Richard Hughes Williams
Going South

Cockatrice Books
Y diawl a'm llaw chwith

Translated by Rob Mimpriss

GOING SOUTH

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GOING SOUTH

THE STORIES OF RICHARD HUGHES WILLIAMS

With an introduction by E. Morgan Humphreys
Translated by Rob Mimpriss

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INTRODUCTION

Richard Hughes Williams (Dic Tryfan as he was known to his friends) was born in Rhosgadfan, a quarrying district on the slopes of Moel Tryfan in Caernarfonshire. He died in hospital in Tregaron in 1919. He was about 44 years old.

His life was therefore short, and by all accounts did not lack hardship. His reputation was small, his acquaintance narrow, and for the most part he was quickly forgotten after his death. He never achieved much fame, even in his own area.

Perhaps something in Hughes Williams himself was responsible for this. He was never a great one for fitting in with his surroundings. He had an elementary schooling and went to the offices of the *Cenedl* as a clerk. It does not seem that he excelled there. I believe he went to work in the quarries for a little while after that. His father was a quarryman, but Hughes Williams must have had some first-hand experience of quarrymen and their work. He was unhappy in the quarries, however, and went to England to earn his living by writing and anything else that came to hand. He told me this was a hard time in his life, while he worked for a period at the docks in Liverpool and wrote for the English-language papers whenever he had the chance. I believe he made his way to London. Somehow or other he

found himself a job writing copy for a pharmacist in England.

His health broke down and he came home, and there was quite a well-known story about him among Caernarfon journalists when I first joined their circle. It's said some friend of his bumped into him, and asked why he had come back.

'I'm ill, boy,' said Dic.

'Good gracious,' said the friend, with an air of kindly concern, 'why didn't you take your own medicine?'

'That's just what I did!' said Dic.

When I first met him in 1905 he was a sub-editor in the office of the *Herald Gymraeg* in Caernarfon. He worked hard, though he was never intended to become a newspaperman. He took little interest in the affairs of the day; the proceedings of councils gave him small stimulation, and he was no politician – though he became a fervent Liberal when he went to edit a Tory paper in Aberystwyth.

Writing short stories was his purpose in life; it filled his thoughts and conversation. There was a certain amount of innocent selfishness about him, entirely benign, which allows some people to talk a great deal about themselves and their work without exhausting one's patience. Dic Tryfan talked about his stories constantly, not from any desire to boast but because they were the most interesting thing in the world to him.

There was a kind of writer in Wales – probably it has not died out – who saw his craft as a means to reflect his own glory. Dic Tryfan was not one of these. The craft itself meant everything to him. That he himself was the agent of it was entirely incidental, and since this was so he saw no reason not to speak of what absorbed him so much. He knew when

he had produced his best work, and he knew when his work was unsatisfactory. If anyone finds any of these stories underdeveloped, or feels that the collection is too repetitive, he should remember that Dic Tryfan was a craftsman learning his work with great pain and hardship, trying this and that experiment, and searching earnestly for the best way to express what he had to say. No one who knows the state of the short story in Wales before Dic Tryfan can fail to appreciate how much new ground he opened up.

This was what filled his time during those years in Caernarfon – probably the happiest time in his life, by many accounts. He read short stories, especially French, and translations of Russian novels, not for pleasure only but, like a surgeon learning his business by dissecting cadavers, to see how they were made. Apart from this he was not a great reader. In general his knowledge of culture was poor, and perhaps this was something of a disadvantage to his work. Throughout this period he wrote stories for *Papur Pawb*, *Cymru* and the *Herald Gymraeg*.

His stories in the *Herald Gymraeg* were serials running from week to week, and he was not nearly such a craftsman in the long story. In fact he made little effort to be, since he saw them as pot-boilers merely. 'The devil made me do it,' he said one time when he was criticised for putting so much unnecessary dialogue in them. But he never sinned against the short story in this way.

About this time he wrote some stories in English and one historical story for the National Eisteddfod in London in 1909. But historical fiction was not his proper field, and I don't feel, when he was writing in English, that he kept that clipped efficiency he had mastered in Welsh. He himself felt

he was strongest in the short story, and he devoted himself to achieving perfection in the form. At the same time, of course, he was spending his days in the newspaper office with all its varied demands – work which taxes the strength and vision and energy to the last. This lay heavier on Hughes Williams than it would have on many others.

In truth he did not like his calling; it was merely something to earn him a crust, and as he grew older it became more burdensome to him. There were some good journalists working with him in Caernarfon at the time. Mr Beriah Evans was at the height of his powers, and Mr Daniel Rees was editing both *Heralds* – in Welsh and in English. Mr William Eames was editor of both the *Cenedl* and the *Observer*, and Mr T. Gwynn Jones came to the *Cenedl* when Hughes Williams was at the *Herald*. After Mr Daniel Rees's departure, Mr Picton Davies, the current editor of the *Weekly Mail* in Cardiff, came to the *Herald*. We were in different camps, but we were all friends. This is one of the mysteries of the profession to outsiders, who cannot imagine how journalists on competing papers can be friends. But so it is. Some Wednesday evenings, when Mr Gwynn Jones and I were in the *Cenedl* offices, having put the *Observer* to bed, Dic Tryfan would pop in for a smoke and a chat, and not about the state of our newspapers.

This is how I like to remember him. A man of medium height, strongly built, with a round, rather chubby face; quite a dark complexion, not rosy; a short, wide nose; heavy brows and dark hair. Perhaps something in his look more than his style prompted someone to compare him with Maxim Gorky. At some point during this time in Caernarfon his hair became streaked with grey. These streaks turned brilliant white, and

laughingly he explained how it bothered him.

'If it went white all over I mind,' he said. 'But I look like a circus horse.'

Few people realised this was the effect of constant pain – a secret he kept to himself and his friends. They knew he was having difficulty sleeping, and would walk as far as Waunfawr and Betws Garmon in the small hours. He had never been strong. The most notable thing about him was his eyes. They were dark and active. A strange light used to come into them at times, and they sparkled whenever he smiled. His smile was kindly, gentle.

In 1913 Hughes Williams went to Aberystwyth to edit the *Observer*. It was a Tory paper, and this was a huge shift from being on the strongly Liberal *Herald*. It was fairly demanding work as well, since the editor was expected to look after the business side of things as well as the contents of the paper. By the start of 1915 he was exhausted. He wrote to me in January that year.

'I've had enough of this place,' he says. 'What makes it hateful to me is its Tory stench. I've argued irreconcilably with half a dozen of the county priests. They send their stuff in, and expect me to print it without changing a single word. The Conservative Club is also up in arms against me. The other day the Chairman told me he'd heard a rumour I'm a Liberal. I said he'd heard correctly and he went out in a huff. All in all I've had some fun, and I dare say the experience will be useful some day. I'll stay until I get another post, and then they can airlift me out of here. The train wouldn't be fast enough. If you hear of a job anywhere, let me know. I don't expect a lot of money, just enough to keep the two of us in reasonable comfort.'

It is fair to add that one should not judge the post in the light of Dic Tryfan's letter. He always expressed what he felt at the time, and as I said, he was not happy on any paper.

'I hear —— passed away,' he says in another letter, written the same year. 'I miss seeing him on the street corner when I come to Caernarfon, with his smile, his stoop and his short coat. He was a funny character. There was something of the fox about the old boy; he wasn't as simple as his laugh led you to think. Peace to his bones.'

The portrait shows the materials from which Hughes Williams' stories were drawn.

'I thought, when I promised to write you a story,' he writes in another letter, 'that it would only be a matter of sitting down for an hour and taking it to the post. But since the start of the week I've spent hours at my desk. On Monday night I did nothing but sit there scratching my head. On Tuesday I stared at the wall for two hours. By last night my temper was starting to fray, but today I managed to get something on paper. To be honest I've lost my hand at writing stories. If it won't do, throw it away. I can feel the desire going out of me.'

He was always, beneath that layer of inoffensive selfishness, dissatisfied with his own work.

In 1915 he went to work for a newspaper in Llanelli. I heard from him there in November that year.

'I'm quite comfortable in Llanelli,' he says, 'but I'd rather earn £2 a week in Caernarfon than £3 a week here.'

Caernarfon had never been perfect either.

The same letter contains a couple of references to his work. 'I haven't written a story since I finished "Going Home" for the *Goleuad*,' he says. 'But I have enough material

if I could only settle down to write. I don't feel I've done my best work yet... I don't care what anyone says about my work, or even if they ignore it. *Welsh Outlook* have refused to review my book. Why, I don't know, but what does it matter? Tomorrow is another day.'

There is a hint of despair in these letters. His friends did not know why at the time, but before long it was obvious. Hughes Williams' physical strength was at an end.

This was during the war years. 'If I had my way,' he said in one letter, 'I'd be in France by now. But there's no point even in talking about it.'

He must have been turned down by the army, but after moving to Llanelli he and Mrs Williams went to work at a munitions factory in Burry Port. I know very little about that period in his life, but I know Dic Tryfan's health broke down completely there. I have one other letter from him, undated and clearly written after his collapse and return from Llanelli to Aberystwyth, where he had true friends, and where he got a job on the *Cambrian News*.

'How is my health?' he says. 'I lost every last bit of it in Burry Port, and I'm coughing like a bronchial cow. But I'm getting better... For one thing, I've got my voice back after losing it for three months. I lost 28lb in three months. But I am getting better, and Aberystwyth agrees with me wonderfully.'

It was only the *spes phthisica* that caused him to doubt his recovery. He dragged on for a while, still trying to work since he had nothing to support him but his profession, and outside a certain circle Welsh readers knew nothing about him. But he was obviously weakening and fading away, and eventually he had to go into a sanatorium in Tregaron, where

he died. It is comforting to think that he had true friends around him in the end, among them one whose acquaintance with him went back to happier times in Caernarfon – I mean Prof Gwynn Jones.

This is what Gwynn Jones called him: 'The harpist of the dumb.'

Hughes Williams was a pioneer in the world of the Welsh short story, an opponent of the belief that one must include everything in a story, that there must be a plot and details and two lovers or great events. Two things he did were revolutionary. He saw that character alone is enough to make a story, and he saw that character can be portrayed as well through dialogue as through direct authorial narration. Look at 'Robin Ten O'clock': the encounter between Robin and Jackson is depicted entirely through dialogue, but we have a clear idea of the character of each by the end. The same thing is true of all his best stories. He used dialogue to a greater degree than anyone else I know of; he removed every ounce of unnecessary weight from the story, searching it with jealous eyes for any needless word or descriptive passage, and struck his pen through it ruthlessly. His best work would be hard to condense any more; it is like a ship which has reefed her sails to the minimum that are needed to keep her answering to her rudder before the wind.

In one sense one could say that this is the dramatist's gift. But not necessarily. It has its place in the story as well, and there was genuine need for its development in Wales. Although much of Daniel Owen's dialogue is amusing, and although it displays his characters clearly, much of it still seems rhetorical and verbose. We may enjoy Wil Bryan and Thomas Bartley and Captain Trevor for the genius with

which they are created, but in the end we doubt that people ever spoke with such eloquence and loquacity in everyday life. Hughes Williams arrived at everyday speech, clipped and incomplete and breathless, that men use with each other.

To do this he had to select. He records the common conversation of men with their fellows word for word, with a haste that is almost unpleasant. His achievement, as the achievement of every writer must be, was in selection and portrayal. He left out the preamble and the scream at the end, as Sir Ellis Griffith once put it. He broke the story down to its barest essentials. But always he was careful of those essentials, and none of them were left out.

One might say that many of the stories in the selection are copies of each other. There is justice in the complaint. It seems Hughes Williams paid more attention to the mode of expression than to what was expressed. Sometimes one has to admit that the material is slight, that the sorrow is too facile and uniform, that the end of his antiheroes is always the same and that too many characters die of consumption. This uniformity and monotony too readily engulfs writers of the quarrying districts. Perhaps there is a uniformity about our lives and society – compared with the lives of farmers – which is notably entirely Welsh. One can regret that he did not write more often in the major key. One or two of the lighter stories show the humour that was in him.

He could understand and appreciate the man who was a bit of a fool and a bit of a lad. He sympathised with the creature who thought himself a poet or musician, and in his dealings with society showed little pity for the hypocritical or disingenuous man.

One can easily imagine Hughes Williams in the quarry as

a lad, joining in the fun against some Robin Bwt, but feeling in the depths of his heart that he too had a Robin Bwt inside him somewhere. His sympathy was always turned to the homeless, the helpless, those defeated in the turmoil of life, and in his stories he always showed the comic side of failure as well as the tragic. For the humour of pity lies in seeing, and there is humour in understanding as well – pity knows how easily any of us can be trampled underfoot in the conflict, and understanding knows that without humour this knowledge becomes unbearable.

He always keeps very close to the world he understands – the world of Huw Huws the deacon, the Bad Lot, Jackson the steward, Siôn William. He found little pleasure in devising other worlds. But the characters are alive in this world of his; the narrator knows that even the sentimentality of his unfortunates, in their own circle and the hardship of their lives, is the fruit of entirely accurate observation. The unfortunate in such a society comes to regard himself as a character in a drama, and to glory a little in his part, even when that turns to bitterness.

The world of Hughes Williams' stories is chiefly a world of men. The women in them are few, and are not so well drawn.

The Welsh short story was not the same after Hughes Williams had made his mark on it. It couldn't have been. He showed a new path and a new style. He adopted a new attitude to life – the attitude of the observer, that to observe is more important than to judge, and that to record what exists is better than to describe what ought to be. He took his work seriously, and lived for its sake. If he is forgotten, as largely he has been, his influence on the literature of Wales

will remain. I hope that this collection of his work will bring him to public attention again.

E MORGAN HUMPHREYS

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The short stories of Richard Hughes Williams, with an introduction by E. Morgan Humphreys, were first published in book form by Hughes a'i Fab, Cardiff in 1932. A second edition, from 1994, added an extra story, 'The Black Cat,' likewise included here.

The translation corrects some minor errors in the original, in particular where Hughes Williams forgets a character's name or misattributes a line of dialogue. Dr Dafydd Roberts of the Welsh Slate Museum, Llanberis, applied his technical knowledge; Prof. Graëme Harper and Dr Tony Brown gave literary insight; Rev. Geraint Morgan cast light on a number of obscure passages, and Mr Maldwyn Thomas, at Gwasg y Bwthyn, was unfailing in his kindness and encouragement.

A number of books were indispensable to my work. *Canrif y Chwarelwr* by Emyr Jones (Dinbych: Gwasg Gee, 1964), R. Merfyn Jones's *The North Wales Quarrymen 1874-1922* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981) and Alun John Richards's *Slate Quarrying in Wales* (Llanrwst: Gwasg Carreg Gwalch, 1995) helped me as they have doubtless helped others to come alive to the subject. Bethan Jones's MA dissertation, *Geirfa'r Chwarel* (University of Wales Bangor, 1993), was also a very helpful resource to me.

An essay of mine explores the short-story craft of Richard Hughes Williams. It is to be found at <http://www.robmimpriss. com/essays/essay-rhw.php>.

TWM HUWS COMES HOME

Every man in Chwarel y Banc knew how Twm Huws left home, but few indeed knew how he came back, since Twm Huws himself, poor man, never had a chance to tell them.

He was an intelligent lad, too intelligent to work in the quarry without feeling he was nothing but a slave in all but name, and so he decided to go away and make his fortune, and to liberate his fellow quarrymen who were, in his opinion, groaning under their burdens.

I don't know exactly where he went. He did not know himself, before he set out, where he was going. That was Twm's main fault, according to the quarrymen, though in his own judgement it was a virtue in him. If people trusted more to fate, he said, and worried less about the future, they would live a lot longer.

So Twm went away one day, trying to persuade himself he was free as a bird. He reached town early, and went straight to the railway station. When he asked, he found that the first train was going towards Liverpool, so Twm bought a ticket to there. I heard all this from a friend of mine, who was in the station at the time. Where he went after reaching Liverpool, I don't know; indeed, his parents didn't know. I went to see them one evening to ask after him, but they were in the dark on the matter.

‘Somehow I feel,’ said his mother, ‘that he’s gone overseas somewhere. I dreamed about the sea last night, and I don’t think I’m far from the truth to say that Twm is not on dry land tonight.’

‘Don’t talk such rubbish,’ said Dafydd Huws. ‘If Twm were here now, he’d tell you what to think about dreams. My word, he was a scholar.’

‘Scholar or not,’ said Sara Huws, ‘my mother and my grandmother believed in dreams, and they were made of better stuff than Twm is. I’m sorry to have to say that about my own child.’

‘Don’t you worry, old girl. Twm’s a clever lad, and I’ve no doubt at all he’ll make his mark on the world. If only you’d heard him talking about... Dear me, I’ve forgotten already. What did he call them, Sara? Don’t you know? Well, you’re a dull one tonight. *So, so, so...* dear me, it’s on the tip of my tongue.’

‘Socialists,’ I told him.

‘Yes, that’s the word. Well, if you’d heard him talking about them, you’d have sworn he was either a preacher or gentry. My God, he was a scholar.’

‘How do you know he was a scholar?’ asked Sara Huws. ‘I bet he tied his own brain in knots, just like you. I’ve often seen a calf bump his head on the cowshed wall who was twenty times as clever as Twm, and better looking. It’s not my place to criticise my own son, but the truth’s the truth, every time.’

Having said her piece, Sara went out, and Dafydd looked in solemn amazement at the fire.

‘Isn’t that a strange thing?’ he said, putting his thumb in his pipe.

'What?' I asked.

'Sara,' said Dafydd, pointing outside with his pipe.

'What about her?'

Dafydd put the pipe in his mouth, and put his mind to drawing for a minute or two.

'Do you know where she is now?' he asked presently, taking the pipe out of his mouth and knocking the ash out.

'No,' I replied.

'In the cowshed,' said Dafydd, with emphasis, 'crying her eyes out for Twm. Do you have any tobacco I can borrow till tomorrow?'

I gave him a plug of tobacco, and he put it on the mantelpiece. I knew he had only asked for tobacco to stop himself breaking down.

'Tell me, do you understand women?' he asked after a while.

'Hardly,' I said.

'I'm the same. I think it's a miracle if anyone can. Take Sara, now. You heard her laying into Twm, and you'd think she was his greatest enemy. But if you or I said a word against him, she'd raise her hackles like a lioness if she didn't do anything worse. She thinks the world of that boy, you see. She knows he's a scholar, but she doesn't want anyone to say it except her. Do you understand her secret?'

I said I did.

'It would do my heart good to have Twm at home,' said Dafydd Huws again, 'if only for her sake. Women are different from us, you see. When something's bothering them, they can't just swear and forget all about it; they have to keep thinking about it until it well-nigh kills them. Must you go now? Well, call round again; maybe we'll have heard

from Twm in a day or so.'

I called at the house dozens of times after that, but they never heard anything from Twm. A year went by, and Sara's hair was turning whiter every day, and her face was more pale and lined.

The year had marked Dafydd Huws also. He very seldom mentioned Twm, but I could see he was thinking about him more than ever. It was also seldom that he mentioned Twm's mental abilities, and he was starting to think, after all, that learning could only lead a man to his ruin.

Another year went by, and with it Sara Huws went to her grave. I was at her funeral, and when I saw Dafydd Huws standing at the graveside, I knew he would not be long in following her. Within three months he was released from his bondage, but not by Twm.

But how did Twm Huws come home?

I remember it well. Five years had gone by since his parents died, and the neighbours had tired of discussing them. In a word, no one even knew where they were buried. The storms of five winters had laid their gravestones to the earth, and when Twm came home the spring growth had covered them.

But now for Twm Huws's return. One night I was sitting on the low wall surrounding my home, when I saw someone cutting across the fields towards Tŷ Hen, the empty house which had once been Dafydd and Sara Huws's old home. It was rather cold, and every now and again I saw the stranger stop to wrap his coat more tightly around his shoulders, or put his hand to his brow to see if there was anyone waiting for him.

'Could that be Twm Huws?' I wondered. I had promised

his father to make him welcome when he came home, and to show him where he and Sara were buried. I was prepared to do the first, if not for Twm's sake, but the second was beyond my power.

I jumped off the wall, and went after the stranger across the fields. I quickly gained on him, for he was walking slowly and frequently stopping. It was rather dark by this time, however, and the stranger hadn't seen me.

I let him walk ahead without disturbing him, but keeping close by, and at last we reached the garden wall. I remembered Twm had never climbed it in the old days, but had jumped over it as easily as over a stone. But the stranger did not jump over the wall. Indeed, he scarcely dragged himself over it, and when he reached the other side he sat down to catch his breath. Then he got up, and went to the door. He tried to open it, but failed, and went to look through the window. Then he sat down again, and I could see without doubt it was Twm. He was filthy, and looked terribly pale, and I could see from the state of his clothes that he was no more than a tramp.

After a while he got up again, and went to the cowshed. What would he say, I wondered, if he knew how many tears had been shed for him there? But it was likely he would never know, and in one sense that was best.

He stayed in the cowshed a long time, and I thought he would never come out again. I could not think what to do. Somehow I hated to break in on his thoughts, but at the same time I felt it was cruelty to leave him there, when I knew he was almost certainly famished. I decided to go in and talk to him, come what may. I opened the door quietly, but I could not see Twm. I went inside and lit a match, but there was no

sign of him. I lit another match and went to the hay pen, and there was Twm lying in the straw with his eyes shut.

I took him by the shoulders and shook him.

'Who's there?' he asked, weakly.

I told him.

'Go away,' he said. 'I don't want to see you. Wait – do you have any bread?'

'Come home with me,' I said.

'Home,' he repeated. 'I'm home already. Can't you see me? I am home, you bloody fool. Tell me, where's my mother?'

I told him his mother was dead.

'And my father?'

'The same.'

Twm sat up and looked at me with fury.

