



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE LIFE
OF THE FIELDS

Richard Jefferies

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

THE
LIFE OF THE FIELDS

BY RICHARD JEFFERIES



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THE FIELD-PLAY

I. UPTILL-A-THORN

“Save the nightingale alone;
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,
Lean’d her breast uptill a thorn.”

Passionate Pilgrim.

SHE pinned her torn dress with a thorn torn from the bushes through which she had scrambled to the hay-field. The gap from the lane was narrow, made more narrow by the rapid growth of summer; her rake caught in an ash-spray, and in releasing it she “ranted” the bosom of her print dress. So soon as she had got through she dropped her rake on the hay, searched for a long, nail-like thorn, and thrust it through, for the good-looking, careless hussy never had any provision of pins about her. Then, taking a June rose which pricked her finger, she put the flower by the “rant”, or tear, and went to join the rest of the hay-makers. The blood welled up out of the scratch in the finger more freely than would have been supposed from so small a place. She put her lips to it to suck it away, as folk do in all quarters of the earth yet discovered, being one of those instinctive things which come without teaching. A red dot of blood stained her soft white cheek, for, in brushing back her hair with her hand, she forgot the wounded finger. With red blood on her face, a thorn and a rose in her bosom, and a hurt on her hand, she reached the chorus of rakers.

The farmer and the sun are the leading actors, and the hay-makers are the chorus, who bear the burden of the play. Marching, each a

step behind the other, and yet in a row, they presented a slanting front, and so crossed the field, turning the "wallows." At the hedge she took her place, the last in the row. There were five men and eight women; all flouted her. The men teased her for being late again at work; she said it was so far to come. The women jeered at her for tearing her dress—she couldn't get through a "thornin'" hedge right. There was only one thing she could do, and that was to "make a vool of zum veller" (make a fool of some fellow). Dolly did not take much notice, except that her nervous temperament showed slight excitement in the manner she used her rake, now turning the hay quickly, now missing altogether, then catching the teeth of the rake in the buttercup-runners. The women did not fail to tell her how awkward she was. By-and-by Dolly bounced forward, and, with a flush on her cheek, took the place next to the men. They teased her too, you see, but there was no spiteful malice in their tongues. There are some natures which, naturally meek, if much condemned, defy that condemnation, and willingly give it ground of justification by open guilt. The women accused her of too free a carriage with the men; she replied by seeking their company in the broad glare of the summer day. They laughed loudly, joked, but welcomed her; they chatted with her gaily; they compelled her to sip from their ale as they paused by the hedge. By noon there was a high colour on her cheeks; the sun, the exercise, the badinage had brought it up.

So fair a complexion could not brown even in summer, exposed to the utmost heat. The beams indeed did heighten the hue of her cheeks a little, but it did not shade to brown. Her chin and neck were wholly untanned, white and soft, and the blue veins roamed at their will. Lips red, a little full perhaps; teeth slightly prominent but white and gleamy as she smiled. Dark brown hair in no great abundance, always slipping out of its confinement and straggling, now on her forehead, and now on her shoulders, like wandering vines of bryony. The softest of brown eyes under long eyelashes; eyes that seemed to see everything in its gentlest aspect, that could see no harm anywhere. A ready smile on the face, and a smile in the form. Her shape yielded so easily at each movement that it seemed

to smile as she walked. Her nose was the least pleasing feature—not delicate enough to fit with the complexion, and distinctly upturned, though not offensively. But it was not noticed; no one saw anything beyond the laughing lips, the laughing shape, the eyes that melted so near to tears. The torn dress, the straggling hair, the tattered shoes, the unremended stocking, the straw hat split, the mingled poverty and carelessness—perhaps rather dreaminess—disappeared when once you had met the full untroubled gaze of those beautiful eyes. Untroubled, that is, with any ulterior thought of evil or cunning; they were as open as the day, the day which you can make your own for evil or good. So, too, like the day, was she ready to the making.

