









TO  
MY ABLE FELLOW-JOURNALIST JOHN LOVELL WHO IN  
A DARKER HOUR OF LABOR AND MISGIVING  
CHEERED ME WITH AN ESTIMATE OF THIS NOVEL  
THAT THE PUBLIC HAS SINCE RATIFIED.



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## PREFACE.

The central incident of this novel is that most extraordinary of all punishments known to English criminal law, the *peine forte et dure*. The story is not, however, in any sense historical. A sketchy background of stirring history is introduced solely in order to heighten the personal danger of a brave man. The interest is domestic, and, perhaps, in some degree psychological. Around a pathetic piece of old jurisprudence I have gathered a mass of Cumbrian folk-lore and folk-talk with which I have been familiar from earliest youth. To smelt and mould the chaotic memories into an organism such as may serve, among other uses, to give a view of Cumberland life in little, has been the work of one year.

The story, which is now first presented as a whole, has already had a career in the newspapers, and the interest it excited in those quarters has come upon me as a surprise. I was hardly prepared to find that my plain russet-coated dalesmen were in touch with popular sympathy; but they have made me many friends. To me they are very dear, for I have lived their life. It is with no affected regret that I am now parting with these companions to make way for a group of younger comrades.

There is one thing to say which will make it worth while to trouble the reader with this preface. A small portion of the dialogue is written in a much modified form of the Cumbrian dialect. There are four variations of dialect in Cumberland, and perhaps the dialect spoken on the West Coast differs more from the dialect spoken in the Thirlmere Valley than the latter differs from the dialect spoken in North Lancashire. The *patois* problem is not the least serious of the many difficulties the novelist encounters. I have chosen to give a broad outline of Cumbrian dialect, such as bears no more exact relation to the actual speech than a sketch bears to a finished picture. It is right as far as it goes.

A word as to the background of history. I shall look for the sympathy of the artist and the forgiveness of the historian in making two or three trifling legal anachronisms that do not interfere with the interest of the narrative. The year of the story is given, but the aim has been to reflect in these pages the black cloud of the whole

period of the Restoration as it hung over England's remotest solitudes. In my rude sketch of the beginnings of the Quaker movement I must disclaim any intention of depicting the precise manners or indicating the exact doctrinal beliefs of the revivalists. If, however, I have described the Quakers as singing and praying with the fervor of the Methodists, it must not be forgotten that Quietism was no salient part of the Quakerism of Fox; and if I have hinted at Calvinism, it must be remembered that the "dividing of God's heritage" was one of the causes of the first schism in the Quaker Society.

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# THE SHADOW OF A CRIME.

## CHAPTER I. THE CITY OF WYTHBURN.

Tar-ry woo', tar-ry woo', Tar-ry woo' is ill to spin: Card it weel, card it weel, Card it weel ere you begin. *Old Ballad.*

The city of Wythburn stood in a narrow valley at the foot of Lauvellen, and at the head of Bracken Water. It was a little but populous village, inhabited chiefly by sheep farmers, whose flocks grazed on the neighboring hills. It contained rather less than a hundred houses, all deep thatched and thick walled. To the north lay the mere, a long and irregular water, which was belted across the middle by an old Roman bridge of bowlders. A bare pack-horse road wound its way on the west, and stretched out of sight to the north and to the south. On this road, about half a mile within the southernmost extremity of Bracken Water, two hillocks met, leaving a natural opening between them and a path that went up to where the city stood. The dalesmen called the cleft between the hillocks the city gates; but why the gates and why the city none could rightly say. Folks had always given them these names. The wiser heads shook gravely as they told you that city should be sarnty, meaning the house by the causeway. The historians of the plain could say no more.

They were rude sons and daughters of the hills who inhabited this mountain home two centuries ago. The country around them was alive with ghostly legend. They had seen the lights dance across Deer Garth Ghyll, and had heard the wail that came from Clark's Loup. They were not above trembling at the mention of these mysteries when the moon was flying across a darksome sky, when the wind moaned about the house, and they were gathered around the ingle nook. They had few channels of communication

with the great world without. The pack-horse pedler was their swiftest newsman; the pedler on foot was their weekly budget. Five miles along the pack-horse road to the north stood their market town of Gaskarth, where they took their wool or the cloth they had woven from it. From the top of Lauvellen they could see the white sails of the ships that floated down the broad Solway. These were all but their only glimpses of the world beyond their mountains. It was a mysterious and fearsome world.

