

TO THE MEMORY OF A BELOVED CHILD

A FOREWORD

May I ask those of my American readers who are not intimately acquainted with the conditions of English rural and religious life to remember that the dominant factor in it—the factor on which the story of Richard Meynell depends—is the existence of the State Church, of the great ecclesiastical corporation, the direct heir of the pre-Reformation Church, which owns the cathedrals and the parish churches, which by right of law speaks for the nation on all national occasions, which crowns and marries and buries the Kings of England, and, through her bishops in the House of Lords, exercises a constant and important influence on the lawmaking of the country? This Church possesses half the elementary schools, and is the legal religion of the great public schools which shape the ruling upper class. She is surrounded with the prestige of centuries, and it is probable that in many directions she was never so active or so well served by her members as she is at present.

At the same time, there are great forces of change ahead. Outside the Anglican Church stands quite half the nation, gathered in the various non-conformist bodies—Wesleyan, Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian, and so on. Between them and the Church exists a perpetual warfare, partly of opinion, partly of social difference and jealousy. In every village and small town this warfare exists. The non-conformist desires to deprive the Church of her worldly and political privileges; the churchman talks of the sin of schism, or draws up schemes of reunion which drop still-born. Meanwhile, alike in the Church, in non-conformity, and in the neutral world which owes formal allegiance to neither, vast movements of thought have developed in the last hundred years, years as preg-

nant with the germs of new life as the wonderful hundred years that followed the birth of Christ. Whether the old bottles can be adjusted to the new wine, whether further division or a new Christian unity is to emerge from the strife of tongues, whether the ideas of modernism; rife in all forms of Christianity, can be accommodated to the ancient practices and given a share in the great material possessions of a State Church; how individual lives are affected in the passionate struggle of spiritual faiths and practical interests involved in such an attempt; how conscience may be enriched by its success or sterilized by its failure; how the fight itself, ably waged, may strengthen the spiritual elements, the power of living and suffering in men and women—it is with such themes that this story attempts to deal. Twenty-two years ago I tried a similar subject in "Robert Elsmere." Since then the movement of ideas in religion and philosophy has been increasingly rapid and fruitful. I am deeply conscious how little I may be able to express it. But those who twenty years ago welcomed the earlier book—and how can I ever forget its reception in America!—may perhaps be drawn once again to some of the old themes in their new dress.

MARY A. WARD

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES E. BROCK

"My dear fellow! No woman ought to marry under nineteen or twenty"

The Rectory

"Meynell, as he hesitatingly advanced, became the spectator of a scene not intended for his eyes"

"He shook hands with the Dean"

"I wonder whether she's ever had any real joy—a week's—a day's—happiness—in her life?"

"The old shepherd looked after her doubtfully"

BOOK I

MEYNELL

"Truth fails not; but her outward forms that bear
The longest date do melt like frosty rime,
That in the morning whitened hill and plain
And is no more; drop like the tower sublime
Of yesterday, which royally did wear
His crown of weeds, but could not even sustain
Some casual shout that broke the silent air,
Or the unimaginable touch of Time."

CHAPTER I

"Hullo, Preston! don't trouble to go in."

The postman, just guiding his bicycle into the Rectory drive, turned at the summons and dismounted. The Rector approached him from the road, and the postman, diving into his letter-bag and into the box of his bicycle, brought out a variety of letters and packages, which he placed in the Rector's hands.

The recipient smiled.

"My word, what a post! I say, Preston, I add to your burdens pretty considerably."

"It don't matter, sir, I'm sure," said the postman civilly. "There's not a deal of letters delivered in this village."

"No, we don't trouble pen and ink much in Upcote," said the Rector; "and it's my belief that half the boys and girls that do learn to read and write at school make a point of forgetting it as soon as they can—for all practical purposes, anyway."

"Well, there's a deal of newspapers read now, sir, compared to what there was."