No stability; now fast in motion; now slow; now by fits and starts; washing her face to-day, her hands to-morrow. Never going straight, even along the road; talking with the waggoner, helping a child to pick watercress, patting the shepherd's dog, finding a flower, and late every morning at the hay-field. It was so far to come, she said; no doubt it was, if these stoppings and doublings were counted in. No character whatever, no more than the wind; she was like a well-hung gate swinging to a touch; like water yielding to let a reed sway; like a singing-flame rising and falling to a word, and even to an altered tone of voice. A word pushed her this way; a word pushed her that. Always yielding, sweet, and gentle. Is not this the most seductive of all characters in women?

Had they left her alone, would it have been any different? Those bitter, coarse, feminine tongues which gave her the name of evil, and so led her to openly announce that, as she had the name, she would carry on the game. That is an old country saying, "Bear the name, carry the game." If you have the name of a poacher, then poach; you will be no worse off and you will have the pleasure of the poaching. It is a serious matter, indeed, to give any one a bad name, more especially a sensitive, nervous, beautiful girl.

Under the shady oaks at luncheon the men all petted her and flattered her in their rude way, which, rude as it was, had the advantage of admitting of no mistake. Two or three more men strolled up from other fields, luncheon in hand and eating as they came,

merely to chat with her. One was a mower—a powerful fellow, big boned, big everywhere, and heavy fisted; his chest had been open since four o'clock that morning to the sun, and was tanned like his face. He took her in his mighty arms and kissed her before them all; not one dared move, for the weight of that bone-smashing fist was known. Big Mat drank, as all strong men do; he fought; beyond that there was nothing against him. He worked hard, and farmers are only too glad of a man who will work. He was rather a favourite with the master, and trusted. He kissed her twice, and then went back to his work of mowing, which needs more strength than any other country labour—a mower is to a man what a dray-horse is to a horse.

They lingered long over the luncheon under the shady oaks, with the great blue tile of the sky overhead, and the sweet scent of hay around them. They lingered so long, that young Mr. Andrew came to start them again, and found Dolly's cheeks all aglow. The heat and the laughter had warmed them; her cheeks burned, in contrast to her white, pure forehead—for her hat was off—and to the cool shade of the trees. She lingered yet a little longer chatting with Mr. Andrew—lingered a full half-hour—and when they parted, she had given him a rose from the hedge. Young Mr. Andrew was but half a farmer's son; he was destined for a merchant's office in town; he had been educated for it, and was only awaiting the promised opening. He was young, but no yokel; too knowing of town cunning and selfish hardness to entangle himself. Yet those soft brown eyes, that laughing shape; Andrew was very young and so was she, and the summer sun burned warm.

The blackbirds whistled the day away, and the swallows sought their nests under the eaves. The curved moon hung on the sky as the hunter's horn on the wall. Timid Wat—the hare—came ambling along the lane, and almost ran against two lovers in a recess of the bushes by an elm. Andrew, Andrew! these lips are too sweet for you; get you to your desk—that smiling shape, those shaded, soft brown eyes, let them alone. Be generous—do not awaken hopes you can never, never fulfil. The new-mown hay is

scented yet more sweetly in the evening—of a summer's eve it is always too soon to go home.

The blackbirds whistled again, big Mat slew the grass from the rising to the going down of the sun—moon-daisies, sorrel, and buttercups lay in rows of swathe as he mowed. I wonder whether the man ever thought, as he reposed at noontide on a couch of grass under the hedge? Did he think that those immense muscles, that broad, rough-hewn plank of a chest of his, those vast bones encased in sinewy limbs—being flesh in its fulness—ought to have more of this earth than mere common men, and still more than thin-faced people—mere people, not men—in black coats? Did he dimly claim the rights of strength in his mind, and arrogate to himself the prerogatives of arbitrary kings? Who knows what big processes of reasoning, dim and big, passed through his mind in the summer days? Did he conclude he had a right to take what others only asked or worked for?

