

THE BLAKES AND FLANAGANS.

BY MRS. JAS. A. SADDLER.

CHAPTER XVIII. THE DINNER PARTY—THE MISFORTUNE OF HAVING A WEAK STOMACH.

Edward Flanagan would have persuaded Margaret to go with him next day to Henry Blake's, but Margaret was, for once, obstinate, or rather firm. "I have never associated with such people as you will meet there," said she; "and I must own I have little liking for their company. Still, I wish you to go, Edward, because your absence might offend your cousin, and I have a great aversion to family quarrels."

No Edward was forced to go alone. He, too, was anxious to keep up appearances, though, in his heart, he felt dissatisfied with Henry for not having invited his father and mother. A numerous party already assembled in the drawing-room, whiling away the tedious half hour before dinner in promiscuous conversation. The Thomsons and Pearsons were all there, so were the Smiths and Greens, but Edward waited in vain to see either uncle or aunt. This he could not help remarking to Mrs. Henry Blake.

"Oh! really," replied Jane, "the old folk are so crochety of late, that we have been forced to cut the connection."

"Indeed," said Edward, "and pray how long is it since you have cut the connection? I was not aware of any coolness between you."

"Well! I can't say there's a coolness; but, somehow, they and we don't get along well together, so I believe there's a tacit agreement between us to keep asunder. The old lady has turned that Henry and I should be of just the same notion. So, of course, we can't;—it would be quite impossible, you know, Mr. Flanagan, for people like us to adopt those old-fashioned ways and notions that they brought with them from Ireland."

This was certainly a satisfactory reason for "cutting the connection," and Edward could not help smiling at the *audacite* with which it came out. He wondered was she really so simple as not to be aware that his parents, too, had brought ways and notions from Ireland; and, what was more, that he had himself "adopted" those identical ways and notions. But, to Mrs. Henry he merely bowed and smiled, and said: "Oh! of course—no one could expect any such thing."

They were two ministers at the table on that occasion. One was the Rev. Hooper Tomkins (who actually did say grace as Tim had expected), and the other a tall, thin, melancholy looking man, who announced the word to the Baptists of that section of the city. These gentlemen were the guests of the evening, and, as such, were duly installed in the places of honor. Conversation went on briskly during dinner, being chiefly of the light and cursory kind which gives life and animation to the dull routine of the dinner-table. Mr. Tomkins was quite taken with our friend Edward, and kept talking to him across the table whenever an opportunity offered. Before him was placed a superb boiled turkey, with oyster sauce, the sight of which softened the good man's heart, yes, even to woman's tenderness.

"Let me help you to some of this fine turkey, Mr. Flanagan. It is a splendid specimen of that species. What shall I help you to?"

"I thank you, Mr. Tomkins," replied Edward, with a smile, "but I cannot avail myself of your kind offer I dine on fish to-day."

"Why, how is that?" said Tomkins, with a look of surprise; "are you a Papist?"

"I have the honor," said Edward, "Henry, will you allow me to send you some of this salmon-trout. I can recommend it, I assure you."

"Thank you," said Henry, "with something like a blush on his face, 'I am doing very well just now. I never eat fish. May I trouble you, Mr. Tomkins?'"

Mr. Tomkins was only too happy to be so troubled. Having helped Henry, he renewed his attack on Edward.

"Really, Mr. Flanagan," said he, "I could not have supposed that a person of your discernment and good sense would be capable of such puerile folly—pardon me, my good young friend—we need not wonder at the low and the vulgar doing these things when we see such men as you giving them an example. Allow me to ask what good you expect to derive from dining on fish instead of flesh?"

"And allow me to ask you, reverend sir," said Edward, very coolly, "by what authority do you call me to account for my choice of food? Suppose I were to answer your questions, as I might do, by saying that I have as much right to eat fish as you have to eat flesh or fowl. But, I will go a little further in the way of explanation. I understood you to ask me why I choose to abstain from flesh-meat to day?"

"Precisely!"

"I do so, sir, because the Church commands me to do so—that is quite enough for you to know, or for me to tell."

