

unconsciousness of the actual was liable to inroads from without, and that day at school roused the curiosity of an inquiring mind. Lizarann asked herself for the first time whether the conditions of her home-life were really normal, and nothing better was to be looked forward to in the future. No doubt Tallack Street would have sided with the lady in the views she expressed of any one house in it, though each house would have laid claim to an exceptional character for itself. But in the case of Steptoe's its unanimity would have been impressive; for Lizarann's Uncle Steptoe he'd be in liquor as often as not, and frequently aim a stool or suchlike at his wife's head—besides language you could hear the length of the street.

It does not follow that he had no provocation. Mrs. Steptoe was a fine study of the effect of exasperating circumstances on a somewhat uncertain temper, and Lizarann conceived of the result as a typical aunt. She had married, some twelve years since, from motives difficult of analysis, a cobbler who drank, towards whom she had always professed indifference. She seemed to have based a low opinion of all mankind on an assumption that they were none on 'em much better than her husband, and most of 'em were a tidy sight worse. If so, the tidiness of the sight might have disappointed orderly, old-fashioned folk. Not that Bob Steptoe was a bad sort when he was sober. Only that was so seldom.

Now, on the Saturday evening in question, this uncle by marriage of Lizarann, having previously taken too much beer, took too much whisky, and became quarrelsome. "A man ain't always answerable, look at it how you may!" said Tallack Street. Let us hope Mr. Steptoe was not, as on this occasion he loosened three of his wife's front teeth and indented the bridge of her nose. His blind brother-in-law, returning at this moment, personally conducted by his small daughter, was unable to see, but guessed that Steptoe was under restraint by neighbours, and from mixed sounds of pain and rage and inarticulate spluttering that his wife had been the victim of his violence. Poor Jim, mad with anger, besought the restraining party only to let him get hold of his brother-in-law, and he would give him what would recall him to his memory on future occasions.