

by moonlight or in open day, according to circumstances—had left him behind, any time for thirty years past. He was not such a very old man, though everybody called him so. He owned to being "nigh upon sixty."

To the children who swarmed on the doorsteps, or played within the limited enclosure, Roger seemed a very Methuselah.

What a vast, impenetrable space lies between childhood and threescore years! How can childish minds be expected to span it?

Owd Roger was spare and delicate-looking, despite the fact that his calling compelled him to brave all weathers. The expression of his face was kind and winning. His hair was thin and, like his all-round whiskers and short beard, almost white. He looked older than his age and his frame was just a little bent from carrying heavily-laden baskets year in, year out. He lived the quietest life imaginable, yet, in spite of his retiring ways, Owd Roger was well respected. Not a mother in the court but would have referred to him in a case of difficulty. Not a toddler born in Glinderses but would have run to him as he appeared under the archway, more especially if tears had to be wiped away, or some childish sorrow removed by sympathy.

There were endless traditions about Owd Roger's past. Some said he had lost a fortune, others that his wife had died a year after they were married. These last called Roger a "widow man," and suggested that as women were plentiful enough, he might easily have filled up the gap by making a second choice.

Others were positive that Roger had been crossed in love in his young days, and had revenged himself on the sex by hiding from everybody belonging to him in Glinderses. Certain it was that Roger disdained all female aid and did everything for himself.

"Nobody ever crosses his door or sees inside his place," said one gossip.

This was some years ago.

"I have," said a second, in a tone of triumph.

"Did Owd Roger ask you in?" questioned a third.

"Not he. I've peeped through the keyhole lots o' times. He's out sellin'

from mornin' to-night, you know. The place is as neat as a new pin, an' he has real tidy things in it—for a man. I often grudge that a man should have that room. It seems too much for him to have all to himself. It's a goodish size, and the window is big and looks on to the street. Glinderses is a confined place. Never a fresh thing, and not often a fresh face to see in it. I get sick o' looking at the same old bricks and mortar, and the same folks, with no change."

The speaker told the truth; but as she spent most of her time just within the archway if it rained, and just on the street side of it in favourable weather, she managed to vary the monotony she complained of. Her house and children might suffer through this self-indulgence, to say nothing of the husband. But conjugal differences were regarded as trifles in Glinderses, and hardly attracted notice.

It was a queer thing, but not a dweller in Glinderses knew whether Roger was the Christian or surname of its oldest inhabitant. Occasionally some extra civil neighbour would say, "Good-day, Mr. Rogers," and this would bring a smile and a cheery answer from the old man. He was not accustomed to be styled "Mr.," but it was pleasant all the same.

When Roger was ten years younger, the cottage next to his own became vacant, and to everybody's surprise it was taken by a real lady. Not the sort of lady that Glinderses had seen more than once before within its precincts—the sort that gives itself airs, bounces about, talks loudly, dresses in all the colours of the rainbow and most of them at the same time, and demands admiring homage by virtue of these qualifications.

The new tenant, next door to Owd Roger, gave herself no airs, but rather shrank from notice than otherwise. She wore black of the simplest kind; but the whole court agreed that it was stylish, though "awful plain made." It was suggestive of widowhood, though weeds had been discarded, if they had ever been worn.

Mrs. Holgate brought with her enough of decent furniture for the two rooms and the little kitchen, and, as a companion, a boy of four years old, by name, Richard.