Henry had entered into a close conversation with his mother-in-law, who sat next him; but it was quite evident that not a word of what was passing was lost on him. This Edward saw, and he was almost sorry for it, as he shrank from giving unnecessary pain to any one. Still, he had not provoked the discussion, and he not in conscience, or in honor, decline giving his opinion when asked. Tomkins looked around the table as if to gather the suffrages of the company, and receiving sufficient encouragement from every eye, he would make another home-thrust at Romish superstitions.

"Still, you do not fully answer my question, Mr. Flanagan. I asked you what is the object of this abstinence? You say the Church commands it. I want to know why the Church commands it."

There was a general disposition to laugh, but Edward was by no means disconcerted. "In that case," said he, with the same quiet smile, "in that case, Mr. Tomkins, I must refer you to our catechism. You can have you at any time by sending to my house."

The laugh was turned against Tomkins, whose ruddy face grew a shade redder as he exclaimed: "Thank you, I have no desire to read Romish books. The track of the beast is, more or less, in every one of them."

"Ah, yes!" sighed the melancholy Milmore from the lower end of the table, "that is unappreciated the case!"

"You are certainly more candid than polite, gentlemen," observed Edward, with his usual composure. "Romish books are assuredly in bad odor with many people now-a-days. They have in them the 'words of power,' my good sir, which many love not, and cannot understand."

Tomkins affected to be very much engaged with the carving of his turkey; but Milmore came to his support; his thin, piping voice gathering strength as he proceeded. He took a new tack.

"Should take it as a favor, my good young gentleman, if you would just favor us with your own views of this Rom—this Catholic practice. How can you account for it on rational grounds?"

"We Catholics are not accustomed, sir, to put forth any views on a point of Church discipline. We believe and practice, but never presume to discuss the wise teachings of the Church. Abstaining from meat on such an occasion as the present, I consider as a public profession of my faith, and I would, therefore, deem it an act of cowardice to shrink from making that profession here or elsewhere. Where the commandments of the Church are in question, a Catholic knows no distinction as to time, or place, or company."

"How is it, then," said Tomkins, with unguarded triumph; "how is it that our excellent host can rise above these servile usages, and yet remain a Catholic?"

"As to that," returned Edward, "I am not the keeper of his conscience. He can answer your question better than I. Doubtless he has good reasons to assign."

Henry turned at the moment, and caught Edward's sly glance fixed full on him. He was just taking wine from Mrs. Green, which gave him an excuse for a trifling delay. When he had made his bow, and set down his empty glass, he turned to Mr. Tomkins.

"I owe it to my unfortunate stomach, my dear sir," said he, with a forced smile; "I cannot make it a Catholic stomach, do as I will."

"How unfortunate!" said Edward, in an ironical tone.

"The truth is, Mr. Tomkins," resumed Henry, determined, it would seem, to throw down the gauntlet at once; "the truth is, my stomach loathes its Catholic tone and old Columbia, and has never since recovered it. Indeed, I much fear it never will. It is unfortunate, as my cousin observes, but it cannot now be remedied. Mrs. Pearson, the pleasure of wine with you? Come! ladies and gentlemen, we have had too much of this tiresome controversy; let us change the subject."

"I quite agree with you," said Edward; "it is a subject I never take up from choice."

The ladies soon after retired, and Mr. Tomkins would have renewed the subject by asking Edward, ironically, did the Church permit him to use wine?

"Instead of answering your question," said Edward, "I will ask you to do me the favor of taking wine with me. I must positively decline answering irrelevant questions," he added with a cheerful smile. "What says mine host?"

All right, Edward! neither ask nor answer them—that is my rule."

"Ah!" sighed Milmore, who even the ruby wine could not warm; "Ah! it were well if all men adhered to that wise rule. The every-day life of man is full of irrelevant matter; yea even the saints of God do not always keep the main object in view."

"Pardon me, Mr. Milmore," said Edward; "if they do not, they are not saints. To be a saint, as we Catholics take it, is to put off the old man, with all his concupiscence, and live solely for God. I suspect, my dear sir, your notion of saints are not precisely of that nature."

