snouts; calves grow strong and jump. And other people's cattle break down your stop-gap.

The hurdle-maker's is a happy sort of place. Late in October, when I went there to order more hurdles, he was trimming up stakes. He has great cone-shaped piles of poles standing on end round old trees, dwarfing his house. He has a yard and a range of buildings. From one of these buildings came drip, drip, drip. 'The last oozings, hours by hours.' The smell of apples was mingled with that of wood. Within was his cider press; his father's and grandfather's it had been. Sacks of apples lay about, and a tub full of brown apple mush. People bring their apples, and he makes them into cider for them, as well as his own, and fills their casks. Through the gate I could see his orchard, with hens walking about it. Cider-making is not a business with him: he crushes other people's apples to oblige them. It used to be a business when he was a boy. His father and grandfather used to put the press on a cart every autumn and go the round of the district making cider from

people's orchards. 'We used to sleep rough, as they say; in barns, on hay or straw. I used to love it. Oh, I looked forward to October.' I could imagine what fun it must have been to the boy, sleeping on the hay or straw high up in some barn, with an outlook in the morning through a knot-hole of a new countryside. Every day somewhere different. The men, too, enjoyed it, the sociability, the bit of roving; dragging their old wooden press about on a cart like a rough-hewn Bacchus. 'It was as good as a holiday.'

One could visualize the preparation, the setting off, the return; all the homely touches. But it is over now. I still wonder what is the secret of the inertia that has paralysed the country in all its workings. A little thing like this matter of the travelling cider press: was there any reason why it should not have continued? It interfered with no trade. Commercial cider in bottles? But the old cider drinkers do not drink that. 'I had two glasses,' said the cider-hurdle-maker; 'it went down very cool, and when you've said that you've said all. Why, if that had been two glasses of my old cider—.'

The old cider-drinkers must have died out. Last summer I saw the tractor driver tipping up a bottle of raspberry-coloured-ade delivered by a lorry, and another lemon-coloured bottle by his dinner basket. But these things are for a time only; they cannot live ultimately against the humanity of the cider press. It is curious how these little pockets of cider-making and cider-drinking occur in our barleycorn East Anglia.

Numbers of wooden casks of all sizes lay about the shed waiting to be filled. Meanwhile the hurdle-maker went on with his trimming of stakes.

Yesterday I was there again; and now his yard is full of new hurdles, glittering with them; and he has orders for many more. Other crafts have died, but his remains. He enumerated to me the country tradesmen in this one locality when he was young: wheelwrights, blacksmiths; builders' yards and painters' shops. Usually two or three would be contiguous, their work being complementary. I should have passed, on my way here, at least three such settlements, with their masters and apprentices, working up the timber of the woods all around. A tumbledown shed, an open space, marked these places: I noted them as I went back.

A big park was about to have a complete new fence—a mile and a half of it—of rived oak. 'I knew the man that rived the old one, that was forty-five years ago. He rived the whole of it, from oaks out of the woods.'

The hurdle-maker is a happy man: his work is still wanted; he has his own cider to drink. The smell of wood and cider, a cask-like smell, saturates his buildings. He works in his own place, in his own time, and the sapling shapes are all about him. His work is ingrained in him from generations, and he wants no other.

I have a demi-john of cider left, old, deep as sunset. I had it from a friend who has a hundred acres and a mill and a cider press on the Suffolk border. He grinds his own corn in the mill, and makes his own cider in the press. He and his wife can never drink all he makes before another brew is ready; so it gets older and older.

I go to seek it in my cellar, for this is Christmas Eve.

I pass three withered, arthritic-looking legs sitting on the stairs. They are stuffed with little presents. Nora creeps into the children's room and fastens them in place.

Anthea is the presiding genius of this Christmas. Father Christmas is instinctively comprehended (after all, what more credible than a jolly old man distributing toys all round?). Moreover, she has *seen* him, as she will tell you. It is true: I saw him myself. In the town market square, while a small, glittering snow sifted down, he came in a cart drawn by what looked like a reindeer. (At least it had reindeer's antlers. They reminded me of a pair on our doctor's wall: Father Christmas had much his figure)—followed by children singing carols, flanked by swinging lanterns, round and round the great twinkling Christmas tree standing in the square. Snow on the roofs all round, and old windows glowing. There was a spirit abroad that night; something lovely that had lived in this land raised its head. But the children departed, and traffic flowed again and white headlamps broke through. Still, after that who could doubt? I did not even myself. That was the last Christmas before war.

The twins are not old enough yet to understand about Father Christmas. Not for want of Anthea telling. Loudly telling.

Christmas had become a feverish effort to boost up trade, those last years. Its lovely spirit was lost with commercial Father Christmases standing in muddy gutters. Trust money-making to pick up a bit of old legend and put it in the cash register. Christmas morning came to have a relapsed feeling, a thank-God-the-shopping's-over feeling, a view of shuttered shops in the mind's eye.

And now. Yesterday afternoon I sat ana listened to the singing of carols from King's College Chapel. I saw in my mind again that building which I can never approach without being filled with a sense of life. And the singing was like the foundation-stone of a new England.

This morning I go to drink the health of some friends. The children are absorbed in their stocking presents (though still Martin's old rag doll is the favourite plaything), Nora in the preparation of the Christmas dinner. I explain to the lady of the house where I go that the hour of our drinking together here is the most critical in the cooking of the dinner, so Nora could not come. I find myself deep in conversation to right and left, till I notice that people are thinning out, and take my leave. I am in that careless mood in which one reaches for the first coat one sees and has forgotten the way out. As I cycle off I recollect the acceptance of an invitation from my host to go on the river with him in his boat and fish. As I know nothing of fishing there seems something a little curious about it, it being winter. Perhaps we are to sit wrapped in old coats waiting for pike.

The cockerel I killed for Christmas weighed 7¼ lbs., and along with home-cured Bath chap, sausages, stuffing, and that old cider of Suffolk, makes a glorious meal. The plum pudding is good, too; but not quite equal to one we ate last year which was two years old. My friends of the morning are having a goose from the farm opposite their house. There were a dozen of these geese, and it was a pleasant sight to see them walking out every morning in single file. As Christmas approached the procession dwindled till there were only two left. Then one. Every

morning they saw the goose destined for their own table walk out alone. And now they are eating it—a little sadly.

While the children are playing we get busy with the Christmas tree; the same that was given Anthea for her first Christmas. I dig it up again from the garden, with all the earth on its roots, moist, to keep it alive. I like the earth to come in, too: I hate the idea of the trade Christmas tree chopped off from its roots (apt symbol of trade Christmas, Xmas). Some yew also and trails of periwinkle leaves and ivy. And somebody has gathered a bowl of real summer roses.

It is a nice matter to balance the candles in their holders on the little boughs. There is still a blob of spilt wax from last year, blue, which an elderly lady botanist stooped to examine with great interest last summer.

What innumerable hiding places there must be in a house of children. Presents have been concealed this last fortnight in my room, under my carved oak table (carved with farm men's names: it came out of an inn), on top of my bookshelf. I am looking for *Rural Rides* and come across a set of doll's furniture. And I forget the book, remembering the cold shop, and the woman in the back room turned temporary showroom, sharing a meal with a blue cat in a basket chair by the fire. And in the very cold front shop, the proprietor blowing up a football for a boy and looking like an old picture of Boreas.

The Christmas cake also comes out of some secret place. There is a present also for Mummy from Anthea, chosen by Anthea at my suggestion in the shop, then this morning wrapped up by us together, and a suitable message written by Anthea's (guided)

hand, And Anthea then running off to the kitchen. 'Mummy, we've got a secret for you.'

The great thing is a doll's house which, grandma has bought for Anthea. It is a bright, garden-cityish sort of doll's house, with diamond-paned windows that open. It stands beside the Christmas tree, and the sprays of yew are to it as might be trees of its garden.

We bring in the candlesticks for the table, and by the time the children arrive are just lit up ready. Anthea comes in and stands bathed in delight, her hand caught up to her lips, gazing around. At the iced cake with Father Christmas standing on it like an explorer on an ice-cap, a very big plinth for a very small statue. At the starry tree with the sweet pine scent warming out of it; at the doll's house. On that her eyes fix themselves. She goes up to Nora and whispers, 'Is that a dolly's house?' Living away in the country she has not seen one before; only heard of one.

'I think it must be.'

'Who is it for?'

Martin and Sylvia are brought in. Martin looks round as much as to say, 'What's all this about?' Sylvia grins: ('It's amusing, anyway').

'Who is it for, Mummy?'

The meal becomes a passion of suspense. 'Who is it for, the dolly's house?'

'Would it be for Sylvia?'

'Oh, no; she's not big enough.'

'Perhaps it's for Martin.'

'But boys don't have dolls.'

'Do you think it's for Anthea?'

Even the Christmas cake, even chocolate biscuits are eaten absent-mindedly. At last, at last the doll's

house. Sylvia has a pig whose tail whirls round by clockwork. Martin has a humming-top and a drum. The rest of the day is a tattoo. On the parchment of the drum are traces of some old legal deed, beautifully penned. Turn—turn—turn. So much for the law.

Outside, as I fed and closed up the animals, there was a glow in the sky, and from several directions the booming of church bells. They sounded like the guns of peace. A cloud blossomed behind the apple trees. There was a sense as though one had a tryst here, remembering the apple-blossom in the cloud, and the peace of the bells meeting and mingling their circumferences of sound over the whole land.

NEW YEAR

I cannot help feeling a bit free to-day as I gaze at the ten-years-old motor in the shed. Ever since one took that fatally easy step and learned to drive, long ago, one has never felt quite one's own master. I say easy: it was then. No driving tests. All you needed was five shillings for a licence. It was a van I bought: being a farmer it seemed to me the most useful. Sometimes we took livestock, sometimes people. Pigs, calves, sacks of meal, coal. The journey with the calves was exciting. There was nothing between the driving seat and the rest of the van but a thin rail for the driver to lean his back on. We

lifted the calves in at the back and they immediately tried to jump out at the front. I drove: my brother sat beside me, facing back, and wrestled with those two calves for eight miles. The van was made of tin, a resounding vehicle. People we passed needed no horn to warn them of our approach: they skipped on to the bank and stared as we went by, wondering whatever was happening inside that van.

I learned to drive in the simplest possible way. The man who delivered the van took me up the road and down the road: that was my tuition. And once you can drive, somehow you are kept at it. It is, 'Oh, would you mind running so-and-so home?' A matter of twenty miles perhaps. Hours, days, slip away. Driving to me was never anything but an exhausting waste of time. I bless the increased tax, the increased price of petrol, the rationing of it—the whole combination that has definitely put the motor beyond the means of a poor man with three chidren.

But Nora—she did not drive, and she suffers from chilblains. She is equally of the view that motoring is quite out of the question now: she cycles cheerfully along with me to market. But on our way home she did not sing, as I did, at sight of Venus, the evening star, above the last red bar of sunset cloud. 'I won't mind it.' she said, 'not a bit, when it isn't quite so cold.' With that she busked first her right arm, then her left, swaying like a skater as the crammed rush-baskets **on the** handlebars swung with the swaying arm.

I have a good bicycle. Its make? The Lidgate. **Never** heard of it? Perhaps not: and if one day you **are** passing through Lidgate and you look for a big factory **turning out** mass-produced cycles, you **will**

not see it. No, but over a stream and up a bank there stands a shop with R. E. Jolley written up. He is the maker of 'The Lidgate' cycle. When I farmed near Lidgate, in course of a chat with him one day, I had a deal with him over one of his bicycles. It cost me four pounds ten, and I have had it twelve years, and I would not take four pounds ten for it to-day. A strong, easy-running machine; and every time I take it out I think of my good friend, Mr. Jolley, and the talks we used to have, up there overlooking the pretty village. The last time I was in that neighbourhood I called on him, and he came hurrying down and shook me by the hand, and up we went through the shop and into the parlour to see his wife and have a cup of tea. He had a whole shop full then of his good bicycles. I hope he is still in business. If you want a good bicycle, get a Lidgate. You can carry such a lot on it. My old market bag, a little bolster-shaped thing, but of such leather as you would hardly see to-day, fits beautifully on to the carrier.

The only thing wrong with our local town, I find, is that the kerbs are skimpy. They will not support a bicycle properly. One tends to choose shops where there is a deep kerb.

And when we are thoroughly loaded, so that the carrier has a slight tail-wag, and the handlebars have rush-basket pendulums, the clock is striking four and the winter day flushing down into the streets. The water is turning to ice in the puddles and crackles under the tyres. Across the river creeps a frosty mist. A waft of perfume out of the cinema, and then suddenly one is up in the glassy country silence. The trees become silhouettes, the sky is all bruised light. There is no wind. Smoke creeps out of a cottage chimney. Sheets are frozen stiff on the line. A farm

exhales its odour, that is its soul, and wraps us in an aura of old England. It is a smell that even seems to have warmth, the air is so scaldingly cold. Puddles in the empty yard glitter: the shapes of the buildings have a look of permanent purpose.

Down a hill and up a hill. I am a little behind Nora, waiting to see if she is going to get off. 'I got off because I thought 1 heard you get off.' On again: the level mile to home. Then 1 saw the evening star come out, Venus above black pine trees, and I sang.

Home. Firelight, warmth, tea. One is proud of the packages ranged on the table, to have brought them home by one's own muscle. In one of Nora's are eleven yards of flannel for new nightdresses for the children.

Dripping toast, tea in big cups, an incandescent fire in the stove, shutters up, curtains drawn. How many eggs to-day? Leaning back, thinking of that ride. Talking of the purchases but thinking of the ride: the smell of the farm, the star, the red bar in the sky. Things that fortify against whatever the loudspeaker may have to say.

The tin bath is being prepared in front of the fire. Toys litter the floor. Anthea is combing Sylvia's hair. 'I'm making her a lot of curls, because she is getting a big girl now.' Topsy the doll has been naughty and was put in another room by herself. 'And then I went to the door again and I whispered with my ears, and she'd stopped being naughty.' Sylvia is banging the dog on the back with the brush: she pulls her ear. The dog, who would bite my hand off for much less, lies on a patchwork cushion and merely looks mournful. Martin, seeing all this, tries to use his humming-top as a brush on his own head.

Picture books have suddenly come into favour, and the toy piano. Martin, in a red jersey, naked from the waist down, standing by the table looking profoundly wise, beating notes out of the toy piano. Sylvia looks at a picture of ducks on the floor. Martin knows there is one of dogs over the page. He goes and tries to turn it over, as he is good at barking like a dog. Sylvia cannot bark, but is very good at 'Quack', so she wants ducks still. A tussle: the cardboard page vertical, one hand pushing one side, one the other. Growls and squeals of anger. No sooner does Martin get the dogs than, flap, it is ducks again. Finally both ducks and dogs are lost in an upheaval, and now it is cows. They are both good at saying moo, so they obliterate the -picture with eager hands and moo like anything.

This morning, left together in their play-pen, they stripped yards of paper off the wall. So we moved the cupboard up against the patch, and life goes on.

Anthea shows me the new soles to her shoes: to have shoes mended is almost as good as having new shoes. What a lot of shoes they need. What a lot of clothes: yards and yards of material. One begins to realize what a big inter-family traffic there is in children's clothes. They are passed on and on. I had a friend when I was thirteen. We often stayed at each other's homes; bicycled together, fished for minnows. I grew a little older and became romantic about her. Later, when I grew up, our ways parted. One day I left my farm to go to London for her wedding. I remember a very hot day, and her elder sister talking hats to a friend all through the service. My friend has had three children, and now I have three; and we never see each other,

but parcels of clothes go to and **fro.** Little woolly coats, frocks with ribbons, these are the connecting links. And when Anthea, Martin, or Sylvia have outgrown them they go on to someone else.

By way of small recompense I sent her one of our cockerels, trussed and garnished with sprigs of fresh parsley which I dug a foot and more into the snow to find. She wrote cheerfully from their country refuge (though things are most uncertain for them): 'Meanwhile we exist—happily, I must own; and I'm sure it's good for us.' It is fortifying to hear from friends, isolated in winter frost, waiting for what is to happen, yet living strenuously forward at the same time, bringing up a family.

There is a woman in the next village with seven children. To-day we did up a parcel of these clothes and left them at her house. Her husband is a fisherman: she is alone for months with the seven.

From there we went on: the sun was summer-bright, the road dusty; the light cold wind scalded our faces. We came to the farm we were seeking, to buy some more pullets.

Crash! A boy who has been walking along a frozen stream cracking the ice with an axe, has fallen and cracked a great deal more with his behind. He gets up dripping, and with one look of mortification at us, that we have seen, departs silently through the fence. The poultry farmer among his pens looks up, too, as though that were a summons. 'Do you want to see me?' We approach. 'It is all right,' I say to Nora, 'he will sell us some pullets: there is something about that rocking-horse.' It prances full gallop across the garden. There is something about a house with a rocking-horse in the garden in January, so vigorous-looking, that predisposes one towards the inhabitants.

But 'No', he says, 'I'm afraid I haven't any to spare: you see, the pullets are all in lay now.'

I agree that of course it is the wrong time, and naturally he does not want to sell laying birds. Then I ask, 'Can you get enough food for all your flock?'

'It *is* a trouble.' he admits. 'Can you?'

'Well, we don't keep many more than enough to supply ourselves. I could manage to feed a few more, though.'

I go on talking quietly about this and that, just to give him time to think. I can see him thinking it over. He says, 'I don't know that I might not let you have a few, in view of the food situation.'

We go the round of his pens. Long-necked, egg-weighted pullets; gallant, glistening, embattled cocks. So tame, too. 'If you'll just stand there, we'll drive this lot into their house.' There is just one pigeon-hole opening into the house from their run. To try and drive a dozen ordinary hens into that, well, you could try all day. But these walk in in a minute. Handling them: 'No, not her, she's got rather a pale eye. This one—' (looking at a number on her ring and consulting a chart) ' —she's laid four eggs. This one—she's laid three.'

He puts black-and-yellow striped rings on our birds. 'We shall know yours when you come for them by the tigerish rings.'

What a great deal there is in poultry to the expert. 'The smooth face and rather prominent eye of the heavy layer.'

Of the first batch of hens I ever had in my life, bought from the outgoing farmer, the best layer was a skinny-looking creature with a cross beak.

Nine years ago to-day Nora and I were going to be married. It is a clear and frosty dawn. 'Now.' Nora says, 'I was upsetting my early tea in the bed, a thing I've never done before or since, and thinking the lace I had chosen did not go very well on the frock.'

Now, .' was waking rather depressed that London should look so dark and dreary even on a fellow's wedding day. As much as to say, 'I don't care a damn.'

To-day we are landed in the biggest war ever, with three helpless infants. Farming against the weather is nothing to it.

I say as I roll out of bed, 'I'll see if I can borrow Mr. Prosser's chicken crate. He made it specially to go on a bicycle.'

Ten-thirty. Now Nora had managed to find some more satisfactory lace, and was sewing it on her frock. Now I was being treated to gin before the ceremony.

To-day I am trying to fix Mr. Prosser's chicken crate on to my carrier in his barn. It seems an insoluble problem: it looks like an elephant on a postage stamp. Mr. Prosser is out. I remember now he said he has some sort of expanding carrier. I wheel the thing homeward, nevertheless. I meet a farmer friend who takes the crate aboard his car. He says, 'I lost my old horse this morning. He was twenty-eight. He was bound up: his muscles were paralysed: he hadn't passed anything since Saturday."

Twelve o'clock. Now we were being married.

Here we are standing in the yard in the wind, with string, wire and pieces of wood, trying to scheme how to fix the crate on the carrier.

Two o'clock. Now we were finishing our wedding

breakfast, and a gleam of sun came out and shone on us, which people said was a good omen.

Now the children have been fed and dressed, and are going out with Ada, then to her cottage to tea. We, too, are setting out, having received by telephone an offer of more easily managed crates from our poultry farmer. Between us, we think, we can carry these slung about us somehow, to get the birds home. We have also, tied on behind, a cat-bag. It is a thing handed down: we have stored it for years; and as we never go journeys with cats it seemed pointless. But it comes in useful. It has two holes, one at either end. I remember, as a child, travelling in a train, and first the cat's paw appearing through the hole, and then its nose, and the talk it started among the passengers about cats. I still expect to see that paw appear.

Now we were leaning back in a closed car, being whisked to Charing Cross.

Now, red-nosed, we are pedalling uphill against the wind. Riding a road regularly you know where to get off: up a hill, you make it a tree or something. Always on this hill we think we shall get right up it this time. Always, at the tree, we know we shall not.

Farm work is at a standstill owing to the frost. A man comes out of his cottage into a trim small meadow and whistles two yearling cattle to him. The cattle stand and look at him, but do not go to him. He stands on the other side looking at them, hands plunged vertically in his corduroy pockets.

A young woman is pushing a load of firewood in a hand-cart. It is a heavy load. She has a child, all red muffler and hood. She perches him on the load, making it still heavier. He laughs down at her, pixie-like, and she, trying to shove the cart into

motion again, laughs up at him. She is pretty and gay and strong: in this game of pushing the hand-cart along she is no older than her child. They belong to some happy time—of yesterday or to-morrow—embalmed in the sunlight.

The old roadman on his tricycle is ahead, cycling with antique deliberation: his knees come out stiffly sideways as they crank over. A rather ragged man passes hurriedly on a bicycle that wheezes. A girl goes by, on her afternoon off, cycling blithely, as though to some music she hears in the air. People cycle characteristically, even as they walk: the ploughman homeward pedals ploughmanlike.

We reach the farm. Crates like Christmas hampers accommodate the birds. The last one goes into the cat-bag. One long tail feather pokes out, accusatory.

Four o'clock. Nine years ago we were sitting in the buffet car of a train having tea.

Here we are starting homeward with our hens; the great crate behind me trying to push me off the saddle, the cat-bag lashed to Nora's handlebars with a dirty handkerchief I found in my overcoat pocket. All the string had been used up on the hampers. The one bird in the cat-bag is more trouble than all the rest, because first it goes forrard, then slips aft, upsetting the balance.

We arrive. I open the lid of a hamper: there they are sitting like the blackbirds in the pie, eyeing me curiously but unafraid.

Five o'clock. Now we were in another well-upholstered car, gliding to our hotel among the twinkling lights of a southern town.

Now, with the new moon looking on and Venus near, and the pigs squealing for their supper and Selina mooing softly for hers, we are doing

things with wire netting; trying to let the old birds into the house without letting the new ones out There is a meeting on the threshold: some come out. With guile, Nora standing still as a post, being a netting-stake, we coax them back. By the time I close the door on the last one Nora is almost frozen to the netting she holds and it is dark.

While Nora is putting the children to bed I quieten the pigs and settle to milking against, the comforting warmth of Selina's flank. Then I make a fire of logs in my little room, put up the shutters, draw the curtains, put a bottle of our wine to chill on the hearth, and light two new candles in the oaken sticks, and draw up two chairs.

That done, I sit, and bless this miracle of silence in a world at war.

('Nine years—that's a long time ago, Anthea—before you were born.' 'I *wasn't* born: I was here always.')

Seven o'clock. We were sitting in a hotel together having a glass of sherry and discussing the furnishing of our farm-cottage, and whether to buy an oil cooking-stove or not.

Now Nora comes in and shuts the door. I fill the glasses. We sit before our fire and discuss—what sort of a cooking-stove shall we get now, seeing that our first one has become too small for our growing family.

One thing leads to another. Because of buying those birds I am now sitting listening to a lecture on place-names. My poultry farmer is a member of the Archaeological Society, and by the following day I seem to be on the way to becoming one. First to return his crates, then to buy some kippers for the family. The lecture is at three. I arrive at a few

minutes to, and the hall has but a sprinkling of people. 'A thin house to-day.' says our chairman. But at three minutes past, just as the lecturer is about to begin, people pour in, until not only is every seat full, but additional chairs have to be fetched.

I remark on this to my neighbour. She replies, 'On the contrary, that is very punctual—for us.'

Upstairs there is a soldier?' club, which also sounds to be full. We are reminded that army boots are heavy boots. To the left of the speaker and just behind his blackboard is a curtained archway. The curtain is in a state of nervous movement: a face appears, and is withdrawn again. I am in the back row. The audience, winter-muffled, look from here like a cloak-room; lots of stuff lying heaped on chairs, attentive-looking stuff.