"Newspapers? Yes, I do see a *Reynolds* or a *People* or two about on Sunday. Do you think anybody reads much else than the betting and the police news, eh, Preston?"

Preston looked a little vacant. His expression seemed to say, "And why should they?" The Rector, with his arms full of the post, smiled again and turned away, looking back, however, to say:

"Wife all right again?"

"Pretty near, sir; but she's had an awful bad time, and the doctor—he makes her go careful."

"Quite right. Has Miss Puttenham been looking after her?"

"She's been most kind, sir, most attentive, she have," said the postman warmly, his long hatchet face breaking into animation.

"Lucky for you!" said the Rector, walking away. "When she cuts in, she's worth a regiment of doctors. Good-day!"

The speaker passed on through the gate of the Rectory, pausing as he did so with a rueful look at the iron gate itself, which was off its hinges and sorely in want of a coat of new paint.

"Disgraceful!" he said to himself; "must have a go at it to-morrow. And at the garden, too," he added, looking round him. "Never saw such a wilderness!"

[Illustration: The Rectory]

He was advancing toward a small gabled house of an Early Victorian type, built about 1840 by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners on the site of an old clergy house, of which all traces had been ruthlessly effaced. The front garden lying before it was a tangle of old and for the most part ugly trees; elms from which heavy, decayed branches had recently fallen; acacias choked by the ivy which had overgrown them; and a crowded thicket of thorns and hazels, mingled with three or four large and vigorous though very ancient yews, which seemed to have drunk up for themselves all that life from the soil which should have gone to maintain the ragged or sickly shrubbery. The trees also had gradually encroached upon the house, and darkened all the windows on the porch side. On a summer afternoon, the deep shade they made was welcome enough; but on a rainy day the Rector's front-garden, with its coarse grass, its few straggling rose-bushes, and its pushing throng of half-dead or funereal trees, shed a dank and dripping gloom upon the visitor approaching his front door. Of this, however, the Rector himself was rarely conscious; and to-day, as he with difficulty gathered all the letters and packets taken from the postman into one hand, while he opened his front door with the other, his face showed that the state of his garden had already ceased to trouble him.

He had no sooner turned the handle of the door than a joyous uproar of dogs arose within, and before he had well stepped over the threshold a leaping trio were upon him—two Irish terriers and a

graceful young collie, whose rough caresses nearly made him drop his letters.

"Down, Jack! Be quiet, you rascals! I say — Anne!"

A woman's voice answered his call.

"I'm just bringing the tea, sir."

"Any letter for me this afternoon?"

"There's a note on the hall-table, sir."

The Rector hurried into the sitting-room to the right of the hall, deposited the letters and packets which he held on a small, tumble-down sofa already littered with books and papers, and returned to the hall-table for the letter. He tore it open, read it with slightly frowning brows and a mouth that worked unconsciously, then thrust it into his pocket and returned to his sitting-room.

"All right!" he said to himself. "He's got an odd list of 'aggrieved parishioners!'"

The tidings, however, which the letter contained did not seem to distress him. On the contrary, his aspect expressed a singular and cheerful energy, as he sat a few moments on the sofa, softly whistling to himself and staring at the floor. That he was a person extravagantly beloved by his dogs was clearly shown meanwhile by the exuberant attentions and caresses with which they were now loading him.

He shook them off at last with a friendly kick or two, that he might turn to his letters, which he sorted and turned over, much as an epicure studies his *menu* at the Ritz, and with an equally keen sense of pleasure to come.

A letter from Jena, and another from Berlin, addressed in small German handwriting and signed by names familiar to students throughout the world; two or three German reviews, copies of the *Revue Critique* and the *Revue Chrétienne*, a book by Solomon Reinach, and three or four French letters, one of them shown by the cross preceding the signature to be the letter of a bishop; a long letter from Oxford, enclosing the proof of an article in a theological review; and, finally, a letter sealed with red wax and signed "F.

Marcoburg" in a corner of the envelope, which the Rector twirled in his hands a moment without opening.