"I repeat what I have already remarked," said Milmore, in the same dreary, monotonous tone. "I have studied the lives of the most eminent saints, and I have sought in vain for one who had not the human alloy. Do we not find a Luther and a Calvin, a Beza, a Zuinglius, a Knox, and a Wesley, having all and each some little remnant of the ancient Adam to mar the beauty of an otherwise faultless character? Ah! yes, even the brightest gems of Christianity have had their little imperfections! I suppose it is so written in the book."

"Very possibly," said Edward, laughing at the odd catalogue of saints brought forward so gravely by the reverend sentimentalist. "It were a mere loss of time," said he to himself, "to oppose some of the real saints to this motley group of proud, soul-less, roving heresarchs. How could such a company as this appreciate the perfect holiness of the saints; and for me to protest against the saintship of any of the notorious characters cited, would only give rise to an unprofitable discussion. I will let it pass."

After a while, when the gentlemen followed the ladies to the drawing-room, Joe Smith drew Silas Green into a corner. "I say, Silas, what do think of Edward Flanagan; ain't he a first-rate fellow?"

"Well, I must say I rather think so," replied Silas, thoughtfully. "I like to see man or woman acting up to their convictions."

"That is, if they have any," laughed Joe.

"Oh! of course. I guess Edward Flanagan has got convictions. He seems to see his way clear through religion, a thing I never could do yet, let me try over so hard."

"Now, just answer me a question,"

said Joe earnestly; "don't you think Henry looked rather small, with that lame excuse about his stomach?"

"Perhaps so; but after all, he only acts like a free born American, in eating and drinking what he likes."

"I know," said Joe; "but even so, I can respect a man that acts a principle. I'm a free born American, and yet I think I'd rather be Edward Flanagan than Henry Blake. I can't understand the difference, but I feel it. If I were a papist, I'm sure I'd do just as Flanagan does, for I don't like shirking; let a man be either one thing or another—that's my notion."

Silas laughed. "Why, let me look close at you," said he, "that I may be sure it's Joe Smith I have. Who ever expected to hear you praise a papist?"

"I praise any man when I find him deserve it," replied Joe, shortly. "But come, there's somebody going to sing, I believe."

During the remainder of the evening Joe kept quite close to Edward Flanagan, wondering how a man could be so intelligent, so polished, and all that, and yet give up the commandments of men (as Joe called the Church) so faithfully. And Edward was agreeably surprised to find to find Joe Smith really susceptible of right feeling, frank and honest, and warm-hearted. Much such a character as Zachary Thomson, but with more of what is now called religiosity—as distinguished from religion. Edward sighed as he contemplated the spiritual waste of so fine a nature, and he said, within himself, "How many there are like poor Joe—enlightened in all save religion, good and generous towards men, yet wholly ignorant of what they owe to God—how pitiable is such darkness!"

"Well, Joe," said Henry Blake; coming forward to where the two were seated; "are you making interest with Edward for one of his pretty sisters? If you are, I warn you in time when you are on the wrong scent."

Edward laughed, and Joe asked, rather earnestly "Why, how is that?"

"You know very little of the Flanagan family," went on Henry, with a dubious smile, "if you could ever dream of wedding a daughter of their house. I have heard uncle Tim say that no Protestant should ever marry into his family, at least with his consent. How say you, Edward, do you think your sisters are as great sticklers for the orthodox as their worthy sire?"

Joe turned his eye on Edward, expecting to see him laugh at this sally, as he termed it, but no such thing, he had grown quite serious, all of a sudden.

"Whether you speak in jest or earnest, Henry," said he, with more warmth than he usually manifested, "I will give you a serious answer, for the subject is one of serious import. I am quite sure that neither of my sisters would receive the addresses of a Protestant, knowing him for such."

"Indeed!" said Joe; "and why not, pray?"