The sweet scent of the new-mown hay disappeared, the hay became whiter, the ricks rose higher, and were topped and finished. Hourly the year grew drier and sultry, as the time of wheat-harvest approached. Sap of spring had dried away; dry stalk of high summer remained, browned with heat. Mr. Andrew (in the country the son is always called by his Christian name, with the prefix Master or Mr.) had been sent for to London to fill the promised lucrative berth. The reapers were in the corn—Dolly tying up; big Mat slashing at the yellow stalks. Why the man worked so hard no one could imagine, unless it was for pure physical pleasure of using those great muscles. Unless, indeed, a fire, as it were, was burning in his mind, and drove him to labour to smother it, as they smother fires by beating them. Dolly was happier than ever—the gayest of the gay. She sang, she laughed, her white, gleaming teeth shone in the sunshine; it was as if she had some secret which enabled her to defy the taunts and cruel, shameless words hurled at her, like clods of earth, by the other women. Gay she was, as the brilliant poppies who, having the sun as their own, cared for nothing else.

Till suddenly, just before the close of harvest, Dolly and Mat

were missing from the field. Of course their absence was slanderously connected, but there was no known ground for it. Big Mat was found intoxicated at the tavern, from which he never moved for a fortnight, spending in one long drain of drink the lump of money his mighty arms had torn from the sun in the burning hours of work. Dolly was ill at home; sometimes in her room, sometimes downstairs; but ill, shaky and weak—ague they called it. There were dark circles round her eyes, her chin drooped to her breast; she wrapped herself in a shawl in all the heat. It was some time before even the necessity of working brought her forth again, and then her manner was hurried and furtive; she would begin trembling all of a minute, and her eyes filled quickly.

By degrees the autumn advanced, and the rooks followed the ploughman. Dolly gradually recovered something of her physical buoyancy; her former light-heartedness never returned. Sometimes an incident would cause a flash of the old gaiety, only for her to sink back into subdued quietness. The change was most noticeable in her eyes; soft and tender still, brown and velvety, there was a deep sadness in them—the longer she looked at you, the more it was visible. They seemed as if her spirit had suffered some great wrong; too great for redress, and that could only be borne in silence.

How beautiful are beautiful eyes! Not from one aspect only, as a picture is, where the light falls rightly on it—the painter's point of view—they vary to every and any aspect. The orb rolls to meet the changing circumstance, and is adjusted to all. But a little inquiry into the mechanism of the eyes will indicate how wondrously they are formed. Science has dispelled many illusions, broken many dreams; but here, in the investigation of the eye, it has added to our marvelling interest. The eye is still like the work of a magician: it is physically divine. Besides the liquid flesh which delights the beholder, there is then the retina, the mysterious nerve which receives a thousand pictures on one surface and confuses none; and further, the mystery of the brain, which reproduces them at will, twenty years, yes threescore years and ten, afterwards. Perhaps of all physical things, the eye is most beautiful, most divine.

Her eyes were still beautiful, but subdued and full of a great wrong. What that wrong was became apparent in the course of time. Dolly had to live with Mat, and, unhappily, not as his wife. Next harvest there was a child wrapped in a red shawl with her in the field, placed under the shocks while she worked. Her brother Bill talked and threatened—of what avail was it? The law gave no redress, and among men in these things, force is master still. There were none who could meet big Mat in fight.

Something seemed to burn in Mat like fire. Now he worked, and now he drank, but the drink which would have killed another did him no injury. He grew and flourished upon it, more bone, more muscle, more of the savage nature of original man. But there was something within on fire. Was he not satisfied even yet? Did he arrogate yet further prerogatives of kings?—prerogatives which even kings claim no longer. One day, while in drink, his heavy fist descended—he forgot his might; he did not check it, like Ulysses in the battle with Irus—and Dolly fell.

When they lifted her up, one eye was gone.

It was utterly put out, organically destroyed; no skill, no money, no loving care could restore it. The soft, brown velvet, the laugh, the tear gone for ever. The divine eye was broken—battered as a stone might be. The exquisite structure which reflected the trees and flowers, and took to itself the colour of the summer sky, was shapeless.