The lecturer begins by warning us against making too easy assumptions in hunting down the meanings of place-names. Dunwich, for instance, was originally a Celtic word meaning deep water, not the 'drab enchantress' that crossword-puzzle makers would have us believe. I learn that there is a Place-name Society, and wonder what would get one black-balled from it. Probably suggesting that Bury St. Edmunds was so named because St. Edmund was buried there. Or to be caught perpetrating a rebus on Bungay on the Society's notepaper. I learn that it has been established beyond doubt that by no means all the river names of England are Celtic. We, as East Anglians, are commiserated with for the fact that we have no records earlier than Domesday Book. That, to the place-name hunter, is as yesterday. It makes our task all the harder.

The fascination of the place-name game is the sort of conjuring trick whereby one word is turned into

something totally different. You remember those humorous drawings which once had a vogue, whereby a slow old man for instance, was gradually transformed into a tortoise? The process in words is as subtle. Yet it looks easy. You explain that y = g, and substitute one for the other: that y was sometimes pronounced like e. That h before a consonant drops out; that f is elided. It seems you or I could do it? But that is just where we make a mistake. There are secret laws governing this jugglery, only learned perhaps after ordeal on being admitted to the Place-name Society.

Thus, in a minute our favourite village is proved to be no more than a tree stump. We stir restively. But look, it is so. The v becomes f, the e drops out; so Stoven ('the little saint gets to a hot place') deteriorates into Stofn, which is early Scandinavian for a tree stump. So that's your pretty village. If it had been even a tree—there is a pleasant pub called The Cherry Tree where I have had sociable drinks in summer. But a stump.

Copdock, now, that is a tree. He pulls the word to pieces: it comes apart like a well-made gadget, once you know how. Copped ac, *i.e.* copped oc, *i.e.* copped oak, *i.e.* a pollard.

'Yes.' I reply to my neighbour's whispered query, ' copped oak.'

'No.' she whispers back, 'I said, can you smell kippers.'

Kippers? What an idea. I sniff and sniff. Why, yes, there is a smell of kippers. Quite strong. Oh Lord, in my pocket where I thrust them when I bought them, in a hurry not to be late for the lecture. Three pairs of them, wrapped insecurely in 'Premier Denounces Germany'. I put in my hand and am met

by an oily ooze. Essence of kipper is seeping through my coat. I lay my hat over the patch. 'Now you mention it I *can* smell kipper.'

A soldier enters precipitately from the street. He is cut off from his club by the learned phalanx of the Archaeological Society. The curtain of the arch becomes violently agitated: a hand emerges from it, with a crooked finger, beckoning. The soldier hesitates: he dare not make the crossing, and retreats to the street.

Four o'clock strikes. The lecturer looks at his wrist-watch, an unconscious reflection on provincial time. 'I have been talking too long already, but I must just give you one or two further examples.' He cleans the blackboard and starts again.

The talk becomes more fascinating the later it grows. There is a pretty fairy-tale of a village whose name means 'The place of the dwarfs'. No one knew why. The only thing unusual about the place was a peculiar echo. Then somebody pointed out that the Celts had a belief that echoes were carried by 'the little people'. Hence the place of the dwarfs. Another name, meaning 'decorated floor', was incomprehensible till a Roman tessellated pavement was unearthed there.

It is a quarter past four. The curtain stirs again. This time a whole arm comes through, and suddenly we are in a flood of electric light. Several people are torn between the fascination of the subject and fear of the black-out, and get up, only to sit down again.

'I really have gone over my time,' admits the speaker, 'but in conclusion I should just like to mention this.' The blackboard is wiped blank again. This time the teaser is Hoxne, pronounced, as we all know, Hoxen. That looks an easy one; but no, it has baffled generations of experts. From Hoxne

to Hoxana: that takes us back a thousand years, and we still are not far from Hoxne. However, a sage at last solved it. Let x stand for cks, he said. Then cks can stand for chs. Now do you see where we are getting? Why, to hock-shin; in other words, a horse's shin-bone. Still in the dark? A piece of land shaped like a horse's shin-bone, from which the place took its name. Cf. Nesbit = nose-bit.

What would happen if I dared, but I daren't, get up and suggest that Hoxne, pronounced Hoxen, equals just oxen?

Obviously those Viking settlers set that booby trap for just such a future mug as me.

Four-thirty. Yet the best is still to come. If Copdock equals copped oak, then what is Baldock but bald oak?

So people thought for a long time, until somebody discovered that in the fourteenth century the Knights Templars held the manor of Baldock. They were crusaders: they had been to the East, to Baghdad, which was then called Beldag. They named Baldock after Baghdad. So the very English town of Baldock on the edge of the Cambridgeshire cornland plain is nothing more or less than Baghdad.

With this the meeting closes amid applause- **and** an odour of kippers.

THE COLD STRENGTHENS

Snow yesterday, snow last night, snow this morning. Everything is covered. It is still snowing. I shovel

away at the snow to clear a path, while still it snows. There is something futile about shovelling snow; it is in great bulk, yet it is light as nothing. It is like trying to throw a feather. It laughs at you. So I shovel, shovel at nothingness, like shovelling in a dream.

When it is snowing or raining, so that the children cannot go out, then it is a custom that there shall be music in the parlour. The parlour to us is half what it is, and half a memory of itself under another roof, with another view. But to the children it will be always what it is. Far away into the year Two Thousand will go a memory of the tub-back chair standing in the corner, with the picture of the old woman darning on the wall above. And the writing table with brass rings instead of drawer-knobs beside the window that looks out upon the crab-apple tree. And Nora's work table with the flowers painted on it and the little drawers that run in and out as smooth as silk, and the lids and compartments. These things, to Anthea, Martin, and Sylvia, will stand in their places as from everlasting to everlasting. The room will be spoken of, and their combined memories will illumine the more shadowy corners. Starting from now, from the exciting thing the room now is; the treat for a wet day or a snowy one.

The snow gives me a holiday, too. And a holiday, when you grow older, consists in allowing yourself to take a long time doing a thing which you usually do, if at all, in a hurry.

So I get my land boots out, and wash them and saddle-soap them. How indissoluble Suffolk mud can be, adhering in hard little knobs in creases and corners, melting slower than trodden snow. Under winter's mud is autumn's; mud of the sugar-beet

'field. And what a difficult thing a land boot is really to get a grip of. Then when they are dry, I get out the dubbin and smear them all over, and rub it in, using the mud-scraper that grandfather has shaped like a wooden knife to press it in all along where the upper meets the sole. How my mother would have loved to see me doing this, to whom it was far more excellent that I should dubbin my boots than write a book.

Their suppleness is something good to feel after all this. Now they sit, black and shining, almost a bit smug-looking. It seems a shame to make them dirty themselves again. Grandfather, passing from the wood-shed, remarks, 'I admire the way you have done your boots.'

Now the music has started. In the parlour Anthea is sitting beside Nora at the piano, with a book of nursery rhymes in front of them. They are playing 'Boys And Girls Come Out To Play'. Anthea watches how Nora does it, and dings away at her end of the scale, chanting at the same time in a high, declamatory voice. It is interesting to watch her singing: she goes blank-looking, as they say old folk-singers do, completely rapt, immersed in her song. And though the feminine members of the household insist that she has a very good idea of the tune, to me it is less of a tune than a declamation, with a curious little half-tone drop at the end of a line. At the same time the ding-ding-ding of the flat of her hand on three notes marks the rhythm inexorably.

While Nora is reading the music Anthea is reading the picture of boys and girls with hoops and dogs that run round the page.

'Come with a whoop, come with a call,
Come with good-will or ne'er come at all.'

'That,' says Anthea, pointing to a figure of a terrier chasing after them, 'is Ne'er.'

Ritual is inborn: ritual and a sense of property are as complete in a child as its fingers and toes. What has happened before must happen again, to the last detail. Nora starting to play and sing a new song is stopped. 'No I sing this one all by myself.' It is 'Goosey Goosey Gander'. Next comes 'Curlylocks'. For some reason this is very affecting; whether on account of the words, the contrast between feeding the swine and sitting on a cushion eating strawberries and cream, or the lilt of the tune, or both, we cannot tell. Anyhow, Nora hurries through it, making almost swing music of it to jolly it up. All the same, before the end of it, Anthea has lost her voice and her eyes blink swiftly. Finished, Nora would turn the page, but Anthea whispers, 'Again.'

The next song is stopped as soon as it is started. Anthea is wriggling protestingly. 'Why, of course.' Nora says, 'I forgot.' and lifts her down off her two cushions. She starts again. 'This is the way we wash the clothes.' Anthea down on the floor does a slow and solemn pantomime. Washing, sweeping, baking, going to church. Then she climbs back upon her chair and is ready for the next song. If in the singing of the many verses of any one of them Nora makes a mistake of one word, Anthea corrects her loudly, and the *Iine* has to be sung again.

Now grandma comes in with the twins. Martin struts about, staring at the still strange room, and finally posts himself by Anthea at the piano, staring alternately at the notes going up and down, and the mouths opening and shutting. Sylvia in grandma's arms gives it all a cursory glance, and interests herself in the quality of grandma's clothes. Martin,

whose eyes are on a level with the keyboard, stares for a long time, then slowly reaches up a hand, gripping the piano with the other, and knocks a note. From now on it becomes a trio. Till Anthea gets into a reverie, staring back at Sylvia, and the song dies on her lips. Martin has seen the big looking-glass. Nora is left playing nursery rhymes to herself.

Mirror supersedes music. Martin is stood up in front of it. He looks first at us, then at us in the mirror. They are here, yet they are there: what is the solution? His eyes get wider and blacker. Sylvia is held up to it. She quickly takes it for granted that there should be two of everybody. Anyhow, she is not going to worry about it. Grandma swings her to her reflection: she laughs uproariously.

Martin is not amused. To be waved at in the mirror makes it the more puzzling. He struts round the room very worried-looking.

Anthea is still eating tea. The tray has gone, the table is cleared, all but for Anthea's plate with a large piece of chocolate cake on it, and a bun at the side. She waves good-bye to the others returning to the parlour. It is not that she eats so very much, but she stops for minutes at a time, lost in meditation. Watching her and her four-year-old rotundity I think, well, things *do* solve themselves. Remembering how worried Nora used to be about her tiny appetite, trying to tempt her with this and that. There she sits munching her way through the cake, and looking at it approvingly and rocking her head from side to side, as she always does when she is enjoying something. As the left hand puts the last piece of cake in her mouth, the right hand is closing over the bun;

'Because it was such a small piece of chocolate cake.'

As this nears its end, 'Now you can go, father, because I can open the door myself, you know.' She has just learned to do this, so I take myself off. Soon a shout, and Anthea with her plate has nearly reached the bottom of the stairs. She is triumphant, and runs along the passage shouting, 'I opened the door myself and came downstairs with my hand full of plate.'

The parlour furniture, pushed to the sides of the room, leaves an expanse of carpet. Here on a cushion Sylvia contorts herself till she rolls off. She laughs and climbs on again. Martin struts like a comedian continually journeying towards something against which to fall. Instead, he stops mid-way, half sits down, half falls forward, steadies himself, and starts again.

Anthea finds something. 'What is this?'

'A mushroom.'

'A mushroom, mummy? What for?'

'It's for mending stockings, dear: you put it under the hole, so.'

'What did you say?' (Meaning,' I don't understand.')

'Let me show you.'

Martin gets it and runs off with it: then Sylvia bags it and carefully puts it behind her. This she does with every toy, till she has a pile. Martin, though twice as big, gets worsted always, because he is not so persistent. He starts something else. The best thing in the parlour to him is the door-knob. Because it is the secret of escape. Already he wants something else: he wants the rest of the house. The door-knob is a talisman. If father or mummy shake it the door opens: but if I shake it the door

doesn't open. One day when I shake it the door *will* open. Meantime go on shaking.

There are two opposite efforts—the dog's **to** get into the room, and Martin's to get out. They await, on either side of the door, their chance. It comes with my entry. The dog with a growl ('Stop me if you dare') and a fury of feet, gets in: Martin collides with me. I stand him up. 'Well—now what?' With freedom before him he pauses uncertainly. He cocks his head, alert, curiously resistant on his stout shoulders, held in a sort of gyroscopic balance. There he stands, and the passage goes off into darkness. The stairs are lit; but he knows the stairs. So thrusting his right leg forward, which brings his shoulder swinging round like a boxer's, he sets off toward the darkness.

Anthea is delighted. She dances after him, shouting in a mock grown-up way, 'Now Martin, where *do* you think you're goin' to?' Martin takes no notice. He is utterly alone, with a puzzled, defensive tilt of the head, strutting on. He comes to a twilit threshold: beyond it is quite dark. He pauses there; then he gets down on his knees and crawls forward. The light is turned **on.** He finds himself face **to** face with himself in a mirror. The old problem.

He is carried back protesting into the warm, into the parlour. A bout of ring-o'-roses as a diversion. Anthea likes the going round part, the twins the falling down part. So it **all** ends in a heap. Martin pulls himself out of it and makes straight for the **door-knob** again.

Enter David Caponeth with his wife **in a snowstorm. And** exit again after a drink, beating for home against the gale. His little car neat **and bright**

stood outside the door, luffed into the wind. And he squeezed himself in as of old. It used to be a very little car, and he filled it like a tight suit of clothes. Little cars have got a little larger, but so has David, his beard, his hat, his coat. All his life he has been a sailor—a sailor of small boats on big oceans, and now he has retired to a little house in an Essex by-way and is in heaven. Occasionally he writes a sea story and sells it about six times over. I can never sell a thing more than once and am happy to do that, but David has a sort of 'ahoy there' acquaintance with all the world, and his stories appear both here and in earnest little American towns who pay well for a bit of culture.

The thing about his Essex cottage is—it is still his ship. Everything is ship-shape. His dining-room is like a cabin—I don't mean consciously. He has had enough of the sea. Being a real sailor he is now interested in the land. But he has been so used to confined quarters that he does not know how to expand. He makes such a clean, clear boundary of his place; digs out a ditch and heaps the earth into a bulwark against his hedge. Neat hedge, neat garden. And he paces about, casting a weather-eye aloft, from boundary to boundary in about half-a-dozen strides.

Sitting having breakfast in his room, though you are set fast in Essex clay, you are still sailing the world. He is drinking very strong coffee in a mug, reading a letter from Cyprus. Vaguely Scandinavian, bare-wood utensils stand about. The bread is so English, so coarsely wheaten, as now has come to look foreign.

His car, too, has a sort of nicety about it, swabbed clean like the hull of a ship.

When he and his wife came to see us they were staying near, and were going to be with us for the day. But the increasing snow decided them to run for home. Even so it was something to see them even for twenty minutes. David is a big man in a small way; a small way for choice. He is prosperous in a small way—his way. He is not going to puff and pant after 'success'. With him you feel that America is only a stone's throw away, the East next door. He wears the world, he makes it come to him, it floats around his cottage in Essex.

And always something heartening. Last time it was something very good about the power, speed, and precision of our mechanized troops. While the papers blare about unreadiness, the real people, the men of steel, are just waiting the moment to strike, quiet and ready.

This time it was, 'Do you know that 43 per cent of the present German recruits are rejected unfit? The outcome of guns instead of butter. The whole thing is rotten, ready to collapse.'

His bearded emphasis holds me spellbound. Has one's wishful thinking been all the while well-founded ?

Well, now they have gone homeward in the snowstorm, David and his wife, and left me to these hopeful speculations.

A pity that they grow grey and doubtful as the echoes of that reverberate and resourceful figure fade, and one is left with just the snow falling as before.

One thing there was no doubt about, and that was the bushel of apples David left for us in a sack. They are spice apples and come off the two great trees

that stand in the middle of, that are the very mast and rigging of, his shipshape garden. These apples invite no one to steal them, they are green and rough and sour-looking; but the taste—that is superb. I have plenty of apples in my orchard, but I have not these apples—could not grow them; they are local to his Essex clay. It is not too much to say that the life of that great nomad, David, is camped around those trees. He clambers up and down them, checking American blight, cutting out dead wood. They overspread his ground, but lesser fruits must take their chance; these take a man's lifetime to come to full fruition.

So I lay his gift of apples carefully away among my own. While there are apples in the box autumn reaches on through winter. Under the straw in the store-shed mine are rosy as though newly kindled by the light I let in upon them.

" Where, alack,
shall Time's best jewel from Time's chest lie hid?"

Why, herein this old grocer's box under straw and a sack. In the autumn with all the gold and red and yellow of leaves and flowers I never knew them, busily picking, hastening because of the coming shower. But now, with the eternal snow all round, their colour is wonderful, gladdening. I had forgotten that earth could do such things.

The well-known Odour, as when I lifted the lid years back on my school box, where books and apples were all packed together. Half the term my Latin grammar smelt of apples.

But all one cared about an apple then was to get one's teeth into it. Later a man needs other comforts. To look at the colour, the sunlight-suffusion freaked

with that chippy red on one side. How did it happen? How could frozen Nature have ever nourished such a smile?

It is better than taking a warm egg out of the nest, to go with snow on one's boots and get a basketful of these keeping apples.

Picking them was living in a different world for a day or two. A tree-top world. Thence looking down into the tree was like being caught by an enormous spider. The trunk was but a nexus of writhing boughs, whose twigs caught me as I forced upward to the top of the ladder. One grabbed me under the collar, another tried to pick my pocket, a third would have lifted me off the ladder by the seat of my trousers and dangled me like a ripe apple. As for my hat, that had been snatched by several boughs in competition, and left far below.

Having forced myself up to the top I attained to a sort of apple life. There is something rare about being close up to the apple in its height, almost cheek to cheek as it hangs, sharing its solitude. While the apple hangs there, it is inviolate; however near you come, it is perfectly to itself, its life the life of the wind.

The picking has so little relation to the eating that one will stretch one's last sinew to gather quite an indifferent apple. But usually the best are at the top, and a few always stay triumphantly out of reach. And there is that other one, so ripe-looking, that you risk death for, only to find as soon as you have it in your hand that it is two-thirds green. One could have sworn that it was red all over on the bough.

Sometimes one has little arguments with oneself, saying, it isn't that one is afraid, but is it worth

risking death for really rather a measly-looking apple? (This as I lean out with ape-like grip on a bough, having a merely formal contact with the ladder by one toe, my other foot on a crotch that may or may not be rotten, and the whole tree swaying in the wind.) Would it be kind to afford wife and children the spectacle of father hurtling head-first through an apple-tree? My longest finger can just feel the apple; (isn't this being just obstinate?) the apple plays a maddening ding-dong with it. If I could stretch another three inches. When one is apparently at full stretch and it is necessary to add yet another three inches, in some way just by altering the body's balance one achieves it. Then slowly feels one's fingers closing round the apple. But if there are two together the question is whether to try to gather the two with one hand and probably lose both, or make certain of one with a pull which is almost sure to dislodge the other.

As I take an apple from the dish now, with the snow-laden gale from the sea rattling the shutters, I wonder if it is one of those I picked from the top of the tree, in view of many fields, of the harvests of a dozen farms, and the summer sun focussed to a point of light in its shiny skin, making a little cosmos of it.

Or one picked at that moment when Martin, after trying to trace my voice, was so surprised to see father appearing out of the top of a tree that he upset his pram and lay howling, while I made a speedy and yet seemingly slow descent.

It is February, and we have plenty of apples yet. Yesterday I looked them over and found no more than half a dozen bad. And this in the hardest winter for forty years. I do not wrap each up

or lay them in trays. Just pack them into a grocer's box and cover it with straw and a sack or two. There they lie in the shed and colour themselves red and gold, that were green when laid in. Till they have the tones that are in wine and firelight and old masters.

There is something staring, insane, about the snow. Every man looks homeless in it. A black, lean, puppyish retriever goes gambolling about, plunging in and out of drifts, anybody's and everybody's dog. He follows a grey lean-nosed woman up the road: won't be shooed away. At last, exasperated, she turns and runs at him. After trudging with difficulty so far she runs back, flapping her arms to shoo the dog. She only loses the ground she has gained. The dog thinks it a great game. She plods on again. By the time the local bus comes in sight he has grown tired of her, though, and attached himself to me. He swaggers out in front of the bus, and it pulls up with a hoot and a jerk. The driver wears a helmet like a flying man.

The bus doubles on its tracks, taking in every possible village on its way to the town. For a shilling return you see the country. You get within a mile and a half of the town—in sight of it—then roundabout for another four miles, coming in from another quarter.

People complain about this, but I say what's the hurry? It is a good shillingsworth.

We pick up the woman who tried to chase off the dog. The door opens in a patent way. It lets in a freezing draught, so it is opened and closed every time someone gets in. 'No, not that handle: the middle one—now push.' There is a boy of about

twelve in the front seat who luckily soon gets the hang of this from the driver. 'Open the door, sonny—shut the door, sonny.'

The woman with the lean Wellington nose looks out, prodding the window with it as the bus jolts, and blinking her deep-sunken eyes. What is she looking for, looking at the landscape as though it were a needle-case? Or is it just a habit?

Others get in, recognize friends, ask after each other's health, and chat. Sitting together, bouncing in unison on the same seat and chatting, with their country hats and parcelled up in their country coats. While the airman-driver charges full speed at a snow-drift in a hollow; and the bus dashes in, groans and grinds and lurches, and drags itself out on the other side like a wounded animal. The village women bounce a bit higher but do not pause in their chat.

In front of me, alone and silent, sits a woman with the blackest of hair and a black Robin Hood sort of hat on it. She half turns her head, looking out of the window. There is something unusual about her profile: unusual here, that is. The high cheek-bones, the full curves of her cheek and nostril and chin. There is something generous about the curves of her face. They are like variations of the same curve, and that a sort of question mark. Even her ears are different, apple-round, though nipped and spoiled by blobs of ear-rings. And her mouth has a quiet, internal smile as she looks out over the snow-covered landscape. She looks at it differently from the others: the grey woman worrying at it with her beaky nose, the gossips flicking glances at this or that house and going off into personalities. But she stares at the whole of it, as though writing her thoughts on those **calm** fields of snow. Her coat is black: smart

and flimsy, with a collarless, square-shouldered wrong sort of smartness for her head and neck. Not like the coats of the country women, with blobs of different-coloured wool stuck on them, big and bag-like. Odd how tragic the collarless line of that coat makes her quiet contained grace of head and neck: it gives a hard, cut-price look to the generous curves of her flesh. She is, I realize, a refugee from Central Europe, several of whom are in houses about here. Perhaps she comes from Vienna or from Prague, detached into the English snow-scene.

Yet the snow seems to de-nationalize the country, too. Black and white, a conglomeration of poultry sheds shine—red and white the houses. Such contrasts are not at home here. We pass a young wood with black slivers of trees, and someone dragging a sledge up a hill. Snow silver-glimmering between the slivers of the trees.

A great red bus with steamed windows meets us—hot-looking; and we, who are only a washed-out blue, have to back. We pass a roadman, with spade shouldered, handsome—as though the crisis of the snow had knit his brow with power. The shapes of it drifted against the hedges are wild. Great sagging lips of it, a generosity of contour, a fantasy of shape, so that our gentle nature-England is drowned, and the elemental forces have overwritten all, scrawled strange and foreign smiles upon the land. The skies have come down on us, and the old signs of our local life look perished and ineffectual; bits of wire-netting on stakes, fruit-trees turned to faggots—a whole fruit-farm become a few last hairs on the universal baldness.

About every mile or so some lonely figure is standing at a corner. An old man gets in with a dangerous-looking stick; one of those old men of whom you

are not sure whether they need helping or not; he looks at you as though he is looking at the distance.

'They never brought the snow-plough down my road till this morning,' he says, standing up gripping the seat in front of him. He continues to stand, as though wanting to address the whole bus. But it starts with a jolt and he is jerked into a seat.

In the snow it looks as though the old life will never resume. Does our village England sleep under that sheet—the green sward and the sleek thatch? Will the pond ruffle again and sparkle with ducks? There is something gaunt and death-like in the angular shapes of houses under the pall. A garden swing hangs stiff with its load of snow.