"Simply," said Edward, "because they have been taught from their earliest infancy that salvation is not to be had outside the pale of the Church, and that it is wrong for the believer to contract a matrimonial alliance with the unbeliever. We have all grown up in the belief that Catholics should marry only Catholics and Protestants—"

"Oh! as to them," interrupted Henry, with some bitterness, "they may, I suppose, marry whom they please!"

"Precisely so," said Edward, calmly. "They have nothing to do as a point of faith, at least with his consent. How among the countless religions where with the land is covered. Pardon me, Mr. Smith, I should be sorry to give you any offence, but I have seen enough of you in the last hour or two to convince me that you are not wedded to any form or phase of Protestantism. I consider you therefore an impartial person."

"Thank you," said Joe, good humoredly; "thank you for the compliment. I must confess I have no particular religion of my own. I have never joined any Church as yet, though my good father and mother are out-and-out Calvinists. Hang it! I don't see the use of so many religions; I want to see all of one religion, and I guess I'll keep clear of them all while they're fighting and squabbling as they are. Now, just look at Tomkins and Milmore there. Don't they look as though they were to find together in the bonds of brotherly love! Well, I wish you could only hear each of them once in the pulpit. I tell you they do spout red-hot fire and fury against all religions but their own. I take it they all handle 'the word' in the way of business—just as you do your leather down in the Swamp, Mr. Flanagan—or our good host here his eloquence in carrying on a suit—all are going their best to earn the dollar."

His hearers both laughed at the earnestness of Joe's manner, and Edward was so pleased with his blunt honesty that he invited him to tea on the following evening.

"I'd advise you to keep the girls away," said Henry, with a sarcastic smile; "my friend Joe is not to be trusted."

"Never fear," replied Edward, "my poor sister Susan is not able to go out, and Ellen hardly ever leaves her. I want Mr. Smith to have a quiet, social evening with us. Mr. O'Callaghan, Margaret, and my father and mother, will I think, impress him favorably. He must see something more of us Catholics."

"You are the first of them whom I have known at all intimately," observed Joe, "and I am already favorably impressed, as you say."

Edward bowed and smiled. Henry attempted to smile, but the attempt was a failure. "Why, you forgot me, Joe. Have you not known me from 'childhood's hour even until now?'"

"Oh, yes," said Joe, blantly; "but you're not a regular out-and-out Catholic. I can meet half-papists like you every day, but they ain't any curiosity. I want to see what kind of people they are that fast and keep from eating meat, and pray, and go to confession, because somebody commands them to do so," and Joe laughed at the strange idea of being commanded into any

thing. "But I say, Flanagan," he added quickly, "do you go to confession—if it's a fair question?"

"Quite fair," said Edward, with a bright smile; "certainly I do go to confession."

"And how often, pray?"

"Once a month or so."

"Once a month! Well, if that ain't the queerest thing! That's something I could never do. I couldn't stand that, any how."

"Well, never mind confession now—that's not the point," said Edward, gaily. "But mind, I shall expect you to morrow evening."

"Might I bring Silas Green?"

"Oh, certainly—if you wish it. I must go now, Henry, and bid your wife good night, but know Margaret will be expecting me."

"I'm afraid you didn't enjoy yourself," said Jane listlessly; "if you did you wouldn't go away so early."

"Pardon me," said Edward with a cheerful smile, "I make it a rule never to stay out later than this, especially when Margaret is not with me. I have really spent a very pleasant evening. Good night."

When Edward got home, he found that Margaret and her father had gone early in the evening to see Susan, and were not yet returned. "She must be very poorly," thought Edward, "when they are staying so late;" so he went himself to see what was going on. He was surprised to find Susan lying on the sofa in the parlor, while Margaret and Eliza sat by her sewing very diligently. Mr. O'Callaghan, Mr. and Mrs. Flanagan, and John, were playing cards at a little distance.

"So there you are, Susie," said Edward, as he took her little hand in his, and sat down by her; "I thought you'd been in bed two hours ago. You look well this evening."

"And I feel well, too, Edward," replied Susan with a faint smile that made her brother start, for it gleamed over her wan features with a pale and sickly light. Her hand, too, was hot and feverish. Edward did not speak for a moment, and he coughed slightly, as if to hide his emotion.