In the second year, Mr. Andrew came down, and one day met her in the village. He did not know her. The stoop, the dress which clothed, but responded to no curve, the sunken breast, and the sightless eye, how should he recognise these? This ragged, plain, this ugly, repellent creature—he did not know her. She spoke; Mr. Andrew hastily fumbled in his pocket, fetched out half-a-crown, gave it, and passed on quickly. How fortunate that he had not entangled himself!

Meantime, Mat drank and worked harder than ever, and became more morose, so that no one dared cross him, yet as a worker he was trusted by the farmer. Whatever it was, the fire in him burned deeper, and to the very quick. The poppies came and went once

more, the harvest moon rose yellow and ruddy, all the joy of the year proceeded, but Dolly was like a violet over which a waggon-wheel had rolled. The thorn had gone deep into her bosom.

II. RURAL DYNAMITE

IN the cold North men eat bread of fir-bark; in our own fields the mouse, if pressed for food in winter, will gnaw the bark of sapling trees. Frost sharpens the teeth like a file, and hunger is keener than frost. If any one used to more fertile scenes had walked across the barren meads Mr. Roberts rented as the summer declined, he would have said that a living could only be gained from them as the mouse gains it in frost-time. By sharp-set nibbling and paring; by the keenest frost-bitten meanness of living; by scraping a little bit here, and saving another trifle yonder, a farmer might possibly get through the year. At the end of each year he would be rather worse off than before, descending a step annually. He must nibble like a frost-driven mouse to merely exist. So poor was the soil, that the clay came to the surface, and in wet weather a slip of the foot exposed it—the heel cut through the veneer of turf into the cold, dead, moist clay. Nothing grew but rushes. Every time a horse moved over the marshy land his hoof left deep holes which never again filled up, but remained the year through, now puddles, full of rain water, and now dry holes. The rain made the ground a swamp; the sun cracked it as it does paint. Who could pay rent for such a place?—for rushes, flags, and water.

Yet it was said, with whisper and nod, that the tenant, Mr. Roberts, was a warm man as warm men go after several years of bad seasons, falling prices, and troubles of all kinds. For one thing, he hopped, and it is noted among country folk, that, if a man hops, he generally accumulates money. Mr. Roberts hopped, or rather dragged his legs from rheumatics contracted in thirty years' hardest of hard labour on that thankless farm. Never did any man labour so continually as he, from the earliest winter dawn when the blackbird, with puffed feathers, still tried to slumber in the thornbush, but could not for

cold, on till the latest summer eve, after the white barn owl had passed round the fir copse. Both with his hands, and with his eyes, now working, now watching, the man ceased not, and such was his dogged pertinacity that, like the mouse, he won a living. He did more, he saved. At what price? At the price of a fireless life: I mean without cheer, by denial of everything which renders human life superior to that of the rabbit in his burrow. No wife, no children, no niece, or any woman to see to his comforts; no comfort and no pleasure; a bare house and rheumatism. Bill, his principal labourer, Dolly's brother, slept with him in the same bed, master and man, a custom common in old times, long since generally disused.

Yet Mr. Roberts was not without some humanism, if such a word may be used; certainly he never gave away a penny, but as certainly he cheated no man. He was upright in conduct, and not unpleasant in manner. He could not have been utterly crabbed for this one labourer, Bill, to stay with him five-and-twenty years. This was the six-and-twentieth year they had dwelt there together in the gaunt, grey, lonely house, with woods around them, isolated from the world, and without a hearth. A hearth is no hearth unless a woman sit by it. This six-and-twentieth year, the season then just ended, had been the worst of the series; rain had spoiled the hay, increased the payment of wages by lengthening the time of hay-making; ruin, he declared, stared him in the face; he supposed at last he must leave the tenancy. And now the harvest was done, the ricks thatched with flags from the marsh (to save straw), the partridges were dispersed, the sportsmen having broken up the coveys, the black swifts had departed—they built every year in the grey stone slates on the lonely house—and nothing was left to be done but to tend the cattle morning and evening, to reflect on the losses, and to talk ceaselessly of the new terror which hung over the whole district.

