

Drawn by Granville Smith

## THE YELLOW VAN

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### XIV

THE peddler rang his bell as he neared the village, and the women came to their doors. It was an audience as well as a knot of customers. He had things to sell which they could get nowhere else without a long journey; and he brought the local news and that strange atmosphere of the outer world which attends the very tramp on his rounds. In his uses as a chapman he had well-nigh everything in their simple range of wants—crocery, tinware, scraps of furniture, plain stuffs and the where-withal for their make-up, writing-paper of the commonest, some of it destined to carry fateful words from village homes to the uttermost ends of the earth, pipes and pouches for the men, fancies in bead-work or cheap jewelry for the women, toys for the children, and oil for the murderous little village lamps.

All this was arranged on his cart in most orderly confusion; he could have found his way to a needle or slate-pencil with his eyes shut, and you could have robbed him of hardly a packet of pins without immedi-

ate detection. But no one wanted to rob him. All seemed to like him, and to have friendly relations with even the horse in the shafts. He was a good-looking young fellow; and his manners, a mixture of cautious familiarity and genial sarcasm, were part of his stock in trade. He sold the article, and threw in the epigram by way of bonus.

His face was turned toward Slocum Parva, yet he was miles away from that restful spot, in a scene, if possible, more restful still. England has almost the secret of these placid hamlets which seem a hundred miles away from everywhere. His bell, for all the lenity of its motion, seemed to smite the stillness with a note of alarm.

He was soon surrounded, mainly by those who coveted his gauds. There is always something to sharpen the appetite of want in a general store. No human being might seem to need a cow in glazed earthenware, with a view of Brighton inserted as a medallion in the center of its system; yet he had found a buyer for such an article by urging a young woman on the eve of marriage to consider the tragedy of a home

without pretty things. It is a peculiarity of purchases of this kind that they awaken unavailing remorse immediately on the completion of the bargain. The young woman hid her offense with her apron as she moved away. He did a brisk trade, with varying fortunes, for the customers often cut him close. His final encounter was with a matron who had to complain of the behavior of a clock bought of him last week. This sex is distinguished by its twin passions for adulation and for the sallies of a sprightly audacity which might seem to preclude it. The peddler had both oil and vinegar in his manner, but the acid was only a subflavor, and, like a good salad, he was preëminently bland.

"Won't go, ma'am! Nonsense! Let 's have a look at it." He stretched out his hand for the delinquent, and subjected it to a keenly scrutinizing gaze. It was a most melancholy little object in painted wood, but one degree above the timepiece of a Noah's ark. "Ah, I thought so: it 's in a temper, that 's what 's the matter with it. You bought it too cheap, ma'am, you really did. Clocks have their feelin's, like Christians: an article o' this sort does n't like to be knocked down at two and eleven-pence ha'penny. But you 've got such a way with you! I wonder you did n't get it for nothin': you might, if you 'd stood out."

"None of your gammon!"

"P'r'aps the young uns have been playin' with it? Not as I bear no malice; I could forgive 'em anything—children like that."

"It's been on the top shelf all the toime, out of their reach."

"That 's it; it felt lonesome. There, it 'll be all right now."

"It 's afeard o' you, I reckon; it 'll go wrong soon 's you 've turned your back."

"Money returned if not found suited; but give it another trial. Do you know what I fancied at fust?" he added as a parting shot. "I thought somebody might ha' been nagging their 'usbands. I 've known a woman's tongue stop a clock. Thank you!"

The last words were evidently a signal to the animal in the shafts, and the equivalent of the "Gee up!" of the ordinary commerce of horse-flesh. They were uttered with a peculiar intonation, and at the sound of them the faithful creature moved forward with a jerk that gave a rattle to

the whole stock in trade. It was a sign of the completed transaction in flummery, and it carried horse and man beyond the reach of reprisal. None was to be feared in this instance. The woman laughed a good-natured threat of vengeance, and went indoors with the clock in her arms. The peddler, before leaving the parish bounds, waylaid a little girl, and, with the gift of a peppermint, induced her to take charge of a bundle of handbills for house-to-house distribution. They contained an announcement of the forthcoming elections for the parish councils, and an earnest appeal to the Progressive party at large to return candidates of the right sort. He dropped other bills of the same kind on the bare hedge-rows, where, as they occasionally fluttered to the ground, they looked like some new and belated variety of fungoid growths.