"How industrious we have grown all of a sudden!" said he, at length, with a forced smile; "is that part of a ball-dress, girls, or what is it, that you cannot spare time for a single word?"

"They're working for me," said Susan, with sudden animation; "it's a covering for my little altar that they're making, and I'm just waiting to see it finished before I go to bed. You must come up to my room to-morrow evening. Edward, when the altar is finished, till you see how nice it looks. We have that handsome crucifix that father gave me, and the little statue of the Blessed Virgin that you gave me, and mother gave me a pretty pair of marble candlesticks, and I'm to have some wax-tapers. Oh! it will be so beautiful. We're going to say the Rosary there for the future, and when I get worse, you know, Edward, so that I can't leave my bed, I can turn towards that dear little altar and say my prayers."

"Well, but you're not going to be worse, Susan," said her brother, trying hard to keep back the tears that would come. "You must get well very soon, and you shall have a nice trip with us this summer—you and Eliza."

Susan smiled and shook her head, but not mournfully. "Thank you, dear Edward, I shall have a trip this summer—this spring, rather—but I don't want to have any of you come with me—not just yet. I'll go now alone, Edward, all alone; but, after a few years, some of you will come and join me in my new home—then another, until, at last, we shall all be united again—never to part any more. Why, what are you all crying for?" she added, looking round in surprise. "If you go on so, it will make me cry, too, and that would not be right. One who is soon to behold God in heaven, and to take her place at Mary's feet, neither can nor ought to mourn for leaving the earth. Even yourselves ought to be glad, though I fear, you are not—knowing that I can do you more good there, and she pointed upwards, "than I ever could on earth."

"Susie, dear," said John, rising hastily from the table, "I can't listen to you any longer. You'd make me cry like a baby—I tell you, there's no fear of your dying—if there were you couldn't talk so. Keep up your heart, sister, and let us keep up ours."

"Spoken like an angel, John," said his father, after wiping away his tears; "sorrow's time enough when it comes. I hope we'll soon have our poor little Susie able to go about again." Then lowering his voice to a whisper, he said to his wife, who sat with her back to the sofa: "Don't, for your life, let her see you crying. It always grieves her when she sees you down-hearted about her. Don't, Nelly, dear I—don't, for God's sake! I can hardly stand it myself. Just look at Edward and John—the two of them hanging over her, and each holding a hand. But don't look round. I don't want Susie to see us watching them."

"Mr. O'Callaghan had let his cards fall on the table, and sat gazing with moistened eyes on the beautiful picture of fraternal love. "Ah!" said he, in a low voice, "you ought to be proud and happy, both of you, my good friends, to see your children such as they are."

"I say, Edward," raising his voice, "how did you get along at Blake's? Were you blessed with the presence of Tomkins?"

"We were doubly blest, my dear sir," replied Edward, fully appreciating the old gentleman's kind intention, and willing to second it as far as he could; "we had not only Tomkins, but Milmore, the Baptist Minister, and what is more, we had a regular set-to about eating meat on Friday."

"How is that?" said his father. "I will tell you, sir, all about it, if Susie will only promise to laugh."

Susan smiled, and pressed her brother's hand, Edward proceeded to give an account of his campaign with the ministers, carefully avoiding John's part in it. But Tim put the question direct.

"Toll me, Edward, did Henry eat meat?"

"I am sorry to say he did, sir. He

says his stomach couldn't do one day without it."

"Humph!" said Tom, ironically. "I thought as much—he's mighty delicate, I know myself! And what about Eliza—did she follow suit?"

"I can't say, indeed, sir," replied Edward, evasively "I wasn't near Eliza at table."

All the family were much amused at honest Joe Smith's home-spun candor, and Edward's announcement that he was coming to tea next evening was received with general satisfaction.

"But, mind, you're not to have Eliza there," said Tim, with marked emphasis.

"I don't mean to have her, sir," said Edward in reply "I know your opinions and those of my dear mother too well for that. But really Joe is such an honest, good-hearted fellow, and, without defended me so manfully, that I thought I could do no less than ask him to spend an evening at our house. I am glad to find that Mr. O'Callaghan has no objection."