It was rick-burning. Probably, gentlemen in London, who "sit at home at ease," imagine rick-burning a thing of the past, impossible since insurance robbed the incendiary of his sting, unheard of and extinct. Nothing of the kind. That it is not general is true,

still to this day it breaks out in places, and rages with vehemence, placing the countryside under a reign of terror. The thing seems inexplicable, but it is a fact; the burning of ricks and farm-sheds every now and then, in certain localities, reaches the dimensions of a public disaster.

One night from the garret window, Mr. Roberts, and Bill, his man, counted five fires visible at once. One was in full sight, not a mile distant, two behind the wood, above which rose the red glow, the other two dimly illumined the horizon on the left like a rising moon. While they watched in the dark garret the rats scampered behind them, and a white barn owl floated silently by. They counted up fourteen fires that had taken place since the beginning of the month, and now there were five together. Mr. Roberts did not sleep that night. Being so near the woods and preserves it was part of the understanding that he should not keep a gun—he took a stout staff, and went out to his hayricks, and there stayed till daylight. By ten o'clock he was trudging into the town; his mind had been half-crazed with anxiety for his ricks; he was not insured, he had never insured, just to save the few shillings it cost, such was the nibbling by which he lived. He had struggled hard and kept the secret to himself—of the non-insurance—he foresaw that if known he should immediately suffer. But at the town the insurance agent demurred to issue a policy. The losses had been so heavy, there was no knowing how much farther the loss might extend, for not the slightest trace of the incendiary had yet been discovered, notwithstanding the reward offered, and this was a new policy. Had it been to add to an old one, had Mr. Roberts insured in previous years, it would have been different. He could not do it on his own responsibility, he must communicate with the head office; most likely they would do it, but he must have their authority. By return of post he should know. Mr. Roberts trudged home again, with the misery of two more nights confronting him; two more nights of exposure to the chance of utter ruin. If those ricks were burned, the savings—the nibblings of his life—were gone. This intense, frost-bitten economy, by which

alone he had been able to prosper, now threatened to overwhelm him with destruction.

There is nothing that burns so resolutely as a hayrick; nothing that catches fire so easily. Children are playing with matches; one holds the ignited match till, it scorches the fingers, and then drops it. The expiring flame touches three blades of dry grass, of hay fallen from the rick, these flare immediately; the flame runs along like a train of gun-powder, rushes up the side of the rick, singeing it as a horse's coat is singed, takes the straw of the thatch which blackens into a hole, cuts its way through, the draught lifts it up the slope of the thatch, and in five minutes the rick is on fire irrecoverably. Unless beaten out at the first start, it is certain to go on. A spark from a pipe, dropped from the mouth of a sleeping man, will do it. Once well alight, and the engines may come at full speed, one five miles, one eight, two ten; they may pump the pond dry, and lay hose to the distant brook—it is in vain. The spread of the flames may be arrested, but not all the water that can be thrown will put out the rick. The outside of the rick where the water strikes it turns black, and dense smoke arises, but the inside core continues to burn till the last piece is charred. All that can be done is to hastily cut away that side of the rick—if any remains—yet untouched, and carry it bodily away. A hayrick will burn for hours, one huge mass of concentrated, glowing, solid fire, not much flame, but glowing coals, so that the farmer may fully understand, may watch and study and fully comprehend the extent of his loss. It burns itself from a square to a dome, and the red dome grows gradually smaller till its lowest layer of ashes strews the ground. It burns itself as it were in blocks: the rick was really homogeneous; it looks while aglow as if it had been constructed of large bricks or blocks of hay. These now blackened blocks dry and crumble one by one till the dome sinks. Under foot the earth is heated, so intense is the fire; no one can approach, even on the windward side, within a pole's length. A widening stream of dense white smoke flows away upwards, flecked with great sparks, blackening the elms, and carrying flakes of burning hay over outhouses, sheds, and farmsteads. Thus from the