The snow and the war are made one now; our life is buried. And the local bus carries us through country that is no longer our country; where a roadman stands who is no longer a roadman, but carries his shovel like a weapon. And the profile of the woman looking out in homeless thought, smiling past pleasure and past pain, alive with another sort of life than has ever yet made its home here.

While a placid, wrinkled village woman, robust, with short grey hair, sits dinging undaunted on the old home topics. She is like the last apple at the bottom of the box, old but sound, firm with the sweetness of summer.

I am right about the Robin-Hood-hat woman. As she gets out she pays, saying, 'One shilling, mistaire.' The correct phrase is 'a shilling return'. When the bus started to run the proprietor said he would do it as cheaply as the train. The fare used to be one and twopence. Then the railway reduced theirs to a shilling. So the villagers refused to pay

more than a shilling in the bus. Hence the phrase 'a shilling return'.

I have just time to get to the dentist. People who look cold make me feel colder. The soldiers look the coldest of all. The whole conversation of the little town is sniff—sniff. The dentist's assistant is amazingly cheerful, as though life were the greatest joke in the world. I sit, studying the dentist's ceiling. How well I know the ceilings of dentists, what they are made of, the mouldings, cracks, shadows, the old fly that hangs by a thread. And that peculiarly drab angle of the building opposite and the pattern of electric wires. And the particularly drab sort of birds that flit across the window, dusty sparrows. But here there are not sparrows but sea-gulls. Every now and then in the dead sky a great whitish-grey bird appears and disappears. While the dentist pokes and scrapes and prepares his drill. I thought, it won't be much, just a stopping come out. One forgets for months together about one's teeth, that being a civilized man the good times are but an interval and that one day again the crash will come. Often one leaves it till one gets used to the hole, it becomes part of the pattern of one's mouth, and when at length you go to the dentist, he prods and says, 'Hm, yes—I'm afraid—'

But for once I have been virtuous and gone early. Even so down comes the drill, till there seems hardly any tooth left. Grinding away on the edge of pain. And staring at the ceiling—a pale green ceiling—I reflect.

Strangely quiet, the little town: very few cars, only silent bicycles and people walking. Footsteps are silent in the snow, you only hear the sniff—sniff as they pass. The silence and the **snow,** yet **many**

people: it is almost uncanny; a sort of numb mingling, dream-death-like; and a touch of the medieval in the hoods that all the women and children wear. And men wearing knitted helmets like Norman chain-mail.

But it is almost more than a similitude; I feel it in the quiet air that projects the spirits of the old, old houses: they, too, are hooded, their sharp dormers peaked with snow. There is a new deathly cold possession of the past; and I feel as though we were fated to return through a darkness of time, to a world familiar to our forefathers.

The war is more than bombs, it is a state of being. I feel it in the furtive quiet of the town. It is the soul of civilization that has fallen, caved in, long-decayed, hollow: and everybody goes furtively, knowing that the end has come.

About half-past four I am aware of something about the town that is odd. And then I realize that what is odd is that it looks ordinary. It is dusk but not yet black-out time, and all the shops are lit up and shining into the street. In the market square my blue bus awaits dim and ghostly. In its darkness there is a stirring as of poultry gone to roost, which tells me it is nearly full. The bulk of the driver can be seen standing up inside the front of the bus facing the assembled passengers. He stands there like Charon waiting for the shades. Really it is as though the little town were the frontier-post of death. And here we are—our pitcher broken at the fountain—fated for the journey.

'The thing is—you lose so much power: it's a job to get through.' our Charon is saying. 'She's got no power at all in the snow.'

There is a silence and you can hear the chewing of sweets, a comfortable masticating. A complex

confectionery odour pervades the bus. I wish that I, too, had bought a bag of sweets.

'Is Mrs. Lovey here?' the driver asks. She makes her presence known. 'Anybody else?'

Everybody is here except one who has got a lift with a friend, the driver is informed.

'That's a good job—I don't want to have to stop at the bottom of that hill.'

Suddenly there is a sort of scuffle at the door. It is the foreign lady: she is laden with parcels, some of which fall. The driver carries them down the bus for her. She sits behind me this time, in a nest of parcels.

I have learned, between masticating intervals, that she is keeping house for a Suffolk farmer.

The complicated door is shut. The driver swings into his seat. While we have been sitting here the town has quenched itself: the darkness is complete, we are all dead.

A couple of tiny lights are switched on in the bus, and we come to have a ghostly sense of one another.

There are more people than there were coming in. Two elderly countrymen, one with a sack over his arm, sitting side by side, erect as though in the hard, straight-backed chairs they have been accustomed to. There is something reassuring about these men: they might be angels, they are so glowingly of the country to which we are going. They are so at home in it that their very phrases have a prepared, pre-ordained cadence. The smile on the face of the one nearest me is not a smile of amusement but of disposition. His birdlike glances at me are curious and welcoming. Such, I feel, will know how to cope with the life to come. They can pick up the thread of their ancestry.

Outside the town it is lighter. There are golden

clouds to the west, a substantial sunset. We bump and lurch more than ever, but the thing is in Charon's hands, and I let myself go with it, and watch the snowdrifts foaming past in contours that rise and fall. The two labourers sit rigid and smiling; the refugee and I relaxed, at a loss, filled with the cold wonder of the world. A cloud-world, one of the transitional circuits of the heavens, and our blue bus swinging through space.

We meet a lorry: it sidles gingerly, and we sidle round it. Then we stop and the driver goes back to see if they want towing out into the fairway again. They are all right, they say, and we leave them, digging at the back wheels, scattering the snow like dogs.

Lonely tracks lead away into the dusk. Here and there one or two get out and go plodding over the waste.

In the most desolate spot the two labourers get out. There is no home, no hut, in sight. But they know where they are going.

We pass houses in a hollow: they are all black-shut and enigmatic. A church, and opposite a glebe with oak-trees standing in it like people.

The bus twists and turns; it is night outside, dark but ghostly with snow. I have no idea where we are. The human chatter in the bus by contrast with the snow-leagues crackles like a good fire.

But the extraordinary thing would be, if one could see not the people but their thoughts, lonely or intervolved, roaming. The woman in front of me kissing the hooded bundle in her arms, the pale blob of a face. So careful as she gets out and stumbles, shopping-bag and baby, towards a deserted-looking cottage. And the refugee behind me, her thoughts, inaccessible, but rubbing against the small-windowed,

clean-kitchen minds of the cheerful villagers chattering and laughing.

We stop at another empty-looking cottage and the driver hoots. Nothing happens. We set a woman down here in the afternoon. 'Yes, she said she was going to wait to ride home.' one of the passengers says. So Charon hoots again. In a minute a door opens. 'Here she comes. Come on, Liza, we almost gave you up.' Liza bustles in and becomes part of the conversation.

All this time I have been in a slack, suspended state of mind. Slack to the quivering and plunging of the bus, lost to the road.

But now I begin to have a vague notion of time and place. I get up towards the front of the bus. The driver knows exactly where each of us is to get out and stops there. 'Yours is the white gate on the right.' he says.

A white gate—how long ago? The bus has become home. But I am dropped out into the darkness. A white gate. Yes, here it is. It leads me along a path that is like a thread of memory, to a door, and suddenly a brightly-lit, warm interior—a life. Wife, children, relatives, and my own room, empty, waiting, with firelight on the walls.

I am turning a dunghill, black and steaming in the glittering snow. The air is the coldest yet: long icicles make ordinary little bushes fantastic. Turning dunghills and ditching—that was the winter work of Suffolk fishermen home from the aurora borealis, in the days when farmers in this parish grew twenty coombs an acre. Land and sea husbandry being **thus** intimately connected.

Feeding, littering, thawing drinking troughs—there is plenty to do. And making a bonfire round the pump, to thaw that. This morning our first conversation was about frozen pipes. We roamed imaginatively through the attic, considering which was frozen and where. I got out of bed in a tangle of pipes. But a slow black rook roaming across the sky of the window put my mind into a lazy, flapping motion—who cares? Who cares? There is a copper in the scullery and a soft-water well, whose pump looks as though it were one of the first products of the iron-age, like the primitive steam-engine, and has a little embossed design just above where, if it were a person (and sometimes it looks like a person) its navel would be. Its handle is old and hammered-out-looking, and so loose it is like shaking a tired man by the hand.

I hear Anthea coming downstairs, right foot first every time, then she runs along the hall and calls at the kitchen door, 'Please, may I come in? Is there anybody there?'

I like the way she sings it out, like a nursery rhyme. There is so much of crisis about life this morning. Cans of hot water being rushed upstairs, the copper-fire being dived at to see if it has gone out, fuel being carted. So it is good to see a rook with his back turned on us all, flapping slowly across the frozen blue, and to hear Anthea's singing voice. All the slack of life is taken up this frozen day; except for that song in the voice, 'Please can I come in?'

After dinner Anthea, wrapped and rosy, goes out into the snow. It sparkles in the sun: fifty yards away there are infinitesimal facets that flash. The intensity of their sparkle travels far to the eye. Anthea has been promised a snow-man. But Nora temporizes by drawing pictures in the snow with a

stick She calls me from my dung-hill. At first I pretend not to hear. Somehow the pleasure of handling snow has gone from us. Anthea builds a castle of snow with her wooden spade. The snow so deep and white is rather solemn to be among. When it comes to the snow-man we shamelessly make the 'castle' do for his body. We have only a head to make. The snow is so dry it won't compress. Only a very little head results from two pairs of very cold hands. Some withered bits that were flower clusters are stuck in the top. 'That's his hair.' But it does not look at all like hair, nor very much like a man. More like a white Christmas pudding with a bit of dead holly on top. Anthea looks at the object. 'When shall we do something else?'

So Nora takes her for a run down the road where the snow-plough has been. What remains is smooth and hard and squeaks under the feet. How tender the tree-trunks look, sun-haiinted: the deep light is like a substance on them. Theirs is the only colour in the world, and the startled-looking red house.

Anthea stops suddenly and looks half distressful, half smiling, as she lifts and presses one foot against another. 'What is it—are your feet cold?' She does not say. It is that her feet are tingling after standing knee-deep in gum boots so long, and she does not understand the feeling. So they run again. Again she stops and looks puzzled. They run and run, and suddenly she becomes cheerful and talkative again, and glows and kicks up the snow.

Again the water troughs are frozen. But across the sky, like missives from the sun, go light golden clouds. Leaving everything I get round behind the stable and stare at the low sun and that high summery sky. I would live in that sky for five minutes. Somehow

it is Italy, it is the background of an old master. Then, against the black conifer there, it is Scandinavia, the clear blue north. As I stare, noting the wispy, changing, ever-parting shapes, ghosts of shapes, it is summer England, and the lilac white with blossom, not with snow.

It is a beautiful and secret thing, that sky. Secret because though ablaze over the land few can stop and see; few look up. Even I have forcibly to restrain myself. Something says, 'That's enough now. Get a move on.' There is something about that sky to which present life is antipathetic, that is too much for understanding, that calls forth a faculty unexercised. You cannot passively stare at such a sky. You have either to rise strenuously to meet it or turn away to your man-made necessities.

But just to stand and look, hold oneself checked and let the moments slip away. The journey of the clouds is more wonderful than anything; it is like one's own childhood. It is a metaphor of life, making it seem unbearable now ever to lose the sense of it. I am thankful for that sky. After days of snow-sleep and a leaden sky of evil—of world-evil—oppressing the soul, I am aware of the essential wonder. To see it in people, flowing through them when they do not know. Go into the old church in the fields—and just simply listen to the silence—and you will feel the mystery of that flow of life, like an underground river moving unknown, the golden age sleeping in secret.

Odd at this stage to be affected by Akhnaton's daughter. But her statue reproduced in a book on past civilizations has made something special of this

evening. Before my fire, surrounded by snow and fog, the stillness of a dead world, like a pause in time, I have read this book, showing that there is no such thing as progress—no slow dawning—but only rents in darkness. Massacre and torture—and then suddenly the flowering of an exquisite sensibility, as in this statue—a vital control. To-day, we are further from achieving what the sculptor of 3000 B.C. achieved than perhaps ever before. That is literal truth. Ours is the age of mechanical perfection and therefore of perfect loss of sensibility. For the perfect surface *is* the surface without sensibility. The springs are dry, while the opportunity is illimitable. If to our modern range of mental experience could be brought, intact, the dynamism of the savage—

But to be near to the sense of that much deeper power than the modern scene could ever have given one a hint of, which has run within man since he stood upright—that is a new warmth to the heart in these days, making these days small and short—even though the promised land be outside one's persona] vision.

That is faith, even if there is no personal resurrection in it. Perhaps a birth of faith.

At this moment I hear Anthea come running downstairs. 'I want a piece of canvas.' she shouts in vibrant, triumphant excitement to which the word canvas seems strangely irrelevant. Until I remember that yesterday for the first time she really made something. By stitching various coloured wools through a square of canvas and then (with help) sewing it on to a piece of cloth, she made a kettle-holder. Now she wants to make another.

The excitement—did I say the springs were dry?

It was lovely when the mildness came again yesterday, and I started pruning. Standing happily breathing the dank and misty air, and enjoying again the sight of myriad beads of dew instead of icicles.

After tea 1 had Martin on my knee at the piano, and Nora had Anthea on hers, so there were six hands at work on it. Then Sylvia came along and spread hers out most professionally on the keys. But finding the notes were not detachable, she became interested in the reflections on the polished surface of the back. Martin hit the notes with one finger with staccato determination. Tum-tum-tum. Then, seeing shadowy reflections in the lid, stopped and pointed: 'M'm,' as much as to say, 'What's that?' Then tum-tum-tum. '—But what *is* that moving in there?'

We sang some old English songs; then one about the spring:

> The Spring is coming, resolved to banish
> The King of the Ice with his turbulent train.
> With her fairy wand she bids them all vanish,
> And welcomes the sunshine to earth again.

'That one again.' Anthea said. And when they had gone up to bed, as she had her bath, 'Sing that song about the spring again, mummy.'

THE EARTH CRUMBLES

After three days in bed, three days and three nights of illness, I am sitting at the window of my room, listening to the birds and feeling the sun. While

I lay abed the snow went and the birds began to sing, and down there in the earth under the window are crowds of snowdrops that take the wind all together. After three days of brain-ache I cannot read, I cannot think; only sit and be thankful for the sun. Such small things as snowdrops moving in the wind become eventful; the way each is hung upon the curved stem, and their whiteness against the black earth, so quick after the dead white of the snow.

One is grateful for such things as that the wind is in the north, so that, though it moves the trees, the air is calm at this open south window, and sun-warmed. I stretch out my hand; the bricks of the house are warm and have attracted one or two flies. I can see quite a long way from this upper window. The white horse is harrowing the ten-acre field. Ten acres of earth crumbled level, and the blue-black woods beyond, and the white horse treading to and fro all day with slow elastic movement, white as the snowdrops are against the earth.

To my thankful eyes there is no monotony in that going to and fro, but a beauty that grows by continuance. Presently a woman in a red tam-o-shanter comes with the man's dinner basket: her disruptive note of red, bobbing into the field, interrupts that white pacing. The man takes his dinner, and his greatcoat from the hedge, and an old sack, and gets round under lee of a bank, and makes a seat for himself in the dead grass. I watch him enviously: I think of what food and drink there is in that basket. Some fat bacon perhaps between two wedges of bread, or a bit pf cheese and a raw onion. The bottle I suppose contains tea, that ought to be beer. My mind goes out hungrily to coarse food eaten on a

couch of dead grass in the March sun. One becomes preoccupied with food. Lying dry in the mouth I have been obsessed since the pain abated by the thought of a glass of beer, longing for something clean and bitter to bring one back to life. None of the things offered were any good: soda-water—ugh! orange drink, lemon drink; they left a sort of sweetness about the mouth. But that glass of beer (so bad for a brain-ache)—again and again I drank it in imagination. In the small hours there it stood before me: I paused with the glass at my lips, to smell the smell of it, then drank it in one draught—in my imagination. It was cold; it misted the outside of the glass.

Now, at the window, I watch the bottle that ought to be beer raised to the lips, its bottom shooting the sun. The labourer is drinking to the sun in my beer, a quart of it, home-brewed. It is that beer (this also came to me in the small hours) that the miller used to brew, who ground my corn in his windmill on top of a little hill. And when I paid him his account he would bring out two glasses, and we would sit in his little hut of an office and drink his beer while the mill sails came sweeping past the window, making a regular swift shadow through the room.

I think, too, of the old beer out of the stone bottles in a barn on days of rabbit-shooting, gulping it down in quantities. What would I not give now for even a wineglassful. I count the days till I shall be well enough for that draught.

Now the bedroom door opens, and in comes Nora with my dinner on a tray—a morsel of steamed fish, half a boiled potato, and a glass of water.

In the afternoon another figure comes into my landscape. It is William going on to his piece of

ground. I try to guess by the movements of his distant figure what he is at. First I see he is digging. Then he appears to be making long, slow, reaching-out movements. Raking I guess. Now he is bending down: he seems still and intent. Sowing something? Can the land be fit already?

The man in the Black Horse showed me how it was done with a twist of the wrists: his were more eloquent than the words. I could clearly see his father walking backwards across the field with his dibblers, dibbling holes for wheat. 'He would go very nearly as fast as you could walk: oh, acres he's done.' The twist of the wrists kept the points clean of mud. 'They shone like new steel.'

This oldish man—Saxon clear in his eyes, with fair not-yet-all-grey moustache, his drink on a shelf above him, and the little grey nervous man beside him, and I, were detaining one another longer than we had intended. It was—at last—my glass of beer. I had only looked in for a few minutes before the ride home after market against the wind. I was very busy; there never is a moment to spare really, if you have even a little land. But here I was, oblivious to the fact that the bar was noisy with townsfolk and town talk, time going on. The little man in a town suit with his big mug of stout (it is the little, nervous people you find grasping the big mugs), suddenly became animated. I had thought, seeing him first, that he was in some small indoor trade; one of those people whose lives are ground away between walls of back premises, monotonous hours upon hours, till at a certain moment in the day they dart round a corner into a usual seat in a usual pub,

and are at peace. But the hands kept uneasy. In those movements that led nowhere, plucking at a button, rubbing an ear-lobe, I sensed the effect of the bombage on that frame; and by the way he sat. Pinned down by all sorts of circumstance; by economics, by the war, by a sort of gentlemanly-seeming—there he was, the victim of our time. His quiet Saxon companion was classless—he might have been a preconquest king, or a peasant. That face going back to the days even before feudal England, with the naively delicate lines of nose and mouth, was held in a strength of stillness. He smiled out of the past. It was again the repose in alertness that is the country genius. There was something he had in common with the wind and the birds: whatever goes over or alters the face of the land, they have the freedom of it and always will. The type of men whose home is in this 'deep tender-heavy clay' as the farm auction notices call it, cannot be moved, and their mind is of its nature. Their stillness is a luminous pondering of that soil—deep, tender-heavy.

It was right that he should imbibe the golden ale. He did it royally, without hurry; harvests gleamed to me as he tipped it up. His genius was of the earth; it was simply this: that he could make fifteen rods of ground produce as much as another man's thirty. This was generally acknowledged. People came to him for the secret, as though it were something that could be had in a word, or at most, a phrase. But people are used to that form of specific—it is the whole art of advertising. He would tell them things about whatever it was they were trying to grow; but that was not the whole story; *that* could not be told, least of all by him, with whom it was all an absorption and second nature. Alertness in repose:

watchfulness out of an experience going back beyond his own life—and the hands. The quirk of the wrists in the use of the dibbler made the other man exclaim, 'It's in the hands.' He put down his mug and began to demonstrate another act of husbandry there in empty air. So that the tool and the field were imaginatively brought before me. Surprisingly to me—for I was right, he had a small business in the town, and his hands had for years been subdued to other uses. 'Ah'—his eyes sprang awake behind his glasses—'I was delivering a chair I'd re-upholstered to a farmhouse. They were cutting round the wheat to let the binder in. "This here'll be something strange to you," the farmer cried. "Eh, strange?" I said, "what's the chief thing about it—to keep the heel down, ain't it?" That made him look. "Here, give me hold of that scythe and I'll show you." I mowed all round that field for him. "What—you've been in this business then?" "Been in it—I went to work on a farm when I was ten years old." '

He was proud; he was back in his Suffolk speech, too, full of deep-mouthed ejaculations of wonder and assertions of bodily power. Up at six driving bullocks that had never been out of a meadow before to market: quite alone with these cattle, chasing them around big fields and back on to the road again; till he was rewarded, at Norwich, with as much breakfast as he could eat.

His children won't believe that he ever worked so hard; they think he is putting it on when he talks in such heroic terms of the past; they can only see what is before their eyes—fields, sleepy cattle, miry yards—when they go for a country jaunt. They chaff him about it. But here he can talk and be believed, and corroborated. Able as he is as an indoor craftsman

he would recover former powers; they are the real triumph over circumstance, not economic but physical. So in a measure his body awakes and almost puts on power; the nervous, empty gestures become movements of skill with seed-hod and reaping-hook. We tell over the old tale of corn and horses and wooden ploughs. Our Saxon friend is quiet in his certainty of the completeness of those former ways to serve eternal needs. He, too, of course, was bred to farming. His fifteen rods is in the nature of the finely tapered finish of a strong shaft. Everything he has in him is in that. The shape, bloom, and colour of produce is his care now, the nourishment of his life.

There is to every man an amount of ground suitable to his talents. Few know it, and most are continually striving to add field to field till they have too much. I know one who farms forty acres and no more; and he makes of that a beautifully complete thing, as productive as his neighbours' hundred acres. Another I know who had the strength of purpose to take one hundred and fifty acres when he had capital enough for three hundred—and the same again applies.

My friend of the inn with his fifteen rods also has found his measure; is complete within it and wastes none of his thought in looking beyond. It is one of the last lessons a husbandman learns—if ever he learns it—that more land does not mean more produce.

His Saxon blue frankness of eye and quietude made him a man to talk to: drinking his ale as by right, with a regalia of first-prize produce to his credit. A king of this ancient island. His neighbour gesturing much more, and protesting too much, as compensation

for the indoor years. Ale and the earth made between us three a friendship not measured by time; our corner was a festival of husbandry. And I still think of what solemn fervour that topic engenders where two or three are gathered together, and what unanimous condemnation of anything opportunist or thriftless in connection with the land.

I still see the hands moving in air with various knacks and rhythms belonging to the work. The hands of the little man whose weakness showed the more as ale made his vehemence the greater and his gestures more ambitious—the one throwing into relief the other.

And though we talked long and loudly, the hands still retained something that no word could catch, moving just so and so.

'Let's go on.' We manage at last to refold the map on the windy fifty-acre common. It should be spring—March is out—but it is winter, no doubt of it. We decided to have a day off, and waited for days for a spring day such as Edward Thomas wrote of, calling it March the third.

'Or do all mark and none dares say
How it may shift and long delay,
Somewhere before the first of Spring
But never fails, this singing day?'

Somehow a brilliant dawn uplifted us and we set out, telling each other that it would turn to rain, and hoping thereby to be proved wrong.

To start with it turns to wind. When we get, in the teeth of it, as far as the bleak high common, we say, 'Shall we go on?' Nora gets off her bicycle and

I fall off mine, and we stand wondering what on earth we came out for. To have a day. We see by the map that it is as far to go home as to go on. At home a good dinner awaits us. On—and there is no knowing what we shall get. It *is* going to rain, too. We *will* have our day. Come on. Thenceforward we insist on enjoying it. There is at least a smell of earth in the wind. Beside a farmyard in the ruins of a castle men are threshing out clover-seed. Dense clouds of dust and smoke are pouring from the tackle. It is one of the worst jobs on a farm. It makes cycling against a cold wind a luxury. A man with a felt hat gone basin-shaped, swarthy as a South American with dust and smoke, goes running across the yard as though he is chasing a rat or is late for something. When he gets there, which is leeward of a corn-rick, he takes up a bottle. One *would* run to it, at that job. The massive, splitting walls of the old castle contain the threshed corn stacks like a mould of clay coming away from the new-born golden straw. The running, grimy man makes a crisis of those grey towers, his no-date hat and clothes. Yet there is something almost modern in the massiveness of the walls, the armadillo age of man upon us again, ten-fold reinforced. The towers stand up tall, boastful. But to-day only in the thickness of the earth is there safety.