"After tea," he said at last, with the sudden breaking of a smile. And he put it on the sofa beside him.

As he spoke the door opened to admit his housekeeper with the tray, to the accompaniment of another orgie of barks. A stout woman in a sun-bonnet, with a broad face and no features to speak of, entered.

"I'll be bound you've had no dinner," she said sulkily, as she placed the tea before him on a chair cleared with difficulty from some of the student's litter that filled the room.

"All the more reason for tea," said Meynell, seizing thirstily on the teapot. "And you're quite mistaken, Anne. I had a magnificent bath-bun at the station."

"Much good you'll get out of that!" was the scornful reply. "You know what Doctor Shaw told you about that sort o' goin' on."

"Never you mind, Anne. What about that painter chap?"

"Gone home for the week-end." Mrs. Wellin retreated a foot or two and crossed her arms, bare to the elbow, in front of her.

The Rector stared.

"I thought I had taken him on by the week to paint my house," he said at last.

"So you did. But he said he must see his missus and hear how his little girl had done in her music exam."

Mrs. Wellin delivered this piece of news very fast and with evident gusto. It might have been thought she enjoyed inflicting it on her master.

The Rector laughed out.

"And this was a man sent me a week ago by the Birmingham Distress Committee—nine weeks out of work—family in the work-house—everything up the spout. Goodness gracious, Anne, how did he get the money? Return fare, Birmingham, three-and-ten."

"Don't ask me, sir," said the woman in the sun-bonnet. "I don't go pryin' into such trash!"

"Is he coming back? Is my house to be painted?" asked the Rector helplessly.

"Thought he might," said Anne, briefly.

"How kind of him! Music exam! Lord save us! And three-and-ten thrown into the gutter on a week-end ticket – with seven children to keep – and all your possessions gone to 'my uncle.' And it isn't as though you'd been starving him, Anne!"

"I wish I hadn't dined him as I have been doin'!" the woman broke out. "But he'll know the difference next week! And now, sir, I suppose you'll be goin' to that place again to-night?"

Anne jerked her thumb behind her over her left shoulder.

"Suppose so, Anne. Can't afford a night-nurse, and the wife won't look after him."

"Why don't some one make her?" said Anne, frowning.

The Rector's face changed.

"Better not talk about it, Anne. When a woman's been in hell for years, you needn't expect her to come out an angel. She won't forgive him, and she won't nurse him – that's flat."

"No reason why she should shovel him off on other people as wants their night's rest. It's takin' advantage – that's what it is."

"I say, Anne, I must read my letters. And just light me a bit of fire, there's a good woman. July! – ugh! – it might be February!"

In a few minutes a bit of fire was blazing in the grate, though the windows were still wide open, and the Rector, who had had a long journey that day to take a funeral for a friend, lay back in sybaritic ease, now sipping his tea and now cutting open letters and parcels. The letter signed "F. Marcoburg" in the corner had been placed, still unopened, on the mantelpiece now facing him.

The Rector looked at it from time to time; it might have been said by a close observer that he never forgot it; but, all the same, he went

on dipping into books and reviews, or puzzling—with muttered imprecations on the German tongue—over some of his letters.

"By Jove! this apocalyptic Messianic business is getting interesting. Soon we shall know where all the Pauline ideas came from—every single one of them! And what matter? Who's the worse? Is it any less wonderful when we do know? The new wine found its bottles ready—that's all."

As he sat there he had the aspect of a man enjoying apparently the comfort of his own fireside. Yet, now that the face was at rest, certain cavernous hollows under the eyes, and certain lines on the forehead and at the corners of the mouth, as though graven by some long fatigue, showed themselves disfiguringly. The personality, however, on which this fatigue had stamped itself was clearly one of remarkable vigour, physical and mental. A massive head covered with strong black hair, curly at the brows; eyes grayish-blue, small, with some shade of expression in them which made them arresting, commanding, even; a large nose and irregular mouth, the lips flexible and kind, the chin firm—one might have made some such catalogue of Meynell's characteristics; adding to them the strength of a broad-chested, loose-limbed frame, made rather, one would have thought, for country labours than for the vigils of the scholar. But the hands were those of a man of letters—bony and long-fingered, but refined, touching things with care and gentleness, like one accustomed to the small tools of the writer.