The man was George Herion, of course. Much had happened since he was last seen. For one thing, he had got married; for another, he had started the little general shop on wheels wherewith he threatened defiance to adverse fate on a memorable occasion. With the success of it Rose had been dazzled into the great venture, and Slocum Parva had almost shaken off its terror of heroic ideals. Our merchant adventurer began cautiously by buying a small stock in trade, piling it on a hand-truck, and wheeling it two-and-twenty miles out and home every day, "standing market" for a rest on the outward journey. Nothing could resist such determination. What the villages on one line of route refused had a second chance in the little market town, and a third in the other villages on the home stretch. When George had ten golden sovereigns knotted in his handkerchief, he told Rose that the time had come to name the day. She named it without further hesitation, feeling that here was a man. The village knew it that night; the duchess knew it next morning; and by the favor of that august person they were established, within a fortnight, in their own cottage, after one of the prettiest village weddings Slocum had ever seen.

But for Augusta they would have been homeless. Slocum maintained so exquisite an adjustment of means to ends in house-room that it had no place for the new pair. George had lived with his mother, Rose with hers: there were no cottages to let.

To build was out of the question: the area of human shelter was fixed as by some law of nature. The village was almost hermetically closed to newcomers. Even babies were considered to have taken an unfair advantage, and were discouraged for the very reason that they might one day grow up with claims of independent settlement like those of Rose and George. As individuals these young persons might plead a right of prescription; as a pair they were intruders. The mothers tried to settle the matter with a happy thought: by living together they might set one cottage free. But the duke's agent was not disposed to sanction this arrangement until the duchess signified that it had her entire approval. So Rose now lived as wife in the cottage in which she had lived as nursing, and, indeed, had first seen the light.

The marriage gave George more to work for, and so, naturally, he worked more. He went on till he saved enough to put shafts to the hand-cart, and a horse to the shafts. In a little time people began to turn their faces toward Slocum when they wanted a flat-iron or a rolling-pin, and Randsford saw its proud supremacy assailed. Rose now needed little to make her the happiest young woman in all the wide world, not even the contrast of a latent anxiety. George still kept up the interest in village politics which owed its birth to the passage of the van, and which had cost him the favor of the "gentlefolks" in the person of Mr. Kisbye. But the ideal of well-being at Slocum Parva was a life without opinions as the prime condition of a life without events. Rose trembled for her mate, now with vague apprehension, and then again with joy at the thought of his power of making things come right.

And so, singing by the way, the peddler went from hamlet to hamlet in his wide round, through villages of all varieties—villages sleepier and sillier than Slocum itself; petted villages, coddled as carefully as Mr. Raif's; wicked villages, where you might get drunk at unlawful hours by whistling in the right note at the right back door; fighting villages, where they lived on dim though still stimulating memories of a time when it was "Who are yer, stranger? Can ye foight?" and off went their coats till the wayfarer established his right of sojourn by the ordeal of battle. He was greeted, as he passed, by the country sights,

the country sounds, the plow, the drill, the humming steam-thresher, the opening notes of chaffinch or blackbird, the opening flower of crocus or primrose, here and there perhaps by some almost white-haired school-boy with a red neck, hereafter, as soldier or sailor, to keep the flag in the sunlight on its passage round the world. Ah, the glorious life of the road! Amid such scenes who could not wish forever to defer the visit of the "terminator of delights and the separator of companions"?

At a turn of his course he drew up to make room for a carriage and pair cleaving their way through a light cloud of Olympic dust of their own raising. He had just time to recognize the liveries, and bring himself to the salute, when, with a smile and a cheerful "Good day, Herion," the duchess was whirled out of sight. The family was still in residence, but was preparing for the annual migration to town. The house-parties were over; the whole world of the British worldlet was going up for the annual meeting of Parliament, and for the ordeal by fire of the London season.

Augusta's interest in George, at first a mere consequence of her interest in Rose, had grown with better acquaintance. She had learned to like him for himself, and for the variety which his pluck and resource had introduced into the pattern of village life. He was refreshing, after the rather too monotonous note of submission; and the sight of him somehow seemed to remind her of her native land. But she was trying to learn to take her patterns as she found them, and this not all in resignation, but simply as a philosopher in petticoats, which is as much as to say a woman of the world. Here was her new home and place of settlement, and here, with it, must be her new point of view. It was as fascinating as China to the thoughtful mind. So millions live and have lived in their own way, and apparently to the greatest ends, in a majestic order with dependence for its main principle. What a contrast, not unrefreshing at times, to those tumultuous millions on "the other side," where every man's morning thought is how he may get one step ahead of his neighbor!

Augusta remembered Uncle Gooding's fable of how they brought the great railway out West. According to this, they put a line of workmen one behind the other, with the smartest last, to give the time.

"The one ahead had to keep pace with the one behind, you bet, or he felt the point of the pick in his heel as he was plugging along. By gum, sir, that last one hot-footed up the whole circus, and they got it fed into them that they had to hustle for all they were worth!"