It is good to see the lace-like top of the church-tower of our destination stand suddenly out of the blue obscurity beyond the hill. The uncouth castle and the wind up here have much in common—but that tower-top in the vale stands still. So delicate, that if there were a wind down there, surely it would be ruffled.

We glide down, and there are crocuses in the

gardens of the suburbs, and after the suburbs calm red Georgian houses of which the best always seems to belong to the doctor. Yes, there is his plate and those different bell-pushes, and a tube inviting you to yell into it. Warm, safe, happy houses with elegant porticos like frames awaiting a caller.

Only an empty stomach can ruin our day now, or a stale bun in a tea-shop, which would be almost worse. That is what we are really thinking as our eyes trace the nice eighteenth-century details of those houses, thoughts which the extreme though appropriate quiet of the street does not answer too reassuringly.

There are two inns, opposite each other. Of the one, the door is open, but the sheet in the glass frame on the wall which was once a bill of fare has been there so long that absolutely nothing is decipherable to our combined eyes but the word COLD in the palest of pale pink ink.

Whether, years ago, they thought when they wrote that bill of fare that the word COLD looked less cold written in red ink, I do not know. It certainly makes no impression in such a state and on such a day as the present. We try the opposite inn. This has at any rate a thoroughgoing commercial look, though closed and curtained. We penetrate through various doors into the authentic gloom of such a place. Gloomier and gloomier. Yet it feels as though market dinners might once have been eaten here, when such little towns had lively markets and needed gossip-and-bargaining corners. It is not the gloom but the silence that dismays us. The place is a labyrinth. At length Nora deciphers 'Dining Room' written backwards in frosted glass. The door is hinged back, open. We enter and see an electric stove half alight. It is a miserable thing, but hopeful to us. I find a

bell-push concealed in the lincrusta. A large rosy girl enters: the room seems to light up.

'We should like some dinner, please.'

She departs with neither yes nor no, and we hear her imparting our message somewhere beyond a stone passage, and it being answered in an elderly, enigmatic mutter. We stand shivering till the rosy girl's return.

'It's steak and kidney pudding to-day and will you take soup first?'

By all means, yes, we'll take everything. I dash off one of my overcoats and begin to feel at home. There are several levers attached to the electric stove, which has also a piece of scenery purporting to resemble glowing coals, in which a mysterious shadowy motion occasionally occurs. We try the levers; but although one of them will put the stove right out none will put it right on.

But the dinner is capital: steak and kidney pudding as big as the plate, a pint of beer in a tankard as bright as silver, and a schoolboy's helping of jam roly-poly to follow.

Outside there is a great yard, and facing the window a piece of statuary in the shape of a Victorian Hercules looking as cold as a Christmas morning bather, and eyeing us, I think, with envious sadness that we have the inestimable good fortune to be alive and able to thrust victuals into us against the wind and rain.

After dinner we are in observant mood, and that leads to a discovery. You never know what England hides—the England of to-day. It is almost as though she does hide them, bits of her old craft, deliberately, from the modern world, as though they were a persecuted religion, by putting up a machine-made

facade. These old country towns have their secrets, doors behind piles of boxes and rooms like secret drawers. I go into a boot shop for a pair of laces: it is just an ordinary modern country boot-repairer's; a man at work behind the counter, boxes of factory shoes on the shelves, rubber heels on cards, advertisements for polish. Among a jumble of things on the counter I see something that puzzles me, a shape as of a hand with cubist fingers, and a hole in the middle of it; flat. There is a pile of them; they are of sheepskin. I pick one up, curious. 'That will be a glove,' says a woman coming through a door which I had not seen before—'when it is sewn up.'

'You make gloves?'

'We have made them for generations.'

'Can we see some?'

The woman leads us through the hidden door, and suddenly we are in a great room among the raw materials of old English life. Piles and piles of fleeces; leather lying up like stacks of elm boards. Heaps of gloves, too, large and fleecy. The woman keeps tossing one fleece after another on to the floor for us to see as she talks, and the rich, alive way the depth of wool lifts and subsides in its journey through the air is beautiful to see. They look heavy, but she does it easily, with a practised rhythm: there is a kind of pleasure in it for her, too, in the heavy fleeces floating down, like telling over again an old story.

It is a cottage industry still surviving. The gloves are cut out in this room on a big treadle machine, above which hang heavy steel patterns. Then they are taken round to the various cottages in the district, the finished work being at the same time collected and paid for.

'One old woman, who has just given up, has made

gloves for my husband, his father, and his grandfather. She said to me, "And you are the fourth generation." ' The woman adds with a laugh, 'She forgot that I am the same generation as my husband.'

The war has deprived her of her son, who is in the Territorials. It is likely to deprive her of her foreman-assistant, leaving her with only a boy of fifteen. The raw materials are becoming increasingly difficult to obtain; the army requires them all. So perhaps this flourishing little business of generations in a back room will be killed by the war. Not killed; it could not really be killed, for these fleeces and that leather are the materials that man will need always, whether he goes back into darkness or forward into light. That is the refreshment of standing here, watching fleece after fleece floating down, and the tiers of leather (goatskins, doeskins, too); the feeling of permanence in them.

'One like these.' the woman is saying, 'has been down for a hearthrug in front of our fire for forty years.'

I should like a leather jacket like that: it is gold enough for anything. How simple a thing clothing and warmth really is: just turn a fleece inside out. Were they so uncomfortable in old England? We, clad in our thin factory stuffs, mutter about their 'terribly draughty old houses'. What could a blizzard do against that, let alone a draught? Why have we made such a complicated and finicky business of dress?

I buy a pair of gloves; thick fleece inside and stout hide out. And the fingers are not merely lined with strips which curl up, as most factory gloves are, but are sewn fleece all round. The best five-and-sixpence-worth I shall get for many a long day.

I don't put them in the window.' the woman says, 'because they get so dirty.' Outside, attached to the shop, is a small eighteenth-century house. Yet it is nothing but an ordinary 'Repairs while you wait' sort of shop to look at. Even when you know what lies in the background, you can find no clue to it in the window. If the factory age passes in the bomb explosions, will hundreds of such village industries come out of such hiding-places, and carry old England on?

By now rain is added to wind. We bustle ourselves up in capes over our coats, and start homeward. We ride five miles along a Roman road, the storm three-quarters against us, yet still have breath, somehow, to talk. Still can notice the chestnut boughs with buds bursting, threshing the air, and small farms full of hopeful preparations for the season. When we turn off that road, we turn away from the wind, and sail the last two miles.

Decidedly—especially over tea—decidedly we have enjoyed our day. To return home is like coming to a children's party. It is their after-tea playtime. Martin is throwing balls about. He takes a new plate with a picture on it we have bought him, and prepares to throw that too. Is distracted in time by Anthea's memento, a bracelet of gold; of gold-paper over chocolate, that is. After a suitably brief period as an adornment, it is stripped, broken, shared, and eaten.

The arrival of a hen and eight chicks, a toy woolly elephant, and a pair of little blue shoes on a Sunday morning are a delight to Anthea. Only to us, who know what they represent, these gifts are tinged with sadness. It is nothing less than good-bye to

Geraldine, Anthea's first friend. She has been sent to a safer region than this near the east coast; her mother will follow shortly, their house will be shut up. Geraldine's father is fighting in France.

And so a short chapter ends, with many other chapters, short and long, of quiet English life, which war has shattered, never to be resumed, not even in the attenuated form that the last peace permitted.

Anthea, luckily, is too young, not for affection, but to know the meaning of parting. Geraldine is of an age between Anthea and the twins. Of afternoons the walk was 'Geraldine's way'—and Geraldine's walk was 'Anthea's way'. So they would meet and go together, Anthea walking beside Geraldine's pram and, as spring came on, picking primroses and violets from the hedgerow and giving to her—picking whatever she demanded from her enthronement of white fur. Toys used to be exchanged 'till to-morrow'. Geraldine came to tea; Anthea went to Geraldine's to tea. It has been a friendship of a year or more. At first Geraldine was hardly more to Anthea than a pretty, alive doll. But a doll with all her own things—exciting. Then she gradually learned to speak, could articulate 'Anthea'. The first winter she only crawled. Anthea, when she went to tea there, took off her shoes and crawled, too—as delighted even at her age to grow younger as older. By summer Geraldine had learned to walk. She trotted about our place in a muslin frock, in little blossomy gusts of movement, Anthea following, and every now and then hugging her ecstatically. Even a painful sting was borne with fortitude in the pleasure of Geraldine's company. But when Geraldine, who had had enough of embraces, suddenly bent down and bit Anthea on the wrist, that was rather surprising. Anthea did not know

what to make of it, unable to see that it could be anything but affection, although it hurt. She went very red: Geraldine was detached from her arm. There were the little indentations of teeth in the flesh, just where the sting was.

'It's all right, dear, Geraldine didn't mean to hurt you,' we began with our quick parental technique of appeasement. But Anthea out of her innocence had the inspiration.

'Geraldine was kissing my bump to make it better.'

'Of course.'

In the snowy winter Geraldine looked like a snow princess with her delicate skin framed in a white bonnet. Her elderly nanny was like a godmother in a fairy tale. In fact it was all like a fairy tale—the children meeting in the bare country featureless with snow—their bright colours the only colour—Anthea in red, Geraldine in white, trustful and happy in the savage cold. It was to me, passing them, a glimpse of that other world of the candle exposed to the wind and the bud to the frost, and the survival somehow of both flame and flower—the world of miracle beyond all those fears that make us people of experience tremble.

No illustrator of the inherent story could have painted more doomlike significance into that snow, the which stood in our minds for cold burial of all that was warm in life. Geraldine's father was on guard in it somewhere: it was the pause, we knew, the lease of calm before the earth wakening to life should bring resounding death to thousands of men, women, and children. Yet one listened to overhear Anthea and Geraldine's conversation as it were to comforting wisdom.

'She calls them.' Anthea cried to me, stretching out

her hands in gloves with flowers worked on them, 'my daisy gloves.'

As spring came Martin and Sylvia grew to take a part in the friendship. Martin, who sat facing forward in the twin pram, would be the first to spot Geraldine, and would make noises of delight. Geraldine, too, would cry 'Martin'. There came a great day when not only Anthea but the twins were to go to tea at Geraldine's. It had to be a fine day, because there was no way of getting there but walking.

Anthea admonished the twins—Martin particularly, who likes throwing things about—'You must be careful of Geraldine's toys because they are precious.'

But unfortunately the day turned out wet. ' Perhaps it will be fine this afternoon,' Anthea said. But no. It had to be announced after dinner that the party was off for the day. There was a red-faced effort to master tears, which was successful—and thereafter a philosophic cheerfulness that 'another day it will be fine'. But unfortunately again that other day also turned out wet. And yet again. The devil seemed to be in the weather. Until 'all going to tea at Geraldine's' became almost one of those fantasies in the no-time of the future, like going in a train to stay with cousins in London, playing with Martin and Sylvia by the seaside when they are big enough to make sand castles. However, the day came at last. Anthea set off for Geraldine's at a great pace, adjuring the twins not to spill their milk—certainly not bubble in it.

And now that spring is here Geraldine has gone. We have instead a brood of chicks that Geraldine's mother wanted to dispose of before leaving the house, a pair of shoes that did not fit Geraldine very well,

and would they do for Sylvia? And the parting present of the jumbo. Geraldine, we say, has gone for a holiday. All the children stretch out their hands simultaneously for the jumbo. It is taken for the walk—the walk to-day is 'the other way as we shan't meet Geraldine'. Anthea helps feed the chicks afterwards, and is surprised that they are not yellow like those of ours, but dark brown.

'Look—the mummy hen is showing them how to feed,' I point out.

'She's not a mummy hen—she's an Anthea hen.' Anthea examines the coop. 'I have a house like that—the Other House—where I and Martin and Sylvia live all alone, and I do everything for them. There aren't any big people. No.' She gives her little shake of the head.

'Why, father, there's one of the baby chicks standing in the dish of its food!'

'So it is. Fancy if Martin stood in the middle of his dinner.'

The idea, so extravagant, slowly forms a picture. It is the cream of farce. She begins to shout with laughter.

So—it is bedtime once again. I hear the idea being retailed with more laughter, as I gather up the box the chickens arrived in, and fold up the string, such a generous quantity of strong-looking string which I put in my pocket for use about the place. Though even then I shall have qualms about using such good string to tie up sacks.

A neighbour passes. What do I think of the news? I shake my head and make some non-committal reply. I think rather of those young threads of friendship woven in daily meetings going ' Geraldine's way'. When all the reverberations of bombing have

died away, this I feel will seem the heart of the matter, multiplied a millionfold; the interrupted flow of a human sympathy.

The Ist May has come, and now is going, this lovely day that dawned with a mist and burst early into sun. Here at least it has been allowed to pass in hope and happiness. In the news this evening is the announcement that it has passed off 'quietly' abroad. Meaning no class-war processions in the cities. Its significance has dwindled to that.

It passed off 'quietly' here, too. Nothing has happened all day, which has become a positive blessedness. The day, thronged with associations of old merry-making, is like a door half-open to illimitable treasures and powers; the power of the fountains that live in every natural thing, for which the world's pre-occupations are too grave. And yet there are wonders at hand to draw the world even out of the abyss, if it could look. The movements of a grey warbler amid the plum tree clotted with blossom. That tiny bird moves with the silence of a shadow, in his absolute absorption in his moment. Lithe, silent, with a mouse-like quality about his greyness: feathers could not be moulded to so delicate an outline, surely.

How sharp the feeling of this Suffolk seaboard country; spring coming all in a rush, blossom spreading over it like a great splash of foam. Days disturbed by their own swift fullness, when every morning, waking early, one's spirit feels like an athlete crouched at the starting line. How one must wake sharply out of the snow to meet it. It is the country of the hard nerve, the cheerful shout, the wind-wet eye. The

country of stout victuals and long-sightedness, of slowness, too, not impatient of the great to-be-ploughed tracts.

Our high farming land seems to ride the spring gale like a ship in trim: everything is neat and hoed and short silky green. But down towards the wood, crab-apple trees lean out and scatter their blossom among the tidy bean rows. Here, too, the honeysuckle, our harmless hedgerow honeysuckle, assumes his true nature of snake, constrictor choking the young trees. Tightly, in sweet spirals it is wound round the trunk and has slept there all winter. Now its green leaves are out ahead of the leaves of the tree, and it prepares to continue its winding. Underneath the crab-apple tree lies a dead stoat, petals falling upon his brown and saffron body; he looks so at peace, so out of the rush and press of spring, which becomes almost a frenzy to be born, to flee darkness and be fulfilled; while he, dark-minded little creature, lies flung out upon death as upon a last prey. And the rabbit dead in the snare there; long dead, sunken, hardly more than the grey-furred growth on a patch of meadow dung.

But down here in the bottom meadows, overhung by the wood, the air is moist and faint. The wind and the trim of the farm lose power: the tangled wood rings with nightingales. There is a thicket near, that once produced, men say, its ten sacks of corn an acre for them. And a house stood there, a farm of many acres. None can thrust through that growth to-day. A tractor began to pull the bushes up last autumn. The scene looks like a trace of giant combat; quagmire and earth threshed up and torn roots. Then the tractor gave up. Men build sea-walls against the erosion of the waves, and every now and then

the storms batter through them and more of the coast crumbles down. Great walls of labour—of yearly labour, desperate and short-handed—are built against the thicket bursting and pressing outwards to the farm. Invisible walls of hedger's hacking arms and ploughman's plodding to and fro.

The rabbits are the advance guard: they rush out and devour the fields. The men are busy now putting up the rabbit wire that the snow beat down. Their hammer blows echo among the trees.

In the bottom meadows an old willow, fallen and re-rooted, looks monstrous. It is leafing in defiance of its own deadness. A cow, broken away from its herd, is wandering there, lowing and running and stopping, wanting a bull. She runs into a pond, and the water is infected by her trouble and splashes about and flings the peaceful white water-flowers into a tangle, and heaves green scum upon a posy of primroses. The cow comes out and stands glaring. Clouds of mud continue to move upward to the surface, and all the clear, flowered, and grassy water-line is marred. The cow sinks into the mud as she stands, her sharp flint-smooth hooves cutting through the dry crust. She heaves awry, like a wreck, extricating herself: the deep mud hisses and sighs. She is bony and wild-looking. Now she stands accusing me. My passing through the meadow works on her. She goes into narrow places and rears out of them, with snapping timber: she runs into gates as though they were not there. I leave her sharpening her horns against the monstrous fallen willow.

Rides have been cut through the wood. The older ones are closing in. Now I am in Chaucer's England, and all the mystery of mediaeval travel is present to

me. In clearings there are encampments of primroses; great companies and rejoicings of them. The nightingales vibrate like light, the midday song of nightingales. Old dead trees lie fallen, weathered and grey, and young birches rise in the clearings.

I remember how the old farmer loves a wood. It is a relaxation to sit here and watch the wildness, after a day of order and cultivation; to exercise the power of stillness, that the wild things may come near. There is a pleasure in a well-kept oak-wood, and also in the farmer's little island of wilderness—his plantation. This is a long-neglected estate wood, and here I am in awe of the old, old England, and feel the spirit of the island abbeys, forest-islanded each from each, rejoicing to be alone with God.

How inevitable it was that the old imagery should be potent. How could the *Pilgrim's Progress* have failed to be written in such a world? Think of this wood going on and on, covering the land, and at once it becomes more than wood—wonder and fear, the depth and mystery of the soul.

The valley of the shadow: but the primrose is potent there: and in the deepest forests of thought nightingales sing at noon.

Anthea's best day—and the world's worst. The Germans blasting their way into France—Anthea waking early and telling the twins, 'I'm four years old to-day.'

For weeks she has watched the tulips growing; for I told her her birthday was when the tulips were out. Tulips were in a big bowl in the room when she was being born. Yesterday, the sun's warmth

opened them all again. 'Go to sleep, babies.' Anthea said, 'and make to-morrow come quickly.'

This is for Anthea her first real birthday—understood and looked forward to. Standing under the apple-blossom, where a bough leaned down low enough for her to reach, she smelled it, drawing with her young arm at the aged bough. She fingered the newly opened leaves, their perfect forms backed with sparkling hairs. "Aren't they beautiful?" So she stayed, holding in her other hand her bunch of cowslips. Then the cats came leaping into the tree, mad for a game.

Her excitement is quieter, but more intense than I have yet known it. That this is a day to be made much of, is the feeling of it. One almost forbears to turn on the news, seeing her passing across the landing, shining down with so whole a happiness as seems to quench the announcer's words like the sun a fire. A strange duality—world-fury and luminous joy: dream touching nightmare in Nora and in me: parenthood in sharpest sense: no animal, no bird watching a cat could bear it sharper.

It is as though—

(Something has gone wrong. Pace matters, pace matters vitally. A load of straw goes by, slowly, nodding on the cart: it goes by to a clip-clop of old-horse pace, nothing will make it faster. And as it nods along over the hedge like a great tousled head it has time to make connection with the may leaves that brush it and the shadows that brindle it, and the life of the fields and cottage gardens over the hedge. A motor passes: and it has no time to have contact with anything. But the load of straw has gathered all the life of this spring day upon it as surely as the sun is bright upon it. It is a loved thing. Speed, I

see, is in inverse ratio to true vitality in man. Because he is not swift—only his machine is. It has to be a compensation. That is what has gone wrong, pace.)

After breakfast, presents. A toy wheelbarrow which both babies try to take possession of, a handle each, leaving Anthea nowhere. A painting book with coloured copies of flowers. Later, when I ask Anthea why she has coloured the leaves of a marsh marigold black, she replies, 'Because it's winter still.' 'Winter?' 'Yes, in the picture it is.' Another scene, figuring a large snowball, is coloured a sad sort of green. 'Well, you see,' she explains, 'I had such a lot of green left over.'

Another present is a watering can. This I am glad to see, for I have been wanting tha-t can for my seeds for weeks past; my big one having so coarse a rose it knocks the seedlings down. Nora, being practical and economical, as any countryman's wife needs to be, saw that the size of watering-can I needed was almost a toy. Light enough for Anthea to handle, anyhow. So she conceived the idea of getting it as a present for Anthea's birthday. Anthea is proud to let me borrow it: it adds to its importance for her. The only trouble has been that I have had to wait so long for it. To know it was lying wrapped up there in the cupboard was very tempting when fragile seedlings were just breaking through.

Martin possesses himself of the watering-can, and looks as though he would like to know what it is for.

Another present—the most successful of all—is a wheelbarrow load of sand from William.

This is joyful; and Anthea with her wheelbarrow and watering-can busies herself all morning among

it in a play that is half horticulture, half cookery. Cookery wins in the end with a selection of ornamental sand buns, and a pie of which I am told I can have 'just one slice' for dinner.

I am hoeing the beans. William is working here too. He tells me the news as heard by him on the one o'clock radio—mostly a catalogue of bombings. Again the incredible phantasm of the world over the horizon builds itself, while the gusty air makes green shadows move over the grass. I cut off a bean, and thereafter concentrate on what I am doing. The bean sacrificed to a thought of bombs reproaches me. To live in the moment of tilth and young green; to do the good one can is the best one can. And to hear Anthea's voice babbling out of the house like a brook. I was early in the orchard this morning, waiting for the kettle to boil. I paced in the dew among the apple-blossom fallen all round the tree. Alone with the sun in the garden, feeling it warm on my shoulder, and everything at its beginning. Suddenly, as at moments happens, the oppressiveness of the world tragedy left me and I listened to a bird calling from a tree and being answered from far off. It had the nature of solo and chorus, the few single notes and the distant many.

This afternoon Anthea goes with Nora to pick some tulips for her tea-party. This also has been since morning a treat in store. Tulips all out and swaying on their stalks are so eminently pickable, so tempting. It has been difficult to refrain. Soon Anthea has a sheaf of them, a great gcblet-glow of them, more and still more. She is allowed to pick some herself: she is very careful to follow instructions and pick them with long stalks. Later, when the twins are playing on the lawn, Sylvia happily plucking

daisy-heads—'No, Sylvia.' Anthea cries, 'this is how you must pick them. I'll show you.' and tries to pick a long stalk to a daisy.

William, who up till now has regarded the war with the detached, rather tired view of one who has been through all that before—now that the Germans are on the old battlefield and all the familiar names of the past come ringing on the news, is thoroughly aroused. He and the ex-servicemen of the village are like old war horses snorting and pawing the ground. 'Why.' his wife exclaimed, after he had been assuming the role of adviser to the generalissimo of the Allied Forces, 'I believe you'd go back there if you had a chance.'

'I shouldn't mind.' he said. 'I'd know my way about.'

Every day he comes with new strategies, new interpretations of the situation as announced in the news. He has a contempt for people who are ruffled by news of retirements here and there. 'Why, that was happening all the time in the last war, only there wasn't all these wireless bulletins and you didn't hear anything about it. If people had known at home all that we knew, why, they wouldn't have had an hour's sleep. Why, we hadn't hardly any shells for our guns, our rifle ammunition was half duds like the shells. The Jerries used to cheer each time a shell came over and didn't explode. They ran right through us—there wasn't anything to stop them. Only they got out of hand in the French towns looting. That's what saved us.' William seems to have a belief in Providence, plus something about the British Army which acts in despite of politicians, generals, and all big-wigs. Perhaps just the fact that it is British.

A sudden humming noise. 'It's only an aeroplane.' Anthea says, as we look up and see one of England's battle planes sailing over at two or three hundred miles an hour—and she stoops again to make another sand pie. Aeroplanes are not very interesting birds, Anthea thinks. Not as interesting as the blackbird sitting on five eggs in the hedge. They don't lay those pretty blue eggs—no, nor are they as awe-inspiring, rather frightening, as that still, tail-cocked, beak-cocked bird in that nest, with the intense bright eye, that stares so coldly at a small girl who has been taken to see.

Nora gets the birthday tea, while Anthea waits outside the door, not to be admitted till all is ready.