At last the Rector threw himself back in his chair, while some of the litter on his lap fell to the floor, temporarily dislodging one of the terriers, who sat up and looked at him with reproach.

"Now then!" he said, and reached out for the letter on the mantel-piece.

He turned it over a moment in his hand and opened it.

It was long, and the reader gave it a close attention. When he had finished it he put it down and thought a while, then stretched out his hand for it again and reread the last paragraph:

"You will, I am sure, realize from all I have said, my dear Meynell, that the last thing I personally wish to do is to interfere with

the parochial work of a man for whom I have so warm a respect as I have for you. I have given you all the latitude I could, but my duty is now plain. Let me have your assurance that you will refrain from such sermons as that to which I have drawn your attention, and that you will stop at once the extraordinary innovations in the services of which the parishioners have complained, and I shall know how to answer Mr. Barron and to compose this whole difficult matter. Do not, I entreat you, jeopardize the noble work you are doing for the sake of opinions and views which you hold to-day, but which you may have abandoned tomorrow. Can you possibly put what you call 'the results of criticism'—and, remember, these results differ for you, for me, and for a dozen others I could name—in comparison with that work for souls God has given you to do, and in which He has so clearly blessed you? A Christian pastor is not his own master, and cannot act with the freedom of other men. He belongs by his own act to the Church and to the flock of Christ; he must always have in view the 'little ones' whom he dare not offend. Take time for thought, my dear Meynell—and time, above all, for prayer—and then let me hear from you. You will realize how much and how anxiously I think of you.

"Yours always sincerely in Christ,

"F. MARCOBURG."

"Good man—true bishop!" said the Rector to himself, as he again put down the letter; but even as he spoke the softness in his face passed into resolution. He sank once more into reverie.

The stillness, however, was soon broken up. A step was heard outside, and the dogs sprang up in excitement. Amid a pandemonium of noise, the Rector put his head out of window.

"Is that you, Barron? Come in, old fellow; come in!"

A slender figure in a long coat passed the window, the front door opened, and a young man entered the study. He was dressed in orthodox clerical garb, and carried a couple of books under his arm.

"I came to return these," he said, placing them beside the Rector; "and also—can you give me twenty minutes?"

"Forty, if you want them. Sit down."

The newcomer turned out various French and German books from a dilapidated armchair, and obeyed. He was a fresh-coloured, handsome youth, some fifteen years younger than Meynell, the typical public-school boy in appearance. But his expression was scarcely less harassed than the Rector's.

"I expect you have heard from my father," he said abruptly.

"I found a letter waiting for me," said Meynell, holding up the note he had taken from the hall-table on coming in. But he pursued the subject no further.

The young man fidgeted a moment.

"All one can say is" — he broke out at last — "that if it had not been my father, it would have been some one else — the Archdeacon probably. The fight was bound to come."

"Of course it was!" The Rector sprang to his feet, and, with his hands under his coat-tails and his back to the fire, faced his visitor. "That's what we're all driving at. Don't be miserable about it, dear fellow. I bear your father no grudge whatever. He is under orders, as I am. The parleying time is done. It has lasted two generations. And now comes war — honourable, necessary war!"

The speaker threw back his head with emphasis, even with passion. But almost immediately the smile, which was the only positive beauty of the face, obliterated the passion.

"And don't look so tragic over it! If your father wins — and as the law stands he can scarcely fail to win — I shall be driven out of Upcote. But there will always be a corner somewhere for me and my books, and a pulpit of some sort to prate from."

"Yes, but what about *us*?" said the newcomer, slowly.