"Not the smallest, Edward. You know very well I never have any objection to whatever you propose."

"But, Edward," said Margaret, with sly humor, "why don't you ask Arthur Brown some evening?—it is hardly fair to treat him so coolly, and he so hot upon a certain affair that we all know of."

Edward looked at his sister, and was well pleased to see her laughing in the easiest way imaginable, without even the shade of a blush on her pretty cheek. She was going to say something, but her mother was too quick for her.

"Arthur Brown has no business here," said she, while her cheek reddened with indignation. "When our Eliza comes to choose a husband, it won't be from among Protestants. I wonder at you, Maggie dear, ever to mention his name to her. I can answer for Eliza, that she wouldn't have anything to say to one of his sort."

By this time Margaret and Eliza had finished their work, and went up stairs to see how it fitted, supporting Susan between them. "See what a baby I am," said she, with a smile, as she shook hands with Mr. O'Callaghan. "You see I can't walk now without help. Times are changed, Mr. O'Callaghan, are they not?"

"Changed, indeed, Susan," said the kind-hearted old gentleman, with a tremulous voice. "But this won't last always—you'll soon get strong again, with God's help."

Susan shook her head, but said nothing. She knew Mr. O'Callaghan did not speak as he thought, but she felt grateful for his soothing kindness, and smiled her thanks as she left the room.

There was silence in the room for a few moments, and it was Tim who first spoke, clearing his throat with a vigorous effort. "Come, come, Nelly, this will never do—bless my soul, woman! 'it's time enough to cry when we have reason—things may turn out better than we think. What are you going to do about that poor Mrs. Dillon? Ever since Hannah married that Sullivan, things are going on, you know, worse and worse. We can't leave the poor old creature at the mercy of their vagabonds. It seems as though they always a set of rowdies hanging about the house, drinking when they can get it, and cursing and swearing all time like troopers. It's best to take the poor woman from amongst them altogether."

"I was thinking, Tim," said his wife, "that if you had no objection, I'd have her come and stay here for the little time she has to live. She wouldn't be any great trouble in the house."

"And if she were, too," said Tim, quietly. "It shouldn't prevent us from taking her. She's a desolate poor creature, and I'll be right glad to give her a shelter. God bless you, Nelly, and go for her to-morrow morning. She'll be as welcome as the flowers of May."

"I'll go for her if you wish, mother," said John; "I know where they live."

"I know you do, John," said his mother, with very excusable pride; "God bless you, my son, you have often gone there of your own accord unknown to any one. Mrs. Dillon told me of your visits. You may go for her to-morrow morning, and bring her here to spend the remainder of her days."

Mr. O'Callaghan took out his handkerchief and wiped his eyes, and said to himself: "It is no wonder that they are all so happy and so prosperous."

And he said the same to Edward and Margaret on their way home.

THE SAVING OF DOLLY.

My name is Hunt. Yes, sir; Anthony Hunt. I am a settler and drover on this Western prairie. Wild? Yes, sir; it's little else than wild now, but you should have seen it when I and my wife first moved up here. There was not a house in sight for miles. Even now we have not so many neighbors; but those we have are downright good ones. To appreciate your neighbors as you ought, sir, you must live in these lonely places, so far removed from the haunts of man.

What I am about to tell happened ten years ago. I was going to the distant town or settlement, to sell some fifty head of cattle—fine creatures, sir, as you ever saw. The journey was a more rare event with me than it is now; and my wife always had plenty of commissions to charge me with in the shape of dry goods and groceries, and such like things.

Our youngest child was a sweet, gentle thing, who had been named after her aunt Dorothy. We called the child Dolly. This time my commission included one for her—a doll. She had never had a real doll—that is, a bought doll—only the rag bundles her mother made for her. For some days before my departure the child could talk of nothing else. It was the big, big doll, with golden hair and blue eyes. I shall never forget the child's words the morning I was starting, as she ran after me to the gate, or the pretty picture she made. There are some children sweet-er and prettier than others, sir, as you must give notice, and Dolly was one.