There. The door is thrown open and Anthea enters to take possession of her tea-table. What a gallant little cake it is, a white fort with four transparent flags of flame. They have such a busy look in the breeze from the window, such a morning-of-the-tournament look. The twins point to them. Of all things that are pretty, a flame most attracts the infant eye. A flame more than a flower—more than moving water. Even a small, sun-transparent birthday-candle flame. There are also iced biscuits; and another cake which should have been the birthday cake, but it turned out too heavy. The mystery of that heaviness is to recur as the cake recurs at teas. Was it the oven? Or was it that in answering a question of Anthea's Nora lost count of handfuls? I say it is a good cake anyhow,; but that won't do. The mystery is solved later. Grandmother, when she closed her house for the duration of the war and came here, brought with her many supplies—among them tins of ingredients labelled this and that. Nora went to one marked Baking Powder for her cake. When

grandmother returned from another visit she said, 'Oh, but that's ground rice. I know it so well I've never troubled to change the label.'

Nora laughed at this, but I assured her that it is the normal development in a household. You set up house with everything labelled and in its right tin; but after a time you find that the rice tin is too big and the sugar tin too small and you swap them. Thereafter for Rice you read Sugar, and Sugar for Rice. This sort of thing multiplies, till only the housewife knows what means what. Grandmother was quite surprised that Nora did not know that Baking Powder meant Ground Rice.

The sound of guns from across the sea grew louder, became continuous day and night. Nora's parents returned from a visit to London with anxious faces. We were so busy with children and the land that the war still seemed extraneous. Even in peacetime we had been used to practice gun-rumblings from the sea. A cousin in the Intelligence sent Nora an urgent message to take the children away from the East Coast. Her sister wrote, offering shelter in Westmorland. Another, more urgent, message came from the cousin in the Intelligence. Suddenly Nora and I found ourselves faced with a decision. It had not crossed our minds that our home was in a danger area: it looked so peaceful, the crops growing well in spite of the drought, the fruit trees crowded with blossom; our neighbour, Mr. Brett, going to and fro with his cows as usual; Mrs. Brett fetching them home with a green branch in her hand, singing as she went.

. We paced the home paddock, among the cowslips, Nora saying, 'Must I take them away?' I saying,

'Dash that cousin in the Intelligence, I suppose he must know.' If we did nothing now and the children were harmed we should reproach ourselves for ever. We vacillated all that week-end. We went to market: the square attitudes of the farmers reassured us. They had always stood like that in the street, talking. They went on talking, despite a bawling propaganda van imploring them not to give way to panic. They were talking of crops, of course, and the propaganda voice sounded much more panicky than they.

The same heterogeneous goods, and the same variety of people; from a van-load of bullocks to a small-holder's bicycle with two hens in a box. Ragged-haired, smoke-cured complexions beside fair, clean-shoed young gentlemen farmers. A man with a week's beard, standing in his pig-float in a fierce abstraction; a tall, scholarly-looking person hugging a rusty mincing machine he had bought for a shilling. Our Miss Archer almost too late with a consignment of her fluffy goslings.

The auctioneer's rostrum is a vehicle like a caravan, open at one side, well-weathered. After each lot, 'Gee up!' and the horse pulls auctioneer, clerk, and one or two large friends forward to the next lot.

'What's that you're all looking at?' cries the auctioneer, popping out his head.

'Some airy-planes: they're turning somersaults up there.' one shouts.

High overhead they zoom, making curly white trails in the sky.

'Well, as long as they stay up there what does it matter?' The auctioneer returns to business. 'Now, what have we here? Ah, something pretty good. How much for a start?'

One of his friends comes out of the door at the back in answer to some remark from below. He descends and looks at one of the front wheels. 'That's all right, guv'nor,' someone else says, poking the thing dangerously, 'it's got a good tyre.'

The big man gets back. 'Gee up!' The slow ride proceeds.

Far away the loud-speaker could be heard still bawling its warnings against panic.

Here Nora and I felt fortified. Foolish that we had let ourselves get worked up into such a misery of indecision about the children going away to Westmorland. Good old Suffolk for us. We bought a calf, a roan one. It came from a neighbour who made it a rule always to send everything to market. So it went there and back. We returned home planning the work on our land. It was a calm, warm evening. We planned to make our small acreage produce more than ever before, following a saying of William's which answered our own instinct: 'Let people do what land they have got twice as well, before ploughing up more.'

We should produce everything we required for family and stock. When foods were artificially cheap it had seemed freakish to do that, though in our heart we felt that a holding should be self-contained. It had been difficult to resist the opportunism of the market, any market that offered, even if one's own stock needed it.

Now our instincts and necessity coincided.

As we arrived home Anthea was in the orchard gathering up fallen petals. 'I'm making pies for fairies,' she said.

The radio was on: through the open window I heard that the news was worse. Added to the news was

the announcement that all schoolchildren were to be de-evacuated from our East Coast fringe.

Once again Nora's mother asked anxiously: 'Have you decided what to do?'

We paced Nora's flower garden, faced with it all again.

There came a day of packing of boxes. And in the evening, even more unreal, we planted out some aster seedlings in Nora's garden—simply because they needed planting out. And one morning a car appeared, and in a minute had whisked, it seemed, my whole married life away.

Leaving a few toys lying about the garden; and under the apple trees six neat piles of blossoms—pies for fairies.

In the interval which followed, life for me consisted chiefly in letters from Nora and an occasional visit to her. For the rest, immersion in seasonal tasks. And late on summer evenings, an hour reserved for tending her garden, which was all I had of her. The asters flowered and died unseen by her. After a while I ceased to move quietly about the house after children's bed-time. I returned to the sort of life I lived on my first little farm twenty years ago. It is sufficient to record that the time passed. Nor will I go into details here of Nora's life in Westmorland, of how, as winter came again, she was snowed up alone with the three in a far-away cottage, and had got to her last bucket of coal before help arrived. Sufficient to record that the time passed and the family at last returned. Almost a year after their departure, the six-thirty train which I see daily pass became of great importance to me. I visualized four

faces turned this way. Within a quarter of an hour the door burst open, and the children, a year older, were running about the house again, and in and out of Ada's arms spread in welcome.

DOUBLE SUMMER TIME

We were having tea under the big apple tree that looks and is a main support of our place. Its apples are a long-keeping kind, and we rely on them from Christmas onwards. Around us our growing chicks darted after insects. We were discussing the setting of another batch of eggs: we were scanning the green depths above us for signs of apples and seeing few. When I looked down again I had an eerie feeling: my chicks had become very, very tiny. I said to Nora, 'Am I dreaming or do our chicks look very small?'

She looked. 'You are right. What has happened?'

Then a hen appeared, but a strange hen, with a whole brood. She saw us and began to retreat in panic.

'Where have they come from? The nearest farmyard is fields away.' Nora said. 'We want another brood.' There they were as though hatched by our imagination.

I flung crumbs which arrested the mother-bird's retreat. 'But they must belong to somebody.' I said, 'We can't just collar them.'

'The owner might sell them: they must be a stray lot. Anyhow a rat will get them if we don't, and—oh, do let's try to catch them.'

They seemed a gift somehow, appearing suddenly through the hedge like that; and questions of legal ownership were in abeyance, while, with elaborate strategy, we tried to induce confidence among them preliminary to an attempt to catch them. I had already used up the remains of the bread and butter, which could do no more than keep the hen from hurried departure at the sight of two large humans rising up a few yards away. Anthea was engaged in making a daisy chain, and this, after a glance at the chicks, continued to absorb her. We were glad, as young enthusiasm at that moment would not have been helpful. The daisy chain was to adorn my wide-brimmed rush hat—a great shillingsworth—which Anthea thought too plain about the crown. The hat had caught on a branch as I got up, and lay on the grass near the chicks. I was throwing the last crumbs, and called to Nora to fetch me some chick food. I had only a very little, and it was precious these days, but I thought it worth gambling with a handful or two. It came just in time: the hen was calling her brood to her. 'There's nothing more here, chicks, let's get away now from these monsters.'

But the chick food brought her cautiously advancing again. By slow degrees we got some, wire netting round on the hedge side of her, and I tried to entice them all into a ring of it which could be closed at the right moment. I began to doubt whether rats would get them if we did not; they seemed too wary for rats. Just so far would they come but not an inch farther; and the mother-hen could only be distracted by ever more frequent scatterings of food from a growing

suspicion of encirclement. The chick food I was expending made me more and more anxious to get them.

We thought. We gained time for thought only at the expense of chick food; so we thought quickly. 'We must get them into the yard.' I said; 'we'll never catch them out here in the open. Get the fruit netting.'

We contrived to get a barrier of fruit netting stretched between us behind them, and they were being urged willy-nilly yardwards. At this moment Anthea rose up from under the tree, her daisy chain completed.

'Father.' she called, 'it's ready to put on your hat.'

'You must wait.' I said, in a kind of stage whisper. The hat was still by the chickens; it lay there on the grass.

'I'll get it.' Anthea cried.

'NO—don't move.'

'But I've been making this daisy chain to go on it.'

'Wait.' I hissed.

'Oh, but I do want to put the daisy chain I've made on your hat.'

The chicks were circling the hat; found it inedible. The hen boggled at it.

'But, father—'

'What?'

'It'll be bed-time in a minute.'

The obstacle of the hat is still not passed, but we are now quite close to the yard. We slowly make the netting into a half circle round the gateway. Anthea stares at our precautions.

Mrs. Richards, our evacuee, appears at the back door, and seeing that Nora is engaged, offers to bath Anthea. Loud protests from Anthea, which nearly

cause the hen to take to the air. 'But, mummy, I haven't put the daisy chain on father's hat, and you promised me a story before bed-time.'

Mrs. Richards' daughter appears. 'Oh, some more dear little chicks!' She runs forward with a sort of wide and general embrace. Our frantic gestures halt her, and she shrinks back precipitately, wondering what awful change has come over our usually cordial selves.

Anthea has calmed down, and stands patiently watching us.

'Mummy,' she says, after a long silence.

'Yes, dear?'

'You know, I don't think you will be able to do what you are trying to do.'

The critical moment has arrived. The hen sees the trap, and with a wild squawk comes hurtling back.

'We've got her.' I cry.

There is a rending: the hen goes flying clean through the netting: all we have caught is one chick, and that inextricably. The squawks of this chick which we try to untangle are added to the pipings of panic from the lost others, and the fury of the hen who returns and buffets us with her wings. Extraordinary the fracas that one hen and chicks can cause when thoroughly upset. The hens in the field take up the tune; our own chicks run hither and thither: the pigs gallop found barking: the geese honk and hiss. We give it up. Our only desire now is to restore peace, and her chicks to the stray hen, that she may lead them off through the hedge whence they came. But will they be restored? Not a bit.

'Where are they, anyhow?'

At last we locate the squawkings: two in the stable,

and the rest deep in the interstices of a ton of coal. There is nothing for it but to wait. We go indoors, picking up the hat and giving it to Anthea. She wreathes her daisy chain around it. That at least is satisfactory.

'I didn't think you'd catch those chicks, you know: and now they've lost their mummy.'

Presently we see seven sooty atoms creep out from the heap of coal, and leg it for all they are worth out of the yard.

I lunged at a monstrous group of nettles, and my scythe fell to pieces. You do not realize how many pieces of a scythe there are to fall and lose themselves, until you are looking for them among a mass of nettles. And every hook and peg a vital part of the thing: one goes and all go, and the blade swivels round and hangs useless as a broken limb.

'I never did like that stick of yours,' William said. 'That's a stubborn old bit of wood, and you've got to reach out to the work so.'

I bought it more years ago than I can remember—in those days when I walked into farming and ordered just tools—bill-hook, fork, scythe, saw, and so on. Thus I came by a left-handed bill-hook, an ungainly scythe, and by luck a good saw.

And, of course, a whetstone, or 'rub' as they call it, to go with the scythe.

'Why, sir.' the agricultural ironmonger said, 'some labourers ccme in here and spend a long time choosing a rub—they won't have this one because it's too heavy, and that one because it's too soft or too rough or not quite the shape they fancy.'

My hesitation, of course, had been one of mere

bewilderment at the various choices in this seemingly simple matter.

Only the day before yesterday I bought another—the last one's last fragment having been worn so small that I cut my finger whetting with it.

It is a stout, barrel-shaped one, cut out, of the solid stone, not a made-up one which disintegrates if you let it get wet. To every man his own scythe and his own rub. Mine is a little too soft for William's complete approval. His scythe is a beautiful thing, the blade worn thin as a knife, the stick light and curved. The handles are set in a peculiar way, and no one else could scythe with them thus, because William was wounded in the last war in the arm, and yet so manages the arm that he can swing ins scythe as easily as any man—he and his scythe are in peculiar and perfect harmony.

My finger is bandaged and stiff this evening, my shoulders ache. The sun is slanting low on our first day of mowing. The swathes lie like grey trails of smoke across the paddock, which looks twice its size of this morning. They tell a story—a story of two scythes—William's thin and short-bladed, mine lank with straight lank handle. ' Yours do reach out too far and push the grass across'. There the swathes show it—lying in twos where mine has thrust too closely against his. William, despite his arm, so cleverly manages his scythe that it swings around him as lissomly as the hem of a skirt from the movement of a woman's hips. My new stick is an old stick of William's that he discarded long ago, but lighter than my old one, which had split at the head, and been bound with wire, and finally fell to pieces in the attack on the nettles. Of course, I had lost everything of importance in the nettles—leathers and iron pins.

But we took one from the handle and made do with a nail which he pulled out of the stable wall, and he brought from his pocket heel-shaped pieces which had come from a shoe-factory—made of paper really, but looking like leather, which he finds excellent for wedging a scythe. We tried the blade this way and that way—measured its position. It should make an equilateral triangle if a line were drawn from the point of the blade to the lower handle. The handles to be the length of a man's forearm apart.

Nora brought us drink and laid it under the oak. The sun beat down. There were marguerite daisies, vetches, and many wild flowers standing in the grass. The whole art of the scythe is to watch your blade and be certain of what you are doing. Your mind must be on your work. No—your mind must *be* your work—mind and body one. Feel the blade swing through the grass the moment before you actually swing it—as an archer wills his arrow to the mark. I stop and sharpen twice to a journey. William demonstrates the superiority of his rub by sharpening my scythe so that it goes for the whole journey.

All goes well until I come to a stump. That is nothing to William, who yearly scythes the grass in the churchyard. He scythes right round a tree leaving not a blade of grass standing, yet not touching the delicate point on the trunk. Such things throw me out of gear, and I have to say to my scythe as it swings back and pauses a second on the verge of another cut, 'Now *you* do it—you do the work.' And the scythe like a living limb responds and comes sweeping through the daisies with sweet, even motion, while my arms are unconscious of the weight, and my eyes watch with pleasure the point swinging round towards my left boot with just sufficient force to cut the last blades

and no more. I come to feel an indolence in action, letting the scythe do it, and a force that is not me takes possession of us both and we swing, swing. William ahead there, half encircling himself with his blade. 'I mow to suit myself.' he says. There is no keeping time with him. I have tried, and suddenly the grass seemed tough as wire, the scythe as clumsy as a tree. There is my time, and his time—we mow to suit ourselves.

'Ah.' he cries, 'I saw that just in time.' It is a hidden tree stump. He mows nicely round it. 'There—we can see him now.' 'Once.' he said, 'mowing just about here I put my blade into a pheasant on her nest. The young ones were just coming off. She sat so close I didn't even see her. My blade went into her. I felt my blade go into something soft, and my blood ran cold.'

William went through the last war: was blown up, buried, fought with the bayonet. But mowing into something soft in our meadow his blood ran cold.

A partridge flies up in his face suddenly, and we find the nest under the brushwood round a beech; fifteen eggs, dim-mottled, tapering. He holds one up to his ear and listens. 'Yes—they're almost hatching.' 'They'll soon be eating my peas then.' He looks around. 'No, I reckon they'll fly over the road into Mr. Croft's corn to feed.'

We remark again on that other partridge's nest in a clump of poppies where the children run to and fro and play ball and laugh and shout. Thirteen eggs the bird laid there, and sat close.

We speak then of the white owl that haunts between our orchard and the churchyard. Regular in her flight, taking almost the same course each dusk: she companions our winter-time: will sit for an hour at

a stretch on an apple-tree here, for an hour on a tombstone near William's window; and does not move for either of us going near. We told each other, when in the spring we missed her, that she was probably sitting hatching some eggs. But now it is mid-June and we are getting anxious about her. She has been flying between William's house and mine for years. Just as it is getting dark in the winter her white motion will go threading through the boughs —breaking the day-long stillness of frost or mist.

William and I work in unison; and we have the same pauses. We enjoy the day as we work, stop to say, 'Yes, look, there's going to be some apples on this tree.' or 'There's some plum-blossom set here'. Up in Westmorland, where I visited Nora just after our harvest and took a hand in theirs, they work so hard that there is hardly time to eat the big tea that comes out in the broad butter-baskets, or to drink the tea without scalding one's mouth. It was, 'All right, Mr. Bell, don't hurry—I know you like to take your time over your food'—after I had been gulping tea and gooseberry pasty for all I was worth. Meal upon meal, till I felt pendulous as a kangaroo.

I was impressed afterwards by the slow steadiness of Suffolk, where we can believe in to-morrow being another fine day. People passing on the road might have seen movements not obviously connected with mowing—William after whetting his scythe suddenly begins marking time upon his swathe. He is telling me how in France he saw horses treading out the corn, and automatically his body enacts it. Now he bends forward, one hand outstretched, the other sweeping the air under it: he is telling how he watched the women reaping the corn with sickles which their men (many already dead in battle) had sown. Again

marking time on the swathe: this time it is a dog treadling a churn round, slowly, slower—then the woman putting her head out of the door and waving a stick, and his feet accelerate to the double.

Now Nora is bringing tea out under the trees; but we do not stop till we have mown right over the edge of the ditch, and I swing mine down into it. We mow off all those small shoots of bramble and thorn which start at the edge of a meadow and creep inwards. That means frequent whetting. His scythe-edge is as wavy as the sea; every nick is a history of his labour. 'That one there—I did that quite soon after it was new, mowing the churchyard. There was a headstone covered by grass. I caught it properly: it took a piece right out of the blade—twelve years ago and you can still see the place.' So we walk slowly to the oak where Nora and the children sit among the swathes, and eat lettuces, and brown bread she has baked, and oatcakes, and plum cake, and drink cup after cup of tea.

'It's like making sheaves.' Anthea says, getting up and gathering the hay in her arms. Under the tree it is rank and has dried strawlike. Last year in Westmorland, where all the corn is bound by hand, she made her first sheaf, a little one; and I showed her how to bind it. Martin has hold of the hay rake and is nearly bursting himself trying to wield it like a man, The teeth are caught in the roots of the grass and he is red with vexation. I tell him he had better put it down; but William lifts himself up from his comfortable reclining position against the tree-trunk and shows Martin how to hold the rake half-way down the handle to make it stand upright, and then the teeth slide through the grass. But soon he is in trouble again. 'Never mind, I'll make you a little

rake, Martin, one that you can handle.' William promises.

Sylvia is carefully picking a doll's plate full of daisy heads. 'Who are they for?' I ask her.

'For Oddy-Doddy.' she answers without looking up.

'Does he like daisies for tea?'

'Oddy-Doddy a she.'

'Oh—and does she like daisies?*

'They're plums.' The big blue hat and square printed slip of a garment go sailing off into the back garden, where presumably Oddy-Doddy lives.

Oddy-Doddy is a character built up from nonsense chatter: the twins are always shouting invented words at one another and somehow that one stuck, became a person, and was endowed with characteristics. A little girl, I gather, something like Sylvia, only a good deal naughtier. Martin follows her. I find the daisy heads being given to the goslings, who waggle them in their beaks ineffectually.

Anthea stays in the hay with her child's book of ancient tales retold. Since she first learnt to read words of one syllable she has practically taught herself. Any day she is to be found sitting under a tree immersed in a fairy tale, murmuring it to herself.

'What's the story, Anthea?'

'This one's the story of Joseph—I have just finished Romulus and Remus.' She hands me the book. 'You read it to me.' she suggests.

I glance at the story. 'It's better as it was told first, in the Bible.'

'Well, read it to me out of the Bible.'

'You go and fetch it—no, the shelf is too high.' I see that I have put an end to my comfortably sitting here. I make an effort to turn back to her book. 'No, you said it was better in your book.'

'All right.' How stiff I am. I go and fetch the Bible. What a tremendous story it is—I had forgotten many of the details. William is munching slowly. 'I bet that chap felt bad—Judah, when they found the cup in Benjamin's sack.' William spent some time in Egypt in the last War. 'That must be a terrible country in a famine. Now here in Suffolk we are always sure of a crop.'

So tea-time passes. Already our morning swathes are fit to turn. The sudden heat threatens to parch our hay to tinder. We must cock it to-morrow.

At eleven o'clock at night I lean out of the bedroom window after supper of lettuce, fresh carrot-thinnings, spring onions, and home-made cheese in the orchard, and smell the smell of the hay for the first time this year rising from those smoky-looking grey lines that stripe the meadow. It is too dark to show the marks of my blade in the grass, sign of bad work, where I lagged a little. I think only of my scythe, renewed by these days of use and shining keen again, the swing of the work, that alliance of muscle and wood and blade that is mowing.

As I build the cocks to William's raking of the swathes, we just keep up with each other and are all day at talking distance. I tell him of how in the north they were surprised when I told them we made cocks with a fork. There they use their rakes, cutting off and bundling up long bolsters of hay like Swiss rolls, and dumping one on another; a most unsatisfactory way, I thought, leaving a cock that is, as they themselves say, 'cockly'. But theirs is a grass district and ours a corn, so I thought there must be some superiority in their method I did not

know of. But here, building again our big Suffolk cocks in our Suffolk way, with the fork, I am convinced that this is the right way—shaking the hay out at the bottom, and gradually building the cock, tossing the hay on lightly, not in a lump, drawing one's fork round the trailing skirt of it, and putting that on top, till the whole forms a perfect dome, whose Tightness (or slight wrongness) you can only appreciate when you are at a distance of the next cock but one. I work slowly perhaps, but it is impossible not to be aware of the art of the job as you do it, and nothing less will satisfy me. I know that I shall be gazing at this field again from my window at eleven o'clock to-night, and shall hope to see something well done. What matter that the weather is set fair and all will be undone and carted the day after to-morrow? I have continually beside me the shade of the farmer who taught me, years ago, and he was a great judge of hay-cocks, as of every other job in the field.

The children, of course, want to cart the hay, too. William, resourceful as ever, produces for them his barrow, which is a box on an old pram chassis. This he has praised to me again and again, as though it were some costly new farming device. The King's glass coach would not evoke any higher expression of admiration in him. This object, on worn and shredded tyres, has been his answer to all his little transport problems for years. I myself have seen a great settee loaded on it, which he was bringing from a sale. When a slate blows off the roof he will bring his builder brother's forty-stave ladder along on it. It is worth more than the most expensive wheelbarrow with

pneumatic tyre to him, for which I am sure he would not swap it.

To-day it is the children's hay wain. They trundle it to and fro; at least Anthea does, the others pushing behind and shouting. William loads them a good load. When he has done, the barrow has disappeared, and something like a great grey sheep stands there. How children love hay, to smell it, to throw it about, and roll in it. They are happy with their wagon-load.

I notice as we load and unload the hay the different scents of it. It is not all just 'hay'. And when I took a wisp to make a nest in a corner of a shed for a sitting hen this evening, I found she had a bed for her eggs smelling of wild mint.

Our little stack is finished: the weather has been perfect, the sun almost too bright and strong. Anxiety is over. Is it? How is our stack going to settle? Will it stand straight and square or—? Yes, it is tending already to lean from the eaves. William has gone home to tea. I let mine get cold while I fetch a big pole to shore it up.

I have taken it in time: as the stack sinks, that lean is rectified. By bed-time it is trying to go over towards the side. I shift my shore against that. By the morning, what? Nora is surprised at my jumping out of bed so nimbly and so early. I really am anxious for the stack, for it is rather narrow for its height, Good, it still stands, at any rate. When I come to have a close look I see that it will always lean a little in that direction, but it is no worse; and from the road I am rejoiced to see that it appears quite straight. The roof has flattened out, and it is

steaming faintly. A ripe smell comes from it: a foot inside it warmth meets my hand. The real time is half-past four, midsummer morning: birds are singing all round. It will be all right. I shall have a good morning, raking the field and topping up my stack roof again to look even straighter from the road than it does. I shall fake that roof a bit—. Now to milking. Barbara Allen: I sing that doleful old ditty loudly to Selina, who lets her milk come quickly.