"Ah!" The Rector's voice took a dry intonation. "Yes — well! — you Liberals will have to take your part, and fire your shot some day, of course — fathers or no fathers."

"I didn't mean that. I shall fire my shot, of course. But aren't you exposing yourself prematurely — unnecessarily?" said the young man, with vivacity. "It is not a general's part to do that."

"You're wrong, Stephen. When my father was going out to the campaign in which he was killed, my mother said to him, as though she were half asking a question, half pleading—I can hear her now, poor darling!—'John, it's *right* for a general to keep out of danger?' and he smiled and said, 'Yes, when it isn't right for him to go into it, head over ears.' However, that's nonsense. It doesn't apply to me. I'm no general. And I'm not going to be killed!"

Young Barron was silent, while the Rector prepared a pipe, and began upon it; but his face showed his dissatisfaction.

"I've not said much to father yet about my own position," he resumed; "but, of course, he guesses. It will be a blow to him," he added, reluctantly.

The Rector nodded, but without showing any particular concern, though his eyes rested kindly on his companion.

"We have come to the fighting," he repeated, "and fighting means blows. Moreover, the fight is beginning to be equal. Twenty years ago—in Elsmere's time—a man who held his views or mine could only go. Voysey, of course, had to go; Jowett, I am inclined to think, ought to have gone. But the distribution of the forces, the lie of the field, is now altogether changed. *I* am not going till I am turned out; and there will be others with me. The world wants a heresy trial, and it is going to get one this time."

A laugh—a laugh of excitement and discomfort—escaped the younger man.

"You talk as though the prospect was a pleasant one!"

"No—but it is inevitable."

"It will be a hateful business," Baron went on, impetuously. "My father has a horribly strong will. And he will think every means legitimate."

"I know. In the Roman Church, what the Curia could not do by argument they have done again and again—well, no use to inquire how! One must be prepared. All I can say is, I know of no skeletons in the cupboard at present. Anybody may have my keys!"

He laughed as he spoke, spreading his hands to the blaze, and looking round at his companion. Barron's face in response was a

face of hero-worship, undisguised. Here plainly were leader and disciple; pioneering will and docile faith. But it might have been observed that Meynell did nothing to emphasize the personal relation; that, on the contrary, he shrank from it, and often tried to put it aside.

After a few more words, indeed, he resolutely closed the personal discussion. They fell into talk about certain recent developments of philosophy in England and France—talk which showed them as familiar comrades in the intellectual field, in spite of their difference of age. Barron, a Fellow of King's, had but lately left Cambridge for a small College living. Meynell—an old Balliol scholar—bore the marks of Jowett and Caird still deep upon him, except, perhaps, for a certain deliberate throwing over, here and there, of the typical Oxford tradition—its measure and reticence, its scholarly balancing of this against that. A tone as of one driven to extremities—a deep yet never personal exasperation—the poised quiet of a man turning to look a hostile host in the face—again and again these made themselves felt through his chat about new influences in the world of thought—Bergson or James, Eucken or Tyrell.

And to this under-note, inflections or phrases in the talk of the other seemed to respond. It was as though behind the spoken conversation they carried on another unheard.

And the unheard presently broke in upon the heard.

"You mentioned Elsmere just now," said Barron, in a moment's pause, and with apparent irrelevance. "Did you know that his widow is now staying within a mile of this place? Some people called Flaxman have taken Maudeley End, and Mrs. Flaxman is a sister of Mrs. Elsmere. Mrs. Elsmere and her daughter are going to settle for the summer in the cottage near Forkéd Pond. Mrs. Elsmere seems to have been ill for the first time in her life, and has had to give up some of her work."

"Mrs. Elsmere!" said Meynell, raising his eyebrows. "I saw her once twenty years ago at the New Brotherhood, and have never forgotten the vision of her face. She must be almost an old woman."

"Miss Puttenham says she is quite beautiful still, in a wonderful, severe way. I think she never shared Elsmere's opinions?"