'Why have you come here to bother me? Go away and learn some manners. Go to *England*–'

He was silent for a while. Then he said again in a quieter tone: 'No. You'll stay away from England if you've got any sense. I've been there, you see, and I got nothing but kicks the whole time I was there. Go away now; I want to sleep.'

I could not think what to do for a minute. Then I decided to go home and fetch my father, thinking he could persuade Twm to come home with us. I ran across the fields as fast as I could, and we were both in the cowshed in less than an hour.

But it was already too late.

CHILD OF THE DEVIL

I

Harri Hook-Nose was one of the devil's children. So Huw Huws, the deacon, said, and so Harri himself said, for that matter.

When he was a boy, his chief hobby was riding about the yard on the back of the pig. It was through pig-horsemanship that he broke his nose. His father once had to shut the pig in the pen, or Harri would have killed it before its time, but Harri went to the pig-pen after him, and while the pig was eating his dinner the equestrian jumped on his back. But instead of running around the outside part of the pen, as Harri had expected, the pig rushed inside, and since the doorway was too small for both to pass through, Harri's face crashed into the lintel, and his nose was ruined.

The nose lay under cover for several days, and when it saw the light of day after the accident, you could see it had fallen in love with Harri's right cheek. After that, Harri resolved to deny himself the pleasures of pig-horsemanship. It was suggested he go for one ride more, to have a chance of setting his nose straight by breaking the other side. But Harri stayed away from the pig-pen.

When he started work in the quarry, his life was not very

pleasant at all. The quarry is no place for a boy with cross-eyes, big feet or a broken nose, and Harri quickly realised this.

The first day, all the boys in the shed went to his hut to have a look at his nose. Some praised it, the others composed an *englyn* to it, and someone even dared measure with a gauge how much it had gone out of line. But Harri had measured him out with a mallet before he'd finished with him.

The second day, Harri was carried to the engine shed, and there, in the presence of witnesses, he was baptised into the Order of the Grey Slate as Harri Hook-Nose.

When he grew up, Harri took to drinking beer, and instead of working he spent his time in the pubs in town. Huw Huws tried to reason with him, but in vain. Instead of repenting, and promising to lead a better life in future, Harri simply agreed with the deacon that he was wicked beyond all redemption.

'Harri *bach*,' said the old deacon one day, 'I'm afraid you're heading for a drunkard's grave before your time.'

'Yes, I'm afraid I am,' said Harri, drying his eyes on the corner of his jacket. 'You're absolutely right, Huw Huws.'

'You've got no one to blame but yourself,' said the deacon.

'No, I haven't,' said Harri.

'If you gave up that accursed beer, you'd be as good a man as ever put his foot in a shoe.'

'But what about my nose, Huw Huws?'

'Tut tut! Don't mention your nose! It's your soul that's in peril, my boy, your soul!'

'Yes, it is,' said Harri again, wiping the tears from his eyes once more.

'You don't consider your situation, Harri; you're don't realise you're on the edge of a cliff. Tell me, do you ever read the Bible?'

'Do I what, Huw Huws?' asked Harri, innocently.

'Do you read the Bible?'

'No, I don't.'

'You should do, Harri *bach*.'

'Yes, I suppose I should.'

'Well, why don't you?'

'Why don't I, Huw Huws?'

'Yes, Harri.'

'I can't.'

'Why on earth not?'

'I don't have one.'

'You don't have a Bible!'

'No, I don't have a Bible, Huw Huws.'

'Will you come round tonight and collect one?'

'I don't want to take your Bible away from you.'

'But I've got three or four at home.'

'Never! That many!'

'Yes, and it'll be a pleasure for me to give you one. Will you come round tonight?'

'I don't know. You won't be angry with me if I don't, will you, Huw Huws?'

'I'm afraid I will, Harri.'

'Well, it's like this, you see, Huw Huws, I'm terribly busy right now.'

'You're busy, Harri?'

'Yes.'

'What have you got to do, my boy?'

'Lots of things.'

'Don't deceive your soul, now, Harri.'

'What is a soul, Huw Huws?'

'You don't know what a soul is?'

'No, I can't say I do.'

'My dear boy, I see no hope for you.'

'I don't see any hope for me either, Huw Huws.'

'You're in the lowest pit.'

'I am, aren't I?'

'Yes you are; no doubt about it. Remember to come round tonight.'

Huw Huws walked back to his hut, and Harri watched him through a hole in the wall. Then, when the deacon was out of sight, he put a stone on his block, threw the cold tea he had in his pitcher through the door, and when he'd checked that Huws the steward wasn't around, he put on his coat and went home.

On the way he thought about what Huw Huws had said, and it seemed to him that he must be a very great sinner. But it never occurred to him to reform. He was too old for that, he said to himself, and even if he were to reform, his life would be just the same.

Back home, he put on his Sunday best and went to town. Sinful or not, it gave him some pleasure, and what right had Huw Huws to tell him what he should and shouldn't do?

The snow was falling gently as he walked the road towards town, and very soon Harri was shivering. He didn't have an overcoat; he'd drunk it, as Huw Huws said; and as the wind pierced the thin cloth that covered his flesh, he could not see how anyone dared speak against brandy, when it put

such a fire in your veins. What would you do without brandy on such a cold night? It was easy enough for Huw Huws to talk; he had warm clothes, and didn't need brandy!

That was what Harri was thinking as he walked into town; and as the snow fell faster, and as the wind blew more sharply through his bones, he hurried onwards. Once or twice, when he thought of the brandy, he ran a few steps; but he quickly realised that his lungs weren't as strong as they had been when he had ridden that pig, and somehow he got tired quicker. What was the matter with him? He was only a young man, and it was very odd that he couldn't run a few yards without wheezing like an old bellows!

II

Three hours later, Harri dragged himself homewards. By this time, the snow was thick on the road, but Harri sang as he dragged his cold feet through it. The wind was colder than ever, but Harri laughed at it; and when it roared through the wood, Harri stopped in the middle of the road and tried to roar like it. He had never been happier. Sometimes he thought he was a king. Then he thought he was a cock, and made the most ugly sounds trying to imitate of the creature.

Before reaching home, however, he began to grow tired. Something seemed to be wrong with his legs. He'd never seen a pair of legs like them; they were like babies' legs! He'd never asked for such useless legs. He swore at them, but they carried on shaking; he tried to pull them off, but fell at the foot of a big boulder, striking his head on it cruelly.

For a moment he was quiet. He was stunned. He tried to

get up, but failed. For a minute he was sober, and when he failed to get up a third time, he whispered, 'In the lowest pit, Huw Huws; yes, in the lowest pit.'

The next minute he was drunk again. He huddled down beside the boulder thinking he was in bed, and moving his hands back and forward as though trying to pull the blankets over him.

'Come closer, Robin,' he said to the rock. 'Don't take all the bedclothes.'

Soon he was covered with snow, and for a moment he thought he was warm.

'Goodnight, Robin,' he said. 'Don't forget to call me at five. Five, do you hear me? Why don't you say something, you old fool?'

He slept quietly for hours, and the snow continued to cover him. Not even his dreams could tire him out, and the wind could not reach him.

III

Less than three days after that, he was lying in a different bed. His course was at an end, and he knew it. He had caught a terrible cold when he was under the snow, and soon, as he said to himself, he would be under it again.

That evening Huw Huws came to see him.

'How do you feel tonight, Harri, my son?' asked the old deacon.

'Terrible, Huw Huws,' said Harri. 'I'm close to the end.'

'Nonsense, Harri. You'll be like a spring lamb soon.'

'Yes indeed – buried under the snow, Huw Huws. I'm

going soon; you'll see; there's no doubt about that.'

'How are you for money, Harri?'

'I've enough to keep me for as long as I need. There it is on the shelf, seven shillings and sixpence exactly.'

'No, you're not dying that soon! The boys have plastered your hut ready for when you get back. When can I tell them you're coming?'

'Look at my face, Huw Huws. Do you see my eyes?'

'Yes, my boy.'

'Well, they won't see that hut again; you'll see.'

'My dear boy, don't talk that way.'

The deacon broke down completely.

'Are you ready to depart, Harri *bach*?' he asked presently.

'Am I what, Huw Huws?'

'Are you ready to depart?'

'No. Everything is dark to me.'

'You don't know the way, as it were?'

'That's it exactly. My mother explained it all to me before she died, but I turned away from it years ago.'

'Well my boy, it's easy enough to turn back. Since you mention your mother's death, I'd have thought after that you'd have lived a different life. But it's better not to talk about the past, and the only thing I'll say to you tonight is this: pray to go same way as she did. If you do that, I won't have much fear for you. Well, I must go.'

'Wait, Huw Huws. I'd like you to sing me a hymn before you go.'

'What hymn, my boy?'

'That hymn my mother used to sing.'

'I don't know what hymn that was, Harri *bach*.'

'That hymn Guto Jos sang in the engine shed last week.'

'*Gwaed y Groes*.'

'Yes, that's the one.'

'Very well, my boy, I'll sing it.'

The old man shut his eyes, and started to sing. He got carried away and sang the hymn three times, forgetting about Harri until he heard him groan.

Then he rushed to the bedside as Harri inclined his head.

'Are you feeling worse, my son?' he asked. 'Can I get you anything?'

But Harri made no reply.

ROBIN TEN O'CLOCK

He was a strange old customer, Robin Jos of Tŷ Clai – or Robin Ten O'clock, as the boys called him. He was one of the older quarrymen in Chwarel y Coed when I knew him, and he is the oldest by now.

As a rule, the quarrymen used to work themselves to death before reaching sixty, as it was called; but Robin was the opposite of everyone else. He thought only a fool would work nine hours a day when six would do just as well.

'What's the point in killing yourself just to earn a living?' he used to say. 'We only get one chance at life, and we ought to make the most of it.'

That was Robin's philosophy, and for that matter he practised what he preached.

In the morning he'd to come to the quarry at about ten o'clock, and that was how he got his nickname. Huws the steward told him hundreds of times that he would be sacked if he didn't come earlier, and to answer, Robin asked him if he was sure that ten o'clock was when he was coming to work. It would have been an achievement for any steward to catch Ten O'clock arriving at the quarry. He was as cunning as a fox, and used to creep from slag-heap to slag-heap, sometimes lying as flat as the ground to catch his breath, and reach his hut without a single eye seeing him.

Huws sometimes went to look out for him, but his efforts were always in vain. After sitting on the cold slag-heap for half an hour or more, he was forced to go back to the shed, and the first thing he'd see would be Robin working in his shirt-sleeves, as busy as anyone.

But Robin once came close to being caught. One Monday morning Huws felt unwell after Sunday dinner, and didn't set out for the quarry until ten o'clock. As he was climbing the mountain he saw Robin walking ahead of him, and the steward chuckled quietly to himself when he thought how surprised old Ten O'clock would be when he told him to fetch his tools and turned him out of the quarry.

It was usual for Robin to take his leisure once or twice on his way to work. After reaching half-way he always sat down on a boulder that the boys called Ten O'clock's seat, and if he had any tobacco he'd have a smoke, and turn his face towards home.

This particular day it happened that he did have tobacco, and having reached his seat he looked back. But instead of having a smoke he got the biggest shock of his life. Down there at the foot of the hill he saw Huws, and his pipe fell out of his hands with their shaking.

'You're in for it now, Robin,' he said to himself. 'You should have got out of bed earlier, my boy. I told you it would come to this. Good heavens, what'll I do?'

For once in his life he ran to the quarry. His clogs were terribly heavy, and as the sweat dripped from his face he put every sinew to work to reach his hut before Huws reached the crest of the hill.

At last he reached the quarry, and having set his pitcher aside he hurried to his cousin Huw's hut, and after explaining

the situation to him he asked to borrow his hat. He put it hurriedly on his head and ran to the office, where Mr Jackson, the chief agent, was sitting.

'Is Mr Huws here, sir?' he asked the agent, touching his hat with his thumb.

'No, Huws not come,' said Mr Jackson in broken Welsh. 'What you want him, Bob?'

'I saw his pony lame on the mountain last night, sir. I'd have told him before, but I can't for the life of me find him this morning, even though I stood at the door of my hut from half past six to seven o'clock.'

'Me tell him, Bob, when he get here.'

'Many thanks, sir.'

Robin turned to go, but before he reached the door he thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to kill two birds with one stone, and turned back.

'Mr Jackson, sir?'

'Yes, Bob.'

'Is there any chance of a raise, sir?'

'A raise, Bob?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How much you get?'

'Ten shillings a load, sir.'

'You get very good wage, Bob.'

'But the slates are terribly small, sir.'

'Small, Bob?'

'Yes, sir. You could sweep them together with your hat.'

'You very big hat, Bob.'

'Big enough, sir. My father wore it for forty years, and my grandfather before him for a good half century.'

'You tell truth, Bob?'

'Well, sir, I'm only saying what my father told me.'

'You get fifteen shillings then, Bob.'

'Thank you, sir, thank you. If ever you want your yard dug, you only have to mention it, sir.'

Robin went out feeling very pleased with himself, and as he was on the way to his hut, he whispered:

'Oh, Huws, where is thy sting?'

About half an hour later, he was summoned back to the office. He went bare-headed.

When he arrived, he saw Mr Jackson and Huws sitting by the fire.

'Mr Huws say you late in the quarry morning,' Mr Jackson said to him.

'There must be some mistake, sir,' answered Robin, pulling his hand through his hair.

'Huws seed you, Bob.'

'He saw me, sir?'

'Yes.'

'Where, sir?'

'On the mountain, Bob.'

Robin looked very puzzled; then he said, looking sharply at Huws, 'There must be some mistake somewhere, sir.'

He thought he would be forgiven for telling a lie once in his life.

'Where you see Bob?' Mr Jackson asked Huws.

'On the mountain, sir,' replied the steward. 'He was at the top of the hill when I was at the bottom.'

'And there was me in my hut,' said Robin quietly, but loud enough for the other two to hear him.

'Me not know who tell the truth,' said Mr Jackson.

'Well, sir,' said Robin, 'my character's on the line, so to

speak, and since Mr Huws says he saw me, and I say he didn't, the only way to decide the matter is for Mr Huws to give a description of whoever he saw. You see, sir, it's a terribly long way from the bottom of the mountain to the top, and what could be easier than for Mr Huws to mistake someone else for me? What was I wearing, or rather, what was the man you saw wearing? I hope I'm not being too bold, Mr Jackson, sir?'

'No, you very fair, Bob.'

'Thank you, sir. Well then, what was the man wearing, Mr Huws?'

'Clothes, of course,' said the steward, sourly.

'What did he have on his head?'

'A cap.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes, sure enough.'

Robin gave Mr Jackson a supplicatory look. Mr Jackson was scratching his head in bemusement.

'Will you tell him what I had on my head when I came about the pony, sir?'

'You make mistake, Mr Huws, very big mistake. Bob hat on his head. Me saw it. *Tremendous* big hat.'

Huws rubbed his eyes. He could see Robin had tricked him somehow, and felt it was wise to leave the matter as it stood.

'Can I go now, sir?' asked Robin, bowing politely to Mr Jackson.

The agent nodded, and in less than two minutes Robin was sitting on his block, thinking how narrowly he'd escaped.

'You were treading on thin ice that time,' he said. 'You'll have to take care, Robin Jos. That old Huws is after your neck,

my boy. The old blood-hound. He isn't fit to be in the same office as Jackson.'

Robin was right. Huws was a hateful, blind old fox, and his only aim in life was getting quarrymen into trouble.

But as for Jackson, he was a decent fellow. He'd never do a bad turn to anyone, and he was always one of the first to enjoy a laugh.

He was very fond of Robin, and quite often went to his hut to see him.

'How is you today?' he asked Robin one day, as he tried to make his way to the block through the rubble.

'All right, I suppose, sir,' answered Robin.

'What's the matter today, Bob?'

'I was hit with a spar when I was slicing a big rock this morning.'

'What mean *slicing*, Bob?'

'Slicing means slicing something, sir.'

'Me know that, Bob.'

'Slicing means slicing *with* something, sir,' explained Robin, getting up from the chipping bench, and making enough faces, to try to show how he was feeling, to frighten a mule.

'You in much pain now, Bob?' asked Jackson sympathetically.

'No, just the odd twinge, sir,' answered Robin, pulling his tobacco pouch out of his pocket.

'Damn,' he said. 'Not enough to fire a flea's eye.'

'You no tobacco, Bob?' asked Mr Jackson.

'You what, sir?'

'You no tobacco?'

'Not even a shred, sir.'

'You take cigar?'

'I don't know which end to smoke first, sir.'

'Me break the end off for you.'

'All right, sir.'

The agent broke the end off the cigar, and gave it to Robin.

'It tastes terrible,' said Ten O'clock after a while, pulling the half-chewed cigar out of his mouth.

'You eating it, Bob.'

'If you don't mind I'll finish it this way, sir,' said Robin, stuffing it into his clay pipe.

'You ruin it that way, Bob.'

'If I don't it'll ruin me, sir.'

'How many slates you done this month, Bob?'

'Let me think, sir; I've done a hundred Countesses, two hundred Ladies Eight, and nine hundred and fifty Little Doubles. Of course, sir, I've done a few Eighteens, Fourteens and Twelves as well.'

'You make lot of slates, Bob?'

'The thing is, sir, those are all the Countesses I've done since the start of the summer. If you don't have some good thick slate in your hut, it can break your heart. It took me five months to do those slates, sir.'

'Some of them new slates, Bob.'

'Of course, sir. Huw my cousin came to see me this morning, and he said, "Robin, I'm a dozen or so short of having a hundred red Countesses in my hut, and I want you to give me some of your red slates for blue ones."'

'Some of the new slates red, Bob.'

'Get off, sir. Huw's stupid. He's as blind as a bat, sir.'

'You done these crooked, Bob,' said the agent, holding a

slate up in front of his eyes.

'It's square as a dice, sir.'

'No indeed, Bob.'

'Well, sir, if you think you can do a straighter one you can take over the chipping bench.'

'Me not quarryman, Bob.'

'That's what I'm trying to get into your head, sir. I've been working in the quarry for years, and I know how to make them straight to a hair's breadth, sir.'

'This slate crooked, *sure*, Bob.'

'You're looking at it crooked, sir, begging your pardon for being so bold.'

Mr Jackson put the slate back, laughing.

'You old – what that little yellow animal, Bob?'

'Canary, sir?'

'No, no, Bob. The little one kill chickens.'

'Fox, sir.'

'Yes, you right. Fox,' said Mr Jackson, leaving the hut.

'Bloody hell,' said Robin, after he'd gone. 'These are all bent as a corkscrew as well.'

PETER

Peter was Harri the Flea's half-breed dog. He was a little grey dog with coarse, thick hair, and not even Harri himself knew his origins.

But if Peter was not quite pedigree, he had more sense than a great many dogs that are spoken of far and wide. I don't think he ever took part in a show; but if he did, he went on his own responsibility.

Neither do I know where Harri first got him. Some say he followed Harri from town, and there is another rumour that does not reflect so well on Harri. But however he came into Harri's ownership, I don't think he ever had cause to regret it, for Harri the Flea was a good master to his dog.

When he started coming to the quarry with Harri, Peter lost his left eye. Another quarryman, Dic the Devil, struck him with a spar, and for several days he crouched under Harri's slate bench in despair, trying to work out, as the Flea said, which side of him was next to the wall. That was the stupidest thing the Devil ever did. Not only did he get a thrashing from Harri that he wouldn't forget for several months, but he also got a good beating from everyone else who could stand up to him, as soon as they heard what had happened to Peter. So he had a hiding or two every day for a month.

But Peter recovered, although it was several months before he could see the world as well with one eye as he had with two. However, he could see the Devil without much difficulty, and he could stay out of reach of his kicks.

Peter's main fault, as Harri said, was thinking too much about his dinner. He got quite enough food from Harri, but Old Nick had shown him the trick of visiting the mess. As a rule, he stole Huw Huws's food. Perhaps he knew the deacon had the best dinner; but when Huw Huws complained to Harri about him, the Flea said it was Huw Huws's fault.

'Just look at you,' he said once, 'a deacon, putting temptation in the way of a poor dumb creature as innocent as a lamb.'

If anyone had been looking at Peter just then, he'd have thought it impossible that such a gentle creature could do any harm at all. In fact he was almost in tears, as Harri said, to think anyone could accuse him.

'But Harri *bach*,' said the deacon, 'how am I putting temptation in his way?'

'By bringing bread and butter and meat to the quarry, instead of just plain bread,' said Harri, as though Huw Huws had committed some unforgivable sin. 'Really, Huw Huws, you're the one who belongs to the *seiat*, you ought to know better than that. You're the one who's had an education, as it were – that is, at least you know what temptation is. Do you see what I mean?'

'Not quite, Harri.'

'Well, I don't know what more I can do to explain it to you.'

'But what shall I do about this dog?'

'I don't know, Huw Huws. I've told him hundreds of times

not to go stealing your food, but he just won't listen to me.'

'But he doesn't understand you, Harri.'

'Don't you believe it. This dog could almost say the Lord's Prayer.'

'Well, tell him I'll twist his neck for him if he doesn't leave my food alone.'

Peter made a most pathetic noise, and tried to escape under the bench, but Harri caught him by the collar.

'Come here,' he said, 'I want a word with you. Huw Huws here says I never told you not to steal his food.'

'I never said that, Harri. I said Peter didn't understand you.'

'Well, you wait a minute; you'll see how much he does understand. Peter–' in English '–sit you down.'

Peter sat.

'He's English through and through, you see,' said Harri. 'He was brought up in town.'

'Is that why the old rascal's so greedy, then?'

'I wouldn't be at all surprised.'

Peter made a heart-rending noise again.

'Quiet!' said Harri.

'Don't be cross with him, Harri,' said Huw Huws.