'You sound very cheerful this morning.' Nora says.

Sunday morning; the air full of roses; but it is blue cotton trousers for me. I hear the voice of my neighbour calling his cattle to milking. All the birds are singing: then the voice of the man calling, and in answer, the boom of a cow. But I, wretch, am not up yet. Up I get and lean out of the window. H 'm, that's my haystack I can smell, rich in the air: the scent of a bed of roses under the window cannot compete with it. I begin to have my doubts about it: I put my arm in again yesterday, and it was hot enough to hatch a clutch of eggs in there. 'All the better for that,' William assured me, 'it'll be brown and solid, like good bacca.' But I am not satisfied with bacca as an ideal for hay, not William's anyhow. I think hay should be green and sweet, as it was in the field.

One does notice the flowers as they come and go, even as one hurries by, even with a mind full of animal and vegetable cares. Every day there seems some new thing born, or acquired, or set upon eggs. Still I manage to get in to breakfast just as the family is seated, and Ada going the round with bibs, while Nora is finishing off the bacon in the kitchen. This morning, however, they have strawberries, which

she has picked early. Half a pint of new milk each, then strawberries wet with dew, and brown, home-made bread and butter and honey. While we—well, yesterday our last home-cured ham's last slice was eaten, and Nora jagged a few ragged bits off the bone for the chickens, to flavour their war-time diet: put it through the mincer so that they should not be able to separate it from the potato, and then—this morning the mince looked and smelt so good that we ate it for breakfast ourselves.

Each child's bib has an animal embroidered on it. Each of these animals has to be offered token spoonfuls of food—porridge, strawberries, and so on—before its owner will take a bite. The result is just what bibs are to prevent. Generous relatives with a taste for embroidery might note this.

Sally is to arrive at ten-thirty. Also some people are coming to tea. Nora says, couldn't we perhaps do something to tidy the place a bit? I point out the invaluable young growth of wild white clover and trefoil on the lawn, where the week-old goslings are grazing in an enclosure of wire. I remind her that our neighbour's wife lost hers through turning them out in the meadow too young, where they fell on their backs in the longish grass and could not get up again. Goslings a week old are the most unbalanced things on earth, tittupping on to their tails or on to their beaks. The very act of eating, which seems to cause them to waggle their heads half off, is enough to unbalance them.

Nora agreed. We both agreed that it was a pity it was not possible to have goslings or any young thing without dithery, tattered erections going up round them. First it was sticks and wire, then a box with a sack to shade it; then, as the heat increased, another

bit of sacking draped on the wire, and so on. One always starts with the best intentions, yet the end is always the same. Only on Sunday morning do we wake up to appearances and say, 'Let's try and tidy things up a bit.'

'At least we can mow round the flower bed,' Nora says. Her voice is muffled, she is already under a bush, dragging up weeds by the roots. So I tear round with the mower, rousing the goslings to a frenzy of fury. But then I have to rig up a net to dry the mowings, because I cannot bear to waste even grass mowings at a time like this. The net is rotten, and the mowings tumble through. I am just on my way to fetch wire netting when Sally arrives. In the back of a car, her kid in a fair-haired girl's arms. Out of the car get father, son, daughter, Sally and kid. The latter, only a fortnight old, is trying to feed on Sally all the way up the path. Father picks her up in his arms.

'I told my wife,' he says, 'that you would be sure to give her a good home.'

We promise this in all sincerity. We have already Mrs. Richards and her daughter bombed out of London; now we have Sally and her kid.

I mentioned Sally this morning. 'What, another evacuee?' Mrs. Richards asked.

'Yes.' I said, 'only this one can scratch her back with the back of her head.' Sally is doing it now, laying back her sharp long horns.

Mrs. Richards' daughter Clara, who is twelve, rushes to Sally, tries to embrace the kid, who leaps into the air and frisks around.

Sally is all white, her kid, too: she has swept-back horns, and eyes that in bright sunlight do not look like eyes at all, but bullseyes. All 1 know about

goats is that they like everything *except* grass. The children, whose pet she is, are already offering her samples of produce: cabbage leaves, bunches of flowers, pea-shucks, ivy. She eats everything; gobbles whole bouquets of marguerite daisies from Sylvia's hands.

Meanwhile I learn what I am to do; quite a lot apparently. Even keep her toe-nails cut. Never mind, I daresay somehow I shall still be in to breakfast at the same time. I think she will be a good way to introduce Martin to the art of milking. We all stand in the sun admiring her, and I think of Virgil's capellae. I think it would be pleasant to lead her out along the lanes, and sit in the shade while she fed and meditate the sort of things that Virgil's herdsmen used to meditate. She, white in the paddock, keenly white in the sun; and the frisking, snowy offshoot of her, bring a new note into this English scene; ancient, mythological. Already I am friends with her.

I take her late owner into my room and we chat, while his children and our children, and Clara and her friend from the village fraternize over Sally and her kid. All the while he is talking, not about farming, though he is a farmer, but about writing. How he once wrote a 500,000-word novel, how characters are born and live with him day and night—while in *my* head merely a white kid is frisking, leaping in the sun. He came up the path with her in his arms, a luminous-looking, gentle person, looking beyond into the world of his characters, his invented plots, his mind a medley of exciting imaginative things, and stolid farming ones.

'How, then, do you write?' I ask him.

'Fancy you asking me that.' he exclaims, 'you ought to know,'

'That's just it: I don't. I could not invent a plot for the life of me.'

'But' (we are at the gate again now) 'think.' He waves an arm at my house. 'A dead body lies in there. It has been raining; but no footprint is to be seen on the earth. Windows and doors bolted—on the inside, mark you. Now, how did it happen? Think hard, and you will work it out. The apparently insoluble problem becomes soluble, and there is your story. All you have to do is to write it and take the money.'

I shake my head. 'I can't think how.' Sally's kid frisking around: the apparently insoluble—what was it?

Anthea and his daughter are of the same age. They are standing by the gate: Anthea has picked her a bunch of flowers. His son, an attractive freckled boy, is saying to Nora, 'Thank you for the lemon squash.' He picks up his golden-haired girl: 'There's good money in crime fiction,' he says, and kisses her and puts her in the car. 'You just think that idea out.'

'No, you do it: it's your idea.'

He looks at me and hesitates. 'As a matter of fact I've got such a lot of mowing to do.'

He departs in his car, leaving me with his murder problem. But Sally and the kid, too. How handsome they look in the sun on the green grass, the succulenf green of growth after hay; and the children in their several-coloured summer garments sitting in a group under the tree. Her late owner, to show her capacity, milked her when he brought her. The milk hissed into the pail as strongly as from a cow's teats: two pints of it. It looked a lot better than 'the good money' to me, these days.

We have just tidied the garden. Suddenly I hear

a fearful squawking from the hen-coop in the orchard. The mother hen has turned on her chicks, now a month old; she has one trapped inside the coop; it tries to squeeze out through the bars, but has grown too fat. I come to the rescue. Immediately the chick has escaped mother hen becomes her old tame self to me. So tame has she been, that after letting her roam with her brood I could pick her up whenever I wanted and put her back in her coop. For a month she has scratched indefatigably in the earth for her young, who drew back and rushed forward in a circle in time with her scratchings; she has never swallowed a morsel of food till they have been fed, only picking it up in her beak and dropping it at their feet. Even yesterday she was doing that. And now suddenly she abhors them. Having expelled them she now murmurs sweetly to me. I detect a new note in that murmuring. I pick her up and carry her into the field she came from, and put her down in front of the hen-house. It is nearly two months since she was there, but she walks straight up the plank and into a nest-box. That was not her favourite nest-box she remembers; she walks out of it, sees a broody hen in her favourite one, walks over the broody hen, sits on her, and lays an egg. Then she wanders comfortably round the field by herself.

I say to Nora, 'Now isn't that extraordinary?'

'Not at all.' she replies. 'After having a family of nine on one's hands for a month—.'

Anyhow she has been a model mother; eager to start all over again, forgetful of the past.

Our tea-time visitors arrive. One is an official in the ploughing up, ditching, and draining campaign. He is sorry for the farmers in that many of them are bad farmers entirely through lack of money. The

result is that they get turned out of their farms for bad farming, reinstated as bailiffs working for the government at government expense, and become good farmers.

Our friend and his wife are young. He is so responsible and so young that Nora and I feel more and more elderly as the time goes on. After tea we take a walk round, he in his unofficial capacity noting, —is he?—things on Sunday which he will descend upon me officially on Monday to put right. That ditch between the meadows might be deeper, but I explain that to deepen it I should have to start about a quarter of a mile farther down, to get a fall for the water. Heavens, why did I mention that ditch? It was vanity, drawing attention to a well-laid hedge, now thickening out well at the bottom. But he looked beyond. I hurry him back with the excuse I should like his opinion of my haystack, yet taking him deviously to avoid that rough meadow into which I was about to lead the way. Once he is safely back I keep him looking at things like the tomatoes in the greenhouse, and Sally and her white kid, who are not subject to any Government pressure. 'Where's that haystack?' he says.

With the directness of youth he plunges his arm in up to the shoulder, a thing which I have not done since it was first erected—because I guessed it might be getting too hot right inside, and—well, there was nothing I could do about it, so why give myself worry? But he drags out handfuls from the stack and we stare at it. 'Did you say silage or hay?' he asks with a smile.

Well, I am grateful to him really; it is best to know the worst.

They have gone. Yes, I am depressed. What a

fool, to be deluded by those hot scorching days into carting my hay too soon—at my age! Nora takes my arm and accompanies me over the evening feeding; holds Sally while I milk her.

'Anyhow, dear.' she says, 'you have bought that stack of good hay from Mr. Sonning and—well, we shall need some litter in the winter.'

Next morning I show William, wrenching out a handful and holding it under his nose, to have at least the satisfaction of showing that my fears were justified.

'Ah, well, there's bound to be a few sappy old bits of hogweed go a bit mouldy, but the *hay* now, solid as that is, that'll be lovely—just like bacca.'

THANKS BE TO GOD

Anthea and the twins cannot understand why suddenly Ada does everything for them and they may only talk to Mummy through the window. It is impossible to explain infectiousness. For Nora has, of all things, mumps.

Of course they like to have Ada looking after them; but it would be better still to have Ada *and* Mummy. Or at least to be able to run joyfully slap into Mummy after an hour's absence shouting, 'We've been to Ada's house; we went over the stiles and what do you think we saw—?' Instead of being fended off, caught, and held back like Sally's kid from Sally when we want

to milk her. Trust Ada, however, to turn deprivation into a treat. The whole afternoon they spend at her house, and she makes them each a little jelly for tea. 'And we went into the church.' Anthea tells me, 'and we heard the echo'—did Ada sing a hymn for them?—'and we saw the picture in the window; you know, inside its got more colours than outside.'

There is only one stained-glass window in the little church, through whose graveyard one passes on the way to Ada's house. The graveyard has reached and passed its climax of growth; it is nature's garden—first of celandines and violets; then buttercups, and finally sheep's parsley. This makes a waving, misty white all over it to the height of the headstones. And now haycocks stand in the churchyard, and flank the path between the headstones as for a hay-harvest festival.

It was a sad Anthea yesterday afternoon She tried to understand about the infectiousness, but the deprivation of touch and nearness was too much. I found her wandering disconsolately about the garden. And the extent of her unhappiness I gathered from the air of independence she adopted, answering me small-voiced in precise little phrases.

'Soon I shall be going to the post, would you like to come with me, Anthea?'

'Yes, if you aren't too long.'

'Would you like me to read you a story first from that book you have got?'

'No, thank you, I can read it for myself.' And she sits down under an apple tree and begins to read for the twentieth time the story of Cinderella. 'You go and get your letters ready for the post.'

'Well, would you just help me move the goslings' **pen** on to fresh grass first?'

'Yes.' She gets up and helps me shift the wire.

'There, what a nuisance. I've cut my finger on the wire.'

Often she will make a fuss just because she has been given a plate with a different pattern on it for tea. Now over the cut finger she is strangely quiet, matter of fact, saying, 'How silly of me to do that,' and turning away.

'Come—we'll bathe it.'

'Yes.' Her hand falls readily into mine now, and we go into the scullery and hold it under the tap.

'Have you a piece of rag?' I ask Mrs. Richards, who is in the kitchen.

'I'll get a bit.' She comes and binds it up.

'You know.' Anthea says looking at the finger as we walk across the fields. 'I don't call that a piece of rag: I'd call it muslin.'

Anthea can climb the stiles now, is tall enough to reach up and post the letter. She loiters in the churchyard, curious about the gravestones. We have told her their meaning; still she is fascinated. 'There's writing on them.' 'Yes—see if you can read it.' I select a fairly decipherable one. 'Elizabeth,' Anthea reads, and then after some words that the shadowless sun-glare blots out, 'Twelve years.'

'That means there used to be a little girl called Elizabeth who lived here once. I expect she played in the hay like you and Martin and Sylvia do.'

'She was a big girl if she was twelve. What else does it say?' She crouches down beside a fragrant hay-cock: she is eager for the written word now that she has learned to read. She has made a sudden leap in these last few weeks from words of one syllable to such difficult words as 'trouble.' Quietly, by herself, curled up in chairs in odd corners or in the

garden. One day we asked her to read aloud and were startled by her swift fluency. Before then it had been 'Tom Peg has a dog', etc. I think Mrs. Richards' daughter must have helped. Actually when she is reading to herself she is not reading silently. She is in fact literally reading to herself; that is, just loud enough for her own ears to hear. This, I take it, is the natural way to read, the way that people used to read, when reading was an art; because one comes across passages in old writings of someone sitting reading, and people stopping to listen. Still among country people it is the spoken word that is the reality; the written word is (what it really is) a cipher awaiting translation, lifeless without the voice.

Now Anthea crouching by the haycock is fascinated by words made in stone, channels of shadow. No doubt but the texture of the stone is vivid to her, and its weathering, the little gold blobs of lichen, and the grey, crumbled scales, and will always be part of the words she now reads, tracing them with her finger, feeling as well as seeing the shapes. 'She is not dead but sleepeth.'

'That means.' I explain, 'that when we say people die we mean that they go to sleep here and wake up somewhere else, in another world.'

This is not difficult to Anthea, for whom there are any number of worlds since she has learned to read. In fact reality is rather like a closed telescope—world within world within world, and every one inseparable and cogent. No conflict between dream and reality.

'But what's this?' she asks, staring down at a modern grave, which consists of granite stones loose inside a square curb. 'What are those stones for?'

'I really don't know: I don't think they look very pretty, do you? It would have been better if there had been flowers.'

'Or earth.' Anthea says.

We are at the stile again, but instead of getting over she sits down by a haycock. So we sit leaning against the hay and staring at the church, at Ada's house, and the two cornfields beyond already colouring to harvest; the wheat the colour of youngest oak leaves. The two best fields in the village, William maintains. And over the hedge there is the little stack of Mr. Sonning's I have bought, standing among his apple trees. It is as trim as a hive, not thatched, since it is to be moved; but covered with a cloth roped well round the eaves.

'But what is that, father?' Anthea is pointing upward to the squat turret of the church, which makes it look more like an ancient chapel.

'That's a weathercock. It is made to look like a cock—.' It turns, presenting itself endways—.

'It's a very thin one.'

'—and shows us which way the wind is blowing.'

She stares at its changeable motion. 'Why does the wind blow in different directions?'

'It blows whichever way it likes.'

'Did God make the wind?'

'He made everything.'

'Yes, he's the Father of everything."

I have been surprised to find the idea of God so natural to a child. But I should not have been, the sense of parenthood being omnipresent: even an extra-large stone is a father or a mummy stone, so the idea of a parentless world is unthinkable. Anthea's natural, positive happiness in the idea made me think that heaven is perhaps nearest to a child, not

in the ideal, wistful way of the grown-up, but in the quick and flashing validity of the world before its eyes.

The motion of the willow that stands over the church instead of a tower is as gleaming as a spring shower. The leaves have the soft movements of weeds under water, from which the fractured top sticks out like the mast of a wreck. Just a stark slivered trunk, motionless, rising out of the soft breathing gloss of leaves. I love that willow: I love all willows, but that one in particular. It has the combined beauty, in its stark top and luxuriant under-leaves, of the youth and age of the tree, of its winter and its summer. Especially as it stands in relation to the church—the tidal, grainy life-grey of the trunk beside the rough grey of the stone, and the elusive, flashing and flowing grey of the leaves in the wind. While there the buttress-rock of God stands breaking the wind. And another motion of wind is over the ripening cornfield opposite, an intricate weaving of the young ears.

The church door stands open: a beam slants across the dusk inside, amid all the general effulgence treasuring light. It is the hub of the seasons; yes, and it will always be, even as the human mind is the temple of evolved life. I find in the interior of the church a counterpart of mind : the stillness is like thought. It is not a question of religiousness but religion: it relates everything in the cycle like poetry; the wild rose to the wagon wheel. This is what secular living fails to do. The wild rose of June blossoms on its spray, and the men toil past in the heat of the hay-gathering and do not see it. Or if they see it they do not know it, otherwise they would want to dance and sing as their fathers

did. They have cheerfulness and skill, but not that exuberance which overflows into the limbs. The fact that they do not dance and do not sing, but cover their innate reverence of soul with a bit of cheap tin New-Worldliness against the weather of life, shows that the circuit of true living has been broken by this civilization.

I was drinking a glass of water, sitting in the orchard at four o'clock this morning; and as I tipped up the glass the glancing water was impregnated with the crimson of the dawn clouds. I lowered it, and watched that rosiness from outer space colouring its gleams and shadows. I felt at that moment an awe of water; I knew, not with my mind only but with my being, the gift of it, the treasure of that ounce or two of transparency glinting silver and rose in my hand.

I leaned against the oak tree where the hedge is low, and stood and watched the red dawn. And the wind came pure and impregnated from far like the water, to be answered by my own deep breath. Rooks came over, cawing as they went to their feeding grounds, and the blown motion of their wings and flight was one with the motion of the sky.

An aeroplane passed over, roaring and seeming dully to be thrashing its way. Dull, hard, straight movement across space, not flight: it cut the great harmony of the dawn but was powerless to break it. The sky grew together again after it had gone, was immediately healed and whole. 'As an arrow is shot at a mark, it parteth the air, which immediately cometh together again, so that a man cannot know where it went through.'

I saw man cutting across the cosmos with

roaring thousands of horse-power, yet having not the real power of one horse, the mystery of him standing there in the meadow, biting his fetlock, then suddenly rearing his head and swinging round startled. How that sweep of dawn reduced the thousands of horse-power to tiny fractiousness. The cloudy spaces are too big, we cannot say, 'Look, what a mighty thing that plane is.' The clouds' forms are too wonderful, we cannot say, 'What a marvellous thing we have made.' But we can wonder at the lark hurling herself, tiny and singing, into the sky. The sky accepts it; the air rings joyfully to its song.

All is a circuit: the sun, moon, stars, and worlds held and moving in a circuit. And man within himself is like the sky at night, full of immeasurable distances and unseen wheeling movement. There is an inward correspondence to every outward thing: we are a firmament and have our inward sun. And even as the sun is in the seed, the radiant principle that makes it spring again towards the sun out of darkness, so the Christ idea was sown in the world, and once sown springs up evermore. The past is sown again, springs up in further time, and fruits. The ideas, the souls, of men and women are sown in the world and spring forth by reason of their ripeness by the inner sun. This quickening cannot fail ultimately for evil, for sunlessness. Sowing and reaping within the framework of the firmament; that is the principle of our inward as much as of our outward life.

And this cycle is one of return, of death nourishing life. If we live bodily by this organic circuit we are at peace in the circuit of our inward selves: if we cut ourselves off from it with pavements and river-polluting sewage, we cut across the whole solar circuit of ourselves. Matter and spirit are inseparable

in this world; their disharmony means death. The earth lives, the sun lives; and we are poised between. The cutting ourselves off from the teaching, the touch of earth, has led to a 'spiritualized' religion, and emotions climbing each other like unstaked vines. The retribution is a present madness of materialism. We must re-learn by what is before us, practise earth's process, perceive and confirm that circuit which is an inner rule of our own being made manifest.

I did not purposely set out to find a philosophy of living. I have merely sat, tired physically, when the day's work is done in the field, either in my arbour in summer, or before a fire in winter, and not consciously thought. Watched perhaps a swallow on a wire, with sunned breast up there when earth is all in shadow, or a bumble-bee fastened on a saffron-headed helenium, black-and-gold-heavy, swaying with the flower in a puff of wind. And some cell of me, tired with sowing turnips till the earth seemed to sway, knows the feeling of the bee clinging to the flower, swaying as it sways. The gulf of the air beneath him, and the close warmth of yellow blazing into the many mirrors of his eyes. He had been bruised by the storm, and clung there against the sun-colour in a trance to revive.

Or I sat on the stile opposite that gap in the hedge through which I always seem to see the country which the old Norwich landscape painters knew. I know it well, I walk it almost daily; yet seen through that hedge-window it takes on a bloom of blue shadow, and becomes more than itself, the spirit of England. As I sat opposite it to-day, a harvest wagon passed across it with high, slow-bowling wheels, my neighbour seated sideways on the horse, and his man—or rather, his man's head—appearing above

the body of the wagon in which he sat. I thought they were off to the hayfield, but soon they appeared in the meadow on this side of the gap, and passed back again, wagon and man sunk in it and neighbour lolloping with the movement of the horse, staring at the trees. Soon they passed again across the gap as before, across its view of country, as though to reiterate and weave a human value into it. The great hind wheel quite closed the window, then opened it again, leaving a curved spray of wild roses in much the same curve as its own. I saw the wheel-shape still under the rose-spray, as the wagon went rolling away into the fields. It returned with a load of hay, and stopped, and the men stood awhile considering their stacking-place, and the poised wild roses framed all.

The wild rose and the church and the cornfield, now a level table of wheat, are to me a matchless trinity of life. A glance at the church melts time. I see that the wheat is eternal; the type of the wheat behind and beyond the actual wheat that grows through the centuries. The Englishman relates himself to it, his type is held true by it: he serves it, it serves him. The wild rose is poised for a day where he labours, and he puts it in his cap for a badge, that he, too, is capable of flowering up into delight, that the fragrance of the hay and the goodness of the corn are a delight for their own sakes. They are a mystery, too, which he acknowledges in the church whose stillness is of the past and the present and the future. Where bread lives as a symbol and light as a beam. The church is a being of his being; it is his type in communion with God: himself and his ancestors and his children unborn are there.

In there I see how small a part of me my body

encloses. It is a mere seed of self, sown in the world by that sum of me above personality, which eternally dwells with the type of the wheat. I never pass that church, with its Norman arch framing the font within, but I feel its power to keep alive the verity of a thing, whatever it is—flower or corn or man—that is brought into it. The daffodils at Easter are the very spirit of daffodils; their light shines from them. So that interior glimpse as I pass from meadow to cornfield draws everything together for me; invisible beams ray out to grass, to cornfield, to cottage, to cloud and sky. The hub of the wheel: and man's consciousness its lynch-pin, his happiness, forward-surging.

The shape stands, but the strength of it is shattered. Because man has lost the key to himself, his happiness. So the rose blooms and is not seen for labour. Unrelated, men are unhappy as a child at odds with its mother. Farming seems all sweat and labour for powers that rule from cities. The feet trudge, but are never lifted to beat the ground in joy. The husbandman walks silent: 'Farming is a worry.' he says, 'the weather is always against you.' He is mute in the roar of machinery.

But the rose will go on flowering. Again and again there will be those few days when the hedge is spread with its flowers, the most delicate of any. And the man will return to them at last.