clouds, as it seems, drops further destruction. Nothing in the line of the wind is safe. Fine impalpable ashes drift and fall like rain half a mile away. Sometimes they remain suspended in the air for hours, and come down presently when the fire is out, like volcanic dust drifting from the crater. This dust lies soft and silky on the hand. By the burning rick, the air rushing to the furnace roars aloud, coming so swiftly as to be cold; on one side intense heat, on the other cold wind. The pump, pump, swing, swing of the manual engines; the quick, short pant of the steam fire-engine; the stream and hiss of the water; shouts and answers; gleaming brass helmets; frightened birds; crowds of white faces, whose frames are in shadow; a red glow on the black, wet mud of the empty pond; rosy light on the walls of the homestead, crossed with vast magnified shadows; windows glistening; men dragging sail-like tarpaulins and rick cloths to cover the sheds; constables upright and quiet, but watchful, standing at intervals to keep order; if by day, the strangest mixture of perfect calm and heated anxiety, the smoke bluish, the floating flakes visible as black specks, the flames tawny, pigeons fluttering round, cows grazing in idol-like indifference to human fears. Ultimately, rows of flattened and roughly circular layers of blackened ashes, whose traces remain for months.

This is dynamite in the hands of the village ruffian.

This hay, or wheat, or barley, not only represents money; it represents the work of an entire year, the sunshine of a whole summer; it is the outcome of man's thought and patient labour, and it is the food of the helpless cattle. Besides the hay, there often go with it buildings, implements, waggons, and occasionally horses are suffocated. Once now and then the farmstead goes.

Now, has not the farmer, even if covered by insurance, good reason to dread this horrible incendiarism? It is a blow at his moral existence as well as at his pecuniary interests. Hardened indeed must be that heart that could look at the old familiar scene, blackened, fire-spilt, trodden, and blotted, without an inward desolation. Boxes and barrels of merchandise in warehouses can be replaced, but money does not replace the growth of nature.

Hence the brutality of it—the blow at a man's heart. His hay, his wheat, his cattle, are to a farmer part of his life; coin will not replace them. Nor does the incendiary care if the man himself, his house, home, and all perish at the same time. It is dynamite in despite of insurance. The new system of silos—burying the grass when cut at once in its green state, in artificial caves—may much reduce the risk of fire if it comes into general use.

These fire invasions almost always come in the form of an epidemic; not one but three, five, ten, fifteen fires follow in quick succession. Sometimes they last through an entire winter, though often known to take place in summer, directly after harvest.

Rarely does detection happen; to this day half these incendiary fires are never followed by punishment. Yet it is noted that they generally occur within a certain radius; they are all within six, or seven, or eight miles, being about the distance that a man or two bent on evil could compass in the night time. But it is not always night; numerous fires are started in broad daylight. Stress of winter weather, little food, and clothing, and less fuel at home have been put forward as causes of a chill desperation, ending in crime. On the contrary, these fires frequently occur when labourers' pockets are full, just after they have received their harvest wages. Bread is not at famine prices; hard masters are not specially selected for the gratification of spite; good masters suffer equally. What then is the cause?

There is none but that bitter, bitter feeling which I venture to call the dynamite disposition, and which is found in every part of the civilised world; in Germany, Italy, France, and our own mildly ruled England. A brooding, morose, concentrated hatred of those who possess any kind of substance or comfort; landlord, farmer, every one. An unsparing vendetta, a merciless shark-like thirst of destructive vengeance; a monomania of battering, smashing, crushing, such as seizes the Lancashire weaver, who kicks his woman's brains out without any special reason for dislike, mingled with and made more terrible by this unchangeable hostility to property and those who own it. No creed, no high moral hopes of the rights of

man and social regeneration, no true sans culottism even, nothing at all but set teeth and inflated nostrils; blow up, burn, smash, annihilate! A disposition or character which is not imaginary but a fact, as proved abundantly by the placing of rails and iron chairs on lines to upset trains, by the dynamite explosions at Government offices, railway stations, and even at newspaper offices, the sending of letters filled with explosives, firing dynamite in trout streams just to destroy the harmless fish; a character which in the country has hitherto manifested itself in the burning of ricks and farm buildings. Science is always putting fresh power into the hands of this class. In cities they have partly awakened to the power of knowledge; in the country they still use the match. If any one thinks that there is no danger in England because there are no deep-seated causes of discontent, such as foreign rule, oppressive enactments, or conscription, I can assure him that he is woefully mistaken. This class needs no cause at all; prosperity cannot allay its hatred, and adversity does not weaken it. It is certainly unwise to the last degree to provoke this demon, to control which as yet no means have been found. You cannot arrest the invisible; you cannot pour Martini-Henry bullets into a phantom. How are you going to capture people who blow themselves into atoms in order to shatter the frame of a Czar?