The peddler was at home now, and the wife received him with a kiss in a kitchen which ought to be considered the "best room" of the house, since it was at least without pretense of style. But his admiration, like hers, was reserved for the lurid glories of another chamber into which at last they peeped fondly on their way upstairs. There it was in its sanctities of plush-framed photographs—George in his Sunday wear, colored like life, Rose in her wedding hat; in its antimacassars, saddle-bag suites, tormented carpets, their patterns echoing the cries of pain from the walls. Ah, how grateful they felt, how good, at the thought of all this redeeming gaiety and beauty in their rather sordid lives! The peep into the best room especially was almost devotional in its effects. George registered a silent vow to be more deserving of his new-found luck. Rose mingled the thought of it with her prayers.

xv

THE family had left for town. The great house was shut up. But Slocum was saved from the void of human interests by the election of its first parish council. The problem of such an election in such a place should be dear to science as to history, since it touches on the question of the indivisibility of matter in the legislative domain. You cannot get much farther down in institutions seen under the microscope. The relation of all parliamentary boards and other assemblies of the British governmental scheme to this speck on the planet is that of Ossa to the wart. Slocum's council is the village senate, the village administration, the village forum, the village tribune in one. It is still a new thing. Parliament, finding the peasantry clamorous for the right to manage their own affairs, has tossed them this log. So it is Gurth the swineherd at the council, with Wamba the witless, if he can find a place, and, with them, Cedric the Saxon, and even Brian de Bois-Guilbert, retired, if any can manage to commend himself to the favor of the tiny electorate.

There is something quite captivating in the thought of the exquisite littleness of the whole thing. The observer seems to watch the processes of insect life. Here is the smallest unit, the very protoplasm of corporate existence, and it has, as such, the charm of all absolutes. You can hardly get nearer to the vanishing-point of institutions than the village council. It has been known to have an audit of nineteen shillings and eightpence ha'penny for the entire year. One may conceive a worn chancellor of the exchequer turning to its debates for refreshment of spirit after a budget night. The question of the abolition of the village pump, in favor of a supply from the mains, means as much to Slocum as the abolition of slavery or the repeal of the corn-laws once meant to the world at large.

It should have been a walk-over for the Conservative party; but new yearnings, new hopes had come with the yellow van. It is idle to make a secret of it: Slocum Parva was undermined with subversive literature about village rights. The batteries were charged at George's; so much was known. Peascod had several times brought to the station dangerous handbills left in the hedge-rows. Bad characters were growing bold. Bangs, the poacher, had openly defied the collector of Easter offerings for the church. It would be difficult to exaggerate the significance of this incident as it stood entered in the constable's official report. As the collector entered the reprobate's cottage on his peaceful, not to say his holy, mission, Bangs called out ominously to his son in the back room, "Boy, put the poker on the fire." The collector began to collect. "Is it hot, boy?" "Yes, father." "Well,"—to the collector,—"I've heard of meat-offerings and of drink-offerings; I'll give you a burnt-offering if you don't get out." The collector left in haste. We live in strange times.

Then England was still under the shock of the tremendous news from South Africa, and Slocum Parva was a part of England, if only a speck of its dust. A few weeks after the departure of the ducal family came the declaration of war, with all that followed, "recoil and rally, charge and rout, and triumph and despair." Stormberg, Magersfontein, Colenso in one black week; Spion Kop; and then again hope,



with Paardeberg and Bloemfontein. The most startling event of all for the village had been the hasty departure of Captain Liddicot for the front, with his regiment, on the very eve of the Christmas festivities, with Mary turning recluse and knitting comforters, and her father's sentient life reduced to one protracted exclamation of "Bless my soul!" In an atmosphere so charged with electricity even Slocum could not preserve its wonted calm.

There were five members to be chosen, —that was the minimum allowed by law, —and there were six candidates. The Conservatives had put up for all the seats. Their phalanx, which they believed irresistible, consisted of Kisbye, Grimber, and the schoolmaster, Parson Raif, the nominee of the castle, and one Fawke, a person in the grocery and lollypop line, who ran in the same general interest, but with some stress on a harmless question of his own affecting the management of the annual flower show. But George had determined to set up one candidate for the Radicals, and had succeeded in persuading Spurr to quit his retirement for public life. This aged person, though, as we have seen, no orator, was a representative of the doomed class of small farmers whose all but fruitless struggle to keep themselves out of the workhouse might be expected to touch the sympathies of the electorate. The constituency could not be expected to carry more. George canvassed for him, spoke for him, in spite of the sickening forebodings of Rose, who sought confirmation of her worst fears in the prophecies of the penny almanac. She found no specific warning against the danger of "tampering with parish councils," her constant theme; but this, of course, was only an oversight on the part of the reader of the stars.