'You're the one who's making me do this,' said Harri. 'Now, Peter, you is a bad dog. You steal *bara* Huw Huws.'

'Butter and meat as well, Harri, butter and meat as well,' said the deacon.

'But he doesn't understand that, Huw Huws. Dogs don't know what butter and meat are, any more than we'd know *turkey* and *black mange*.'

'Peter ought to know,' muttered the deacon.

'But no one ever told him what he was eating, you see. If

you gave him bread and butter and meat, and told him that was what it was, he'd understand what he was eating. Let me talk to him in my own way. We understand each other quite well. Now, Peter, you not to steal *bara* Huw Huws any more. Do you understand, you old one-eyed lout? I'm afraid he's forgotten all his English in this quarry, worse luck.'

'Don't be hard on him, Harri, lad.'

'Well, I don't want him stealing your food, Huw Huws.'

'Don't worry about it, my boy. I'll keep my food in my pocket.'

'No, you can't do that; it'll spoil.'

'Then I'll put it under the bench in my hut.'

'But the rats will eat the lot there. Where do you keep your food in the cabin?'

'On the right hand side as you go in.'

'Good God! I know what we'll do.'

'What?'

'Keep your food on the other side, and there's no way Peter will find it.'

'How come?'

'Well, you see, the old rascal lost his left eye, and when he goes into the cabin he only sees what's on his right side. So if you put the food on the left, he'll never find it.'

'But you've told Peter now.'

'Oh, he doesn't understand Welsh all that well.'

Huw Huws did what Harri had told him, and the next time Peter went into the cabin he thought he'd lost his other eye.

Peter became a gentleman before the end of his life: at least, that is how Harri put it. Mr Jackson took a great fancy to him, and one day he went to Harri's hut. Peter was lying

under the bench at the time, his one eye shining in the darkness.

'You dog, Harri?' asked Mr Jackson, sitting down on the block.

'I'm a dog, sir? Well, it's the first I've heard about it.'

'You own Peter, I mean.'

'Oh, there's a bit of a difference there.'

'You sell him?'

'Sell who?'

'Peter.'

'No, I wouldn't like to do that, sir.'

'Me give five pound for him.'

'For who?'

'Peter.'

'I wouldn't dare sell him, sir.'

'Why you say that?'

'He belongs to my mother.'

'She like five pound better.'

For a minute Harri didn't know what to do. He hated parting with Peter despite all his faults, but refusing to sell him to Mr Jackson was worse, because he knew he would give a good price for him. And Mr Jackson was a decent fellow.

'I'll sell him to you, sir,' he said in the end.

'For five pound?'

'No I can't sell him for that amount.'

'You want more?'

'No, less will do me. Peter isn't worth five pounds any more than I am. I'll take two and ten for him.'

'How much that, Harri?'

'*Tŵ sofrens and a halff, syr*.'

Mr Jackson roared with laughter.

'You learning English, Harri,' he said.

'Yes sir. Peter taught me, as well.'

'Peter!'

'Yes. You see, he didn't speak a word of Welsh when I got him, so of course I had to learn English to understand him.'

'You funny man, Harri.'

'I suppose I am, sir. You'd better have a look at Peter, or perhaps you'd like to take him away now. Come here, Peter.'

Peter came to Harri, looking balefully with his one eye at Mr Jackson as if he understood what was happening.

'He's not a very nice dog to look at,' said Harri, 'and if you've got a cat or any chickens, I wouldn't recommend you introduce them. Do you want to take him away now?'

'If you like, Harri.'

'Very well, sir. Now then, Peter, old chum – you scuttle it with your new boss.'

Peter made a pitiful sound again, and looked pleadingly at Harri.

'I'm afraid he won't budge for anything, sir,' said the Flea. 'Peter, go you at once.'

But Peter didn't move.

'Wait outside, sir,' said Harri.

Mr Jackson left the hut, and the next minute he heard Peter give a heart-rending howl.

For the first time in his life, Harri had kicked him.

When Peter left, there were tears in the eyes of Harri the Flea, and he did no more work that day.

THE POET

The greatest mistake the Poet made in his life was going to the quarry, and the other great mistake of his life was staying there. The boys didn't take to him, and neither did he take to the boys. To him Dic *bach* the Devil and his friends were nothing more than wild animals, and on the other hand Dic thought the Poet was a creature from another world.

The Poet was a tall, slim lad, one of the kind that makes you think he's going to shrivel up and fall over when you look at him. He had a big nose, dark eyes, and enough hair to cover a larger head than his own. His face was always terribly pale, because his nose put it in shadow, said Dic *bach* the Devil, but his hands were bony like an old woman's.

He always wore the legs of two stockings over his wrists, because his mother was too poor to buy him a new jacket every time the sleeves on the one he was wearing got too short. Somehow, his arms and legs seemed to grow much more than his trunk, and this made him shrivel with embarrassment.

For his feet the Poet had boots almost big enough to live in, and from the distance it looked as though he was walking about in two milk churns. I don't know why he wore such big boots, unless it was to stop him being blown away by every breath of wind. On his head he wore an old straw hat that

had lain under the bench in the cabin for two winters, until someone resurrected it. The Poet fell in love with it, even though the crown was missing, and even though it was so worthless the boys hadn't even bothered to thrown it between the belt and the pulley.

I said the Poet's mother was poor. She was too poor even to give the Poet enough to eat, but was always careful to give him his helping first, and to take what he left for herself. The Poet had a big appetite, and sometimes he completely forgot about his mother, and then he would cry like a child over his cruelty.

I got to know him when I saw his lunch tin was empty. I started talking to him, and if his looks were pale and haggard, I quickly realised he wasn't a fool.

He was fond of poetry, he said, and had started composing his own. He work on the theme of hardship had brought tears to his mother's eyes. Sometime perhaps it would bring tears to the eyes of others. His life was a life of tears. He had lost his father before he knew his worth. That was not much, but he was close to losing his mother, whose worth he knew. This discouraged him. He would give the world to have her with him when he achieved fame. What pleasure could there be in fame without his mother to see it? He was sure he'd make his mark on the world, if he lived; and he was strong and healthy – at this point he coughed and spat out blood – except for a slight cold! He'd be better in a week or two.

Those were the Poet's thoughts when I talked to him for the first time. I knew he had few friends and many enemies. This drew him closer to me, and the more I spoke to him the more I liked him. One thing disheartened me, and that was

the way his face grew thinner day after day; the way his eyes shone less and his cheeks lost their colour. One day I noticed he was not at to the quarry, and I asked some of the boys about him, but they knew nothing.

On the second day his hut was still shut, and I began to fear that something was wrong. He lived in a village four miles from mine, so it was hard for me to get news of him.

He did not come to the quarry on the third or fourth day either. The fifth day I saw him dragging himself up the mountain, and somehow my heart lifted at seeing him. When he opened the door to his hut I went over for a chat, and I could see at once that some great change had taken place in his life. His face was thinner and paler than ever, and he was coughing more often.

'Do you remember I told you I've been writing about hardship?' he asked suddenly.

'Yes, I do,' I said.

'Well,' he said, 'I've written my last poem now.'

I asked him what was on his mind.

'I've just buried my mother,' he replied, 'and I've been living in great hardship myself since I last saw you. Do you have a mother?'

'Yes.'

He was quiet for a while.

'What did she give you for dinner today?' he asked, fingering the stockings on his wrists.

'Bread and butter and cheese.'

'Do you think you'll have any to spare?'

He coughed, and I could see from the sleeve of his jacket that he had been coughing more blood than ever.

'It's like this,' he said, 'I haven't eaten since the day before

yesterday. There wasn't any bread in the house after Monday, and if there had been I don't think I could have eaten. It's a little hard to eat in the presence of someone who died from lack of food! But I'd rather not say anything about that. My mother's gone, and this is hardly good news for me. The other day I told you I'm fit and healthy, didn't I? Well, that was all lies. I've no more chance of seeing the end of the year than I have of seeing the end of next century. When I was in the cemetery yesterday I knew she hadn't gone long before me. When my mother was alive I used to brag to her so much about my health I seriously started to believe I was well, but when I saw the earth falling on her coffin, it was as if it was falling on mine too. There's another thing; I told you I'd be famous some day. Well, I don't think I was honest with you about that, either. Recently, last week in particular, I've come to understand it's only my poverty that makes me different from other people. When you fight against the world and waste time trying to put the blame on the world, and make up hateful names for everyone and everything in it, you and a lot of other people start to believe in your genius until the world teaches you different. Tell me, is it dinner time yet?'

It wasn't, but dinner time or not, the Poet and I went to the mess, and Huw Huws the deacon was there.

'Well, Gruffydd *bach*,' said the old man, 'you're like a hand-reared lamb now.'

'Yes, Huw Huws,' said the Poet. 'The only difference between us is that nobody brings me milk.'

'Where are you going to live, my son?' asked the deacon.

The Poet looked thoughtfully at the fire, and said:

'There isn't enough of me left to live for more than two

months. It isn't a question of living for me, now; it's a question of dying.'

'Don't talk such nonsense,' said the old deacon. 'Here, have a sandwich and hold this caddy, and I'll pour you some tea.'

The Poet had enough life left in him to eat the sandwich. The deacon always had good sandwiches, with something more than butter as filling.

'I really think,' said the deacon, as he saw the Poet devouring the sandwich, 'that coming home with me would be the best thing for you. You're not going to do the right thing by yourself alone in that house of yours.'

'I can't come, Huw Huws.'

'Why not?'

'Well, if I were fit and healthy like I told Bob here I was last week, I'd come without hesitation. But now, do you really think it would be fair for me to come home with you today, and for you to end up paying for my funeral tomorrow? I'd consider that an ill deed, Huw Huws, and I don't want anyone to be able to point at my grave, and say, "He took advantage of a poor old man." Do you see?'

'Yes, but I can't help thinking you have some other reason.'

'How many times have you heard me tell a lie, Huw Huws?'

'Not once.'

'And you don't think I'm going to start now in my old age? – which it is, as I'm nearing the end of my days.'

'No, but I can't for the life of me help thinking you're in a terrible hurry to attend your own funeral. It won't do you any good, you know.'

‘Well, wait a minute, and let’s try and understand each other. Look at my face for a start.’

‘It looks very pale, of course.’

‘Well, now, look at the sleeve of my jacket. It was clean on yesterday.’

‘Well, I realise you’re not in your usual health.’

‘Look at my arms, my throat, my legs. For goodness sake, there’s no room for any life in them.’

‘I can see you’re far too thin.’

‘But you still don’t think I’m ill?’

‘Yes, yes, but I want to hear you say more about living and less about dying.’

‘You want to hear me say I have a good long life ahead of me?’

‘Yes, of course I do.’

‘And make me tell the biggest lie I ever told in my life?’

The deacon realised he’d put his foot in it.

‘Well, never mind that. The only thing I want you to do now is come home and stay with me.’

‘I can’t do that, Huw Huws, but if it’s all the same to you I’ll have another sandwich.’

‘My dear son,’ said the old man, ‘have two or three.’

The Poet took a sandwich, and then he lay down on the cabin bench for a sleep.

A few minutes later, Huw Huws came to my hut.

‘What do you make of that young man?’ he asked, sitting down on the block.

‘I don’t know,’ I replied.

‘Well, you know what? I think he’d make a wonderful preacher.’

I should say that Huw Huws’s main hobby was looking for

someone among us who was likely to make a preacher. His favourite had been the Gentleman, but after he was killed, it was hard for the old man to put his finger on anyone else he could send to Clynnog. We were all mischievous lads, with no more sermons in us than a calf.

'The Gentleman was a nicer man, but I think Gruffydd has more talent. Dear me, I wouldn't be surprised if I could send someone from the quarry to Clynnog after all before I die. I don't think you noticed how well he was speaking, and he's got a real gift for debate as well. Did you see how easily he drove me into a corner? No, I think I've hit on a capable lad. Come with me, and we'll talk to him about it.'

When we reached the cabin, the Poet was lying where we had left him, except that he had turned his face to the wall.

'It's a pity to wake him,' said Huw Huws, 'but it won't do him much good sleeping in a place like this. Gruffydd!'

The Poet didn't move.

'Wake up, my lad!' said the deacon, shaking him by the shoulders.

Gruffydd didn't move. Huw Huws looked at his face.

'Do you have a match?' he asked me.

I gave him one, and when he'd lit it, Huw Huws stared intently at the Poet's face. After a while I saw his hand begin to tremble, and he shook his head three times.

'Go to my hut, and fetch the coat that's hanging over the chipping bench.'

I left, and ran back as soon as I could. When I reached the cabin, the deacon was wiping blood from the Poet's face.

'I'm afraid I won't be sending anyone to Clynnog after all,' he said, drying the tears from his cheeks.

ROBIN BWT

No one ever met a stranger character than Robin Bwt. He was full of originality, and he might have been a capable man if he'd had more education.

But Robin had never had much education, although he was very fond of reading. But even after extensive reading he remained confused by what he had read, and as a result his conversation could be laughable in the extreme.

Robin's great ambition was to win the prize for recitation. He'd competed many times, but never won, and to be fair to him he never took it as an injustice. No, Robin was too generous at heart to claim he was being treated unjustly.

I remember once seeing him standing on his block, reciting 'The Sale of the Slave'* to another reciter who was trying to teach him. You couldn't find fault with Robin's posture or tone, but he kept pronouncing the words in his own rather countrified manner.

'Go through that first bit again, Robin,' Huw Jos told him.

Robin coughed, and put his hand on his breast, and began. Everything went well until he came to the fifth line, if I remember correctly, when Robin said:

* The poem, by Ellis Roberts, won a prize in the Ffestiniog Eisteddfod in 1854. The lines below read 'There never came beneath this hammer, or the hammer of any other salesman either, a finer tool.'

'Ni fu o dan y mothwl hwn na mothwl un
Arwerthwr arall chwaith amgenach teclyn.'

'Stop!' roared Huw Jos.

'What's the matter now?' asked Robin innocently.

'What have I told you hundreds of times?'

'You ought to know.'

'You ought to know as well by this time. Can't you say the word *morthwyl*?'

'Of course I can.'

'Why the devil don't you, then?'

'But I do say it.'

'No you don't. You half say it. Say it after me now. *Morthwyl*.'

'Mothwl.'

'I don't believe it. *Morthwyl.'*

'Mothwl!'

'Morthwyl!'

'Mothwl!'

'Morthwyl. M-o-r-th-w-y-l.'

Robin scratched his head. Then he said:

'It's only a hammer, isn't it?'

'Yes, of course it is.'

'So if you asked me to lend you a *mothwl*, a hammer is what you'd get.'

'I suppose so.'

'And if I asked you to lend me a *mothwl*, you'd know what I meant.'

'Yes, of course.'

'Well, why the devil won't you let me say *mothwl?*

Everyone knows what I mean.'

'Maybe so, but pronunciation like that won't do for the kind of recitation we're doing here. You have to say the word properly, or you won't win the competition.'

'Very well, then, say it again.'

'Morthwyl!'

'Mothwyl!'

'Mo-o-o-orthwyl!'

'Mo-o-o-othwyl!'

'Morthwyl.'

'Mothwyl.'

'For goodness sake, Robin,' said Huw, wiping his brow. 'It was a waste of time giving a brain to you.'

'They should have left me without one, like you,' retorted Robin.

'Go to Jericho,' said Huw, getting up. 'And don't bother asking me for any more recitation lessons. If I'd given a pig as many lessons as you've had, I'd have stuffed something into its head long ago.'

'Pigs understand each other,' Robin replied. 'And you can go to the devil.'

Huw went off, shaking his head. To be fair to him, he'd done his best to teach Robin, but he wasn't going to try any longer.

The next day was the competition. A large number of people were taking part in the recitation, and regrettably, Robin did not hold the stage.

The day after that I went to talk to him, and even though he was quite discouraged, he was ready at once to say the result had been fair.

'There were some really good reciters there, you see,' he

said. ‘I didn’t stand a chance.’

When Robin realised he had no gift for recitation, he turned to writing poetry. He bought Dafydd Morgannwg’s *Poetry School*, and for weeks he talked about nothing but assonance and alliteration, the elements of *cynghanedd*. He tried to make *cynghanedd* out of every word he said, until everyone was laughing at him.

At the time, a talented lad called Harri Price was working in the quarry. Harri was an outstanding poet, and Robin spent most of his time in Harri’s hut.

‘How’s the poetry coming along?’ Harri asked him one day.

‘All right,’ answered Robin. ‘Would this make *cynghanedd*? “Put the harness on the horse.”’

‘Yes, and a very nice one too,’ answered Harri. ‘How long did it take you to do that?’

‘Only an hour.’

‘No way!’

‘Yes, really,’ replied Robin innocently. ‘Are you sure it’s all right?’

‘All right? Of course it is! It’s one of the best lines I’ve heard for a long time, indeed; no doubt about it.’

‘I’ve got another one,’ said Robin, starting to swell.

‘Never.’

‘Yes, and I think it’s quite a good one, too.’

‘Out with it, then.’

Robin did his best to look profound, and after spitting on the floor, he said: ‘“The slate is square.”’

‘Did you write that?’ whispered Harri.

‘Yes.’

‘How much time did it take you to do it?’

'About three quarters of an hour.'

'Well I never. Well, you'll have to apply for the Order soon.'

'Do you think I'd get in?'

'No doubt about it, yes.'

'Have you joined the Order?'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'I'm not good enough.'

Robin looked quite gloomy.

'You're a far better poet than I am,' he said.

'Do you think so?'

'By God, yes.'

'But you don't know what you can do yet. It's not long since you started studying *cynghanedd*.'

'No, that's true.'

'And once you've mastered all the metres, I'm sure there won't be a better poet than you in the country.'

A smile lit up Robin's blue eyes. He was thinking how much he would give to be a poet like Dewi Hafhesp or Trebor Mai.

'You certainly ought to apply for the Order,' said Harri. 'You'll need a bardic name, though.'

'Like what?'

'What's your house called?'

'Potato Place.'

'Hmm, I don't think we'll get a name out of that. Wait a minute. What do you think of Son of the Stalk?'

Robin shook his head.

'No, I don't like that name,' he said.

'No, it's not as poetic as you'd think, now you mention it.

Do you think you'd like to be The Potato Poet?'

Robin shook his head again.

'Well, I don't know what to suggest,' said Harri. 'Can you think of a name that would do?'

Robin blushed.

'I've been thinking about it a little already,' he said, 'and I think Robin Hefin would do. There are lots of poets called Hefin.'

'Yes, and they're all very good names. Guto Hefin, Siôn Hefin and Twm Hefin.'

'I can't think of anything else.'

'But I can.'

'What?'

'Robin Fychan.'

A cloud came over Robin's face. 'You're making fun of my size,' he said.*

'Making fun of your size!' said Harri. 'Not at all. You couldn't possibly have a more respectable name than Fychan. Take Ap Fychan, for example.'

'Yes, that's true,' said Robin, and his face started to shine a little.

'Of course it is. It's very wrong of you to think I'm teasing you, when I think so highly of you.'

'I was only joking, Harri.'

'But you shouldn't make jokes like that; it hurts my feelings. Well, study as hard as you can, and I'm sure you'll be accepted for the Order at the next Eisteddfod.'

Robin went back to his hut, and Harri roared with

* Since *fychan*, like *bach*, means 'small,' and *bwt* is a stump, Robin has some reason to be sensitive.

laughter. Then another idea occurred to him, and he ran to the shed.

About five minutes later, he and half a dozen other lads went to Robin's hut, with sacks on their heads like druids.

'What do you want?' asked Robin, rather uncomfortably.

'Robin Fychan,' answered one, in a deep voice.

'What for?' asked Robin.

'If you want to be initiated into the Order of Bards, you have to be initiated by your friends first,' answered Harri.

'No, I don't,' said Robin. 'I'm not as stupid as you think.'

'Get him, boys.'

'Yes, get me,' said Robin, seizing the chipping knife.

One of them went for Robin, but the chipping knife came down on his arm, and he was content to escape. The others realised Robin's initiation would not be much fun, and went out in a rush, leaving Harri.

For a minute or so the two glared at each other, as viciously as two dogs.

'Well, Harri Price, aren't you a contemptible creature?' said Robin.

'Not as contemptible as you, Robin Bwt,' answered Harri.

'Robin Bwt, Robin Betty – ugly Robin;
Robin, swift to be surly;
Robin with the scowl of a Rabbi,
And the harsh voice of a banshee.'

This was too much for Robin. If he could not write an *englyn* he could do something better, and he started calling Harri every name he could think of – and Harri was not half as good at that as he was.

After that, neither of the two said a word to the other for years, and Robin never mentioned poetry to anyone again. In fact, he began speaking out against the poets, saying not of them was in his right mind.

But things changed. Robin was taken ill, and stayed off work for several months. Then he came back to the quarry, but it was obvious to everyone he would not be there long. His face had thinned until it looked like a child's, and his voice, which had filled his hut when he recited 'The Sale of the Slave,' had dwindled to nothing.

Harri Price felt very badly about him, and one day he went to his hut to shake his hand.

'How are you today, Robin?' he asked.

'I'm getting better,' answered Robin, throwing a sack round his neck. 'Don't I look better?'

'Well, yes, you do look a bit better, lad,' answered Harri.

Robin coughed until his sides were shaking.

'If only this cough would go away, I'd be fine,' he said.

But the cough did not go away. The next day he stayed at home, not feeling his usual self. He was still no better the day after that, and so it went on, until he had to stay at home with no chance of leaving the house.

One day I went to see him, and he looked very unwell. He was coughing incessantly.

'How are you, Bob?' I asked.

'Not great,' he replied. 'How do you I look to you?'

'You don't look too bad.'

'Don't lie to me now.'

'I'm not lying.'

'I'm afraid you are.'

'No, I'm not.'

'Indeed you are. Is my mother in?'

'Yes.'