In its dealings with the lower class this generation is certainly far from wise. Never was the distinction so sharp between the poor—the sullen poor who stand scornful and desperate at the street corners—and the well-to-do. The contrast now extends to every one who can afford a black coat. It is not confined to the millionaire. The contrast is with every black coat. Those who only see the drawing-room side of society, those who move, too, in the well-oiled atmosphere of commercial offices, are quite ignorant of the savage animosity which watches them to and fro the office or the drawing-room from the street corner. Question it is if any mediaeval soldiery bursting abroad in Sinigaglia were so brutal as is the street rough, that blot and hideous product of modern civilisation. How easy it is to point to the sobriety and the good sense of the working class and smile in assumed complacency! What have the sober

mass of the working class to do with it? No more than you or I, or the Rothschilds, or dukes of blood royal. There the thing is, and it requires no great sagacity to see that the present mode of dealing with it is a failure and likely to be worse. If you have gunpowder, you should not put it under hydraulic pressure. You should not stir it up and hold matches to it to see if it is there. That is what prosecutions and imprisonments on charges of atheism and so on do. It is stirring up the powder and trying it with a match.

Nor should you put it under hydraulic pressure, which is now being done all over the country, under the new laws which force every wretch who enters a workhouse for a night's shelter to stay there two nights; under the cold-blooded cruelty which, in the guise of science, takes the miserable quarter of a pint of ale from the lips of the palsied and decrepit inmates; which puts the imbecile—even the guiltless imbecile—on what is practically bread and water. Words fail me to express the cruelty and inhumanity of this crazed legislation.

Sometimes we see a complacent paragraph in the papers, penned by an official doubtless, congratulating the public that the number relieved under the new regulations has dropped from, say, six hundred to a hundred and fifty. And what, oh blindest of the blind, do you imagine has become of the remaining four hundred and fifty? Has your precious folly extinguished them? Are they dead? No, indeed. All over the country, hydraulic pressure, in the name of science, progress, temperance, and similar perverted things, is being put on the gunpowder—or the dynamite, if you like—of society. Every now and then some individual member of the Army of Wretches turns and becomes the Devil of modern civilisation. Modern civilisation has put out the spiritual Devil and produced the Demon of Dynamite. Let me raise a voice, in pleading for more humane treatment of the poor—the only way, believe me, by which society can narrow down and confine the operations of this new Devil. A human being is not a dog, yet is treated worse than a dog.

Force these human dogs to learn to read with empty stomachs—stomachs craving for a piece of bread while education is crammed

into them. In manhood, if unfortunate, set them to break stones. If imbecility supervene give them bread and water. In helpless age give them the cup of cold water. This is the way to breed dynamite. And then at the other end of the scale let your Thames Embankment Boulevard be the domain of the street rough; let your Islington streets be swept by bands of brutes; let the well dressed be afraid to venture anywhere unless in the glare of gas and electric light! Manufacture it in one district, and give it free scope and play in another. Yet never was there an age in which the mass of society, from the titled to the cottager, was so full of real and true humanity, so ready to start forward to help, so imbued with the highest sentiments. The wrong is done in official circles. No steel-clad baron of Norman days, no ruthless red-stockinged cardinal, with the Bastile in one hand and the tumbril in the other, ever ruled with so total an absence of Heart as the modern "official," the Tyrants of the nineteenth century; whose rods are hobbies in the name of science miscalled, in the name of temperance perverted, in the name of progress backwards, in the name of education without food. It is time that the common-sense of society at large rose in revolution against it. Meantime dynamite.