Nothing could prevent George from working heart and soul for his man. As one born and bred in the village, he knew what he knew. For behind these fair outskirts of Slocum, with their honeysuckle porches, there were sometimes dire realities. In the dry weather our peddler, after his hard day's work, had often to walk a mile to get a couple of pails of drinking-water for his wife's use. It was lucky for the duchess that she did not push her researches in Samson's cottage as far as the back premises. She would have found the narrow yard one pool of slush, and, in spite

of the occasional brickbats used as stepping-stones, would have risked damage to her dainty shoes. The rain and the damp at times claimed free right of entry in these ramshackle bowers of bliss. The workmen from London who came down for the wedding decorations would hardly look at them as dwelling-places.

The overcrowding was sometimes terrible, in spite of the refusal to build—or because of it. Slocum knew how many members of growing families were occasionally crowded into one room. What our village Hampden wanted was to get these things set right; with his instinct of self-help,—the instinct that had enabled him to recover himself after the mishap at Mr. Kisbye's,—he thought that only the village in council could manage it. His soul sickened against all the meddlesome guidance from above that was but coddling at the best—the very charity blankets lent in winter and sealed up during the summer, the seal to be broken only by the housekeeper at the Towers.

The combat was now joined. Skett, the navy, was pressed into the service, and was engaged, very much in the manner of a famous character of drama, to represent a wall whereon the Progressives might exhibit a placard which was strung round his neck as he sat at the cottage door. Sally Artifex promised a public canvass of the entire womanhood of the village, not so much in the interest of any political party as with a view to the selection of candidates pledged to the practice of all the domestic virtues, especially on the part of the male sex. The Conservative interest stood proudly aloof from these anxieties, relying on the all-sufficiency of its nod at the right moment. Only Mr. Kisbye rode more frequently through the village, and slightly deepened his scowl, while, to nice observers, Herbert Peascod, on his beat, seemed to keep the Knuckle of Veal in detective observation as the headquarters of the enemies of the country. The powers that be were all indifferent or worse, knowing that the new council was only one more institution to capture. There was one exception: the High-church recluse, Mr. Bascomb, made an unwonted irruption into the political arena as a supporter of the popular ticket.

For the rest, even smug Mr. Grimber from London boldly proclaimed that he

was for the castle, and did not care who knew it. What was good enough for the Duke of Allonby was good enough for him. The powers of darkness, as represented by the larger areas of local government, looked down on Slocum Parva with undisguised contempt. The scorn of Allonby Towers had a spice of mirth in it, and so was tempered by good nature. The Duke of Allonby's amazement at the thought of this village was sublime in its intensity, if not exactly in its mode of expression. His village, in all its goings out and its comings in, it was, and ever should be; and the thought of its having a will of its own tickled him to that degree! The words were his, and so was the trick of leaving the rest of the sentence to the imagination of his hearers.

The populace would soon be ready for anything. This very night an orator standing on a chair outside the Knuckle of Veal publicly clamored for a new letter-box for the benefit of the straggling continuation of the village a quarter of a mile beyond its center. He was succeeded by a carter, who said there never would be quiet in the country-side till Sokes Lane, that well-known short cut between two main roads, had a new coating of metal, and a full cart-load in the hole at the bend. Then, as to the charities, a new recruit, and a woman this time, for the sex had mysteriously left the fence, asked if it were "trew" that the old writings provided for fuel without respect for persons, while under the new practice it was "no churchman, no coals."

But the water was the burning question, strange as that may seem. It threw out a heat, in the course of discussion, that led to the removal of the meeting to the inn parlor, where the flame was partly reduced, again in a manner contrary to experience, by the use of spirituous fluids. The village had now discovered that it wanted water all the year round. At present it had to depend upon its wells. But nature sometimes forgot Slocum Parva, and there were days when water was as dear as "tuppenny," and bad at that. Such were the statements overheard through the open window of the inn. They were boldly contradicted by the Conservative interest, otherwise called the Moderate, which remained outside the building in protest for this occasion. The Conservative interest,

quoting a letter of one of its cousins, argued that Australia got on very well in spite of droughts, since common laborers there earned five shillings a day. A voice from within said that Slocum might manage to make do with the wells, if some one would only put pumps to them. It was the everlasting bucket going up and down that troubled the water, and in summer made its muddy sediment yield "worms and insects and things," instead of potable fluid.