'Well, shut the door.'

I shut it.

'Do you know something?' he asked.

'No,' I replied.

'I won't be here tomorrow.'

'Don't be silly.'

'Silly or not, I'm telling you truth. You mark my words.'

'There's no need to think about death now, Robin.'

'There's no need to think about anything else.'

'You're still only young.'

'I'm as old as I'll ever be. I'm at the end of my life, and you know, it's been a pretty wretched one at that. I've tried my hand at a lot of things, but I didn't try doing the only thing I should have done. There's nothing like a death bed for making you think over your life's work. No indeed. Pass me that bottle. That's the stuff that's killed me, you see. It's brandy, and the doctor says it's what's keeping me alive now. Isn't that a strange thing? Give me a spoonful; a spoonful's enough for Robin now. A glassful to kill, and a spoonful to live. Thank you, Bob. You'd better go home. I'm tired, really tired. I want to sleep. Good night, Bob.'

When I was on my way to the quarry next morning, the first thing I saw was Huw the joiner taking a plank to Robin's house. I knew he was coming for Robin.

GOING SOUTH

Winter is a wearisome time for quarrymen. Finding work is hard, and even for the quarryman who works every day, the wage at the end of the month is a small one.

No one but those who have felt the pinch can understand the feelings of the quarryman on pay day. No one but the quarryman himself knows what it is to stand at the office window on a cold evening and wait for the steward to call his name. Looking at their pained faces, covered with sweat trails – the quarryman knows what it is to sweat when everything around him is freezing – one might think they are there to be executed, not to be given their wages. How their hands tremble as they take the money and count it once, twice, three times! Just three pounds for a month, and a household of seven or eight to feed! But that is enough. I have a story to tell.

About eight years ago it was especially hard in the quarry, and as the quarrymen say, it wasn't worth taking your dinner there. The market for slate was unusually slack, and the steward swore at the men every hour of the day until he was as hoarse by evening as you are when you've caught a cold.

No one likes to be sworn at; and every day a quarryman would pick up his tools, grasp the sack that served him as a

cushion, and leave the shed with his bench on his shoulder, and nothing more would be seen of him.

'There's decent work in the south,' he would say, 'and decent money as well.'

And to the south he would go.

Who has seen the quarryman leaving his home? Isn't it a sad sight? There he is starting out with tears in his eyes, and with a smile on his face like the smile of the sun on the snow. He does his best to smile for his mother, his wife, or his sister. God knows there is no urge to smile in his heart. In his hand is a small tin trunk that has never been out of his bedroom before. In it are a few collars, white as the snow, half a dozen pairs of socks that have been darned a hundred times, four shirts carefully patched, and pieces of cloth and wool with a little thread round them, and an iron needle stuck through the middle. That's all. No, wait. At the bottom there's a little Bible, a book of hymns, and the poems of Ceiriog, Islwyn or Mynyddog.

But I'm wandering again.

I was saying, wasn't I, how the workers left the quarries? It was mostly the young quarrymen who left. It is hard for an old man to leave home while the mountains are covered in snow. It is hard for him to go far when his grave is so near. But the young man has no thought for the grave, so he leaves with his heart full of hope.

The steward hated watching the young workers leave. He and his masters would have preferred to be rid of the old. But the old stayed in the quarry, and each day the steward swore enough for three – that is, until he was too hoarse to swear again for three days.

But there was one young man who had not left. He was called Jim.

Jim worked with his father, old Ben. Ben was deaf – too deaf even to hear the steward swearing – and that was why Jim had not gone south.

The quarry is a dangerous place for a deaf man. Jim knew this, and stayed home. But the steward carried on swearing, and one day he mistakenly swore at Jim instead of Ben.

Without saying a word, Jim took his coat and started for home.

Ben saw that something was wrong, and with baby steps he ran after him, and tripped over a piece of slate.

Ben had forgotten how to run properly.

'Jim,' he said, getting up and rubbing his elbow. 'Jim.'

Jim waited outside the shed, and the other quarrymen heard the conversation that followed.

'Where are you going, Jim? That slate over there, I banged my arm. Where are you going, Jim lad?'

'I'm going home, dad,' shouted Jim, until the shed resounded.

'Home, Jim? I've hurt my arm, you know; it's definitely sore. Are you ill, son?'

'No, dad.'

'Then what are you going home for, Jim? My arm's going to hurt me bad tonight. What are you going home for, Jim?'

'That Robin swore at me, dad. He *swore* at me. *Robin!*'

'He swore at you, Jim? You know, I'm going to have trouble with this arm of mine. You say he swore at you, son?'

'Yes, dad.'

'And that's why you want to go home, Jim?'

'I want to go south, dad.'

'What, Jim?'

'I said I want to go *south*.'

'Go south, Jim?'

'Yes, dad.'

For the next few minutes there was a silence, and the quarrymen held their breath while they considered the results of this. It was the first time Jim had thought of leaving his father.

'Are you really going south, Jim?' asked the old man in the end, and his voice was quavering.

'Yes, dad, I am.'

'You'd do better to stay at home, Jim. My arm is really sore, you know; I'm not just putting it on. Are you really going south, my son?'

'Yes, dad. I'll get decent work and decent pay.'

'Decent work and decent pay, Jim?'

'Yes, dad.'

That was all. Jim went home, and the old man returned to the shed with tears in his eyes.

'Where did he go, Ben?' asked Dic Evans, one of the quarrymen, pretending he had not heard a word of the conversation.

'Home, Dic. My arm hurts terribly bad, you know.'

'Home?' said Dic.

'Yes, Dic, home.'

'What's he going home for, then?'

'You're married, aren't you, Dic?'

'As far as I know, I am, yes.'

'And Beti's alive, isn't she?'

'She was when I left the house this morning,' answered Dic, thinking Ben had lost his wits.

‘I was married too once, wasn’t I, Dic?’

‘That’s what I always thought.’

‘But Barbara’s dead, isn’t she?’

Dic nodded.

‘Beti can wash and do the ironing, can’t she, Dic?’

‘I’d like to see a woman who could wash and iron better than she does.’

‘Barbara could too when she was alive, Dic.’

‘I dare say she could.’

‘But she’s dead now, Dic.’

Dic nodded again, and there was silence for a while.

‘Can you think of anything harder for a man than washing and ironing?’ said the old man presently.

Dic shook his head.

‘You don’t know what it’s like, do you, Dic?’

‘No, I don’t.’

‘Well, I do. For seven years, yes, seven years this Christmas, I’ve tried to be a mother and father to Jim. I’ve tried, Dic. Every shirt he wore, it was me that washed it, every collar that went round his neck, it was me that ironed it, and every patch you see on his trousers, it was me that sewed it on. I’m not saying this to boast, Dic, but to show you what a fine lad Jim is. He never complained, you know, not even the first week, when his collars were as limp as a one-year-old child’s. You see why Jim went home now, don’t you, Dic?’

‘He doesn’t have enough clean shirts and collars to go away?’

‘You’ve got it exactly, Dic; you’ve understood, my boy.’

‘I’ll tell you what we’ll do, Ben,’ said Dic, drying his eyes.

'I'll send little Robin for his things tonight, and Beti can get them ready.'

'Will you really do that, Dic? Will you, lad?'

So he did, and in two days Jim went south.

Every Friday he sent his father a letter with fifteen shillings enclosed.

Ben could not read, so the following Monday during the dinner hour in the cabin, he'd take the letter out of his pocket, and ask the quarryman sitting next to him to read it.

'From Jim,' he'd say, opening his lunch tin.

It wasn't easy to read Jim's letters, so if the person reading the letter was 'creative,' as it's called, so much the better. Sometimes, as Dic Evans said, it was impossible to make head or tail of the epistle, but whoever read it was careful to lay Jim's news before the old man in the best light possible, and to end the letter by saying that there was decent work and decent pay in the south.

One day, however, a cloud came over the quarry. It was rumoured there had been a terrible explosion down south, in the pit where Jim was working. A few days later, Dic brought a copy of the *Herald Gymraeg* to work, and inside was a list of those killed.

Jim was among them.

What could they do?

It was Thursday already, and if Ben didn't get his letter from Jim on Saturday, something would happen. A committee was formed to consider the matter. 'Would it be wrong to forge a letter for Ben every Friday?' asked one. They all came to the conclusion that it would not. 'But what about the fifteen shillings?' asked Dic Evans, running his hand through his hair.

This caused a stir.

'Do you think the boys down south would send money if we asked?' suggested Dic again. 'We're as poor as church mice here.'

The committee thought they would, and laid the matter before them at once. On Saturday, Ben received a letter from Jim, but no money. As it happened the old man did not miss the money. Wasn't the letter enough?

That Monday, Ben took the letter out of his pocket, and gave it to Dic Evans to read.

'From Jim,' he said, opening his lunch tin.

Dic looked pleadingly at the others, but they took no notice of him.

He wiped away the sweat that was trickling brightly on his brow, and started to read.

Jim was well as usual. No time to send money this week. He'd send thirty shillings next week. Decent work in the south, and decent pay to be had. The old man smiled as he took a sandwich out of his lunch tin.

No one else smiled, and no one else had a sandwich on his knee. None of them had any appetite. 'Ate too much yesterday afternoon.'

For the next two months, Ben got a letter and fifteen shillings every week from Jim. There was decent work and decent pay in the south.

One day, Ben decided it wouldn't be a bad idea to send a letter to Jim. Couldn't little Robin next door write as well as a clerk? The letter was written, and two days later it came back in a different envelope. Ben called little Robin again. 'What does this say, Robin?' he asked, putting his thumb over the message on the letter he had sent to Jim.

'Jim Jones is dead,' said Robin, and his face was like chalk.

'Jim's dead?' said Ben. 'Jim's *dead*?'

'Yes,' said Robin, getting ready to run.

Ben went home and took to his bed. That evening Dic Evans came to see him. The kitchen was empty. Where was Ben?

He looked through the bedroom door.

Ben was in bed.

What was the matter with Ben?

He wasn't asleep, because his eyes were open.

'Ben?' said Dic.

Ben tried to get up.

'Is that you, Jim?' he said. 'Is it you, son? Wait for me, I'm coming.'

EB

Everyone said Eb was good for nothing when he was a lad. In school, there was no one as dull as he, and no one was beaten so often by the teacher. But if Eb was dull, he had a warm heart. He would do anything for anyone with a smile on his face, which was 'worth double,' as Harri the blacksmith said, and he never asked anyone to do anything for him, which in Harri's view was a fault in him.

But still Eb's slates were often scarce enough. Even if an apprentice runs errands half the day, it is very seldom he gets enough slates to keep him busy for the other half. Not every contract quarryman is endowed with generosity. The apprentice works for other people all day, and depends on his luck for payment. Sometimes he doesn't see a slate worth slicing, and when he does it's generally small enough.

That was how it was for Eb. He ran errands all his life and was never paid. But still he never got tired of running, and he never once grumbled, and the result of it was that he was a little slave to everyone.

But one person was very kind to him, namely Huw Huws. The old deacon hated to see the quarrymen treating Eb badly. He could remember the day the lad was orphaned. Indeed, he had been the first one to put his shoulder beneath the rock that had crushed the life out of Siôn Ellis. He

remembered that an old widow was entirely dependent for her livelihood on Eb, and in his eyes it was a sin to exploit the lad. He would give generously of his own slates when he had any, and when they were scarce he would go to the Baby and ask:

'Bob, how are you for slates today?'

'Not too bad,' replied the Baby, as a rule.

'Well, I'm as poor as a church mouse, and this lad's got nothing to do–' pointing at Eb, who as a rule would be standing behind the deacon, with his enormous clogs, and his clothes patched but clean, showing plainly that he was far worse off than either of them.

'Don't you have any slates, Eb?' asked the Baby.

Eb shook his head with a childish smile on his innocent face.

'Come on, lad. How many blocks did you get today?'

'Only one.'

'Where is it?'

'On the slag-heap. It had a crack through the middle.'

'Who did you get that from?'

'From Robat Ifans for going home to fetch his dinner.'

The Baby let out a quiet whistle.

'That's their principles for you,' he said. 'If you weren't a deacon, I'd say they're the hardest bastards I've ever met. Indeed I would, Huw Huws.'

'And I'm ashamed to be a deacon sometimes. Take Robat Ifans now: if Cadi Ellis doesn't pay for her pew he'll be saying horrible things to her, and here he is sending this innocent boy two miles down the road, and giving him a slate with a crack through the middle for going. Don't you have a few pieces of slate he can have? It breaks my heart to see him like

this, with nothing to do day after day. It's the end of the month now, and I don't think he even has enough slates to send up. How many Countesses do you have this month, my boy?'

'A dozen,' answered Eb, smiling as usual.

'Good God!' said the Baby. 'You won't make enough to buy salt!'

Eb shook his head a third time, and carried on smiling.

'What shall we do with him, Huw Huws? It's the last week of the month, and it's a sin to let him send those scraps up.'

'Yes, lad.'

'Are you busy tonight?'

'No.'

'Well, let's stay behind for an hour or two, and work a few of these slates for him.'

'All right. Thank you.'

'Now Eb,' said the Baby, 'take these little slates to your hut and run back here.'

Eb pounced on the slates like a cat. He was far from lazy, and everyone knew it was lack of slates, not laziness, that earned him such a small wage every month.

'Take them in both arms, my lad,' said the Baby, 'or they'll break.'

Eb ran to his hut with the first armful, and was back in less than five minutes.

'There's an armful of Tens for you there,' said the Baby, 'and I think there'll be some bigger pieces for you later.'

When Eb arrived back at his hut with the second armful, Huw Huws was waiting for him there.

'He's a good lad, Bob, isn't he?' said the deacon.

Eb nodded, and started sorting through the slates he'd

been given. Wouldn't he have good news to tell his mother that night? He could hardly wait till it was time to go home, he wanted to tell her so badly. But now he thought about it, the Baby had promised him more slates.

'Stick around him,' said Huw Huws, 'and you'll always have enough slate.'

'He told me he's got some blocks I can have,' said Eb, smiling more than ever.

'Did he?'

'Yes.'

'Well, keep an eye out for what he wants. Always keep his workbench clean, and when you see he wants his chippings cleared, make sure you run and get a wagon. It'll pay, you see: it'll pay ten times better than running errands for people like Robat Ifan. Bob's got a conscience, you see, and I can't say that for many of the people you run errands for.'

That month, Eb made a better wage than he had ever had before. For four nights the Baby and the deacon stayed after work for two hours, to increase the lad's stock of slates. Eb was delighted to see such good slate in his hut, and was busy counting them every five minutes. He had a hundred Countesses by the end of the month. Most often he had about thirty to send up with Bob Ten O'clock, but now he possessed a hundred. He had eighteen Tens as well, and three hundred Ladies Eight, not to mention fourteen Little Doubles and eighteen Nines, so that instead of a ten-shilling wage he got thirty shilling, and his mother wept with joy over the money.

'I've never met the man,' she said, 'but I'd thank him on my knees if I saw him. Tell me, does he smoke tobacco?'

Eb shook his head.

'Well, I'll ask Huw Huws what he'd like.'

'Maybe he'd like a pair of socks, Mum?'

'You've hit on it, love. Your father always used to say there was no one else like me for knitting.'

The Monday after pay-day, Eb came to the quarry with a new jacket. It was a shop-bought jacket as well, not made at home by his mother.

He started cleaning the Baby's hut instead of standing around with the other lads. Then he swept the workbench, so that when Bob arrived at the quarry, everything was ready for him to start work. At the deacon's suggestion, Eb refused to run errands for Robat Ifans and his kind, and concentrated on pleasing the Baby.

For two years things went by in this way. Eb grew into a strong young man, and within six months of going to rough-split with the Baby, he got a job chipping with him, and started earning a man's wage.

Eighteen months after that, however, there was a major collapse at the quarry, and the rock-face the Baby was working was buried under it. There was nothing to do now but to fetch the wagon. By this time Eb had been offered another job chipping, because he was a skilful workman by this time, but he didn't want to leave the Baby, and the two went together to work in the tunnel.

The Baby was one of the strongest men in the quarry, and by now Eb was as strong as he was. It was a sight to watch the two working together. For six months things went on in this way. The face was starting to come into view, and in six months the two expected to reach the block and chipping bench again.

But a man's expectations are often foiled. One day, the two partners were trying to loose a piece of rock when the

slag-heap above their heads started shifting. They were caught in the middle, and by accident the Baby's foot was jammed between two stones, and he was caught prisoner. Eb ran to free him, but to his horror he saw a huge piece of rock sliding slowly down the slag-heap towards them. He knew he had no time to free the Baby, and so he stood his ground on the slag-heap, and his face was white with fear.

Then he ran up hill to meet the boulder, and planted his heels in the slag. Once, and once only, he looked at the boulder sliding down towards him, and his face turned whiter still as he turned his back square on towards the boulder.

'Run, Eb, run!' shouted the Baby, when he saw what his friend was doing.

But Eb made no move.

He had decided to save the Baby's life, come what may.

The next minute the boulder had reached him. For a second it stopped on its deadly crusade.

With terrible strength Eb turned its course, and in doing so sacrificed himself on the altar of love. What is the strength of a man against a boulder weighing two tonnes? The next minute, the boulder was sliding over Eb's dead body, more slowly than before, as though to revenge to the utmost one creature for daring to save another from its claws.

In another minute it was all over. The boulder slid past the Baby without touching him, picking up speed as though ashamed of its black deed.

His mother did not recognise Eb that evening.

MARTHA

One of Dic Little Double's main faults was that he was so puny and weak: at least according to Martha, his wife. Martha herself was a very large woman, and whenever the two walked to town or chapel together, the boys used to call 'Carthorse and chick!' after them.

Of course the boys took care not to get close when they did this, for Martha was a woman to fear, a woman who could leave her mark on the body of anyone who happened to be unlucky enough to fall into her hands.

Dic himself liked to hear the boys making fun of Martha, because that was the only taste he got of revenge. Once he forgot himself and his strength as much as to laugh when the boys called her names, and the next minute he was floored by Martha's fist. He was home for a fortnight on that occasion, and when he managed to stagger back to the quarry, he swore he would never leave it again.

He did not know where he would sleep, but sleep to him was a trivial matter. How many times had he enjoyed a night's rest since he married? Only once, and that was when Martha was ill with a fever.

What worried him most was how to keep Martha away from the quarry if he made it his home. Martha was not a woman to be trifled with. He knew that well, and dreaded

what might happen if Martha came to the quarry in the dead of night to 'fetch him.'

He decided to lay the matter before the quarrymen at dinner time. In the meantime he went to see Harri the Flea to ask his opinion on the question.

'Well,' said Harri, seriously, 'you can borrow my gun if you like. But remember, if she manages to get it off you and shoots you for your pains, don't you dare put the blame on me.'

'But I don't know how to shoot,' said Dic.

'Well, Martha's so big a one-year-old child couldn't miss. I could shoot her myself if I had to.'

'But what if I shoot her and miss?' asked Dic. 'Then what do I do?'

'That's your look-out,' answered the Flea. 'If you like, I can give you a lesson or two on how to handle a gun. Then you needn't be frightened.'

But somehow Dic did not take to the idea of shooting his wife.

'I think I'd better wait and see what the committee has to say about it,' he said.

'It's up to you,' said Harri the Flea. 'Myself, I think there's nothing like a firearm for settling small disputes. When's the committee?'

'As soon as possible after mid-day.'

'Where?'

'In Huw's engine shed.'

'Who's the chairman?'

'You, if you like.'

'No, I'd rather not.'

'Are you afraid Martha might hear about it?'

‘Well, she’d better not hear about it. I don’t have a right to shoot her like you do. Huw can be chairman. If Martha lays into him, there’s enough dirt on his face to protect his skin from her claws.’

Dic Little Double shuddered, but said nothing.

After the quarrymen had finished their dinner, Harri the Flea called them together in Huw’s engine shed, ‘to discuss a most important question, a question every man in the quarry should consider carefully.’

Those were Harri the Flea’s words, and to be fair, they were effective enough in drawing a large number of quarrymen together.

After getting their attention, or at least asking for it, the Flea asked Dic to stand on top of the coal heap, so that everyone could see him. Then, clearing his throat three times, and running his hand across his chin as many times again, he said:

‘Gentlemen – you know what the purpose of this important meeting is, or at least you will do if anyone’s told you... Did you tell them, Dic? No? Well, my goodness, you’re a lot of use. You should have explained this important question to every man jack of us here. Well, wait a minute now, where am I? Or rather, where was I? Oh yes, there we are. Stop making a fuss, Dic. The coal’s slipping, you say? Well then, tell it to stop. I don’t know which of you is more like a heap of coal. Damn, I’ve lost the point again. You’d better tell them the story yourself, Dic. You know more about it than I do, anyway.’

‘No, you’re the chairman,’ said Dic.

‘Who says so?’

‘Me.’

'Well, what can a chairman do?'

'Whatever he wants.'

'All right, I'm appointing Huw as chairman in my place.'

'What are you playing at?' demanded Huw.

'Well, if you like I be vice-chairman.'

'What does a vice-chairman do?'

'Gives the chairman a kick whenever he's dishonest.'

Huw dozed off.

'Well,' said Harri, 'I see nobody loves you as much as I do, Dic. Now then, what can I say? Got it at last. Well, gents, you all know Dic, and most of you know Martha, his wife – a sallow, spiteful, miserable, ugly, fiendish bitch. She hates everyone, and everyone hates her. Don't tell her I told you this. Well, about two weeks ago Dic met with an accident, an unexpected accident, and as a result he had to stay at home for two weeks. Show them the side of your face, Dic. Look at that scar, gents, a scar caused by the hand of one Dic loved – at least till he met her – the hand of one who should look after him like an angel – whatever a lady angel's called – by a hand – a hand – a hand – yes, by a bloody great big one. Well, gentlemen, Dic's come to a decision, for the sake of his health, to stay away from the aforementioned hand in future, and I want every one of you to give his honest opinion on this most important question. Come here, Huw. Now, who wants to start? Feel free to speak up, mates.'