Just a day's holiday, the first since that day on the eve of Spring, and it turned out to be a short day. After the first mile it was difficult not to turn back, such hoeing weather as this, seeing the hoers everywhere in the fields again. Not since the farming slump

had begun—how many years ago?—had I seen so many. Women and men together, old and young. Every root field had its company, pointing their hoes with the precision of aiming a gun, and with a swift motion nicking out a dozen plants, leaving one. By degrees the weedy field is conquered. At first the lines of root-plants can only be traced as a ribbon of paler green interwoven with the green of weeds. Then, where the hoers have been, the weeds are banished from the sides of the rows, and finally there is an old man steering a horse-hoe, another leading the horse, and behind them the land is left clean and perfect, the thin regular lines of plants the only growing things. Each waves its two young leaves in the summer wind, such a delicate small entity for all the work of men and horse and machine. Everywhere we saw care of the earth and pride in the earth again. It made us half-ashamed, seeing such weedless fields and gardens, such broad-leaved crops, that we had left behind us even a weed among our own. 'We ought to go back and get on with ours.' Nora said. 'I would like to.'

'So would I,' I said. 'But we will go on as we planned, because England is coming to life again, and it is good to realize what it is that we are a part of.'

Yes, England was coming to life again, even in those few miles. Every villager was out and caring for the land. The old grey mare plodding down the beet rows, the old grey man guiding the horse-hoe steadily between the tender plants. The young women beside the young men, sturdy with their long-handled, broad-bladed hoes, pointing them with such care, aiming them among the rows of plants, and then pausing and laughing, as though they desired nothing

better than to hoe, men beside women, all day. There were bright-overalled older women, too; but it was fine to see young women in the fields again, as hopeful as this weather.

The old tangled hedges were down, the ditches clean: the fields were brimming with greenness. Beside a church one of the great barns of old England was being re-thatched. Because of the shortage of tin: the tin had all gone to the war, leaving the country its ancient peace. The shining slant of new straw-colour was strong in the sun. Such a length and depth and breadth of it; the thatcher slowly descending his ladder in his labour-worn trousers and shirt was honoured by it, it proclaimed him. Seeing that modest figure diminishing down a green lane towards a cottage, leaving that beauty of laid straw, ten rods of it at least, shining sunward, I knew that all past controversy of old versus new was irrelevant. Here I felt the rebirth of our green island: this was not antiquarian, this was for ever. We are being reborn into our great days; the slanting plain of thatch told me so, like the lifted face and stmrdy laughter of the girl with the hoe. And an old man I passed who was so crippled that he could no longer walk: he had lodged himself on a soap-box, and was weeding his plot of ground like that, shifting himself along, box and all, somehow, bit by bit.

It was a rest for the horses mostly; between cutting the hay and the corn. They stood head to tail, flicking the flies off each other's faces in the meadows. They say, 'You never see a bad grey horse'; and here were two grey horses, white horses really, standing like that, while white ducks threaded their way out of a pond, and the farmhouse near had a room with opposite windows, a whitewashed room laved with

summer light, open to the day, empty, awaiting its people at evening; a doll on the window-sill, a stick by the door.

We passed a herd of cows on a common: we chose in our mind's eye one of them we should like to make our own, a red poll of deep colour, almost black. We coveted one of the grey horses, too: to-day was as good as an agricultural show to us; it was a perfect substitute for that, our pre-war day's outing of the summer, of admiring this or that fine beast.

Miles of sunlit fields of growing corn, and manure-heaps square and upstanding, and acres of odorous beans and blooming trefoil. The old fodder crops that had faded out in the days of falsely cheap feeding stuffs and slump. I had not seen anything like it since the days of twenty years ago, when I had come to a traditional Suffolk farm. As I rode slowly along beside Nora there came to me again in great strength, through the scents of the flowering fodder crops, the true traditional feeling of the farming. It was self-reliant again, reborn, with hoers happy in the fields. We passed margin lands, tangled with bushes, which future people coming back into this country-side would clear and make fruitful, building again our green island, that turns every dwelling into a bower.

We walked down a narrow path between hedges to a church. The path was shadowy, but ahead two children played where a gap let through a flash of sunlight. They *were* the sunlight, the bright issue from our shadowy, narrow vista. It put a false perspective upon them, the narrow path making them seem doubly distant, yet unnaturally bright, as though they would vanish at some flicker of the sun in our eyes through the leaves. They were at the

churchyard gate, and were the prelude to another vision, a graveyard kept like a garden, single peonies opening like great tulips and roses climbing up the old flint church. The place was enclosed by trees, silent, deserted. A sanctuary of stillness after the wide views and the striving, populous fields. A stone-lintelled door in the side of the nave was embowered with rose boughs; the glass of the windows was clear. It was at such a door that Christian knocked and was answered by Interpreter.

Inside the church there was panelling carved by men and boys of the village. This was a war memorial of 1914-18. But I was not saddened by the sight of it as so many war memorials must sadden those who pass them to-day; for here were carved those natural emblems that are for ever—a spray of daffodils, the blacksmith's anvil, a horse-shoe, a miller's sack, and a mouse. Not crudely, nor yet masterfully carved; but tentatively, desiringly. In these emblems I saw a turning back that was also a rebirth, a looking forward. The work of men who loved their land, learning again, tremulously, the old sweet controls.

It is plum-picking time, greengage-picking time, time to take honey if you have any hives. The trees round Mr. Terrell's buildings are hung with green and golden drops of fruit. Mr. Terrell is in his stable: he is at the other end of the process. Embowered in fruitfulness, he is forking out manure. Green cavernous avenues are every way he looks; they arc vistas of his years: his life has shadowed him over with a rich green; success, in fact. He would be mindful of its origins at such a time—diligence and dung. »

So I find him, bright, quiet-smiling. Another is

not far behind me. Honey, she wants. Is there any chance of a pound or two by next Saturday? Especially for Saturday, as there is a birthday. Well, his son did say he would take some honey off to-morrow. Two pounds? He will see how the crop turns out. He will do his best for her. She leaves a two-pound jar, hopeful. Mr. Terrell puts it with others that have been left.

It does not need much imagination to picture how Mr. Terrell forty years ago began planting a four-acre orchard, and now it is a cornucopia. Or perhaps it does; to see how he has persevered to this point, when money has lost its sway and produce is the power. The power in the land, literally; though it was far from so when he planted his first tree, and has been even less so often since. Had he some prevision? No, only an instinct for feeling bed-rock under the ebb and flow, which compelled him forward against the tide. What does need imagination is to see his four-acre field as he first saw it, bare to the sky, windswept and derelict, and the little house standing bleakly.

How many people have gone in for market gardening, for fruit growing, since he took his place, and gone out of it again, capital melted away, and enthusiasm. Mr. Terrell never had that preliminary glow of the fireside project, which the disillusioned do not allow as one of the pros of a scheme that has gone so completely con. After all, they had their dream. Mr. Terrell never had any capital sum for its pillow. With him it was all piecemeal, perilous; and he knew too much of the business for rosy vision. And yet after all he had, besides skill, the only power on earth that could make four acres keep a man for forty years and rear a family, in a country that has rejoiced in being the world's dumping-

ground for food. Nothing but such singleness as is in his smile and look could have been proof against reason, and against mood.

As we pass from the stable to the barn he fingers certain plums, names them, differentiates their flavours; is particular to tell me that those are the real old English greengages. His talk is full of qualities. He planted them all as slips from a single tree. There is no rigid order, the boughs twine wild-looking among one another. They are set too close everybody says. They make an arbour of his pig-sties. 'But I expected *some* to die.' he explains. The small capitalist who goes in for the business has a mathematical plan. Mr. Terrell, scraping shillings together, has always felt his way. Literally he planted his orchard a few shillingsworth at a time. He grafted and budded young trees. When he could temporarily afford no more he even grew fruit from stones and pips. There are puzzling nameless varieties.

He has two of his acres under the plough. 'Yes, our onions did well: they're up there.' He points to steps leading up to a loft in the barn roof. 'My son laid that floor.' he says, as I mounted to see the onions. They lay spread out over the whole of it, large, sound onions. 'There'll be just enough to let every one of our customers have two pounds.' This is a novel situation, of conferring food—as though the consumer has at last discovered the value of it, which the grower has always known in terms of labour and care; as though he and the consumer at last talk the same language.

I praise the floor as a dry storing place. 'One of my boys is good at working with wood; **the** other he's clever with iron. It's lucky **to** think **that**

they are both at home now, and took to the business. I can't do much now: I'm over seventy: I never was very strong.' He moves with a certain stiffness, but one does not notice, seeing only the alertness of his eyes. He looks perhaps sixty, no more.

There is a grinding mill in the barn. In the days when trade was bad, and the sons growing to manhood, the four acres seemed quite inadequate for them, and one boy decided to go to Canada. But then a neighbouring farmer said, 'Look here, I'm giving up my grinding business: if you care to take it on I'll let you have the mill and engine cheap.' So the boy—the one clever with iron—reconsidered his decision, and instead of migrating to Canada bought the mill and set it up in his father's barn.

We are walking round his holding now, through apple avenues. It is not a very scientific holding: he does not spray his trees. Originally the cost was a consideration. He produces saleable fruit, and that satisfies him. But in another way he is less questionably thrifty, that is in planting trees in his boundary hedges. The fruit that overhangs the highway on that account he does not look to gather; that is a sort of bonus to the passer-by. In the same spirit, while he is weighing out the greengages Nora has commissioned me to get, he is insistent that I should help myself from the basket out of which he tips them.

Ah, the sweetness of greengages in their season: it is all the sweetness of summer. I go on eating and spitting out the stones. Old English greengages, thousands of them hanging before my eyes; Mr. Terrell in his barn talking of his life, till he forgets what weight of fruit it is we are weighing. Nora meanwhile has gone on to the town to get rubber rings for her

preserving jars, has returned and seen my bicycle still standing there, and reached home; and still I am talking and eating greengages. For I am truly at home here, sitting on this bag of grist, my heart is at home. For I have met an English peasant-proprietor, that most honourable, rare, and misunderstood of men. It is fineness, not boorishness, that is his hall-mark. A feast of English quality it is: this one man's success cancels a host of defeats for me: it is the very sweet and secret juice of England that has come to fruition against the bitterest weather, economic and political, of all time.

And this is his life which he relates to me: it began with a chance word I let fall on grinding, on flour and bread, so to cooking. 'Yes, I understand about baking: I can cook. It was very handy when my wife was having the children. You see, I started work as a baker's apprentice when I was eleven. I used to carry a board on my head. It was long hours in those days.' His father worked for a nurseryman. When rheumatism crippled the father and he could no longer work, his son left the bakery and took on his job in the nursery garden. 'My brother worked there, too. We never earned more than fourteen shillings a week, either of us. Still, we saved a little somehow; and one day, passing this way on a journey for my master, I saw this little house and field for sale, and it came into my head we might buy it and start on our own. We hadn't got enough money, of course, but we managed to get a mortgage. The house was a double-tenement then. I got married and lived in one end, and he had the other. But after a while he went abroad. Those were difficult times: the children came quickly. Often I didn't know which way to turn for a sixpence.'

The picture is clear as he talks of those days—winter, snow clogging under the horse's hooves as he drove his van to a town fifteen miles away to sell his goods, so that he had to get down every mile or two in the bitter wind. A poor trade when he got there, then the slow drive home in the dark to the infant family in the little house. Yet always he fought to keep out of debt. He even delayed ordering his seeds till he had the money. The firm he dealt with once wrote inquiring for his order. He answered, telling them why he had not given it. They offered him credit, gladly. One year he had a bit of luck with pigs; bought a sow going cheap in the market, and she turned out to be a good breeder. He sold a batch of pigs for fifty pounds. Fifty pounds: it was wealth; but it went to pay off the mortgage. The house and acres were his own untrammelled property, but still he had no ready money. It was like starting all over again. To get his land ploughed he had to hire. Of course, the plough came when the weather was such that it often did more harm than good. Eventually he sank what little money he had again accumulated in a small mechanical plough. It soon went wrong. He had it repaired, price seven pounds. He had been up and down the field half a dozen times with it, after getting it back from the repairer, when it literally blew up. 'I was glad to be quit of it. I turned to my horse: I understand a horse. I bought a one-horse plough: but it was too heavy for one horse to pull on this land. Then my eldest boy who was growing up said, "I'll make you a little plough, dad, just right for Tommy." I laughed, not thinking he could do it. But he worked away with all sorts of odd bits of iron; and there is the plough that he turned out.'

It is a neat thing: Mr. Terrell points out its

component parts, which have half a dozen different sources, some of them domestic. But it works. Later, the same son made a miniature rib-roller out of worn convex plates of his grinding mill clamped together. Next came a horse-hoe—I believe there was part of a bedstead in that; then a harrow. Now there is a complete set of miniature farm implements for the two arable acres. The other son has his bees: he maintains the barn and buildings.

What a force of faith and ingenuity has gone to the sustaining of those few acres. I marvelled aloud. Mr. Terrell explained, 'Of course, I've always loved the work. However hard I *'d* worked all day, if there was just a glimmering of light left, I would walk round the place last thing. I loved to see the things growing.'

Many of his trees have neighbourly pedigrees. A slip from Mr. Sparling's Crimson Bramley, a sucker from Mrs. Carey's Golden Gage.

Well, there is the explanation; a dogged sort of love—single to the exclusion even of business sharpness (I've not liked to charge poor people so much') —creative, re-creative. For after all how should Mr. Terrell look sixty, who is over seventy and was not strong in the beginning? Whence the ever-present smile? Another, who had the business instinct, has travelled the world, made money and lost money, while this man has been watching things grow in the last glimmerings of days. Now, at last, he has come into his own (does his brother call him lucky?) nationally and economically: the whole of England acknowledges him, the primary producer. But he never speculated on that chance, living his quiet destiny.

This has immensely cheered me. That a man has

only to be certain in himself to do what he will. This I have felt—but dimly, waveringly. Now it is proved to my sight. For of all impossibilities, to one who knows something of farming, to buy four acres without any capital, and then proceed to make it support you and a family for forty years is the most impossible.

Finally Mr. Terrell and his wife have refused an old age pension. It would mean undergoing an official's inquiry into their means. Besides—'I don't think we ought to take it.' he says, with his young smile.

HARVESTFESTIVAL

For some reason—when we were shocking up the beans this afternoon I thought of an elderly schoolmaster I met years ago at a friend's house. He had recently retired, and was having a house built. It had proved to be more perplexing than he had imagined. Only that day he had received an assortment of door-handles to choose from. He was feeling a bit engulfed by all these details as we walked round my friend's garden after tea. The fields were ripening, and I spoke of the harvest at hand. Immediately his eyes brightened, and he told me of how in 1917 he and a party of his pupils had spent the summer

holiday helping with the harvest on a Yorkshire farm. How they had worked and eaten and slept! He continued to dwell upon it for the rest of the time I was with him; and when we said good-bye he stood taller, younger: that harvest holiday had been a great event in his life. There had been nothing quite like it before or since; I could see that by the way it kindled him to tell of it, escaping from the door-handles.

And yet, superficially, what is there in it? Here we are, trudging round a field that is none too dry, picking up harsh bean sheaves that scratch our arms, grasping a thistle three times out of five, till the finger-ends are tender. But yet who would miss it? Who would see a harvest go by and have no hand in it? That is the feeling of young and old; not just those in the position of the retired schoolmaster, to whom it is a novel change, but old men who have toiled with scythe and sickle in their day, as well as the boys who stand expectant round the corn here armed with sticks.

Why should Mr. Winch come? He has earned his ease. Yet how he can sympathize by a murmured word, as Jack Ridgewell speaks of his old father now confined to his bed and basket chair. 'He finds the time hang so. You see, when he had his strength he would think nothing of walking seven miles after he'd finished work and had his tea, to cut up a pig he had killed the day before, He could have put the horse in the trap, but he wouldn't bother, he'd just as lief walk. As long as he had a pipe of bacca he didn't mind whether it rained or blew.'

He had been, after all, a man of winds; a miller, a dresser of corn, and of his own millstones, too. ' He'd tap away all day and all night, to get the job

done, and come in with blood all over his arms.' The minute punctures of flying fragments of stone were the cause.

Right away back in the windmill we are now: but here we are in the beanfield, too, taking just so many rows of sheaves to a shock. The field curves into a corner of the wood: we come to a narrow end. 'Now, let's see—best put five rows to a shock here, or we shall be left with just two. Then up there' (where the binder stands in some trouble) 'we can take four again'.

Yes, we are very much in the present. 'Look at that cloud boiling up.'

'What are you chaps looking for; lost your gold watch?' Two are searching about at the edge of the wood. 'No, we were just seeing what a lot of nuts there are this year.'

'Ah—' Jack stares over the stirring mass of the standing wheat ('Yeoman?' 'No,' says Mr. Camm, 'it's got a curious name—I've forgotten—but bred from Yeoman'). 'I don't like to see the wind draw water into the sun.'

There is a stopping-place by the gate; again and again we come round to it. The place where bottles of tea lie in the grass, where the small square tin is brought out and shag laid nicely along the cigarette-paper, coaxed with the fore-finger.

'How are your arms? They feel it a bit till they get hard.'

It is only the beginning of harvest, and the arms are tender yet, embracing sheaves of sharp straw.

'Old Boley—d'you remember old Boley?' (the tongue sliding along the cigarette paper). 'I never did see him with a pair of gloves on; and there were some thistles on that farm then. His hands were

like leather. Why, he'd hedge all winter with his bare hands, too.'

The binder is still in trouble: a bean gets under the canvas where an inch of it is torn and stops everything. Is it moving again?

'One day, when Mr. Greaves had High Farm, I came into the field and he called to me, "Just come here a minute." The men were shocking up wheat at the far side of the fifteen-acres. "Tell me, Jack, which way are those men moving?"

'I looked for a bit, and then I told him, "They're moving downhill."

' "Thank you," he said. "That's all right, they're good steady chaps. I don't like to be a spuffler."

'He would come to you and say, "Don't plough too deep, two or three inches, that's plenty." He'd make a man take a log off the harrows. "Give the horses plenty of corn," he'd say.

'Of course,' Jack added in explanation of such a paradoxical farmer, 'he had plenty of money.'

So we go round and round the field and unwind the years. Jack and I happen to be next to each other: we meet with a sheaf under each arm, stand sheaf to sheaf, and part again, stooping after more.

'My father used to kill a pig a week at home. I used to help hold the pig. One day I kept quiet till he'd done, then I said, "I'm going right in now."

' " Why, what for?" '

' "That pig bit my thumbnail off."

'My father: no weather never hurt him. He only had the doctor once, for a cold that he took no notice of and it took hold of him inside. "Why aren't you in bed?" the doctor said as soon as he see him. He gave him a bottle of medicine. He only took one drink of it. "Ugh—fetch me some beer." He

wouldn't go to bed. I see him rolling about on the green by the mill in pain; but he went on taking corn and meal about in the cart; till gradually he got the better of it.'

The young boys are whittling at their sticks with pocket knives, waiting for the rabbits; country boys and evacuees.

It is certainly going to rain; but we are close behind the binder with our shocking of the sheaves. There is a power of rest in the midst of labour which these men have. Though the arms are tender now, and the finger-ends; and the feet tired with walking round and round the field of sticky earth; yet the eyes are bright with the recreated years. The mind reposes on the ample traditions of use, of custom, and of men who knew the need to do the same things in the same sort of way. Of weather that behaved thus and thus; of weather whose freaks, remembered, set a limit to the worst that that oncoming cloud may do. A sort of rainbow of the unwritten covenant, assuring us that we *shall* bring all this corn in safe at last.

'When the wheat was damp my father used to grind a little maize with it: that would clear the stones.

'Another thing, sacks and sacks of acorns my father used to grind. Wonderful grub to fat pigs on. They used to send the kids out gathering them in the woods; it didn't take them long to collect a bushel. Everybody had a pig fatted on acorns and a little barley meal.

'Yes, we always did our own bacon. Wet days we'd have a whole day at home doing the bacon, or baking bread and cakes.

'I wouldn't have any but stone-ground flour. My father he wouldn't eat any other.'

'But what's the difference? Isn't it just a matter of how much is dressed out of the flour afterwards?' I ask.

'No. Roller mills only crush the grain, the stones work contrary to each other; they grind it. There's a lot of difference. Try fatting pigs on meal from a roller mill and then on stone-ground. They'll do twice as well on the stone-ground: it's more digestible.'

We shell out some of the beans we are shocking. They are a good crop: we hold them in our palms. 'They will fat cattle, same as they used to, as I can remember.

'The taters look well, too. The biggest crop of taters I ever saw was grown with fish manure. Truck loads of cods' heads and innards came to the station. How they stank. The men could hardly bear to unload 'em. They made a heap of them in the field. The rats that ran about there! Master great old rats: people got so they hardly dare go that way at night. At last it was all spread and ploughed in and the taters set. We lifted tons and tons off that field, the biggest taters I ever see—and every tater tasted of fish.

'Yes, that's truth I'm telling you. You couldn't eat 'em; not except you were eating fish, too.

'These Fen taters, too; they're big and beautiful to look at—but no flavour.'

So, there's no easy way out, no short cut to fertility and flavour. But turnings of dunghills, slow compostings of decays. . . .

This we know from far back. It reinforces us to exchange the proofs of it.

This is what harvest is: hard hard labour of body, but also a stamping of the feet for joy upon the great bedrock of tradition.

It has started to rain. Mr. Camm is hurrying off with the binder canvas under his arm, to get his wife to sew it. It all conies back to the woman then, and her needle and thread, to get the harvest on.

I am leaning on the gate, and suddenly it is as though I had all day to do that and nothing else, or anything else; to stare at butterflies, at clouds. But it is not so; it is the attitude of leaning on the gate, familiar and easy, that induces the idle mood, looking out upon the passing world. The passing world at the moment is represented by nothing more lively than a strip of road and a field of indifferent barley beyond. Just outside the gate stand Nora and Anthea waiting for the bus. Martin and Sylvia and I are on the inside waiting to see them off. They are calling all sorts of messages through the bars, while I try to remember things needed from the market town, but this idle leaning on the gate has put them all out of my mind.

The bus arrives with half the village already packed into it. We receive a general smile, and our wave to our two becomes in return a general send-off. Small journeys become big ones by reason of their fewness, and something of an ancient 'God-keep-you' follows them from me, as they go forth into the dangerous hours of to-day.

The twins go dancing away from the gate across the meadow on a game of their own, and I must set to work. There has been rain: the weather, now black, now brilliant, holds up the harvest. It is the twins' birthday to-morrow. There is a bed of roses in front of the house smothered in weeds, and the grass ankle-deep around it. There has been no time to touch

it. But this morning I think that by working furiously I could get that looking trim by dinner time as a contribution to the birthday. I am worried by a shortage of food for the growing chickens. I set to work with a fork, turning over the bed, and wondering what to feed my birds on. They are at the hungry stage of growth, and there is no corn for them to glean yet. But the sight of sour earth turning over fresh and dark is a never-failing pleasure, and I forget to worry. Suddenly I am aware of a moving mass at my feet, almost on the prongs of my fork. It is the chickens: they have seen me or smelt the earth, and are through the hedge and round it and over it, and are gobbling, pecking, squawking, tugging, fighting. Some are feasting on ants and ant-eggs, bringing their beaks down like little picks, others are straining to swallow large worms whole. It is as though we were to swallow boa-constrictors. After each morsel has been accommodated inch by inch, and the beak finally shut down on the last of it, there is a thoughtful pause, the wide eye is vivid with some inward crisis of capacity. But only for a minute: the internal problem is solved; the chicken rushes again almost upon the points of my fork in eagerness for more. They snatch worms from under rolling clods that are boulders three times their size, and deftly escape the falling weight. My work is clogged; I am mobbed by them—but how they are being fed! I would almost go without my own dinner to see them gobbling and gulping so, their flimsy war diet being reinforced with vast quantities of meat. How beautiful the roses look now against the dark earth, shining clear, like colour lit up out of night. I cut the grass all round, which is not grass, ours not being a proper lawn, but a mass of wild white clover. The right lawn,

though, for a smallholder, equal to having a patch of lucerne. Selina soon has her nose buried in a heap of it.

That such a feast of protein should be a by-product of an hour stolen for quite useless beautifying. The fact of the twins being three years old becomes a feast for all.