"A very great big doll, please, daddy," she called out after me; and please bring it very soon."

I turned to nod a yes to her as she stood in her clean whitney-brown pinafore against the gate, her nut-brown hair falling in curls about her neck, and the light breeze bringing them.

"A bravo doll," I answered, "for my little one—almost as big as Dolly."

Nobody would believe, I dare say, how full my thoughts were of that promised doll, as I rode along, or what a nice one I meant to buy. It was not often I spent money in what my good thrifty wife called waste; but Dolly was Dolly and I meant to do it now.

The cattle sold, I went about my purchases, and soon had no end of parcels to pack in saddle bags. Tea, sugar, rice, candles—but I need not worry you, sir, with telling of them. Last of all I went about the doll—and found a beauty. It was not as big as Dolly, nor half as big; but it had flaxen curls and sky-blue eyes; and by dint of pulling a wire you could open and shut her eyes at will.

"Do it carefully," I said to the storekeeper. My little daughter would cry terribly if any harm came to it."

The day was pretty well ended before all my work was done, and just for a moment or two I hesitated whether I should not stay in town and start for home in the morning. It would have been the more prudent course. But I thought of poor Dolly's anxiety to get her treasure, and of my own happiness in watching the rapture in her delighted eyes. So with my parcels packed in the best way that they could be, I mounted my horse and started.

It was as good and steady a horse as ever you rode, sir, but the night began to set in before I was well a mile away from town; it seemed as if it were going to be an ugly night, should I turn back and wait till morning? I had the price of the cattle, you see, sir, in my breast pocket, and robberies, aye, and murders, also, were not quite unknown things on my way and mine. But I had my brace of sure pistols with me and decided to press onward.

The night came on as dark as pitch, and part of my road would be pitch dark besides. But on that score I had no fear; I knew the road well, every inch of it, though I could not ride as fast I should have done in the light. I was about six miles from home, I suppose, and I knew the time must be close upon midnight, when the storm, which had been brewing, broke. The thunder roared, the rain fell in torrents; the best I could do was to press onward in it.

All at once, as I rode on, a cry startled me—the faint wailing, like the cry of a child. Reining up, I sat still and listened. Had I been mistaken? No, there it was again. But in what direction I could not tell. I couldn't see a thing. It was, as I have said, as dark as pitch. Getting off my horse, I felt about, but could find nothing. And while I was seeking, the cry came again—the faint moan of a child in pain. Then I began to wonder. I am not superstitious, but I asked myself how it was possible that a child could be out on the prairie at such an hour and in such a night. No, a real child it could not be.

Upon that came another thought—one less welcome: Was it a trap to hinder me on my way and snare me? There might be midnight robbers who would hear of my almost certain ride home that night and of the money I should have about me.

I don't think, sir, I am more timid than other people—not so much so, perhaps, as some; but I confess the idea made me uneasy. My best plan was to ride on as fast as I could, and get out of the mystery into safe quarters. Just here was about the darkest bit of the road in all the route. Mounting my horse, I was about to urge him on when the cry came again. It did sound like a child's; the plaintive wail of a child nearly exhausted.

"God guide me!" I said, undecided what to do. And I sat another moment listening, I once more heard the cry, fainter and more faint. I threw myself off my horse with an exclamation:

"Be it a ghost or be it a robber, Anthony Hunt is not one to abandon a child to die without trying to save it."

But how was I to save it? The more I searched about the less my hands could light on anything, save the sloppy earth. The voice had quite ceased now, so I had no guide from that. While I stood trying to peer into the darkness, my ears alert, a flood of sheet lightning illuminated the plain. At a little distance, just beyond a kind of ridge or gentle hill, I caught a glimpse of something white. It was dark again in a moment, but I made my way with unerring instinct. It was enough, there lay a poor little child. Whether a boy or girl I could not tell. It seemed to be three parts insensible now, as I picked it up, dripping with wet.

"My poor little thing!" I said as I hushed it