'I think it's Dic's fault for getting mixed up with her,' said Dic Ifan. 'She's never said a bad word to me.'

'Would you like to swap?' asked Dic from the top of the coal heap.

'Yes, would you like to swap?' asked the Flea.

Dic Ifan dozed off.

‘Does anyone else have a word, brethren?’ asked the Flea. ‘A word of testimony, or anything like that? We would all be blessed to hear it.’

‘What does Dic think about it himself?’ asked Bob Ten O’clock.

‘That’s a very pertinent question,’ said the Flea. ‘Now, Dic, what do you think about it yourself?’

‘Well,’ said Dic, getting down from the coal heap, ‘it’s like this, boys. Like what, I hear you say? Like this. I’ve come to the decision, like I told Harri this morning, to set up house in the quarry here, and I want your help to keep Martha away, or at any rate to try. If you think the job hard, you have my sympathy. That’s all I have to say on the matter.’

‘Well,’ said Dic Ifan, who’d woken up again, ‘what do you think if one of us goes to tell Martha you’ve fallen down the main shaft, and we can’t recover the body? I think that ought to settle the matter. Who would ever want to tell Martha you’re alive?’

‘Very good, very good,’ said the Flea. ‘Everyone in favour of Dic Ifan going to tell Martha that Dic fell down the main shaft and was drowned, raise your hand.’

‘Hold on,’ cried Dic Ifan, ‘I never said I’d go.’

‘It’s already been passed, Dic,’ said the Flea. ‘You should have informed the secretary of your objection in writing. All right, lads, the meeting’s over.’

After some grumbling, Dic Ifan went to see Martha to tell her that Dic was dead. He had no desire for the job, but at the same time he did not want anyone to think he was afraid of Martha. And with a long face he knocked on Dic’s front door, and Martha opened it.

‘Well, Martha, my dear,’ he said, pretending to wipe tears from his cheeks, ‘I have some bad news for you.’

‘Come inside,’ said Martha, ‘we can discuss the matter better there.’

Dic entered, and shook in his boots when he saw Martha turning the key in the lock.

‘Now then, what have you got to tell me?’ asked Martha, standing in front of Dic with her arms folded.

‘Dic fell – he fell down the shaft and was drowned,’ said Dic.

‘Don’t you have any worse news than that?’ asked Martha, grinding her teeth.

‘No,’ answered Dic.

‘Well, I’ve got worse news for you.’

‘What’s that?’

‘That I’m going to give you the biggest hiding you’ve ever had in your life.’

‘But why?’ asked Dic, getting out of his chair.

‘For going to the committee.’

‘What committee?’

‘The committee where you said it was Dic’s fault for getting mixed up with me. Now, my boy, take your coat off; we’re going to see whose fault it is. Just because your Siani’s afraid to open her mouth in your presence, that doesn’t mean we’re all made the same way. Siani’s weak and sickly; I’m fit and strong: yes, my boy, strong enough to settle for three like you. What do you think about that?’

With that, Martha gave Dic such a box on the ear that he fell to the floor with his feet in the air, and before he could get up, she’d swept the floor with him. Then she took hold of

his trousers, and after opening the door she hurled him outside.

'Tell Harri the Flea I want to see him for a minute or two,' she said, as Dic crept away.

After making enquiries, the quarrymen learned that Dic the Devil had been to see Martha that afternoon, and given her an account of what had happened at the committee.

SURVIVAL SAM

Sam always said he was 'surviving,' in summer and winter just the same, and he always looked healthy enough.

He was never very ill: at least, not by his own account. At his worst he was 'not good, but surviving,' when he was in indifferent good health he was 'just about surviving,' and when he was well he was 'surviving all right.'

Of course, it was not always that Sam was 'surviving all right,' and once or twice I saw him only 'not good, but surviving.'

I remember that time well.

Sam was walking to the quarry with me one morning, and as usual he was 'surviving all right' at the time. But it was easy to see he was not in his usual health, and I'd have been willing to bet anyone a shilling that Sam would only be 'just about surviving' before he went to bed that night.

After dinner I went to his hut, not to look for Sam himself, since as a rule he was there as seldom as a doctor is at home, but to look for my sack which I'd lent him the day before. Sam was there, however, with a very strange look about him.

'How are you at the moment, Sam?' I asked.

'Just about surviving,' answered Sam.

'What's the matter?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'I feel as if someone's kicked me.'

'Are you in pain?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'and I don't know where it hurts most. Just this minute I was thinking it was my head, but then again my back is no better.'

'Go home,' I told him.

'Not yet,' said Sam. 'I think I'll go for a walk to the engine shed.'

That evening, I went to the engine shed to look for my pitcher, and Sam was there in his corner.

'How are you now, Sam?' I asked him.

'Not good, but surviving,' said Sam.

'You'd better come home with me.'

'I suppose so.'

'Can you walk?'

'I don't know.'

'Well, come along, before the last whistle.'

Sam got up from his corner.

'I've never felt so light-headed,' he said, as he tried to put his coat on. 'I feel as if I'm floating.'

We walked home slowly. Occasionally Sam felt better, and told everyone who asked that he was 'just about surviving,' but by the time we reached the village he was 'not good, but surviving' again.

I took him inside. His mother was in the garden, digging potatoes to boil for him and his father. I called her, and she came inside at once.

'Sam's not well,' I told her.

'Isn't he?' said Anne Jones coolly.

'No,' I said to her, rather abruptly, 'he isn't well at all.'

'Where is he?' asked his mother.

'He's gone upstairs.'

'In his dirty boots! The monkey. Sam!'

Sam called down with a whistle.

'Can you hear me?' called his mother.

'Yes,' said Sam in a faint voice.

'Come down here then.'

Sam came sooner than he was expected – that is, he fell on the top step, and he was at his mother's feet before she had time to realise what was happening.

'What's the matter with you, Sam?' she asked him.

'I feel terribly faint,' replied Sam, trying to get up.

Anne Jones saw his face, and it scared her a little.

'Are you ill, son?' she asked.

'Yes, I am,' answered Sam.

'Where does it hurt?'

Sam looked at me in confusion, and asked:

'Where did I say it hurt most in the engine shed, Bob?'

'In your head,' I replied.

'That's right,' said Sam, 'where else?'

'In your back.'

'Yes, that's it. I'm going to bed, mum; I'm really not well. Where did I say it hurt, again, Bob?'

'Your head and your back, Sam?'

'Yes, that's it. Well, good night.'

'Do you want a bit of supper before you go?' asked Anne Jones.

'Perhaps I should have something to eat,' replied Sam, taking his lunch tin out of his pocket and sitting down on the stairs.

The food in his tin was untouched.

‘You haven’t eaten at all today!’ said his mother, rather shocked.

‘Not a bite,’ said Sam. ‘My head’s been hurting too much, you see.’

He looked at the bread and butter for a minute or two, gravely, and then he slowly shut the lunch tin.

‘Where did you say I was hurting, Bob?’ he asked again. ‘Goodness, I feel ill.’

‘Would you like a little bread and milk?’ asked his mother.

Sam shook his head.

‘Well then, go to bed, son, and I’ll bring you a posset.’

I helped him upstairs, and the next day Sam’s hut was empty at the quarry.

That evening I went to see him, and asked how he felt.

‘Just about surviving,’ answered Sam. ‘The old lady’s been really decent.’

The next day, Sam was ‘not good but surviving.’ I saw the doctor going to see him, and called in to ask how he was.

‘He’s caught a terrible cold,’ said Anne Jones, ‘and the doctor says he’ll have to be careful. A touch of influenza, and his lungs are weak. That’s what the doctor said.’

Sam was home for five weeks, and I never saw anyone change so quickly and so much. He had thinned terribly and his eyes were aflame when he came back to work after his illness.

‘How are you today, Sam?’ Huw Huws, the deacon, asked him.

‘Surviving, I suppose,’ said Sam, sitting down on a piece of slate in exhaustion.

‘You look as though you’ve pulled through quite well,’ said the deacon.

Sam coughed until his shoulders shook.

'Yes,' he said.

'And I'm sure you'll get better really soon.'

'Gosh, yes,' answered Sam, coughing more than ever. 'Mum was saying just the same thing this morning.'

For the next two months Sam was 'just about surviving.' Then, with the approach of autumn, he took a turn for the worse. It was terrible to hear him cough, and worse still was to see him open his lunch tin day after day, and close it again without eating.

After a while he was 'not good, but surviving' again, and one day he was missed at work. We all knew he had said goodbye to the quarry for good.

That evening I went to see him. His mother was crying in the kitchen when I arrived, and I could hear someone upstairs, talking to Sam.

'Huw Huws is there,' said Anne Jones. 'Go on up.'

I went quietly up the stairs, and saw Sam lying amongst the pillows, and Huw Huws sitting in a chair at his bedside.

'I was just telling him,' said the deacon, 'to hurry up and get better and join us again. I think he looks a bit better tonight. What do you think, Bob?'

I looked at Sam's emaciated face, and saw the hand of Death there already. Then I looked at the deacon, and there were tears in his eyes. No, I couldn't say in my heart that he was deceiving anybody.

'Yes, he looks a lot better tonight,' I replied. 'How are you feeling, Sam?'

'Not good, but surviving.'

'Well, not many people like being stuck in bed,' said Huw Huws. 'I remember how much I hated it as a boy, when I had

to stay in bed for a month.'

'Were you ill like this when you were a boy, Huw Huws?' asked Sam.

'Was I?' asked the deacon, striking his hand on his knee. 'I should think I was.'

'And were you coughing as well?' asked Sam eagerly.

'Coughing? Like a horse!'

'Get off!' Sam said joyfully.

The deacon went on to talk about the quarry, and all the things that would happen when Sam came back, until in the end poor Sam was 'surviving quite well.'

But he languished for several months. Occasionally, especially when Huw Huws came to see him, he was 'surviving all right.' At other times he would be 'just about surviving,' but for the most part he was 'not good, but surviving.'

One evening I went to see him as usual. I'd heard in the quarry that day that he was seriously ill, and unlikely to live for long.

When I arrived at the house, Anne Jones had gone out on an errand, and I went quietly upstairs.

It was a lovely evening in spring, and the sun was shining tenderly on the bed. I was greatly surprised to see the smile on Sam's face, because naturally I had expected a look of utter despair.

'How are you tonight, Sam?' I asked. Sam looked at me for a moment, smiling more than ever. Then he said:

'I feel better every day.'

Within two hours of this he was dead.

OLD MAN'S WILL

All of us at the quarry liked him, although he was nothing that one could expect of a man. Sometimes he would go to the mess, and after examining the contents of everybody's pitcher he would fill himself a caddy with the milkiest coffee or tea, and sit down on the bench to talk to himself and have a smoke, if he had any tobacco, or take what comfort he could from an empty pipe, if he had none. Sometimes he would look in the food tins, and take a hunk of cheese from one, a bit of meat from another, and a piece of bread thickly buttered from a third. Sometimes he was discovered doing it, but no one ever said a cross word to him, because they knew he seldom enough got breakfast, and never saw dinner or supper.

Once and only once did he repent of opening somebody else's pitcher. I remember the incident well. An Anglesey lad came to work in the quarry one day, and since they say Anglesey people are very fond of something tasty to eat, the old man went to the cabin as usual, and after opening the Anglesey lad's pitcher, he took a generous drink of the tea inside. But the Anglesey lad found him at it, and gave the old man a terrible beating, until you could hear his groans from the shed.

But that was the stupidest thing Anglesey Jac ever did.

Harry the blacksmith heard the old man screaming from the forge, and throwing down the chisel that was in his hand, he strolled over to the cabin. When he saw what was going on he took hold of the lad without saying a word, and gave him a taste of his own medicine, and he wasn't at work for a week after that.

The old man's worst enemy was his wife. This story has to do with her.

Beti Huws was a big woman, who 'feared neither man nor devil' – as she used to say when the old man told her what the boys at the quarry wanted to do with her if she ever beat him again. It was a small wage the old man earned each month – just two pounds, or sometimes thirty shillings – and every pay day the old boy was in hot water. Beti was younger than he. She was also stronger, because she gave the old man the bread, and kept the meat for herself.

One week a number of the quarrymen lost their sacks, and could not understand what had happened to them. In the quarry it is an unforgivable sin to steal a sack, and the thief is punished most severely when he's caught, by bringing the shovel into contact three times with a certain part of his anatomy. His sack is a quarryman's best friend. It keeps his clothes dry in the rain when he's crossing the mountain from home, and it stops the cold wind getting among his bones. When dried again in the engine shed it makes an excellent cushion, for it is tiresome sitting on a hard block for hours every day.

So it is not surprising that the quarrymen were furious with the culprit. Nobody knew who had done it, and in their eyes it was unfair to suspect anyone.

One day, however, the old man was seen going to the

engine shed. I have said that he used to talk to himself when he had done wrong, and as he returned from the engine shed that day he was doing so more loudly than usual. And two quarrymen who were counting their slates at the quay heard what he was saying.

'You're going from bad to worse, Guto,' said the old man. 'On my word, you are. That's the eighth sack you've taken in a fortnight. You've stolen from Huw Tŷ'n Twll, the Baby, the Devil, Dic Price and Harri the Flea, and you've taken two other sacks from Harri's engine shed besides. You don't deserve to live, you old wretch.'

The two quarrymen looked at each other, and then looked at the old man, as he dragged himself off towards the top of the slag-heap. They almost wept to think the old fellow could stoop so low. If he had stolen one sack they could have forgiven him, but it broke all bounds to steal eight.

They decided to follow him to see what he'd do with the sacks. He was heading, as I said, for the top of the slag-heap. Maybe the sacks were hidden there.

Presently, the old man reached the top of the slag-heap. He looked around him, then started walking down the other side, and as his head dropped out of sight, the two men ran to reach the top.

At the top they saw the old man, talking to himself more than ever, making his way down the slope on hands and knees. At last he reached the bottom, and looking around him once again, he went inside an old hut.

The quarrymen went down the slag-heap after him, making as little disturbance as possible. If the old man had hidden the sacks in the hut, as they suspected, they thought

the best thing to do would be to take them back to the engine shed without uttering a word to anyone about the thief.

They quickly reached the bottom, and stood for a minute outside the hut.

Inside, the old man was still talking to himself, and as the two listened their faces paled like the snow that covered the mountain.

'There you are, Guto,' said the old man in a quavering voice, 'that's another blanket for you, a good one too. You'll be as warm and dry now as the Prince of Wales. It was cold last night; I never saw colder, but it'll be better tonight, you'll see.'

Quietly the two men slipped away. The night was coming, and in the distance they could see their friends starting home, and as the snow began gently falling they felt a longing to be at their hearths. They had not quite grasped what the old man had said, but agreed to look into the matter the following morning.

At home they completely forgot about the incident, but when they got up the next morning, and saw the snow lying thick on the ground, they began to feel uncomfortable, and after barely stopping for breakfast they hurried to the quarry. They reached the shed, and related what they'd heard the night before to the other quarrymen, and then two or three dozen of them hurried to the top of the slag-heap.

At the bottom they saw the hut almost completely covered by snow. They looked at each other for a minute, and then started scraping at the snow with their hands to clear it. The hut was closed up from inside with two pieces of slate, but with difficulty they managed to pull them aside, and three quarrymen went inside.

The next minute they came outside with tears on their cheeks. It was clear that some great event had occurred, for a quarryman is not easily moved to tears although his heart may be tender.

They quickly realised what had happened. In the corner of the hut, with a block under his head, and with his fellow quarrymen's sacks wrapped round him, the old man lay, his face as cold and white as the snow that lay like a coverlet on his wretched bed.

'He's gone,' said Harri the Flea, wiping his eyes on his sleeve. 'He's gone, boys, and only last night I was cursing whoever had taken my sack. If only I'd known where it was, I'd have–'

'We've got to get him out of there,' said the Baby. 'Harri, go and tell Huws the steward, and get a stretcher for us.'

They cleared the snow away until in the end the old man's hands came in view. In one of them was a nail, and the quarrymen could not understand what the old man had been doing with it.

But after clearing away a little more of the snow, they found the slate that someone had written on.

The Baby picked it up, and after examining it for some minutes he said, 'It's the old man's will, boys.'

If someone had said such a thing the day before, they would all have laughed themselves hoarse. But no one was smiling now.

'Read it,' said one.

'Not now,' said the Baby. 'There'll be enough time for that when we've got the old man home.'

At this point the stretcher was carried in, and they took the old man up with tender hands. After carrying it to the

shed, the quarrymen were at a loss what to do with the body. They hated to carry it back to Beti. They knew she had an unfeeling heart, and they were determined that their comrade should be buried with respect.

But someone said Beti was not at home, and nobody knew where she was, and before anyone could say anything further, the Baby suggested they take the body to his house, and this was done.

Back at the quarry, the Baby read out the will as follows:

'This is the old man's will, boys:

'"I have nothing to leave behind me except Beti, and since Anglesey Jac was so kind to me, he has the right to her."'

EVENING'S REST

I

Not resting at sunset after a hard day's work, but resting in the evening of life with no hope of seeing morning. That was the only rest for Siôn Ifan and Margiad, his wife.

Siôn had worked as a quarryman until he was too old to treat slates. He had worked hard all his life, but when it was time for him to rest, he had no money to live on. This is not at all unusual for a quarryman. He seldom earns more today than he will spend on bread tomorrow. It is easy to speak of saving for the future, but not so easy to know how and when to begin.

But I was talking about Siôn Ifan and Margiad's rest.

One cold winter evening about ten years ago, Siôn went home from the quarry muttering loudly to himself. Huws, the steward, had sent him home that same afternoon, or in other words, had fired him.

Naturally Siôn was broken-hearted. Some say he was crying on the way home, but his eyes had long been given to watering, so it is hard to tell.

I was very young at the time, and since I had no work to do, I decided to follow him home. I pitied him, for I had only just then realised that there is no great difference between a

labourer and an animal in the eyes of the world. And my pity for Siôn was more like the pity one feels for a dog that's been kicked than anything else.

The old man didn't see me at all, because he wasn't looking behind him. Perhaps he didn't want to look back at the place that had drained him of blood and abandoned him to die now he had no more blood to give. Once or twice he sat down on the mountain, and I crept up as close to him as I could, hiding as little as a few yards away.

'What will Margiad say?' asked Siôn, putting his hand on the lid of his battered pitcher. 'What will she say? – that's the question.'

He was quiet for a moment, and then said again:

'You ought to know, Siôn, that you're not worth a shilling, just like Huws was saying. You ought to know that by now, my lad... Dear God, what shall I do?'

He got up, shaking like a leaf. He wiped his hand slowly across his brow, and resting his chin on his breast, walked slowly homewards.

I followed him because, like Siôn, I wanted to know how Margiad would react. Also I had a three pence in my waistcoat pocket, and although I hadn't a hope of getting another penny until pay day, I was willing to give that little to Siôn.

Eventually the old man reached his cottage, and it was a run-down place. But it was too good for Siôn and Margiad to stay there for much longer.

I let Siôn go inside first, and then got as close to the door as I could, and settled down to hear what Margiad would say.

After a few minutes I heard Siôn's voice:

'Margiad,' he said, 'how old am I now?'

'What's that?' said Margiad.

'How old am I?'

'Well, you'll be seventy-eight next May Day, if you live.'

'I'm getting older, aren't I?'

'Well, you didn't think you were getting younger, did you?'

'No, Margiad, but...'

'But what?'

'Oh, nothing important. What's for supper tonight?'

'There's a bit of potato left over from Sunday. Or maybe you'd rather have bread and milk?'

There was a silence again. I went to the window and looked inside. Siôn was sitting on a stool by the fire, and Margiad was pouring buttermilk into a saucepan. Then the old woman opened a cupboard. It contained two cups, a tin box of tea, blackened with age, and an old-fashioned sugar bowl. In the far corner was a barley loaf, and a crust of white bread. Margiad took the crust, and broke it with difficulty. Like everything else in the house, it was old. In five minutes the bread and milk was done, and Siôn sat down to eat. It was obvious he had no appetite, for instead of eating he toyed with his spoon, staring ahead of him in a daze. After a while he said:

'Huw Dafydd's gone to the workhouse, Margiad.'

'Oh, I'm sorry,' said Margiad. 'We've a lot to be thankful for, Siôn, compared with some people.'

'Do you think so, Margiad?'

'Do I think so? Yes, I do. If I ever had to go to the workhouse, I think I'd be dead in two days.'

Siôn groaned.

'What's the matter with you?' asked Margiad.

'Nothing, nothing,' said Siôn.

There was silence for a third time.

'Why aren't you eating?' asked Margiad presently.

Suddenly Siôn broke down, and said:

'I can't, Margiad.'

'What on earth is the matter?' asked Margiad.

'I was fired today.'

'You were what?'

'I was fired.'

'Who by?'

'Huws.'

'Great heavens, what will become of us?'

'For hours I've been asking myself the same question.'

'Is there any chance he was joking?'

'Huws, joking! No danger of that.'

'But, Siôn, dear, what shall we do? We've only got a few shillings left in the house. God knows this isn't my fault. All my life I've tried my hardest, and this is what I get for it. I've skimped and saved, and now I've got nothing but the workhouse to look forward to, and I must have said a hundred times I'd rather die than go there. Isn't there any chance Mr Huws would take you back, if you told him how things stood? He knows you've worked in the quarry all your life, and I can't believe he wouldn't let you stay there. Go and see him tonight, and ask him to take you back, for the sake of everything. Tell him you can't survive without working. Say something to touch his heart.'

'He hasn't got a heart,' said Siôn. 'And another thing; he said I'm not worth a shilling.'