There was, however, one link that connected the people of Wythburn with the world outside. To the north of the city and the mere there lived a family of sheep farmers who were known as the Rays of Shoulthwaite Moss. The family consisted of husband and wife and two sons. The head of the house, Angus Ray, came to the district early in life from the extreme Cumbrian border. He was hardly less than a giant in stature. He had limbs of great length, and muscles like the gnarled heads of a beech. Upon settling at Wythburn, he speedily acquired property of various kinds, and in the course of a few years he was the largest owner of sheep on the country side. Certainly, fortune favored Angus Ray, and not least noticeably when in due course he looked about him for a wife.

Mary Ray did not seem to have many qualities in common with her husband. She had neither the strength of limb nor the agile grace of the mountaineer. This was partly the result of the conditions under which her girlhood had been spent. She was the only child of a dalesman, who had so far accumulated estate in land as to be known in the vernacular as a statesman. Her mother had died at her birth, and before she had attained to young womanhood her father, who had married late in life, was feeble and unfit for labor. His hand was too nervous, his eye too uncertain, his breath too short for the constant risks of mountaineering; so he put away all further thought of adding store to store, and settled himself peaceably in his cottage under Castenand, content with the occasional pleasures afforded by his fiddle, an instrument upon which he had from his youth upward shown some skill. In this quiet life his daughter was his sole companion.

There was no sight in Wythburn more touching than to see this girl solacing her father's declining years, meeting his wishes with

anticipatory devices, pampering him in his whims, soothing him in the imaginary sorrows sometimes incident to age, even indulging him with a sort of pathetic humor in his frequent hallucinations. To do this she had to put by a good many felicities dear to her age and condition, but there was no apparent consciousness of self-sacrifice. She had many lovers, for in these early years she was beautiful; and she had yet more suitors, for she was accounted rich. But neither flattery nor the fervor of genuine passion seemed to touch her, and those who sought her under the transparent guise of seeking her father usually went away as they came. She had a smile and the cheeriest word of welcome for all alike, and so the young dalesmen who wooed her from the ignoble motive came to think her a little of a coquette, while those who wooed her from the purer impulse despaired of ruffling with the gentlest gales of love the still atmosphere of her heart.

One day suddenly, however, the old statesman died, and his fiddle was heard no more across the valley in the quiet of the evening, but was left untouched for the dust to gather on it where he himself had hung it on the nail in the kitchen under his hat. Then when life seemed to the forlorn girl a wide blank, a world without a sun in it, Angus Ray went over for the first time as a suitor to the cottage under Castenand, and put his hand in hers and looked calmly into her eyes. He told her that a girl could not live long an unfriended life like hers—that she should not if she could; she could not if she would—would she not come to him?

It was the force of the magnet to the steel. With swimming eyes she looked up into his strong face, tender now with a tremor never before seen there; and as he drew her gently towards him her glistening tears fell hot and fast over her brightening and now radiant face, and, as though to hide them from him, she laid her head on his breast. This was all the wooing of Angus Ray.

They had two sons, and of these the younger more nearly resembled his mother. Willy Ray had not merely his mother's features; he had her disposition also. He had the rounded neck and lissom limbs of a woman; he had a woman's complexion, and the light of a woman's look in his soft blue eyes. When the years gave a thin curly beard to his cheek they took nothing from its delicate comeliness. It

was as if nature had down to the last moment meant Willy for a girl. He had been an apt scholar at school, and was one of the few persons in Wythburn having claims to education. Willy's elder brother, Ralph, more nearly resembled his father. He had his father's stature and strength of limb, but some of his mother's qualities had also been inherited by him. In manner he was neither so austere and taciturn as his father, nor so gentle and amiable as his mother. He was by no means a scholar, and only the strong hand of his father had kept him as a boy in fear of the penalties incurred by the truant. Courage and resolution were his distinguishing characteristics.

On one occasion, when rambling over the fells with a company of schoolfellows, a poor blind lamb ran bleating past them, a black cloud of ravens, crows, and owl-eagles flying about it. The merciless birds had fallen upon the innocent creature as it lay sleeping under the shadow of a tree, had picked at its eyes and fed on them, and now, as the blood trickled in red beads down its nose, they croaked and cried and screamed to drive it to the edge of a precipice and then over to its death in the gulf beneath, there to feast on its carcass. It was no easy thing to fend off the cruel birds when in sight of their prey, but, running and capturing the poor lamb, Ralph snatched it up in his arms at the peril of his own eyes, and swung a staff about his head to beat off the birds as they darted and plunged and shrieked about him.