So Sunday comes, that is the birthday. A fine day. No, I insist I will not do a thing more than feed and milk to-day, in spite of many temptations to small tasks. Some are never happy without employment for their hands: for myself, I like to be idle or hard at work. If idle, then positively idle. In hard work there is also a repose. It comes as a gift. Sunday is the fount of it: one acquires a reservoir of it by observing Sunday as a day of rest, and it lasts one through the week. Yes, there was wisdom in the dispensations of our forefathers.

The birthday was memorable for bubbles and candles. Penny bubble pipes were the favourite presents: there was a consolation one for Anthea, too. By nightfall two out of the three were broken; but it had been a glorious bubble, that birthday. A dish of soap and water was soon consumed: Martin imbibed quantities through holding his pipe at the wrong angle. When the other two had mastered the art of swelling out a bubble with gentle breath, he was still puffing furiously through his, expecting to see an enormous bubble appear at once. Then he, too, got the knack, and soon bubbles were floating about in the sun all around them. So great was the bubble enthusiasm that I was only allowed the loan of a pipe for the time it took to blow one bubble, and that not a very good one. Then Martin dropped his pipe and it broke; but he went on blowing at the stemless bowl, assimilating even more soapy water

than before. He still had a good appetite for dinner.

There were bats and balls for the afternoon.'I'm going to keep my ball for ever and ever.' cried Anthea, and next minute lost it. My sitting down under a tree for a rest turned the game of the balls into one of Aunt Sally—at me. While I fended off one, another would catch me a stinging blow on the ear, till I had to get up and go for a ride in self-defence.

I was glad, for what a country it is, of fruitful farms as individual as people, in the setting of their houses and buildings. No two are alike, but each by some pond or rise or fall of ground is limited and expressed. By a pond of a farm set back among trees, a group of people were fishing; boys and a woman, the farm wife she looked. While the farmer or his man drove an apparently endless procession of cows across the road to his buildings for the milking. The people at the pond were still and silent, caught up into that connection with the still water that their lines made; then moved, lifting their rods and lowering them again one after another with just such a sway as a breath of air made among the willows. While the cows crowded slowly across, putting their weight down carefully on their small pointed hooves on the unfamiliar surface of the road. And the farm stood away back there, smoking like a labourer at rest.

Derelict meadows I saw, as well as well-shocked harvest stubbles; neatness side by side with neglect. Plenty of room for improvement, but nothing to put one out of heart really. Knowing the constant application necessary even to make an acre or two thrive, I could see it all as rural England's ragged arms wide open to receive her people back again from cities. Then every farmstead will still be as

individual as a face, and the most careful husbandry will yet leave that lane roaming into greenness, such is the genius of the land.

I passed many fine homes, cottage and farm and hall, riding that little way; and heard children calling to one another, and saw women walking out in the sun with their babies; and I thought, there is no land more beautiful, more powerful for good—not with armies—than England. Here it is flat, but a blue veil of air hangs over the distance that is more mysterious than heights, and a new stack stands like a small bright ark upon it. It has the effect of beauty in a chosen setting, though it all came about by work and daily need.

So, turning in at my own place again, I saw it from the outside, and how the many miles I had walked—and hours worked—between field and field, had composed that picture. Indoors, looking out upon the rose-bed I had cleared, now all bloom, the children were sitting down to their birthday tea. I hastened in, with a handful of those green and scarlet balls gathered from wild briars, just in time to see the six candles flaming. They hardly lasted longer than matches, but it was enough, the birthday was commemorated. They had talked so long about those candles, how many would there be, of what colour? It was candles even more than cake they were looking forward to. Now we all blow—puff, puff, puff—out they go, and the sugar roses that are their holders are distributed and eaten.

After tea, songs. Anthea is growing up. 'I'm getting tired of "Hush-a-bye Baby".' But it is the twins' birthday, so they have their choice, followed by 'Greensleeves' and 'Barbara Allen' for Anthea. And so to bed, hugging their presents.

Before Anthea set out in the bus yesterday to buy the presents, I had the task of extracting pennies from her red money box with the aid of a knife. It took me a quarter of an hour to get ninepence. Her presents to the twins were two similar red money boxes; so in days to come my task of the knife will be trebled.

The twins are having a wild game on their bed, while Anthea is having her bath. Plenty of baths to-night owing to the rain. At six o'clock these summer mornings there is a slight sound which only we parents recognize. It is the creak of bed-springs. The twins are jumping about pretending to be goats leaping in the air, or penning themselves in the frame of a stool after taking the top off. I have to get up and send them back to bed—till my back is turned. It is our signal to get up.

To-night the same game is on. It is all animals with them. At tea I coughed. 'Father did nearly bark,' Sylvia said.

Anthea is full of an idea for to-morrow. In the town she saw some pottery from a local clay. 'One day we are going to where they make those things and I'll get some clay and be able to make jugs and basins for us to use.'

'You'll have to bake them.'

T i l bake them in the oven. To-morrow I'm going to start to make some with my plasticine so I'll know the shapes to do them when I get the clay.'

She runs off to the bedroom. In there they are strangely silent. When Nora and I go in they are all sitting side by side making motions with their hands.

'We're having a lovely feast,' Anthea cries; and they continue passing delicious nothings to one another.

Monday afternoon: it is fourses time. The barley stack is roof-high, and Jack Ridgewell who builds it goes round it critically before sitting down to food and drink. There is a place for him on the stack cloth which, half unrolled, makes a sort of couch, with rolls of it at either end for bolsters. On this we recline, leaning back on one elbow. The grass is green with aftermath, the stack white, and over the hedge are the summer-baked red tiles of Mr. Camm's buildings. There is no road within half a mile: all around us are woods. It makes a classic meal, a banquet of bread, this reclining after labour. And the talk happens to be, as it might have been in Virgil's day, of goats. For one of the young labourers, commenting on our two which he passes daily, says, 'I've drunk gallons of goat's milk; I would now if I could get it. My father used to keep three on the common. Butter and cheese, too, we made: it was lovely.' This though he milks eight of Mr. Camm's cows daily, and you might think would be glad to forget the subject. He enumerates all the ways in which he considers goat's milk to be superior to cow's milk. 'It's richer and lighter and sweeter. I suppose you'll not be wanting to part with that kid of yours?'

Others take up the tale; of the commons that here have been so much part of the cottager's life, and are becoming so again now. Of a certain pugnacious billy which attacked all it met, till a well-aimed blow by Jack Ridgewell felled it one day, and the owner came running out very upset. 'You've killed him.' he cried. Jack was quite unrepentant, and a further fight seemed impending. But at that moment the billy opened its eyes, and got up and stood meekly. Nor did it attack anybody again.

Which led us to pugnacious rams, and a particular

ram, a champion of pugnacity; and how old Walker, now dead, was charged by it when ditching. He could not move quickly enough to get away, so he faced it with his spade which he levelled at its head. The one who tells this story holds out a big slice of bread to illustrate the spade. He shows with his other hand how the charging ram met it: the fingers divide about the spade of bread. 'That cleft his skull clean in half.'

'You've killed my best ram.' his master said.

'I can't help that; I only held my spade up; he killed hisself. Don't, he'd have killed me.'

As we resume work I see in the distance a procession of children. Three are mine, one is Ada's: Ada and Nora follow, laden.

It is a gleaning picnic, an idea of Ada's with which to follow up the birthday, hailed with delight. They make their way into Mr. Camm's wheat stubble. I saw in the daily press the other day a picture 'by our own cameraman' of people gleaning—among shocks of corn. An unheard of thing—but presumably the picture went down all right. In fact, not only must the corn be carted, but the field raked before gleaning can begin. It is a concession (a tacit one) that our family can go gleaning in Mr. Camm's field while the rakings have yet to be carted.

While waiting for a load I go over and talk to them. Gleaning is a kind of diligent indolence: there is no end to it. You do not seem to be working; but strolling, meditating, glancing at the view. Yet in comparatively little time you have a sheaf of corn; corn which would otherwise be wasted, for these fields are too near the wood and its foxes to be safe for fowls, even by day. Seeing the gleaners at it I realized for the first time what a quantity of corn

is left even after the modern binder and rake have been over the field. The ears are by no means easy to see among the stubble; the eyes must follow every straw to its end to see if an ear is attached. There are booby traps for the beginner; you see a whole heap of ears and stoop eagerly to shovel them up with both hands, only to find they are empty. They are those that the birds have pecked off when the corn was still standing, and dropped upon the ground to feast on them there. What restraint is necessary, too, to go picking up a straw at a time, when whole heaps of rakings lie there to hand. One realizes, as no one who has not gleaned can ever do, what it meant to Ruth that Boaz told his young men to drop some ears out of the sheaves for her to pick up. The word gleaning has come to have a wrong shade of meaning, in the sense of picking up beggarly remnants; but actually some of the fattest ears are among the gleanings.

It is a little festival of the fields. The whole village is out at it. Mr. and Mrs. Barron are in the next field; they have been there all afternoon, slowly and persistently peering, bending, stretching. They are so intent on their task that, after beginning side by side, they part and nearly meet again a number of times without being aware of each other, following the erratic course that one straw after another leads them. They return at intervals to the heap of corn they have gathered, to add to it. They glean holding their bunch of wheat in the right hand, as a duck might be held by the neck. They pick up more and more with the same hand till it can take no more: the left hand is filled in like manner.

At last a daughter calls Mr. and Mrs. Barron in to tea: they take up a surprisingly big load for so

much standing, and carry it home to their orchard acre.

Our family has already settled to tea, the children having gathered what they consider a sufficient gleaning to justify the picnic. Anthea has brought a book, because 'I won't want to be corning all the time'. Ada's boy is also fond of reading, and has his eyes on the book. As soon as Anthea closes it he opens it, and reads avidly all through tea. At least until Nora passes him one of her jam tarts, which is of such excellence that he just sits munching with a smiling stare at the distance. Beside the family is the sheaf of wheat they have gleaned. Nora is kindled by this gleaning, though hers is interrupted many times by young voices claiming attention. 'Mummy, here's a pretty flower.' 'What for is that man with that horse over there?' 'Oh, mummy, I've a prickly thing in my shoe.'

'If we could come alone together one day,' she says, 'we could gather a lot.'

Mr. Camm's tractor is drawing another load of barley to the stack, which now claims me again. Jack is having a hard job to stack it. The corn was laid, and the sheaves are practically shapeless, short, very dry and slippery, and impossible to bind into place. Added to that there are several loads of loose barley at the bottom of the stack, which makes the worst possible foundation for sheaves. 'They ride about on that loose barley: do what you will you can't keep 'em from riding.'

The loads themselves come leaning drunkenly. Once Mr. Camm took both hands off the steering-wheel of the tractor to make urgent gestures, which the men interpreted, and ran with forks to hold the load propped the rest of the way to the stack.

We are few now, for the young man who loves goat's milk has gone to milk the cows. I hear the ting of milk in pail. The buildings, which have slept silent all afternoon, now wake to life with the mooing of cows, bleating of calves, followed by the high-pitched squeal of pigs sensing food. Even the ducks are roused, and come up out of the pond quacking loudly.

The energy of body, eye, instinct, that Jack has to exercise in keeping this stack right: who could begin to cope with such a thing, not born to it? A school of art could as well teach a man to produce masterpieces as an agricultural college inculcate the power. There is nothing to induce such humility in a man who, like myself, considers he has a good working knowledge of farming, as to fork to a man building a stack of these short, glassy sheaves. I who write and am generally vocal about farming; what a quack I suddenly feel beside Jack, very quiet in stress here.

I see that nothing will do fundamentally but a return to the land by generations, an absolute drenching of the human being in these processes. Books can be written on agricultural policy, will go on being written, yet never touch on this vital, untellable, essential skill, which is the corner-stone.

The stack is safely completed as far as the roof: he begins to draw it in. The sheaves now come up with a little green in them. He is glad, for the weeds make the sheaves less slippery. They are better sheaves: I campass them to him butt-end first; I can see which are the butt-ends.

Yes, he could glean two sacks of wheat in a week, he says, if he could choose his field. He knows just the **kind** of farmer and just the kind of crop most

favourable to the gleaner: the kind whose dilapidated horse-rake jumps on the rough stubble and leaves plenty in the furrows.

Seeing the gleaners, having a vista of them from this stack roof all about the fields of the village, I wonder how much corn is being retrieved this year in this parish, which in years past has been lost. And how much that will be in the whole of England; and how much year upon year in the past we as a nation have let rot into our soil again and replaced from abroad, for the want of this pleasant, sociable, and healthy occupation of evenings on the stubbles. The wheat ear lying there, that has escaped all the implements of harvest, has now become a symbol to us all.

Poor William, unloading uphill to me on the roof of the stack—if he takes off his waistcoat he gets the barley awns down his trousers; if he does not he sweats. As his wagon-load sinks down between the two stacks there is not a breath of air. At last it is too much: he strips off his waistcoat.

From the barley stack's narrow top we look down on to the roof of a hay-stack. 'Do you remember how high that stood when we built it?' Only a month or two back: it seems seasons ago.

The sun sets. I see groups of women and children moving slowly from the stubbles with sheaves and baskets. One family has a sackful. They have a dilapidated bath chair, in which the sack is settled and pushed home like a limp convalescent.

My family has gone some time since. Ada follows with her basket on one arm and her little dog on the other, who is so old now that she can only sniff the air of the hedgerow and go to sleep again, where once she rushed eagerly through thorns and briars.

Does she remember those days, I wonder, in the whiff of rabbit-smell she had to-day?

I make my way across the fields, shaking as many of the barley awns as I can out of my shirt first; but they mostly settle round my waist. I gather up the sheaf of gleanings Nora has left for me to take, this one precious sheaf after forking wagon-loads, and cut across the stubble homeward. I break off shoots of ground ash as I go, for Sally loves such things, and her affectionate bleat of welcome merits a response. I am laden with the green and the ripe by the time I reach the home meadow. Nora, bless her, has fed the fowls. All I have to do now is to get out my scythe and mow green food for the racks, close the hen-house, milk.

I mow in the dew and the sunset: it is a sweet and restful change from pitching sheaves. The sky is covered all over with silvery mackerel clouds. Robins sing an autumnal evening song. My Cobbett's Corn stands up like a giant wheat, its broad flagged leaves streaming in a gust of wind, its silken tassels of the cobs streaming too. It rustles, nearly ripe. It is both fodder and food, cobs for us, plants for the stock.

Anthea, ready for bed, calls from the window, 'Look, there's a harvest field in the sky.' The mackerel clouds have turned to golden sheaves.

As I mow something goes bouncing away from my scythe. It is Anthea's lost ball. Yesterday she said, 'I've asked fairy Rosebud to find it for me.' But it did not appear. 'I asked her too late at night.' she explained; 'She was busy making the sunshine for to-morrow. I'll ask her to-night before I go to bed.'

A light shines from upstairs: it is not quite black-

out time. And there, strangest of illusions, is a woman dressing for dinner! Actually it is Nora slipping on an old frock of flowery stuff with which she graces our supper hour. It has done that duty for three years now. I, too, closing the last door of the yard, fling off my corduroys, scattering grain and awns, wash, shave by red sky-glimmer and robin's song. So we sit down to our supper of eggs, beans, salad, Cobbett's Corn, or whatever our place at the moment provides, and for an hour really rest.

Harvest festival: we take our produce to the church. The church stands in the fields, and now the fields fill the church. I swing back the door whose hinges are like plaited iron, stoop under the low Norman arch, close it behind me. The ring of the falling latch echoes, and all is still. The church has become a cornucopia, in the sunny field solitude of this Saturday afternoon. Not only is there cultivated produce, but the wildness of the hedgerow: the font is entwined with bines, with old-man's-beard. It appears as some pillar remnant of the Golden Age up which Nature has climbed. Sheaves of corn stand up like great shields on either side of the chancel: each sheaf has fixed to its middle, just where the sheaf-knot would be, a great green apple. Plumes of green maize flank the altar.

The village women have done it; they have made the jam which stands on the font among the fluff of old-man's-beard; they have baked the loaf that stands bright and solid in the window. Theirs the fancy and skill which modelled that basket of eggs in butter. They also have had the sensibility

to arrange all these in such a natural way, and to bring in the wild bines, too, and make them seem to grow here.

The church itself seems to have quickened and flowered and fruited; so that the font and its angels become an allegory, and the pulpit's three-hundred-years-old wood sprouts living green. It has been done in that unself-consciotis, almost absent-minded, mood, in which I have seen a labourer fix a knot of ears of wheat above the dairy door as he passed on his way home after the first day of reaping.

The top of the font has sprays of asparagus fern rising from the centre of it, and drooping over like a fountain, among them fuchsia sprays with their drops of red buds seen through the green haze. Tomatoes, apples, stand under this green fountain among the foamy old-man's-beard. There are bunches of flowers and greenstuff from cottage gardens, and eggs of that colour which makes me remember a farmer's daughter carrying them in a basket. It was an afternoon of high summer, and I noticed the bloom of the sun on her arm. You can call it brown, or golden; but that does not describe it. It is the imprint of summer work on the bare flesh, of carrying corn to the hens in the sun, of working cream into butter in the dairy, the colour of the arm of a working farmer's daughter, young, hardy, and yet smooth and rounded as an egg-shell.

Farmers' wives and daughters, although they produce all that is needed for sturdy life, are often nowadays no botter off than city folk for food, having town bread brought to them, commercial bacon in rashers, commercial flour. But that arm linked round the basket on that particular afternoon I shall always remember; it matched the eggs in curve and

smoothness and life-bloom. Such fragments of summer one likes to recall in quiet hours by the light of autumn fires.

There is a hidden meaning in it. I feel it is the germ of all wholeness, this harvest festival. I sit down in a pew, not to think, but just to be among it and in view of that loaf of bread on the window-ledge. The windows are not of stained glass, are not even opaque, so instead of stiff figures of saints one has boughs and birds and the motions of the day. I think churches should all have clear windows, and be surrounded by trees allowed to grow naturally; to let the Genius in by every gleam and motion of the air. To let light glance and move upon the floor, the carving, and all the ancient stillness of the place. It glints now on that old bench-end in the choir which is carved in the form of a greedy fox that has put his head inside a pot and cannot get it out again. It searches out the grain of the pulpit's panelling, and the cream-washed wall has happy reflexions.

Sitting here one's eye wanders about the lofty interior. The barn-like beams up there affect one with their horizontal strength, then one is beguiled by a corner of shadow-play. Another carving on a bench-end, a little house, much ruder than the fox, proclaims itself of later date, which is a reversal of the usual assessment of phases of a civilization.

But what my attention returns to is the loaf of bread. It is a good loaf; the crust almost crackles, and it is still further commended by the sun which claims its old relationship with it, bathing it in its true colour. This side-light becomes somehow the focus of the whole church: everything flows to it, and it stands squat and stalwart. So brightly lit, it is the bread of vision, but real bread all the more for

that, bold men's bread, kneaded with bare arms. There are visions latent in a loaf of bread, all the more readily revealed by the discipline of baking it, and in the earth by the discipline of tilling it. And in a knot of wood, whose strength defies your axe. There is enough meaning in the ordinary acts of country life to get the soul to heaven.

The church standing in the fields, its windows clear casements—its interior is in no way esoteric, but simple as a barn. It is sprung as truly from this earth as a mediaeval village-girl Madonna I saw once in a church window. So the sheaves and the fruits and flowers become the adornment: for stained glass and traceries, their living colours and forms. The church stands empty, but for me it is full of life; everything at its best, the bloom of freshness on it, the spirit shining out of it. Now I could imagine some new life of men bursting in, some true festival. The antique synthesis of this place makes a forward vision of it, a vision of the sinews too. There are roots of sugar beet under the lectern. Yesterday I was lifting those roots, knocking them together. At sight * of them all the movements of the work come back to me; I feel them in my limbs. The sheaves bring all the movements of shocking and carting them, their bristly touch and rustle. To-morrow this service will not be just a thanksgiving of the breath, but a thanksgiving of the body, reliving the labour of the harvest among the sheaves with the men who shared it.

Oh let men work in the light, in the air! It is not because we have exhausted the meaning of simple life that we have achieved complexity. When we have discovered all that we can discover, then we shall turn and rediscover. I think there are certain things that are for ever—fragments of the

immanent kingdom. There shall always be ears of wheat above our lintel at harvest, always human arms of the tone and texture of summer work. And an ancient church furnished with new sheaves.

These are moments chosen out of the past to remain with us, to vibrate with happiness. I remember a certain fly glinting on a flower, though hosts of them have come and gone; the light of a setting sun on one old apple bough. I remember a nun sitting in the corner of a railway carriage, and how the calm of her face and dress made the ordinary fashion-clothes of a woman traveller seem flamboyant. I foresaw then some form of dress to supersede fashion, just as I have seen, gazing at a white windmill beyond a field of wheat, that the power of wind and water will be harnessed again with new skill by men.

I see these things beyond this war, clear suddenly through the incandescence; and I know it is not a dream or an escape, but an emergence. Here and there I come flashingly on England's future. I see the whole thing is being born through this furnace. Through the furnace of cities and of shop-fixed crowds.

Wait and you will see this green England reborn, waking in the cool of the morning with dew upon it; the sails will stir, the plough and the chisel go forward; every man in his own sanctuary of spirit, holding steadily to the whole through the detail. In every village there is a monument to the skill and faith of the past. This is the power-house of the future, whence men will draw practical vision and integration for what they do. They will rediscover worship. Except for that the whole of humanity would be destroyed. And it will not be destroyed because,

for one reason, of the small flame of truth that these village churches have kept alive, so that one with eyes to see *could* see.

In the city the spire of the cathedral is stately as a ship among the clouds, journeying, journeying impassively from the past to the future. This is the sign we shall know the future by, when men's works grow out of their lives, not only out of their heads, and their homes are bowers of their lives, budding abundantly. All around, the motley architecture of commerce will pass away. That finger of stone will not pass away.

I entered from the city square through a ray of sun that blinded me at the door, and suddenly was in a soaring fountain of stone. Despite my familiarity with that interior, the shock of surprise was even greater than before. That such a thing can be. One needs no other proof of the past. The realization of a vast extension of human powers. One has lived so long in this great commercial rat-trap of a world that one forgot that man could arise in freedom.

Yet withal this cathedral is no greater than my village church in the fields, or the hearth of a family at peace.

The family was sitting on the grass, and the swallows in a row above. Our roan calf cropped the aftermath and the pigs were rustling peas out of a forkful of bines I had thrown into their brushwood pen. A late brood of chicks, gawky, were almost daring to peck the bread-and-butter out of our hands.

'I expect it is the last time we shall have tea in

the orchard this year,' I said, as I edged from the lengthening shadow of a tree.

'Oh, but won't there be just *one* time more?' Anthea pleaded, who hates to come to the end of anything.

'Just one time more, perhaps; but look, the swallows and martins are getting ready to go.'

'They go to Africa.' Anthea informed us, twirling on a stick her little globe that is the size of a tennis ball; and her thumb covered the whole extent of their journey. They fly all day and all night over the sea. I read about it in my book. They must be *very* tired when they get to Africa.'

'But *our* Martin not go.' cried Sylvia.

'Oh no, he won't fly away.' we laughed. 'He will stay here with us and wait for them to come back in the spring. And one day we shall see them mending their nest again above your window, babies; and in a little while they'll have babies of their own, just as they had this year.'

When the twins were born, and there were all-night vigils over their small uncertain lives, there was a continuous stirring on the other side of the wall. Stirrings and as it were splutterings, very similar to the stirrings and splutterings of the twins in their cradles, never ceasing through the night. Perhaps that was why we called the boy Martin, though we did not do so consciously for that reason. The birds with their burden of parenthood were neighbourly to us; their stirrings were company in the silence of the night. When, later, the young birds took the air, our young lay under the trees waving their arms at the leaves.

Last, spring again the parent birds came and mended their nest in the eaves, and soon another assembly of small heads was peeping out.

Looking at them now it is difficult to believe in thei accomplishing that vast journey. They seem almos' part of the family, who have woven their flight through all our summer work. It is as though some part of u were flying off to Africa. But they will come again and be as English to us as the May. Meanwhile ou, land and our children will so occupy' us that the months will fly as fast as the swallows till the swallows come again.