'Well, if you only got nine pence a day, it would be better than nothing. We won't starve if we can only buy bread. Go

and see him, please, Siôn.'

'I might as well save my breath, Margiad. He'll only swear at me. You don't know Huws.'

'Well, there's nothing to do but go to the workhouse, then,' said Margiad, sitting down. 'And if we must go, the sooner the better.'

'But you said you'd be dead in two days.'

'I was being silly, Siôn *bach*. Now I think about it, I'm sure I'll be perfectly happy there. Huw Dafydd will be there.'

'When shall we go then?'

'Tonight if you like.'

'Wouldn't it be better to wait till tomorrow?'

'No, let's go tonight. Now I remember, we've run out of coal. How far is it to town?'

'About four miles.'

'As far as that? Then the sooner we start the better. Finish your food; I'll be ready in a minute.'

II

Half an hour later, Siôn and Margiad were on their way to the workhouse. Both were wearing their Sunday best – Siôn with his felt hat and black coat, Margiad with the shawl which had been a wedding present from her mother. They walked slowly, for both had aged in the last hour.

'Are you sure you'll like it there, Margiad?' asked Siôn, rubbing his hand over his chin.

'Of course I will,' replied Margiad. 'We'll live like gentry there, Siôn – gentry!'

'Yes, yes,' said Siôn, smiling. 'They say the man there is really kind.'

'Well, he ought to be kind. We've been paying him all his life.'

'And you think they'll let us in?'

'Oh, certainly.'

III

Two days after that I saw Siôn wandering over the mountain, with a wild look about him.

'When did you get back, Siôn Ifan?' I asked.

'As soon as Margiad left,' replied the old man.

'Where is Margiad?' I asked.

'She went home yesterday morning. Have you ever been in a workhouse?'

'No.'

'Would you like to go?'

'I don't think so.'

'Are you sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'Well, then, find me a gun to shoot Huws. Did you hear what I said?'

'Yes.'

'Why won't you do as I say, then? Shoot him like this. Ha ha! Margiad went home yesterday morning. Shoot him like this!'

The next day Siôn Ifan's body was found in a flooded shaft at the quarry. There was an inquest, as there would have been over any other body. One of the witnesses said it

had broken Siôn's heart to go to the workhouse, and the jury were surprised by this. They could not understand what people had against such an exemplary workhouse. Of course, Siôn drowned himself intentionally 'while in a disturbed state of mind.' The jurors agreed on this, and the coroner asked no more of them. It is not good to enquire too closely into the death of a poor man.

THE LOST

A winter fog was descending slowly over the great city of London. At first, it barely touched the highest pinnacles, but it was falling lower every minute until, in the end, it was low enough to send a shiver through the frame of anyone exposed to it.

It was a dreary day, utterly miserable, for what is as comfortless as London when it is wrapped in a mantle of fog?

So it was hardly strange to see everyone in a bad temper, but it was strange to see warmly-dressed ladies in their carriages more snappish than the homeless who wandered aimlessly in the streets.

But perhaps to them, the fog was no worse than anything else. It was no colder than snow, and no wetter than rain; and the policeman who watched the sick and the starving from dawn till dusk was not such a threat on a foggy day, for he had other matters to attend to.

But not every homeless man felt like this. The hearts of some were not consumed by fear, and their spirits still burned although the cold water of hardship did its best to quench the flame.

I would like to say Twm Huws was one of these, but he was not.

How Twm Huws came to be in London I don't know, but I

know how he had come to be homeless.

He was a capable lad at one time, and if the life of a brute does not destroy ability, then he's a capable man still.

He had once been a presentable young man as well; but now, as he stood on the corner of the street, nobody would have thought he had ever been other than what he was now – one of the city of London's tramps. That was what Twm was, nothing more.

His clothes alone were enough to show that. His trousers and coat had been strangers to each other until Twm came across them, and by then they were due to retire. How Twm found them I don't know, and for his sake I have not tried to find out.

But if his clothes were insufficient to show that Twm was one of the lowest of London's low, his face remained as a witness against him. It was unhealthily flushed, in a word, not pleasant to look upon; and if I hadn't known Twm, I would have sworn he had never had healthy skin in his life. There's nothing like sin for leaving its mark on the faces of those it has under foot.

But however low Twm had fallen, he feared nobody but himself. He knew very well that he had no worse enemy; and now, as the mist twirled about him playfully, retreating from him the next minute as though afraid to touch such a filthy creature, Twm cursed in a strident voice: a voice made ugly by London sin.

He shivered in his skin as animals do when the cold comes through their bones, and walked on to a little shop. In the window, sausages and potatoes were roasting slowly on a small stove. Twm looked at them intently for a moment, and then he shivered again, and turned away.

But he couldn't go long without gazing at them, and he turned round to face them again. Just then a man in a white cap came to the window, and Twm showed him his teeth, like a dog when someone threatens its bone. But the man had seen such beasts before, and was not afraid of Twm. Indeed, he jeered at him as he pushed a fork into one of the sausages, to carry it to a man who was waiting to eat at a little table.

Twm pushed his face against the window, and as the man lifted his fork to his mouth, he showed his teeth again, snarling like a dog. Then he turned his back on the window, and rubbing his face with his hand, he sighed and went on his way.

I decided to follow him. He started in the direction of Euston station, but turned and headed towards Islington. He walked slowly, too weak to go fast, and he shivered in his skin at every breath of wind that blew down the street.

Having gone this way for some minutes he stopped suddenly, and I thought he had been taken ill. He stood for a moment, swaying on his feet, and then he turned south and was gone.

I hurried ahead, and heard a Welsh hymn being sung – *'Dewch, hen ac ieuanc, dewch.'* I was outside a chapel in King's Cross, and the sound of singing had drawn Twm to its door. I approached stealthily, but slipped, and Twm spun round abruptly at the disturbance. Then he started moving his head to the music, and when the hymn was finished he sighed:

'Aeth yn brynhawn, mae yn hwyrhau, a drws trugaredd wedi ei gau. Yes,' he said, 'the door of mercy is shut.'

'Drws trugaredd heb *ei gau,'* I said. 'It isn't shut yet, you know.'

'No, *wedi ei gau,'* said Twm. 'There it is, shut. Can't you see it?'

'No, I can't, Twm *bach*.'

Twm looked at me fearfully, then circled me like a dog that cannot decide whether to run away or attack.

But he didn't attack me. He only gazed at my face, and cried:

'Twm? Twm? Who's calling me Twm?'

I told him who I was, and Twm wiped his face with his hand.

'Don't call me that,' he said. 'I don't know the name. I've sunk too low to deserve the name my mother gave me.'

'You haven't sunk too low to rise up,' I replied.

'I can't go any lower. The filth of all the gutters in London is on my clothes. I've gorged myself on it. Don't come near me.'

'How did you come to this, Twm?'

'The first step was the step away from home. I should never have left the old lady, you know. Tell me, is she still alive?'

'I'm afraid she's dead, Twm.'

'Of course, she would be. Who am I fooling? Haven't I dreamt a hundred times I heard her say I was killing her? "Twm *bach*," she said to me, the last time I dreamt of her, "you've done for me." Tell me, when did she die?'

'Three years ago.'

'How long ago was that?'

I looked at him in amazement.

'Do you have any change?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Can you spare me any?'

'It depends what for.'

'I want something to eat.'

'What about drink?'

'I'm not interested in drink.'

'All right, come and have something to eat with me.'

He looked at me intently.

'Are you serious?' he asked.

'Yes, of course.'

'Come on, then. Hurry up, or I'll be going out like a candle.'

We were soon back at the sausage shop, and without a word Twm sidled into the shop, as good as saying it was I who was responsible for bringing him.

I won't try to describe Twm Huws eating, but it was a sorry sight. When he'd finished, he wasn't the same man as he was when I first saw him.

'I haven't had a meal like that for two years,' he said.

'But whose fault is that?'

'Not mine,' said Twm. 'It was my fault at first, but I haven't touched a drink for months, and now I don't want to either. Don't you believe me? You can put a shilling in my hand and tell me to go to the pub and spend it, and you'll see I'm telling the truth.'

I thought that was a trick to get a shilling out of me, but then I felt ashamed of my readiness to doubt Twm for being as he was. I took a shilling out of my pocket, and gave it to him.

Twm took hold of it, and looked at me scornfully.

'Oh, you're a fool,' he said, spitting on the shilling. 'You're as easily gulled as you were in school. I should have asked for half a crown, and had a proper spree for a change.'

The next minute, I heard the door of the pub slam shut.

THE BAD LOT

How he had found his way to this hole at the bottom of the quarry when he was so drunk it is hard to tell; but there he was, in the level they had opened a few months back.

'I'm a bad lot,' he said mournfully, holding his parched mouth under the little spring that ran from a cleft in the rock.

It was only five o'clock in the morning, and there was no one on the level beside himself. Even he should not have been there, but when a man wakes up from a drunken sleep on the roadside, before the rest of the world is awake, he naturally goes to the place he loves most. And heaven to Harri Huws was the bottom level of Chwarel y Coed.

After knocking his head sore in his attempt to cool his throat, he lay down on a heap of rubble. 'I'm a bad lot,' he said again, more seriously than before, and a minute later he was sleeping the alcohol out of his system.

He was almost completely sober when a lad of fifteen arrived at the level with a candle in his hand. He was singing at the top of his voice, as a young lad does in the morning, but when he saw his partner on the slag-heap in his best suit, a cloud crossed his cheerful features.

'You've been at it again, haven't you?' said the boy sternly.

'Yes, Dic *bach*,' answered Harri, with a hint of regret in his voice.

'Aren't you ashamed of yourself?'

'Yes, lad.'

'You're worse than a pig.'

'I know I am.'

'Go home and get changed. You've ruined your coat. Your mother will be out of her mind.'

'She will, won't she?'

'Very well. Go home, and hurry back quickly.'

Harri went, keeping his eye on the chink of light that showed him the mouth of the tunnel. But he hadn't gone ten yards when he heard a sound like the sound of an earthquake in another world, and the level shook as though falling in pieces about him. His mind cleared at once, and a fire came to his eyes. But he could no longer see the glimmer of light that had been dancing so merrily a moment ago. The fall had frightened it away, leaving Dic and Harri prisoners in the dark tunnel.

Harri let out a whistle and went back to Dic, and re-lit the candle that the boy had dropped in his fright. Then he returned to the mouth of the tunnel, with Dic whimpering at his heels.

An experienced quarryman can judge the extent of a fall from the sound, and Harri realised there were at least five thousand tonnes between himself and daylight. But he gave no thought to dying. Wasn't he as strong as the rock that was gradually settling in the mouth of the tunnel?

He struck it once, twice with his hammer. It was as sound as a bell – the best slate he'd seen for days. But he would have to drill through it. He would have to bore through to its core

so he could fire it when his fellow quarrymen came to save him and Dic.

But would they come in time? He broke a piece of tobacco, stuffing it carefully in the side of his mouth. Yes, would they come it time? – that was the question. How many days would it take them to clear five thousand tonnes? – no, six, the sound hadn't finished yet. Could they clear it in a week? If they worked day and night – and they would, for Dic's sake – they could do it.

'Harri.'

'Yes, Dic *bach*?'

'Let's go.'

'Go, lad?'

'Yes. We can go, can't we, Harri?'

'Of course, just as soon as they shift this boulder.'

'But I want to go now, Harri. Can't you move it? Push.'

'No use, Dic.'

'I'll help you. Now, push your hardest. One, two, three. Why aren't you pushing, Dic?'

'I am pushing. There you are. We've moved it a little bit. Now it'll be easier for them when they move it tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow, Harri!'

'No, I meant tonight.'

'But it didn't budge an inch, Harri; I'm sure it didn't. Do you really think we'll be out tonight?'

'Yes, of course we will.'

'Harri!'

'Yes, Dic *bach*?'

'Do you think I should pray?'

'I don't know what good it'll do, lad.'

'But they're bound to find us. Dad wouldn't let me die.

Tell me I'm not going to die, Harri. Maybe I'd better pray. They're bound to come, aren't they? Where are you, Harri? Don't go away. Listen! Someone's coming!'

'Yes, they'll be here very soon. We'd better get on with our work. Come on. Slowly now. Where are you? Are you sitting down?'

'Yes, Harri.'

'Aren't you feeling all right?'

'Not really, Harri.'

'A little heavy, perhaps?'

'A little.'

'Are you sleepy?'

'A bit.'

'Sit down, then. There you are. I'll look for another candle. Where's your food?'

'Under my coat.'

'You're a big eater, lad. Six pitchers of bread and butter, a huge chunk of cheese, and an egg. You're gentry, Dic.'

'Mum put them in. She says I'm skinny; I'm shooting up too fast. I'm not going to die, am I, Harri?'

'No, of course not.'

'Can I eat now?'

'No, not yet.'

'Why not?'

'We'll have to work all night to make up for the time we've been idling... Thank God I've got my tobacco... Where's your tea?'

'I don't have any tea, Harri, only milk. Mum says I'm–'

'So you were saying. Give me the pitcher. It'll be safer on this ledge. Can you reach it?'

'No, Harri.'

'The rats can't get at it now. They'd rather have milk than cheese.'

'But they can't chew through the tin, Harri.'

'Don't you believe it! They'll eat the slate in here when they're hungry.'

Dic shuddered.

'They might eat us, Harri.'

'And we might eat them. They know that well enough, you see, and they'll stay out of our way. You needn't be afraid of them.'

'Harri.'

'Yes, lad?'

'I'm sleepy. Can I sleep in here?'

'Sleep? Of course, just like in your bed at home.'

'But will I wake up after?'

'Yes, of course you will.'

'Are you sure we can't leave? You didn't push hard enough, Harri; I'm sure you didn't. I think I'll sleep now. Do you want to sleep?'

'No, not yet. It's too early for me, Dic, far too early. Do you have a cold?'

'A bit.'

'I thought so. Lie down and I'll put my coat over you... No, I don't want it. There you are; are you comfy?'

'I'm all right, Harri.'

Five minutes went by, and Dic was sleeping comfortably. And as his slumber deepened, the look of fear drained out of his pale face. Harri watched him intently, chewing his tobacco.

'I'd far rather the boy were on the other side of that fall,' he said. 'Hello! Have you turned up already? Get back to your

hole, or by God, I'll smash your skull in. There, told you so... Don't worry, I'll break the news to your family soon enough.'

He grasped the hammer, and with the candle in his other hand, he went to hunt out the rest of the rats. In the weak candle light he saw another one bashing itself uncontrollably against the side of the tunnel in its struggle to escape from the light. The silence was broken by a sudden squeak. More rats came to light, and in half an hour there was a line of bodies on the tunnel floor.

'There you are,' said Harri. 'You're better off than the boy and me. No pain, nothing. Now for the mourners.'

He took a lump of cheese from Dic's lunch tin, and put it on a slate in a prominent place where none of the rats could fail to find it. For Dic's sake, he was resolved to destroy them.

Rat after rat came out of the darkness, standing within a few inches of the bait. Harri watched them intently, and he couldn't understand why their bodies trembled when their eyes were aflame. But a man can never understand a rat. He only need kill each one. The hammer came down on rat after rat, and their fiery eyes were dulled suddenly. And the hammer did its work so well that there wasn't a squeak to warn the living that it was all nothing more than a deadly trap.

And then the last rat came. Harri knew it was the last one because it was crippled. And a crippled rat must always stand back. It dragged itself painfully over the rubble, and for an instant Harri felt pity for the 'destitute creature.' But even a crippled rat can do great harm, and the hammer came down once more.

Three days had gone by. Harri shook himself out of an uneasy sleep. He had dreamt a rat was chewing his face. The pain was terrible. He felt with his fingers, and his face was wet. He couldn't understand it at all. He lit the candle. Yes, it was blood. His hands were covered with it, and it was dripping down his chin. Had they attacked Dic *bach* as well? He dragged himself over on his hands and knees. He made no attempt to get up, for something told him that he couldn't, that he was too weak. But he could not understand this weakness he felt. No, Dic was asleep, with no injuries he could see. Strange! He crawled back to his corner, and put his hand in blood. He paused. Perhaps it was his blood? Yes, and he was weak from the loss of it. But how had he lost it? He didn't understand it at all, and for several minutes he stared in bemusement at the congealing blood. It had dripped down a piece of slate. At last, he understood. He had slept with his head on the slate, and the sharp end had pierced his flesh.

Gradually his senses returned, and his legs recovered a little of their strength. The pain retreated from his face, to settle in his stomach. He remembered he had not eaten – since when? He had eaten nothing the day before the fall. He'd been drinking for a week; and now, when his belly was crying for food, he'd forgotten that his tin, behind the rock that had cut his face so cruelly, was full of it. He seized it eagerly.

'Dic *bach*!'

He shook the lad tenderly.

Dic rubbed his heavy eyes, looking about him in bewilderment.

'You'd better have something to eat.'

The look of bewilderment went from Dic's eyes, and he

started to cry.

'Haven't they come yet?'

'Not yet, lad.'

'But they will come?'

'Yes, yes. Here, take this.'

'That's not mine, Harri. Have you eaten yet?'

'Yes, I've had all I want.'

'On your word?'

'On my word.'

'They'll come soon, won't they?'

'I'm expecting them any minute.'

'You ought to eat, then.'

'No hurry. If you've finished, I'll put the rest of it here. Lie down now. I'll wake you up when they come.'

He put the tin in reach of Dic's right hand, where he would find it if by God's will he woke up. The candle was burning dimly on the rock; there was only an inch of it left. Harri lit another. Dic was sleeping heavily again, but his breath was becoming more laboured every minute.

Harri tried to get up. Something was vexing him. It was the sound of water dripping from the top of the tunnel. Until now, he'd paid no attention to it, but now it was making the sound of a waterfall, and the sound was affecting him strangely. He felt he'd go mad if it didn't stop, but he didn't move an inch to stop it. Why wouldn't it stop? But it was doing so. It grew quieter and quieter until it ceased altogether, and Harri slept.

On the fifth day, a shaft of light penetrated the darkness, and when the mouth of the tunnel was clear, four quarrymen entered slowly. They knew they were entering a grave, and

had no reason to hurry. And a sad scene met their eyes. In one corner, stripped to his waist, lay Harri, with a dead rat in his hand. In another corner, wrapped from his head to his feet in Harri's clothes, Dic was crying, with two empty lunch tins at his side.

'Harri's gone,' said one of the men, shaking the Bad Lot. 'Strange he died before Dic *bach*.'

But he looked at the half-naked corpse and the two tins, and he understood. It was not so strange after all, but it was strange that the greatest sinner in the quarry had given his life for another.

But when the drinking was forgotten, everyone agreed that it was just like Harri.

THE SCHOLAR

About ten years ago, a smart young man came to Chwarel y Banc, looking for work. No one knew him, or knew where he was from, so naturally there was much speculation about him.

Labourers were very scarce in the quarries at the time, and it was easy for anyone to get work.

'What can you do?' asked Huws, the steward, when the stranger asked for a job.

'What have you got?' asked the stranger.

'A lot of things you can't do, my lad. Do you think you can load a wagon?'

'What with?'

'With your hat, of course.'

'With my hat?'

'Yes, or if you've got a teaspoon in your pocket, better still. Come with me, we're going to see Robin Ifan.'

The two men went to the top, where an old man was loading sand onto a wagon.

'How many slates did you get today, Robin?' asked the steward mockingly.

'You what?' asked the old man fiercely.

'How many slates did you get?' said Huws.

'I got one,' said Robin, more angry than ever.

‘Where’s Elis today?’

‘I don’t know where that layabout’s gone.’

‘When was he here last?’

‘Some time before Christmas.’

‘Well, you’ll be needing a partner, then. What do you think of this young man?’

‘What can he do, sir?’

‘I don’t know; you can ask him yourself. Do you have a spade here?’

‘Elis’s spade is in the cabin, if the boys haven’t walked off with it. But sir, does this fine gentleman know what to do with a spade?’

‘Yes, he knows where to put it if you don’t shut your mouth.’

‘He looks like a shop-keeper, sir.’

‘Even better. He’ll know all about sand.’

‘Look at his hands. They’re like the minister’s wife’s! It’s a fat lot of use bringing me a scarecrow like this as a partner, when I’ve been working beside this wagon for over forty years. Can’t you find him something to do in the office? I dare say he can sweep the floor or put coal on the fire.’

‘Who’s the steward, Robin, you or me?’

‘Well, you, I suppose, sir.’

‘Then stop telling me how to do my job, or you’ll start getting ideas above your station.’

‘Very well, sir.’

‘Run and get that spade.’

‘Why can’t he go, sir? he’s younger than me.’

‘He’s never seen a spade before.’

‘Well, I must say he’s the funniest creature I ever set eyes on. Does he know how to eat his dinner, then?’

‘Well, provided you’re not too hard on him, I might let on he doesn’t know the first thing about it.’

Robin went off towards the cabin, muttering loudly to himself.

‘Well, Robin Ifan,’ he said, ‘you’ve gone down in the market. You’re not worth a groat, it seems. You’ll be lucky to earn your tobacco next month with an old pussy-cat like that.’

He found the spade under a pile of sacks, and having sneaked a short smoke from Harri the Weight-taker, who had gone out for a breath of fresh air, he went back to the wagon.

‘What took you so long?’ demanded Huws.

‘Someone had hidden the spade up the chimney, sir.’

‘So I suppose you went up after it? Well, it’s the best place for you.’

I should say that Robin had a dangerous temper, and that was the reason Elis, his partner, was spending the day in bed. The two had come to blows, and Robin had struck Elis in the back with his spade. Huws knew that, and decided it would be wise to make sure that nothing of the same sort happened to the stranger. So he called Robin aside.

‘Robin,’ he said, ‘take care how you talk to this man.’

‘Why, sir? Bit of a prig, is he?’

‘Yes, he is. You know what he was before he came here?’

