

stand. His money they did understand and appreciate, but even that did not come from him as though he wished it to do them good. He had, indeed, as much courtesy for the cottager in his own house as he would have had for Lord Wellington in his, but the courtesy was still a sort of iced haughtiness, and there was a feeling which crept even along the cottage hearth that it sprang from the respect he owed to himself as a gentleman, rather than from any consideration for others. Moreover, an uneasy consciousness that something was wanting in his intercourse with these people did but increase the coldness and reserve which they took for pride.

As he reached the door of the cottage he had intended to visit, it opened, and a dirty child toddled out, crying dismally. Within he saw the sick woman with her peevish, muddled face, and her coarse, soiled garments, crouching over the fire on the hearth strewn with white ashes; whilst garments hung to dry fluttered on the chairs, and the table bore the remains of the evening meal. While he took this in, a man with a pipe in his mouth slouched across the kitchen; the woman spoke to him sharply, warding off the pipe, and he looked at her and swore.

With a miserable feeling of depression and helplessness the curate turned away. What could he do there if he went in? Nothing; absolutely nothing. The woman would whine and the man scowl, and the dirt and squalor and tobacco smoke sickened him. Not that he would have turned away for that, if there had been any good to do by going in, but in his inmost heart he felt that there was not, at least, that he could do none. So he looked at the pig piston with an exasperated feeling that it was always busy and always effecting something, and went back to his room and his books.

There was discomfort in the aspect of that room, with the light straight through from wall to wall, and the meagre furniture, but he shut his eyes to it, with a scornful self-questioning as to whether it was or was not too good for him. He wanted a place to study in, not a lounge. Want of appreciation had not made him careless over the compilation of those sermons which so few understood, or even heard. They were indeed the one aim and object of his life; he gave to them his best thoughts, and brought to bear upon them his highest powers of reasoning. And yet what could he do in his present position? This was his thought as he stopped for a moment and laid down his pen. He summoned up before him the whole body of his hearers and non-hearers; the whole silent stolid mass of people who sat in their pews for the purpose of listening to him. Which amongst them cared for his preaching or his efforts? Could he find one person in the congregation able to give a trustworthy verdict on the fruit of his brain? And there came into his mind the restless, irritating thought—“If I were in a different position; if I had to speak to brain-workers, if I had scope for my powers—a fair field; then I might do something.” But the thought was momentary, though it left its sting behind. The asceticism which made him put away from himself the comforts which other men enjoy innocently, made him silence these discontented longings with a single stern dogma. After all, if he had but known it, he was self-deceived. He was in fact preaching to himself, not to others. He lived, as it were, in the shadow of his own brain, and the sermons which he prepared for an ordinary mixed congregation, were in reality only the working out, link by link, of the chain of ideas and theories springing up in connection with, or in answer to the great philosophical and scientific writers of the day—thoughts which hovered about