A Conservative, suspected to be Mr. Grimber, created a diversion by asking who was to pay for the pumps. There was a moment's consternation within the building, when another voice replied mockingly, and with the expected reward of a guffaw, "His Goodness Gracious, to be sure," an allusion to the owner of the Towers as unmistakable as it was insolent. "Men, men," cried George, in his cheery voice, "we don't want any stuff o' that sort." The meeting now seemed to get completely out of hand, until its very promoters grew terrified at the spirit which they had raised. When Bangs (his words were taken down) bellowed, "Why can't we have water-pipes, like the duke and Squire Liddicot?" the landlord himself grew alarmed, and said with becoming severity, "Gently, please."

It was anybody's meeting now, and a Camille Desmoulins might have run a free course. The wildest cries were heard amid the din: "Oil-lamps for the main street, leastways o' nights when there's no moon!" "A playground for the children!" "Seats in the shady lane!" Mr. Grimber turned homeward with the reflection that he should never have thought to see this day; and other well-disposed persons followed his example.

When the meeting began to talk of letting the shooting over the old gravel-pits which were given to the parish after the great inclosure of 1810, and Bangs offered to bid, the landlord put out the lights.

## XVI

THE great day of the election came at last — just because it had to come. They were all afraid of it as something impending, and would gladly have put it off. It was a fairish day, yet, to speak the truth, not much more so than the one that went before. You might never have guessed with what sort of event it was charged.

The result was a startling surprise. George got his man in, at the expense—of all persons—of the castle candidate! Spurr triumphed over Mr. Raif. The Conservatives, who took for the occasion their second baptismal name of Moderates, had expected to have it all their own way. They were left with but four winners, Kisbye and the schoolmaster, Grimber and Fawke. Radicalism, treacherously calling itself Progressive to confuse the issue, had effected a lodgment in the sacred soil. Its victory had all the interest that might attach to the creation of a soul under the ribs of death. The other side took it so: Squire Liddicot thought that things were going rather too far; the ducal agent frowned; Mr. Kisbye said that George Herion was a firebrand, and that there would be no peace in Slocum till he was turned out of the place.

It was understood that there would be a full evening sitting at the Knuckle of Veal. The event had to be adjusted to consciousness, to be digested, so to speak; and where but in the village inn? The landlord, who had quite overcome his rather unprofessional displeasure of the other evening, was in his best humor. There was a flutter of expectation in the outer bar, as though new times were at hand. Bangs, the poacher, found other gossips already assembled in the parlor, old Skett among them, and Job Gurt—who would have been there, as at a post of duty, in any case.

It would be an error to suppose that the blacksmith was a sot. If he was a glutton for drink, he was also a glutton for work. He earned "good money," and, with his pickings in the season at Allonby, turned in an average five-and-twenty shillings a week. Sixteen of these shillings he gave to his wife for housekeeping; the rest he reserved for beer. As he had no children, he could not be said to be doing an injustice to his family. He began with this generous liquor at five in the morning, to clear his head of the fumes with which he usually charged it at night. His prudent helpmate took care that the house should never be without this restorative. He was a genuine Saxon peasant, and one of his remoter ancestors had probably contracted his final headache by a blow from a mace at Senlac. To be fair to him, however, it should be said that he was on this occasion extremely moderate in his potations. He had

recently had a bout. He was now slowly getting sober again, so that his system might the better respond to treatment with his favorite beverage on next bank-holiday.

These and other small fry were there to make an audience. The principal figures who were more intimately connected with the event of the day lingered, as befitted their state. The first of them to arrive was Mr. Grimber, the retired tallow-chandler, doubly respected as a Londoner and as a person of independent means. He may best be described as the essential ratepayer of the smaller sort, the despair of the champions of the lost causes in heroic ideals. He was absolutely self-centered, save for his immense reverence for wealth and station, and nothing could exceed his disdain for all who, as he put it, were fed, clothed, or educated at his expense. He had paid rates nearly all his life,—not without satisfaction to his vanity as a man of substance,—and for the same period had cherished a profound contempt and aversion for those who derived the slightest benefit from his enforced contributions to the public cause. In short, he was in every respect a genial model of skullcapped nincompoopery, alike in body and in soul.

On his entry, the others said in chorus, "Good evening, Mr. Councilor." It was a new form for the new occasion, and it was one that, as a precedent, would govern Slocum for all future time. Mr. Grimber replied, "Good evening, gentlemen." When his colleague, the schoolmaster, followed, he was saluted in the same way. His reply was, "Good evening, gentlemen—and Mr. Councilor." It was another precedent for the ages. Mr. Kisbye, of course, was not for this company.