‘If he wasn’t a baker or tailor, no.’

‘No, nothing like that.’

‘What was he, then?’

‘He was a soldier.’

‘A soldier?’

‘Yes, boy, a soldier.’

‘I’m scared.’

'And he's just got back from a long way away.'

'And left his backbone behind him.'

'Don't fool yourself. There's more to him than meets the eye.'

'Has he been in any battles?'

'Yes, many times.'

'Well, somebody's kind to the poor.'

'What are you talking about, Robin?'

'Harri the Flea's dog.'

'What about it?'

'It wasn't worth a penn'orth of powder to shoot, so the boys drowned it. Obviously someone thought the same about him.'

'Well, do what you like; but I've warned you, and if they're holding your inquest by the end of the week, don't you dare put the blame on me. This boy knows what's what, and the best thing for you to do is be as nice to him as you can. Now, get on with your work, and if this boy doesn't know what he's doing, mind you help him out.'

Robin went back to the wagon, muttering louder than ever.

'If he can use a gun,' he said, 'I can use a spade, and there's no way I'm going down on my knees to some redcoat.'

He put a plug of tobacco in his mouth and went over to the stranger, still trying to shut his tobacco tin.

'Well, mate,' he said, 'what's your name?'

'Arthur Obadiah Huw Jones.'

'Bloody hell, you're gentry! Is there any more?'

'Yes, two letters.'

'What are they?'

'B. A.'

‘Are you a preacher, then? My word, Huws is a lying bastard.’

‘Why, what did he say?’

‘He said you’re a soldier.’

‘Well, I’m a soldier as well.’

‘Have you been in any battles?’

‘Yes, dozens.’

‘Were you at Waterloo?’

‘Yes, I just got back from there last week.’

‘How was old Bony?’

‘Oh, he was in good form. No, I forget – he had a touch of tooth-ache.’

‘How many fleas – I mean men – have you killed?’

‘In my life?’

‘Yes.’

‘I couldn’t count them. I must have killed thousands.’

‘Where’s your gun?’

‘It’s at home. I’ll bring it tomorrow to show you.’

‘No, better leave it where it is. We’ll all be safer. Do you know how to load a wagon?’

‘With your hat, isn’t it?’

‘Get lost, you stupid fool.’

‘With a teaspoon, then?’

‘Well, God help me, I’ll starve at this rate. Do you know what a spade is?’

‘Oh! So that’s a spade, is it?’

‘Yes, very good, but what’s it for?’

‘For digging potatoes.’

‘Yes, but don’t you think you could load sand into this wagon with it?’

‘Maybe I could, but then what do we do with the sand?’

‘You can take it home in your pockets for all I care, so long as we get it through the machine.’

‘Through the machine!’

‘Yes.’

‘What for?’

‘To weigh it, shop-keeper.’

‘What do you want to weigh it for?’

‘To find out how much money it’s worth.’

‘Oh, I get the idea.’

‘Well, I’m amazed.’

‘Yes, it is rather impressive, isn’t it? Right, let’s get to work, or we won’t have a penn’orth by evening.’

The strange young man grasped the spade, and started shovelling sand as though there were prizes for it. Soon his side of the wagon was full, while poor Robin’s side was still half empty, even though the old man was working harder than he’d worked for a decade.

‘Well, I’m damned,’ he said presently; ‘you’re a bloody good loader. If you can push as well as you can shovel, we’ll make our fortunes.’

‘Really!’

‘No doubt about it.’

‘How much sand do we have to load to make our fortunes?’

‘Oh, about eighteen loads a day.’

‘I could do it single-handed.’

‘Well, you’ll only need to keep coming to the quarry for a couple of months.’

‘Then what’ll I do?’

‘Live on your money, lad, live on your money.’

The two began seriously loading, and soon the wagon was

ready for them to take to the top of the pile.

'You take that side and I'll take this side. Now, are you ready?'

'Yes.'

'Look out for the points, or it'll end up on the ground.'

'What'll end up on the ground?'

'The wagon, stupid.'

'It's on the ground already.'

'You don't say. That's bad news.'

'It was on the ground from the start.'

'Before we started loading?'

'Yes.'

'Well, why didn't you tell me?'

'I didn't realise you needed to know.'

'Where's your common sense?'

'In my boots.'

'I think it must be. Which wheel is it?'

'All four of them.'

'Bloody hell.'

Robin ran round the wagon, and let out a whistle.

'Who taught you to tell lies?'

'What lies?'

'You told me the wagon was on the ground.'

'Well, it is on the ground, as well.'

'Don't talk such rubbish.'

'Where do you think it is? Hanging in mid air?'

Robin saw it was he who had no common sense, and kept his mouth shut. The two pushed the wagon hard, but as they were going over the points, Robin pushed one way and the stranger pushed against him, with the result that the two front wheels slipped off the rails, and the wagon up-ended

with its load spilt out on the ground.

'Well, you're a right one,' said Robin, scratching his head gravely.

'What do we do now?' asked the stranger.

'You can go home and see your granny for all I care, if you've got one.'

'What are you doing?'

'I'm going to see Huws to ask if he's got a wheel-barrow we can use. Maybe I can manage that much.'

In a while, the two had managed to lift the wagon back on the rails and reload it. Then they started off again towards the weighbridge.

When they got there, Robin whispered in the stranger's ear:

'Remember to stand on the machine when Harri the Weight-taker's weighing the load.'

The stranger did as he was told, and went up greatly in Robin's opinion.

'They're always cheating us as much as they can,' the old man said, 'so it's only fair we should take a penn'orth or two back occasionally.'

The two worked solidly for the rest of the day, and in the evening Robin said to the stranger:

'You'll soon find your feet. You're better than Elis already. He's a lazy old dog, you see; he wouldn't work to save his neck. Make sure you're here at seven tomorrow morning.'

But the stranger didn't come, even though Robin was looking out for him until after ten o'clock.

At about eleven, Huws the steward went past, and said:

'Where's your partner, Robin?'

‘I’ve no idea at all, sir.’

‘Have you killed him already?’

‘No. He said he’d be coming in at seven.’

‘Maybe he’ll come this afternoon.’

‘No, I don’t think so, sir.’

‘Why not, Robin?’

‘He was an incredible scholar, sir.’

‘A scholar!’

‘Yes, a B. something.’

‘You mean a B. A.’

‘Yes, that’s it. He had all these books in his pocket as well, and he said the wagon was on the ground when it was on the rails, and by God, he made me believe him. I’ve no doubt at all he was a clever fellow.’

‘What was he like as a worker, Robin?’

‘Well, he was a damned good worker, and a decent fellow as well. I’m sure he was a scholar.’

The stranger never came come back to the quarry, even though Robin was looking out for him daily. The old man said his partner was a scholar without equal, until in the end he really believed it, and one day he told a colleague he’d ‘seen a story in the papers about some professor, who’d just spent some time in Wales.’

SIÔN WILLIAM

It was a cold, wet day, and the quarrymen crouched in their miserable shelters with a look of utter despair on their grey faces.

'If we don't get better weather than this,' said one of them, standing by the door with a sack over his shoulders, 'we'll starve like rats.'

'Yes,' answered an old man stooped from work, 'those of us who aren't starving already.'

The quarrymen did not understand. It was easy enough to talk about starving.

So it was hardly strange that the quarrymen were a little surprised to hear Siôn William suggest that some of them were already starving.

'What do you mean, Siôn?' asked one of them suddenly.

'Nothing,' said Siôn William, shrugging his shoulders.

'What were you talking about starving for, then?'

'What was Huw talking about it for?' asked the old man.

'He was just joking.'

'So am I just joking. Am I too old to make a joke, then? Maybe I'm too old to do anything except stop dead in my tracks.'

'No, you've got me wrong, Siôn *bach*,' said the quarryman,

kindly. ‘I’m as glad to see you joking as the next man in this quarry, but–’

‘But what?’

‘Never mind.’

‘No, I want to know what you mean.’

The quarryman started talking to someone else, thinking this was the best way to end the conversation.

But Siôn William wasn’t ready to cast the matter aside so easily, and rubbing his beard with his hand furiously, he approached the quarryman.

‘Guto,’ he said.

The quarryman pretended not to hear him.

‘Guto Jos,’ said the old man.

Guto said not a word.

‘Can you hear me, Guto?’

‘Yes, what’s the matter with you?’

‘Nothing,’ replied the old man, and his eyes were flaming.

‘Why won’t you leave me alone, then?’

‘I want to ask you a question.’

‘What is it?’

‘Do you think I’m starving?’

Guto Jos scratched his head. He had been driven into a corner.

‘I never said a word about it,’ he replied.

‘Answer my question. Do you think I, Siôn William, am starving?’

Guto Jos let out a whistle. ‘Get off my back,’ he said.

‘As soon as you’ve answered my question,’ said the old man. ‘Am I starving?’

‘You ought to know.’

‘I know that, and I also know you and everyone else in

this hut thinks I'm starving – yes, starving. Well, you're totally wrong. I'm not starving. I'm rich, in fact – rich.'

Having finished his lecture, Siôn William slumped down feebly on the bench.

'What time is it, boys?' he asked presently.

'It's nearly mid day,' answered one.

'Is it?' said the old man almost fearfully. 'I want to sleep. I didn't sleep well last night. Don't wake me, boys.'

He fell asleep, or at least he closed his eyes and snored as though he were sleeping.

Dinner time came, but the old man slept on, and the quarrymen exchanged glances as they tried to eat their sandwiches.

Another hour went by, but Siôn William didn't wake up, and since the rain was still falling some of the quarrymen got ready to go home.

'We'd better wake up the old man,' said Guto Jos.

At this point, Siôn William opened his eyes and did his best to look sleepy.

'What time is it, boys?' he asked once again.

'Three o'clock,' answered one of them.

'Three o'clock!'

'Yes.'

'I haven't had lunch.'

'Well, better late than never.'

The frightened look came over Siôn William's face once more.

'I don't think I'll bother eating right now. There's no point messing around until I get home. I left my food in the shed anyway.'

'Well,' said Guto Jos, 'I have a spare sandwich if you'd like

it, to save you going up.'

The old man looked at him sharply, but saw nothing in Guto's eyes to suggest he had realised he had no food.

'Well, if it's spare I'll take it,' he said, 'to save me going up. I'm getting too old to climb all the way up those steps.'

Guto gave him the sandwich, and the old man ate it ravenously.

'Do you want another?' asked Guto Jos. 'It'll save me carrying it home. You can pay me back sometime, if you like, when I've left my sandwiches in the shed.'

'That's exactly what we'll do,' said the old man. 'It's give and take in this old world, isn't it?'

'It certainly is.'

After eating the second sandwich, Siôn William seemed better. He pulled an old pipe out of his pocket, and after putting a bit of tobacco in it, he started to smoke.

'Guto,' he said a while later, touching Guto's arm.

'What is it now?'

'I've got a damn good chisel here.'

'Well, what about it?'

'Nothing; would you like to have it?'

'But you need it yourself.'

'No, I don't think so,' said the old man gravely.

'Why not?' asked Guto in surprise.

'Well, the truth is I'm retiring,' said Siôn.

'Retiring?'

'Yes, retiring. Didn't you hear me say I'm rich?'

'Yes, but...'

'But what? Don't you believe me?'

'Yes, but...'

'That's enough, Guto. If you don't want the chisel, there's others will.'

'But you shouldn't be giving away your tools like this.'

'Yes, but I'm retiring. I'm not going to need them any more. Don't you understand?'

'Yes.'

'Take the chisel, then. Now, who'd like a sack?'

'You'd better keep that, anyway. A sack will be handy after you retire.'

'No, I don't think so. I'm going to want a mackintosh after I retire.'

'But it'll do for something else.'

'No, I don't think so. I'll leave it here. Perhaps someone else will want it. See you later, Guto.'

The next day, Siôn William didn't come to the quarry, and everyone was asking about him.

'He's retired,' said Guto Jos solemnly.

The quarrymen laughed heartily. They all assumed that Guto was joking.

'You can laugh if you like,' said Guto, 'but it's true. You won't see Siôn William in this quarry again.'

'But how will he live?' asked Huw Huws.

'He's rich,' explained Guto.

The men laughed again. Who ever heard of anyone growing rich in the quarry?

'Well, he told me himself,' replied Guto.

'He must have saved a bit of money,' said Huw Huws. 'He always was a careful spender.'

'You need to be more than a careful spender to get rich in the quarry,' said Dic Ifan. 'My wife's the thrifty type, and I'm not sure I'll die without seeing the workhouse.'

Some of the men paled at hearing the word *workhouse*.

'Well, the old man's retired anyway,' said Guto Jos. 'He told me yesterday he was going to, and he was quite stuck up about it.'

Nothing further was said on the subject, but Guto Jos decided to visit the old man that evening and see how he was getting on in his retirement, and he asked Huw Huws to go with him.

At about eight o'clock, the two were at the door of Siôn William's cottage.

'He's trying to save money, anyway,' said Huw Huws. 'There's no light or fire.'

'Perhaps he's in bed,' said Guto.

'I suppose so,' said Huw Huws. 'I'll knock.'

He knocked, but no one came to the door.

'Give it a kick,' said Guto.

Huw did so, but it didn't arouse Siôn William.

'Kick it again, Huw,' said Guto.

Huw kicked harder, and the door of the next house opened.

'In God's name,' said a middle-aged woman, 'what's the matter with you?'

'Where's Siôn William?' asked Guto Jos.

'You're a nice pair,' said the woman, and sniffed.

'What do you mean?' demanded Guto. 'Speak plainly or hold your tongue.'

'And you call yourselves men!' said the woman, ignoring him. 'Men indeed, leaving an old man to die!'

'Die!'

'Yes, die. I assume he died there.'

'Where?'

'In the workhouse, of course.'

'Who's in the workhouse?'

'Siôn William. He went there this morning.'

The two quarrymen looked at each other.

'I should have known,' said Guto Jos, gazing down at his sleeve. 'It's the only way a quarryman can retire.'

HARRI THE SOLDIER

Harri, if you could take his word for it, had been in hundreds of battles, and had come within a hair's breadth of losing his life more times than that.

Naturally the boys liked to ask him about it, and Harri was always happy to answer. The one who used to question him most was Huw Sioned. Huw had been in the Militia, and reckoned he knew everything there was to know about war – except what it was like to be in one.

'How many battles did you say you took part in, Harri?' he asked one day, stuffing an enormous plug of tobacco into his mouth.

'How many?' said Harri.

'Yes.'

'Well, lad, I don't think I could count them. I must have been in hundreds.'

'You don't say.'

'Yes indeed, hundreds.'

'Were you at Waterloo?'

'By God, yes.'

'That was a terrible battle, wasn't it?'

'No, not too bad. I've seen worse.'

'You don't say! Where?'

'When I was in India.'

‘You’ve got it all wrong.’

‘And who are you to say that?’

‘I’m as good a soldier as you are, or better.’

‘Oh, shut your mouth. You’ve never been under fire in your life.’

‘I know what’s what, though.’

‘So do I, and I don’t take lessons from the Militia.’

‘You were no more in Waterloo than I was.’

‘How do you know?’

‘If there’d been half a dozen people there like you, we’d have lost the battle.’

‘Not a chance. Whatsisname said – who was the gaffer looking after the shop? Yes, Nelson. Nelson said he’d never seen better soldiers in his life.’

‘Nelson wasn’t there, you fool.’

‘Who was it, then?’

‘It wasn’t you, for a start.’

‘I’m telling you, I was there.’

‘Then you’re lying, aren’t you?’

‘Well, you’re a fine one, asking me questions, and then calling me a liar. Who was it looking after us, then?’

‘Francis Drake.’

‘I don’t *think* I saw him,’ said Harri, scratching his head.

‘I’ve already told you you weren’t even there.’

‘Oh, shut up. Francis Drake, Francis Drake, Fra... My word, I think you’re right.’

‘Of course I’m right. If you’d asked, I could have told you in the first place.’

‘You’re a better scholar than me,’ said Harri. ‘And you’ve got a better memory.’

At this point Dic *bach* the youngster came over.

'Do you know anything about Waterloo, Dic?' asked Harri.

'Yes.'

'Who was that fellow looking after the shop?'

'Wellington.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

'Wasn't Nelson there?'

'No.'

'Was Francis Drake there?'

'Give over,' said Dic *bach*. 'He's been dead for hundreds of years.'

'Was that other fellow dead, Dic?'

'What other fellow?'

'Nelson.'

'No, I don't think so.'

'He was alive at the time, was he?'

'Yes.'

'What was he like, Dic?'

'He was a one-eyed sailor with only one arm.'

'Well, he was a pretty grim specimen.'

'No doubt about it.'

'Did he lose his eye and his arm at the same time?'

'Yes.'

'How was that?'

Dic *bach* hesitated a minute. He was having to use his imagination now.

'How did it happen, Dic?' asked Harri again.

'Well, first this bullet him in the arm, and then it bounced off into his eye.'

'It re-crotcheted, as we say?'

'That's right.'

'My word, you're a clever boy, Dic.'

'Yes, I know.'

'But who was this Francis Drake fellow Huw was talking about?'

'Oh, he was one of these soldiers as well.'

'But you're sure he was never at Waterloo?'

'Yes, quite sure.'

'Did you hear that, Huw?'

'Yes,' said Huw. 'I must have made a mistake.'

'It's easy enough to make a mistake, Huw.'

'Yes, it is.'

'Especially if you don't have a clue what you're talking about.'

'I know as much as you do!'

'About potato soup, maybe you do.'

'You were telling lies a minute ago.'

'What about?'

'About Waterloo.'

'What did I say that wasn't true?'

'You said Nelson was there, you old fool.'

'He might have been,' said Dic *bach*. 'He and Wellington got on really well.'

Dic *bach* liked Harri better than Huw.

'Did you hear what Dic *bach* was saying, Huw?' said Harri.

'What?'

'He said Nelson used to go around with Wellington, that fellow who was in charge at Waterloo.'

'Did he?'

'Well, Dic says so, anyway, and he ought to know, having derived all the benefits of education, as Huw Huws puts it. What did Nelson look, like, Dic?'

'He only had one arm.'

'My word, I do believe I spoke to him. He was a Welshman, wasn't he, Dic?'

'No, English.'

'Are you sure?'

'Quite sure.'

'Well, maybe I'm wrong about that. I'm sure I spoke to him, though.'

'When?' asked Huw.

'At Waterloo.'

'Don't talk rubbish.'

'How many eyes did he have, Dic?' asked Harri.

'One.'

'Are you sure?'

'Yes.'

Harri was silent for a minute.

'I'm sure I spoke to him,' he said presently.

'What did he say?' asked Huw.

'I've an inkling he asked me for a bit of tobacco.'

'Oh, don't talk such rubbish,' said Dic *bach*.

'You shut up now, Dic. You weren't even born at the time.'

'But Nelson was a gentleman.'

'I thought he was a soldier.'

'He was in charge.'

'In charge of what?'

'Of a whole load of ships.'

'Oh, give over.'

'He was, you know.'

'Well, they must have been short of tobacco sometimes.'

'Must they?'

‘Of course.’

‘But Nelson didn’t smoke.’

‘Then maybe he chewed?’

‘No, I don’t think so.’

‘I knew officers who chewed like sheep.’

‘But Nelson wasn’t one of them.’

‘He wasn’t worth a farthing as a soldier, then.’

‘Who says so?’

‘I do.’

‘The text books say something different, though.’

‘You don’t want to believe them, lad. Text books will say anything.’

‘But Nelson was a brilliant soldier!’

‘I happen to disagree.’

‘Why were you never promoted?’

‘Oh, I was too old when I joined up.’

‘How old were you when you joined, then?’

‘I was coming up to thirty.’

‘And how old are you now?’

‘I’m sixty years old.’

Dic let out a whistle.

‘You never were at Waterloo,’ he said.

‘That’s what I’ve been saying all along,’ said Huw.

‘You don’t know a thing about it,’ said Harri.

‘But you couldn’t have been at Waterloo!’

‘Why not?’

‘You hadn’t even been born yet.’

‘Were you there when I was born?’

‘No, of course not.’

‘Well, how can you say I’d not been born, then?’

‘But the Battle of Waterloo was more than sixty years ago.’

‘That’s what I’ve been trying to get inside his head,’ said Huw.

‘What was the name of that other big battle, then?’ asked Harri.

‘What battle?’ asked Dic.

‘That big one.’

‘What big one?’

‘I wouldn’t have to ask if I knew, would I?’

‘But there have been hundreds of major battles!’

‘What was the latest, then?’

‘Jericho?’

‘Yes, that’s the one.’

‘Were you there?’

‘Yes, I was.’

‘How did you get there?’

‘In a steamer.’

‘It must have been terribly cold in Jericho.’

‘Oh, it was all right. It was summer when I was there.’

‘Was the fighting hard?’

‘I suppose so. I was wounded there.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes, twice.’

‘Where?’

‘I was hit on the side of my head by shrapnel.’

‘You gave as good as you got, though, didn’t you?’

‘By God, yes!’

‘Was it the blacks you were fighting with?’

‘Yes, and the Irish as well.’

‘And you’re sure you were there?’

'Where?'

'At the Battle of Jericho.'

'Perfectly sure,' said Harri.

'Would you be willing to give your word for it?'

'Give my word? Yes, of course.'

Dic *bach* roared with laughter.

'What's wrong with you?' asked Harri.

'There never was a Battle of Jericho,' said Dic. 'Not since the Old Testament.'

And he ran for his life.

'Well, I'll be damned,' said Harri.

THE BLACK CAT

When I was a child I was told that the black cat is the creature most like the devil. At the time I didn't know how much truth there was in this, but now I know it's true, every word of it.

I have a black cat, and if the devil is worse than she, he's blacker than the most zealous Puritan ever painted him.