This is a long digression: suppose while you have been reading it that Mr. Roberts has passed one of the two terrible nights, his faithful Bill at one end of the rickyard and himself at the other. The second night they took up their positions in the same manner as soon as it was dark. There was no moon, and the sky was overcast with those stationary clouds which often precede a great storm, so that the darkness was marked, and after they had parted a step or two they lost sight of each other. Worn with long wakefulness, and hard labour during the day, they both dropped asleep at their posts. Mr. Roberts awoke from the dead vacancy of sleep to the sensation of a flash of light crossing his eyelids, and to catch a glimpse of a man's neck with a red necktie illuminated by flame like a Rembrandt head in the centre of shadow. He leaped forward literally yelling—the incendiary he wholly forgot—his rick! his rick! He beat the side of the rick with his stick, and as it had but just caught he beat the flame

out. Then he dropped senseless on the ground. Bill, awakened by Roberts' awful yell or shriek of excitement, started to his feet, heard a man rushing by in the darkness, and hurled his heavy stick in that direction. By the thud which followed and a curse, he knew it had hit the object, but not with sufficient force to bring the scoundrel down. The fellow escaped; Bill went to his master and lifted him up; how he got Roberts home he did not know, but it was hours before Roberts could speak. Towards sunrise he recovered, and would go immediately to assure himself that the ricks were safe. Then they found a man's hat—Bill's stick had knocked it off—and by that hat and the red necktie the incendiary was brought to justice. The hat was big Mat's; he always wore a red necktie.

Big Mat made no defence; he was simply stolidly indifferent to the whole proceedings. The only statement he made was that he had not fired four of the ricks, and he did not know who had done so. Example is contagious; some one had followed the dynamite lead, detection never took place, but the fires ceased. Mat, of course, went for the longest period of penal servitude the law allotted. I should say that he did not himself know why he did it. That intense, brooding moroseness, that wormwood hatred, does not often understand itself. So much the more dangerous is it; no argument, no softening influence can reach it.

Faithful Bill, who had served Mr. Roberts almost all his life, and who probably would have served him till the end, received a money reward from the insurance office for his share in detecting the incendiary. This reward ruined him—killed him. Golden sovereigns in his pocket destroyed him. He went on the drink; he drank, and was enticed to drink, till in six weeks he died in the infirmary of the workhouse.

Mat being in the convict prison, and Dolly near to another confinement, she could not support herself; she was driven to the same workhouse in which her brother had but just died. I am not sure, but believe that pseudo-science, the Torturer of these days, denied her the least drop of alcohol during her travail. If it did permit one drop, then was the Torturer false to his creed. Dolly survived, but

utterly broken, hollow-chested, a workhouse fixture. Still, so long as she could stand she had to wash in the laundry; weak as she was, they weakened her still further with steam and heat, and labour. Washing is hard work for those who enjoy health and vigour. To a girl, broken in heart and body, it is a slow destroyer. Heat relaxes all the fibres; Dolly's required bracing. Steam will soften wood and enable the artificer to bend it to any shape. Dolly's chest became yet more hollow; her cheek-bones prominent; she bent to the steam. This was the girl who had lingered in the lane to help the boy pick watercress, to gather a flower, to listen to a thrush, to bask in the sunshine. Open air and green fields were to her life itself. Heart miseries are always better borne in the open air. How just, how truly scientific, to shut her in a steaming wash-house!

The workhouse was situated in a lovely spot, on the lowest slope of hills, hills covered afar with woods. Meads at hand, corn-fields farther away, then green slopes over which broad cloud-shadows glided slowly. The larks sang in spring, in summer the wheat was golden, in autumn the distant woods were brown and red and yellow. Had you spent your youth in those fields, had your little drama of life been enacted in them, do you not think that you would like at least to gaze out at them from the windows of your prison? It was observed that the miserable wretches were always looking out of the windows in this direction. The windows on that side were accordingly built up and bricked in that they might not look out.