The defeated, and yet, in a sense, the triumphant, party presently appeared in the person of old Spurr. He was toil-worn, rugged, dirty as usual, and he had the air of some hunted Hebrew prophet who had momentarily left his wilderness in search of refreshment while dodging the wrath of a king. There was no sport to be expected from his taciturnity and from his total want of repartee. He even failed to comply with the formula. George, it was known, would be late, as he was still on his rounds. The sitting, therefore, lacked animation until the arrival of Mr. Fawke, a little man, now swelling with importance, whose face seemed to say nothing except

that pudding was cheap. His flowing salutation brought the whole composition into convivial harmony with a sweep of the hand.

"I drink your 'ealth, sir, and proud to welcome you," said the ratepayer, raising his glass.

"An' I should loike to drink it, tew," piped Samson Skett.

Like most persons called for the first time to public station, Mr. Fawke seemed wishful to show that it had not made him proud.

"I 'ardly know 'ow it 'appened, I 'm sure," he said, "an' when I think 'ow many there is in this parish that knows more than me, I could almost throw it up. I can only do my best, that 's all."

Nobody helped Mr. Fawke at this stage, and a humane person might have felt that he was rather hardly used.

"But, gentlemen, it 's no use tryin' to make believe. I never 'ad a day's schoolin' in grammar in all my loife—an' me to be a speaker, too!"

"Woire in, Fawke, and get your name up. That 's all you 've got to dew."

"Well, mates, I 'll say this for mysen: it 's come through no seekin' o' mine. I 'ad n't even no idee of it till I see my nime in the list."

A voice: "Come, now, did n't 'e say that, if anybody 'u'd ask 'e, you 'd make one?"

"I may have said it, but I asked no man to ask me, and I canvassed no man, neyther."

The voice: "What about Maw?"

Fawke, changing color: "Now I 'll just tell 'e all about that. Maw said he did n't think his name was on the register—casual-like, as we was passin' the time o' day. Well, I said I 'd look; an' there, sure enough, I found it, an' I jest let him know."

The schoolmaster: "Why not? Why not? What 've ye got to be ashamed of, man?"

Fawke, taking heart: "I certainly did say, after that, 'My number 's four on the pollin'-card'; but it went no further."

The voice: "There!"

Fawke: "The fact is, the act 's a bit too complected. It wants masterin'. 'T ain't so easy to put yer mark agen a name if you can't read the name. We 'ave n't all got the edication."

Grimber, contemptuously: "Education, education—nothin' but that now! I speak as a ratepayer."

Job Gurt: "You 're reet there, maister. It 's a 'ard thing on them as 'ave got children. A child as might be earnin' a few pence a week to 'elp keep 'issen, taken away and sent to school—as you might say, by force of arms. It 's a 'ard thing on a parent, say Oi."

"It 's the law, and we 've got to put up with it," growled the schoolmaster. Even he thought that the parent had a case.

It was the matured deliverance of the rural mind on this subject. No one in that parlor spoke up for education; its warmest apologists simply held their peace. And while silly Slocum talks thus after its nature, tremendous Germany and tremendous America, with their systems polished to the last point of perfection, are waiting to spring on an unlettered prey. Truly, there is no fighting against doom.

"We want to be guided," said Fawke, directing his gaze to an aged person in the corner, who seemed to require propitiation. "We 're mere young uns at it."

It was the voice (for this person was the owner and embodiment of that organ), but it took not the slightest notice of him.

"I wish it 'd all passed more amicable and friendly-like," continued Fawke, still propitiatory. "I wish there 'ad n't been no opposition to the dook—as one might say. It ain't pleasant to 'ave a contused election 'mong neighbors."

"Contested," suggested Grimber, not unkindly.

"All my grammar 's self-taught," said Fawke.

"Well, you got a program o' your own, I understand, if it comes to that," said Grimber, sharply. "What 's your little game? I 'ope you ain't comin' on the rates for more money."

"I don't quite ketch your meanin', Mr. Councilor."

"Well, what 's your wheeze for the free and independent elector, your job line, speakin' as a tradesman to a tradesman?"

Fawke, clearing his throat: "The question o' the day in Slocum Parva, aye, an' Slocum Magna, too, is prizes at the flower an' vegetable show. You see, it 's like this here. Our fust prize is five shillin'; our second 's two an' six; our third 's only a shillin'. Now it ain't enough to encourage laborin' people. It don't pay, when p'raps you 've brought forward as many beans, 'taters, an' onions as 'u'd cover this



table. The thing I've been workin' for all my life is to get the money raised to seven an' a kick, five bob, an' two an' a half. That 's the way to encourage industry an' beat the furiner. An', mark my words, it 's got to come."

