

China, who knew how difficult it was for the old rector to make even this concession, and who had indeed almost despaired of enlisting the old man's assistance at all, thanked him heartily; and shortly afterwards the family gathered in the sitting-room of the rectory for evening prayers.

The next morning China Maedonald made his way through the town again to Windermere's cottage. In the front garden he found Mrs. Cadwallader cutting some flowers. She still wore black; but the morning sun shining on her fair hair and white skin, against the background of the rich colours of the garden, gave her a charming air. China admitted to himself the naturalness of Windermere's course of action.

As he came in the gateway, he wished her good morning, and asked for Windermere.

"He is in the kitchen," she said, laughing, "peeling the potatoes. Your visit last night has bucked him up wonderfully, and he is full of energy this morning." She shot a glance at the house, and then continued in a lower voice, "And I think you took the right line with him last night. He told me something of what you said. I would gladly do my share, even by taking in washing, if only we could get free of this wretched pension question. I begin to believe that pensions bring a curse with them. What do you think? But of course I dare not say anything like this to poor old Windy, for fear of upsetting him. He worries himself sick about things, as it is."

"I have great hopes," said China, "that we shall be able to find something that he can do. Has he ever done any writing?"

"I have done my best to get him to try writing some stories; and he has actually made one or two attempts, which I thought awfully good. But he tears up everything he writes—says it is dishwater, or bilge, or something like that—and won't make any effort to get it published."

"That's the artistic temperament,"

said China; and he made his way through to the kitchen.

Windermere looked up from his menial task as China entered. He was apparently in great good humour.

"Like all crocks," he laughed, "I am put on cook-house fatigue."

"Nonsense," retorted China, "you asked the sergeant-major to put you on this fatigue because you like it."

"Perhaps you're right. But what duty have you come to warn me for now? I can see in your eye the look of the orderly sergeant when he comes around and says, 'You're for guard to-night'."

"You do me an injustice. I could never achieve the manner of an orderly sergeant. But I have one or two proposals which I should like you to think over. In the first place, have you ever done any writing?"

"Nothing to talk about."

"Why not try your hand at it?"

"What could I write about?"

"You could do some stuff about the war; there is quite a demand for that sort of thing."

"You forget that it is some time since I was at the war, and anything I could write would be hopelessly out of date."

"Well, then, write about the problems of demobilization and reconstruction."

"I don't know anything about them."

China lost his temper. "Then write about the pensions system," he snapped. "You know something about that."

Windermere paused in the midst of a potato. "By Jove, Padre," he exclaimed, "do you know, I think I could do something along that line."

"Write a novel," went on China, anxious to make hay while the sun shone. "I'll guarantee to find you a publisher, or else I'll help you to publish it on your own account."

But Windermere was not listening to him. With the potato knife in one hand and a half-peeled potato in the other, he was gazing out of the kitchen window as though he saw a vision.