It was natural that a boy like this should develop into the finest shepherd on the hills. Ralph knew every path on the mountains, every shelter the sheep sought from wind and rain, every haunt of the fox. At the shearing, at the washing, at the marking, his hand was among the best; and when the flocks had to be numbered as they rushed in thousands through the gate, he could count them, not by ones and twos, but by fours and sixes. At the shearing feasts he was not above the pleasures of the country dance, the Ledder-tespetch, as it was called, with its one, two, three—heel and toe—cut and shuffle. And his strong voice, that was answered oftenest by the echo of the mountain cavern, was sometimes heard to troll out a snatch of a song at the village inn. But Ralph, though having an inclination to convivial pleasures, was naturally of a serious, even of a solemn temperament. He was a rude son of a rude country,—rude

of hand, often rude of tongue, untutored in the graces that give beauty to life.

By the time that Ralph had attained to the full maturity of his manhood, the struggles of King and Parliament were at their height. The rumor of these struggles was long in reaching the city of Wythburn, and longer in being discussed and understood there; but, to everybody's surprise, young Ralph Ray announced his intention of forthwith joining the Parliamentary forces. The extraordinary proposal seemed incredible; but Ralph's mind was made up. His father said nothing about his son's intentions, good or bad. The lad was of age; he might think for himself. In his secret heart Angus liked the lad's courage. Ralph was "nane o' yer feckless fowk." Ralph's mother was sorely troubled; but just as she had yielded to his father's will in the days that were long gone by, so she yielded now to his. The intervening years had brought an added gentleness to her character; they had made mellow her dear face, now ruddy and round, though wrinkled. Folks said she had looked happier and happier, and had talked less and less, as the time wore on. It had become a saying in Wythburn that the dame of Shoulthwaite Moss was never seen without a smile, and never heard to say more than "God bless you!" The tears filled her eyes when her son came to kiss her on the morning when he left her home for the first time, but she wiped them away with her housewife's apron, and dismissed him with her accustomed blessing.

Ralph Ray joined Cromwell's army against the second Charles at Dunbar, in 1650. Between two and three years afterwards he returned to Wythburn city and resumed his old life on the fells. There was little more for the train-bands to do. Charles had fled, peace was restored, the Long Parliament was dissolved, Cromwell was Lord Protector. Outwardly the young Roundhead was not altered by the campaign. He had passed through it unscathed. He was somewhat graver in manner; there seemed to be a little less warmth and spontaneity in his greeting; his voice had lost one or two of its cheerier notes; his laughter was less hearty and more easily controlled. Perhaps this only meant that the world was doing its work with him. Otherwise he was the same man.

When Ralph returned to Wythburn he brought with him a companion much older than himself, who forthwith became an inmate of his father's home, taking part as a servant in the ordinary occupations of the male members of the household. This man had altogether a suspicious and sinister aspect which his manners did nothing to belie. His name was James Wilson, and he was undoubtedly a Scot, though he had neither the physical nor the moral characteristics of his race. His eyes were small, quick, and watchful, beneath heavy and jagged brows. He was slight of figure and low of stature, and limped on one leg. He spoke in a thin voice, half laugh, half whimper, and hardly ever looked into the face of the person with whom he was conversing. There was an air of mystery about him which the inmates of the house on the Moss did nothing to dissipate. Ralph offered no explanation to the gossips of Wythburn of Wilson's identity and belongings; indeed, as time wore on, it could be observed that he showed some uneasiness when questioned about the man.

At first Wilson contrived to ingratiate himself into a good deal of favor among the dalespeople. There was then an insinuating smoothness in his speech, a flattering, almost fawning glibness of tongue, which the simple folks knew no art to withstand. He seemed abundantly grateful for some unexplained benefits received from Ralph. "Atweel," Wilson would say, with his eyes on the ground,—"atweel I lo'e the braw chiel as 'twere my ain guid billie."

Ralph paid no heed to the brotherly protestations of his admirer, and exchanged only such words with him as their occupations required. Old Angus, however, was not so passive an observer of his new and unlooked-for housemate. "He's a good for nought sort of a fellow, slenken frae place to place wi' nowt but a sark to his back," Angus would say to his wife. Mr. Wilson's physical imperfections were an offence in the dalesman's eyes: "He's as widdierful in his wizzent old skin as his own grandfather." Angus was not less severe on Wilson's sly smoothness of manner. "Yon sneaking old knave," he would say, "is as slape as an eel in the beck; he'd wammel himself into crookedest rabbit hole on the fell." Probably Angus entertained some of the antipathy to Scotchmen which was peculiar to his age. "I'll swear he's a taistrel," he said one day; "I dare not trust him with a mess of poddish until I'd had the first sup."