"It will be a tough job," said Grimber. "'Ow often do we meet?"

"A full hour every month," said Fawke, eagerly, "sometimes two; an' I mean to bring it on fust thing."

The discussion could not be maintained at this high level, and it soon began to decline into sheer inconsequence. Fawke became almost interjectional in his vain repetition of stock phrases—"I 've no edication," "we do our best," "it 's got to come." Grimber made an effort to restore it by a masterly digression on the water question. He recalled a time when the wells of London were condemned, owing to an outbreak of cholera, and when the shop of his father, an undertaker, like a second Temple of Janus, was never closed, night or day, for three weeks.

"I speak of a man as I find him," maundered the wretched Fawke.

Grimber looked as though he thought he would say something to Fawke; then again he looked as though he thought he would not. And the more merciful view prevailed.

A stir at the door, and George came in. "Good evenin', gentlemen all. Well, lads, we've done it"—shaking hands with Spurr. The old man smiled in iron lines, and, by way of showing some excitement of sensibility, knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Every kind of leadership soon makes itself felt, even the humblest. All pressed forward to shake hands with the peddler. Mr. Grimber did it with the unmistakable air of taking leave of him on his passage to perdition. Still, it was done. The school-master thought he was proud to have had him in his class, but said only, "Well, well! Well, well!" with the qualified praise which he had formerly given to a successful lesson. The youngster had the self-possession of his new pride in himself. He was beginning to do things instead of merely thinking things and hoping them—precious moment for all of us. He was alive with the new sense of opportunity. The village was not the narrow place he once thought. His success in his new trade showed that something might be done in Slocum, if

one only tried. And now there was this second and greater success. He might start the village, as he had started himself, in some way of life less miserably narrow and bounded than the old one. It was no revolt against his betters. He was a peasant still, and recognized their right to rule him; all that he wanted was to be allowed to bear a hand. Regenerative ideas mature slowly, and no one gets new-born all at once. What a triumph if he could endow Slocum with a tight thatch and a pail of clean drinking-water all the year round! He was elate, radiant. Fawke tried to introduce his panacea of the flower show, but George waved him off with a laugh. "Never mind that now; let 's all have a chat, same as old times."

The proposition was evidently relished; the conversation at once took a more convivial tone, and the oldest chestnuts of anecdote began their weary and yet welcome round. There is still a market in the inn parlor for worn-out jokes, as there is one elsewhere for worn-out boots. Nature knows nothing of waste.

The wide, wide world, too, came into their talk, but only as the universe might come into the talk of astronomers. It seemed immeasurably far. Yet not always so. They mumbled cricket, even at this season, and it seemed to bring Australia very near to them. America was remote as being less in their thoughts. The national game was, in a manner, their tie of empire. How this county bowled, how that one batted, rallied them, as experts, to a sense of a common interest in life.

George now called for a song, and, though this request was evidently welcome, compliance was delayed by the usual sheepish unwillingness to face the company. One or two cleared their throats, and pondered, and gave it up, professing to have forgotten the words. The landlord at length came to the rescue with a contrivance expressly designed for emergencies of this sort, and superfluously introduced by Fawke as the "grammerphone," perhaps with the thought of his own educational deficiencies still running in his head. The function of this most dismal instrument seemed to be to make the minstrelsy of the music-hall accessible to the rural districts. The landlord adjusted the slides, not without difficulty, and touched the springs, not without mistakes. At length,

after several false starts, the thing was delivered of a metrical pleasantry on the subject of paper collars, in a far-off tone which suggested a revel of cockney gnomes in the bowels of the earth. Yet nothing could have been at once more impressively unearthly in its metallic travesty of the human voice, nor more commonplace in its general drift.

It was as disappointing in this respect as those sittings of unlettered mediums in which the sages of history revisit our sphere to talk the wisdom of the copy-book in the vernacular of Whitechapel. It left the company cold, but not for this reason. They felt that it was dull, while they silently acknowledged that it was perhaps too fashionable for their comprehension. In short, they put it in the same category as the selections from Wagner at village concerts, performed by distinguished amateurs. In the one instance, as in the other, they were much too well-bred to complain. The judicious landlord saved them the trouble by covering the machine once more with its oil-cloth, and stimulating Bangs to harmony with the offer of a drink.

The poacher accordingly plunged headlong into a patriotic ditty, inspired by the war, with a burden of "England, be proud of your boys in brown." The choice of a color was but a tacit confession of the poet's inability to make khaki subservient to the purposes of his art. Whatever its faults in composition and execution, this was at least a vital deliverance, and it had the happiest effect. The whole parlor joined heartily in the chorus, and Fawke, in particular, grew manifestly reckless, as though meditating an immediate start for the front. The ice thus broken, Mr. Grimber next undertook to oblige.

"I ain't got nothin' new," he said, "but if you care for one of the old uns, here's something that my old father learned from his father, who was a volunteer in the great French war. It's about Napoleon Bonyparte."

An old song, and a song that might contain some mention of the battle of Waterloo! Nothing more was needed to bespeak their most reverent attention. It opened as follows:

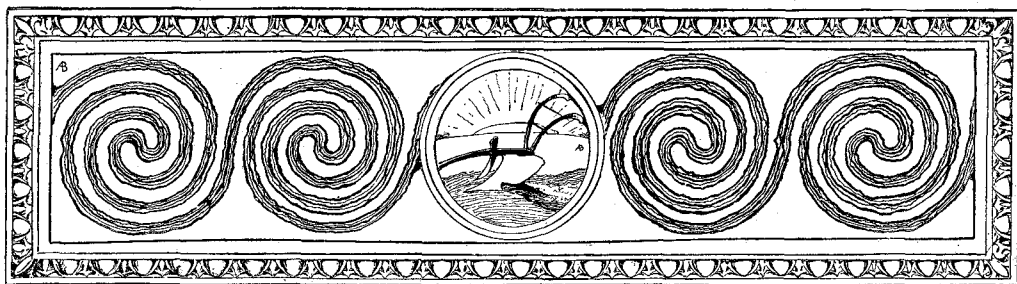
"Come, all you young men, beware of ambition,  
Or else, in course o' time, you may alter your  
condition.

Oh, think upon 'is woes who was born to be a  
yero,  
And now is gone to end his days in the isle of  
St. 'Eleno."

There were twelve verses, and they traced a career of misguided ambition from the cradle almost to the grave. In the treatment of it, and particularly in Mr. Grimber's rendering, this dazzling but irregular genius became an awful warning for the rising manhood of Slocum Parva of the dangers of discontent with their lot. He seemed to walk the earth again to impress upon them the great truth that if they were not exceedingly careful they might cease to be British boors. He had probably served the same purpose for their grandsires, and so had not lived altogether in vain. The song was thus of real social and political significance in its solemn echoes of the teaching of the catechism in regard to contentment with the state of life to which we are called. The implied rebuke seemed especially to come home to Mr. Fawke, with his newly awakened desires for civil and even for military distinction. He sat silent, as though meditating, with thankfulness, his exceedingly narrow escape of a throne.

They were at the height of their rude revel when a child from the village came in and handed a letter to George. It had just been left at his cottage, and the messenger who had brought it from the agent's room at the castle said it was pressing. So few letters, pressing or other, came to them that all present boded something momentous, especially when they saw the young man, as he opened it, turn deathly pale. He read it again in the perfect silence, dropped it, and staggered forth without a word. One of them picked it up and without ceremony read it aloud for the benefit of the company. It was a formal notice to quit, on the ground that the cottage was wanted for a new laborer on the estate. They all realized its dire significance just as fully as George. It meant ruin. Without Slocum as a center, his little business would be nothing; and for a man under the ban of the castle there would be no other footing anywhere throughout the countryside. "A fancied summat was comin'," said Job, "when A see the agent makin' a ugly face."

(To be continued.)



## EARLY SPRING GLADNESS

BY JOHN BURROUGHS

NOW clap your hands together,  
For this is April weather,  
And love again is born;  
The west wind is caressing,  
The turf your feet are pressing  
Is thrilling to the morn.

To see the grass a-greening,  
To find each day new meaning  
In sky and tree and ground;  
To see the waters glisten,  
To linger long, and listen  
To every wakening sound!

To feel your nerves a-tingle  
By grackle's reedy jingle  
Or starling's brooky call,  
Or phoebe's salutation,  
Or sparrow's proclamation  
Atop the garden wall!

The maple-trees are thrilling,  
Their eager juices spilling  
In many a sugar-camp.  
I see the buckets gleaming,  
I see the smoke and steaming,  
I smell the fragrant damp.

The mourning-dove is cooing,  
The meadow-lark is wooing—  
I see his flashing quills;  
Cock-robin's breast is glowing;  
The wistful cattle lowing,  
And turning to the hills.

I love each April token  
And every word that's spoken  
In field or grove or vale;  
The hyla's twilight chorus,  
The clanging geese that o'er us  
Keep well the northern trail.

Oh, soon with heaping measures  
The spring will bring her treasures  
To gladden every breast;  
The sky with warmth a-beaming,  
The earth with love a-teeming—  
In life itself new zest!