But she always seems like the most harmless of creatures, fooling everyone around her.

She can look like a saint when she wants, and you'd think if you watched her curl up in a chair, and close her eyes as though she were weary of the world and everyone in it, that she wouldn't hurt a fly. Indeed a fly once thought the same, and alighted on her nose. The next minute he was preening his wings in a different part of her body. It's a sobering thought, how many flies she deceives in a day.

She's not in the least bit afraid of dogs, especially not at a distance. The other day I was out in the yard when a dog hove in view towards her. She retreated inside very smartly, but to make sure the dog had eyes only for her, she stood mounted on a chair in front of the window and showed herself to him plainly. More than that, she called him every cruel name her cattish graces suggested, taunting him with his missing eye and truncated tail, and adopting such airs

that soon he was grovelling in the dust in his distress. Then she turned up her nose at him, as good as saying he was too loathsome even to look at, and went to sleep.

But her chief amusement is hunting. She came here from the countryside, and since she'd had the chance to hunt everything from chickens down to the smallest beetles, she was full of the joys of the hunt when she set foot in my kitchen the first time.

She first showed her gifts in this field when she pounced on the feather that graced my wife's best hat. But something pounced on her as well, and she reached the conclusion that hunting does not pay as well in the town as in the country.

It was the hardest thing I ever did to stop her going out of her own accord. She knew as much, and did her utmost to go. She would creep behind the door every hour of the day, and slip out at the first opportunity. I knew her tricks – that one at least – but she had others, and I was as innocent of those as a cuckoo chick is the stars.

One day she sat down, or rather lay down, on the mat by the door, and fell into a very deep slumber. Indeed, I'd never seen a cat sleep so soundly or so long. Just then someone knocked on the door, and since the cat was unconscious and snoring, I assumed that all would be well. But the instant I opened the door, pussy woke up of a sudden, and out she goes like a shot. Make fun of me if you will, but believe me, it was no laughing matter. It's a horrible feeling to know you've been outwitted by a cat.

Dear pussy wasn't home for supper that night; perhaps she feared a cooler reception than usual. I didn't want to lose her despite all her faults, since my mother had told me – the type of feline logic herself – to be kind to her. At that

moment I could only pull out my hair at the thought of being kind to that cat. The vixen is spoilt by kindness. If she had been a stray I'd have broken her neck at the sight of her.

She didn't come home for breakfast the following morning either. I was a little concerned about her by now, since although our town toms may not be much to look at, they use their claws more readily than country cats. So I was afraid there wouldn't be much left of poor pussy by the time I saw her again.

I went inside to try and think what to do, and after sitting down and staring at the ceiling for a quarter of an hour, a glorious vision, as the poets say, came over me. I went out, and called half a dozen of the scruffiest young urchins of the town together, and after describing pussy in as much detail as I could, biting my tongue so as not to use foul language, I gave them to understand that there would be sixpence for the boy who brought her back.

They scattered in haste, and I felt a moment of pity for all the black cats of the town. I'd never dreamed in my life there could be so many of them, and I was surprised when I was told by the boys they'd seen black cats by the hundred. But they all had proper tails, at least when the boys first saw them, and my poor pussy only had a stump.

But one boy had seen a cat with a stump.

'Where?' I asked him.

'On top of the town clock,' he replied.

'Well, go and get her,' I told him.

'I can't,' he replied.

'Well, you don't get sixpence for sight-seeing. You have to bring her here.'

The boy ran his hand through his hair, and you could see

his poor wits were quite addled by the problem.

'I can't fly,' he observed.

'I wouldn't like to see you try.'

'Then how do I get her down?'

'Try putting pepper on her tail.'

'But you said she didn't have one, sir.'

'Well, pretend you're playing blind man's buff and put the pepper where you think it should be.'

'But I don't have any pepper.'

'Wait here, and I'll get you some.'

I went inside and put some pepper in a twist, and gave it to the boy. He put the pepper under his cap and took off with new hope in his heart. Poor brat. I never saw him again. I hope he didn't break his neck trying to climb the town clock.

Just then another boy came back, saying he'd seen another stump-tailed cat in the park with a chicken in its mouth. I gave him threepence to tell the world it was a white cat, not a black one.

I could see now how the cat could go so long without breakfast or supper. She was doing very well for herself, rather better than me. It isn't often I get chicken for supper, believe me.

Before evening another four urchins came to call. All of them had seen a black cat. One had even tried to grab what it had of a tail, and been badly scratched for his trouble.

'It ain't fair,' he complained.

'What ain't fair, mate?'

'If she had a tail I'd have caught her good and proper.'

'That's not my fault,' I said; 'it's the cat's.'

'I still want a penny.'

'What for?' I said.

'For grabbing its tail.'

'If I had a penny every time I did that, I'd be richer by now than I'll ever be.'

The mudlark went out for another attempt.

Just then another boy came back with a beautiful cat under his arm and a smile on his face.

'Here it is at last,' he said.

It was black, and had a stump for a tail, but it wasn't my cat.

'Where did you find it?' I asked.

'I saw it going inside this house, and managed to sneak in and grab it. Where's my sixpence?'

'In my pocket,' I said. 'That isn't my cat.'

'But it's black.'

'Isn't it.'

'And it's got a stump for a tail.'

'So I see, and so will you if you don't take it away.'

The urchin gave me a very black look.

'Have you really lost a cat?' he said.

I reflected. It was obvious they weren't going to find her, and the sooner I got rid of them the better.

'No,' I said, 'I've been having you on.'

The boy spat on the floor, but before he had time to speak his mind another one came back with a cat.

'Let it go, mate,' said the first urchin.

I could see it was my cat, and I told the boy to wait.

'Let it go,' yelled the first boy again. 'The old fool hasn't lost a cat. He's been having us on all this time.'

The urchin let her go right under my nose, and I had the pleasure of watching her escape at a speed of ten miles per hour.

But she was back again by nightfall. I'm not sure I was pleased to see her.

THE PAGAN

His real name was Robert Huws, though I never heard anyone except the minister and the steward call him that.

I don't know who exactly gave him his nickname, but I know he got it because he liked to go and listen to the birds singing on a Sunday morning better than he liked to go and listen to the minister preaching. As he put it, he did not understand the minister at all, but he understood every word the birds said to each other, and he could whistle along with the best of them.

No one would have taken the Pagan for one of those people who spend their lives charming rabbits or partridges to destruction. No, killing was not in his nature. He much preferred to see everything alive and playing around him, than dead and in his pocket. But still his friends had no better name to give him than Pagan. Of course, Bob didn't care a fig about this, for I don't think he knew what the word meant exactly.

He was, it must be said, completely ignorant so far as Biblical knowledge goes, and it was chiefly because of this that he was held in such small regard. He was not what one would call an influential man or a substantial one. In a word, he was just the Pagan.

But Bob was a better man than many who laughed or

shook their heads at the thought of him. If he was not an outstanding Christian he was a faithful friend, and if he lacked brains he had a heart.

I say 'if' because I myself believe he had four times as much brains as the men who worked with him. Of course, they didn't realise that: that is, they didn't want to realise it, and if they had been told, it would only have made them angry. Even so, they flung the Pagan's ignorance in his teeth every day: because they were ignorant themselves, no doubt.

But one or two of the quarrymen had a very high regard for Bob. For instance the Baby, one of the quarrymen, considered him a very knowledgeable man. He was as good as a dictionary to Huw Huws the deacon as well, although he used strong language occasionally. If Huw Huws wanted a definition of an insect, reptile or bird he'd go to the Pagan at once, and it's said he put his foot in it once in the Bible study by answering a question to do with a particular bird by saying, 'According to the Pagan.' Of course, various people had said, 'According to Charles,' or, 'According to Saunders,' but nobody dared say, 'According to the Pagan,' even though the Pagan's opinion was as good as theirs, or better on some things. 'The Pagan's the Pagan,' as the other deacons said, and it was an unforgivable sin to drag his name into the Bible Study.

But Huw Huws didn't care a fig about anyone. The Pagan was a human being, and he was made in the image of God like any other human being.

'If some of you went to him for lessons now and again,' he said to his fellow deacons in the quarry the next morning, 'you'd be better men for it. You can take my word for that.'

They didn't say a word at the time, but as soon as they got the chance they flung so much dirt at Huw Huws, and the Pagan, that it was enough to make everyone stay away from the two of them for two lifetimes, if that were possible.

Within a week of that, Huw Huws, 'so everyone is saying,' was a heretic.

'What do you make of it?' the old deacon said one day to the Pagan. 'Haven't they managed to blacken my name?'

'Yes,' said the Pagan quietly. 'That's what you get for mixing too much with black sheep.'

'What do you mean?'

'That the best thing for you as a deacon of Libanus is to stay away from me – speaking to you as a deacon of Libanus, remember.'

'But that's not Christian, Bob *bach*.'

'Maybe not, but it's what the *seiat* expects. I'm a sinner, you see, and your duty is to stay as far from me as you can – that is, unless you want more of the same treatment.'

'What do I care for their slanders? And to tell you the truth, Bob, I'm sick to death of Guto Siôn and Harri William. They have the tempers of wasps, and they can sting too, for that matter. I don't know what will become of the chapel if things carry on this way for long. Not a Sunday goes past when they're not picking a fight with me, and if I won't quarrel with them, they turn on each other like two tinkers.'

'It's part of their religion.'

'Don't say that, my son.'

'I said it's part of *their* religion.'

'Well, be that as it may, it's the part they do best. Sometimes I get no pleasure at all from the chapel. I

shouldn't be saying this to you, but it's true, you know, every word of it.'

'Come for a walk with me next Sunday. I guarantee you'll forget all about it in five minutes. There's a strange bird in the Dell at the moment – at least, I haven't found out the name of it yet – and my word, it's a wonderful singer.'

'How does it go, Bob?'

'Like this,' replied the Pagan, giving a strange but uncommonly lovely whistle.

'I've never heard that before,' said the deacon.

'No,' said the Pagan, 'there's something of a canary's song about it, only it's not so full.'

'What kind of bird is it, I wonder?'

'I don't know yet, but I'll find out in a week or two. Will you be coming with me next Sunday?'

'My dear son, you don't know what you're saying.'

'It would do you a world of good to hear it.'

'But what would Guto Siôn and Harri William say then?'

'Well, they can't quarrel with you if you're not there, and I'm sure it's better to hear a bird singing than a couple of deacons bickering.'

'You don't understand, Bob, indeed you don't. Do you know what would happen if I came with you next Sunday?'

'It would give you a great deal of pleasure.'

'Perhaps it would, my son, but do you know what would happen in the next *seiat*?'

'No.'

'Huw Huws would get thrown out, that's what.'

'What for?'

'For going for a walk on Sunday instead of going to chapel.'

'Who'd throw you out?'

'Well, Guto Siôn and Harri William would be fighting for the privilege – or at any rate, arguing for it.'

'And they're the ones who quarrel every Sunday?'

'Yes.'

'Well, they're the two strangest customers I've ever heard of. If I were you, Huw Huws, I'd send them to graze in other pastures at once.'

'I can't do that, my boy.'

'Why not?'

'They haven't done anything wrong.'

'I thought you said they quarrel every Sunday.'

'Well, they do.'

'Throw them out, then.'

'It's easy enough to talk, my boy.'

'Well, if I were a deacon I'd give them both the sack in a twinkling.'

'Would you, Bob?'

'Would I? Oh yes, no fear.'

The two were quiet for a minute; then the old deacon asked quite suddenly:

'Why don't you come along to the chapel sometimes, Bob? You know, it would do my heart good to see you coming to Bible Study.'

'Do you have a class?'

'Yes indeed.'

'Do that old Guto or Harri have anything to do with it?'

'No.'

'Do they come to Bible Study at all?'

'Yes they do, but they don't have anything to do with me.'

'Well then, I wouldn't care if I came next Sunday.'

Huw Huws looked at the Pagan with the joy bright in his eyes. But suddenly the smile retreated, and tears came in its place.

'Would you have said that before if I'd asked you?' he asked, putting his hand on the Pagan's shoulder.

Bob saw how at once how things stood, and did not hesitate to say what he knew would comfort the old man.

'No, I don't think I would. There's a time for everything, Huw Huws.'

'That's true,' said the deacon. 'You see, I never thought of asking you before. Strange, as well, considering who you are.'

'The Pagan,' said Bob.

'No, no,' said Huw Huws, 'that's not what I meant. I think more highly of you than that; you know that as well as I do. When will you come?'

'The first chance I get,' said the Pagan. 'When do you start next Sunday?'

'Well, how would it be if you came at around half past one? That way we'll have half an hour for a chat before leaving. Do you have a Bible, Bob?'

'A Bible, Huw Huws?' said the Pagan, scratching his head.

'Yes, my boy.'

'No, I don't think I have. I had one somewhere, but after my mother died everything got mixed up somehow.'

'Well, never mind; I've got two or three. You know what, my boy, this is the best day's work I've done for years. You might be coming to the *seiat* next. You've no idea how much you get out of it sometimes.'

'But what about Harri and Guto?'

A look of decision came to the deacon's eyes.

'I'll speak to them next week,' he said. 'I'm the head

deacon, and I wouldn't be surprised if Williams, the minister, were willing to stand behind me. He's got enough pluck, you see, and between us we could bring things to order. My word, I'm sure he'll be terribly pleased when he hears you're coming to the Bible Study. Now I think about it, he speaks very highly of you. He said one day it's a pity to see such an intelligent man as you – that was the word he used – staying away, and I agree with him entirely. Well, I'd better get back to my work. What time is it, do you know?'

'It's dinner time,' said the Pagan, and the next minute the noon whistle sounded.

The following Sabbath the Pagan got up earlier than usual, and was in the Dell between seven and eight o'clock. It was a summery morning, and the birds had got up as early as the Pagan. Bob thought they were singing more sweetly than usual, and almost regretted his promise to go to the chapel. But he was not going to disappoint Huw Huws, even if all the birds in the world came to play around him. He would have preferred, of course, for the deacon to come with him to the Dell than to go to chapel with the deacon, but he was sensible enough to realise that that would not do so far as Huw Huws was concerned.

After eating dinner he put on his best clothes, and went to Huw Huws's house. The deacon was sitting at the table with a Bible and Thomas Charles's Bible Dictionary in front of him, and when he saw the Pagan he smiled.

'You've come at the right time,' he said. 'I've been puzzling over the name of a bird, and I don't understand what Charles says about it.'

'What is it?' asked the Pagan, in his element at once. 'A goldfinch, perhaps?'

‘No, not quite,’ said Huw Huws.

‘What sort of voice does Charles say it has?’

‘“Fair,” I think.’

‘And what’s the name of this customer, then?’

‘The pelican,’ said the deacon, looking intently at the dictionary.

‘Oh, that isn’t an interesting bird at all,’ said the Pagan, rather disappointed.

‘Don’t you think so?’

‘No indeed, though it is very good at fishing, now I come to think about it.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes, and it’s a good parent as well.’

‘It is?’

‘Yes. If you looked at the picture, perhaps you noticed something like a pouch under its beak.’

‘No, I didn’t notice.’

‘Well, there is one, and the old thing carries its chicks in it.’

‘Dear me.’

‘Yes, it’s a fine bird, but it isn’t a singer.’

‘Well, my boy, you amaze me,’ said the deacon, shutting the Bible.

The Pagan amazed the rest of the class as well, when Huw Huws asked if there was anyone who knew what a pelican was, and what the difference was between it and other birds.

GOING HOME

I

Twm Huws had been in the trenches for three days, and now that the guns of the enemy were silent he had started to realise what war is.

'I don't know what possessed me to come here,' he said, scratching his head, 'indeed I don't. The people at home told me enough times not to go. What are they doing tonight, I wonder? I'd hand in my gun to go home.'

He made himself as comfortable as he could in the cold trench. It was good to rest and think about home, if only for a few minutes.

'It'll be Sunday tomorrow,' he continued, 'and here I am in the middle of nowhere, shooting at every poor creature out there that moves. I wonder what Huw Huws would say if he could see me now?'

The old chapel in the valley came to life before his eyes, and a thousand memories to his mind. All were sweet; and one by one the people he loved most came to keep him company in the trench.

The first to come was Rhisiart Ifans, his first teacher in the Sunday School. Rhisiart had died when he was a child, but he was standing alive before him now – a big strong man

with a flowing beard, which his left hand was always stroking. He was stroking it now, and Twm was afraid to see rebuke in his eye as he'd seen so many times as a child. But there was no rebuke in the teacher's eyes now, only tears.

After him came Huw Huws the deacon. Huw Huws had always been a decent fellow, and a bit of a fighter himself. When Twm had joined the army, he had been the only deacon to stand by him.

'Always fight fair,' he had told him, 'and no one can criticise you. It's always been a battle in this old world, and it'll be a battle to the last.'

His words had stuck in Twm's mind, and he was almost sure he had always fought fair, although that was difficult at times, when the other side took unfair advantage of it. Huw Huws's eyes were smiling at him now, and Twm felt sure that he had fought fair.

Next came his father, and gazed intently at him. There had been a frown on his face when Twm saw him last, but there was no sign of it now.

Twm knew that there had never been anger in his heart when his eyes were reproving, and now he saw only concern.

'I always told you it would come to this,' said his father, looking at his miry clothes. 'But there's nothing to do now but press on. And to tell you the truth, I can't say for sure I wouldn't join you if I were twenty years younger. You're rather like I was when I was your age.'

This lifted Twm's heart, but when his mother came, and he saw the pain on her face, he could not halt the tears in his eyes. The old woman took his coat just as she would on a wet day when he was coming home from the quarry, and let out a heavy sigh.

‘Look after your health, won’t you?’ she said, squeezing his hands.

Twm couldn’t answer her. He knew very well that hundreds of his fellow-soldiers had frozen to death in the trenches, and that he himself was not so far from doing so that minute. It was better to fight after all than to cower in the cold trenches. He shut his eyes to stop himself seeing the turmoil in his mother’s eyes. The next minute the ground shook as though in an earthquake, and Twm fell like a rag into the bottom of the trench.

II

With half a dozen other soldiers Twm was carried to hospital. He didn’t exactly know why he was being taken there, since the shell that had killed a number of his fellows in the trench had left him untouched. He was feeling unusually drowsy, that was all.

At first he was angry with them for taking him away when he was as fit as a nut, but somehow he felt rather weak, lying down, and it was good to rest without moving a limb.

Between sleeping and waking he heard a doctor telling a wounded soldier lying near him that he would be ‘going home tomorrow for Christmas.’

This drove the sleep from his eyes, and he tried to lift himself up on one elbow; but strangely, he couldn’t seem to move by this time.

The doctor came over and started undressing him. Twm couldn’t think why he was doing this; he could do it himself quite easily, if only they’d give him time to wake up. But perhaps it was better to leave it to the doctor. He wanted to

sleep. But he couldn't see why the doctor had to use scissors to do the job.

'How do you feel?' asked the doctor.

'Fine.'

'Are you in any pain?'

Twm shook his head. He was almost asleep by this time. He closed his eyes, and then opened them again.

'Can I go home tomorrow?' he asked.

'Yes, my boy, of course,' replied the doctor.

And thinking about tomorrow, and going home, Twm sank into a dreamy sleep.

The day dawned, a lovely morning, nothing like the cold, wet days he had seen in the trench.

He got out of bed smartly. He was afraid he wouldn't be allowed home after all, but nobody stopped him. He crossed the water as though in a dream, and soon he was back at his father's cottage.

By this time it was night again, and he felt he couldn't go much further, and when he tried to jump over the garden gate, as he had done hundreds of times in the past, pain shot through his whole body, and his strength deserted him. He leaned against the window-sill, and looked inside the house under the half-curtains.

Everything in the house was just as it had been the morning he went away.

Not even the breakfast things had been moved, and his work boots were just where he had left them under the settle. His father was sitting in the chair by the fire with his eyes closed, and his pipe had gone cold in his mouth. His mother was sitting on a stool beside him, gazing thoughtfully into the heart of the fire. On her lap was the atlas he had had

as a boy in school. Slowly she pulled a pin from her white hair, and after putting her spectacles on her nose she examined a map, guiding the hairpin along the page. A heavy sigh came from her heart, and the hairpin fell from her fingers. She glanced at the window, and suddenly got up from the stool. She had seen him, but it was fear, not joy, on her face. Twm opened the door to drive the fear away, but instead of a warm hearth he saw only darkness, such darkness as he had never seen before.

'Poor creature,' said the nurse. 'It's a mercy he was released from his pain.'

III

'I'd feel easier if I knew where he was,' said Margiad Huws, 'but the map doesn't mention the place you saw in the paper. You must have made a mistake, Robert.'

'The paper said Flanders,' said Robert Huws, knocking his pipe against a bar of the grate, 'and that's where Twm's regiment will be. Everyone's heard of Flanders. "Go to Flanders," they say.'

'I wish Twm hadn't gone, anyway. I don't know what got into his head. If they'd done something to him I could understand, but he's putting his life in danger for nothing. I'm sure a lot of them have been killed.'

'Yes, a few.'

'Poor creatures. But Twm was always getting into fights. I must have told him hundreds of times it would land him in trouble one day. And there he is now, up to his neck in it.'

'But he'll come through all right; you'll see.'

'I don't know. I'd understand if he managed to dodge

those bullets, but it's those big things – what do you call them? – that worry me. In a fair fight, I'd have a lot of faith in Twm. But what chance does anyone have against those shells? No, I'm afraid Twm won't make it this time.'

'Nonsense. He's as safe as if he was sitting on that settle.'

'No, something's been telling me all day things aren't going well for Twm. Last night I dreamed he came home in a dreadful state, and I'd swear this minute something's happened to him.'

'Oh, do stop fussing,' said Robert Huws, shutting his eyes for a snooze, as his custom was when he couldn't answer Margiad's arguments properly.

Margiad Huws was silent, but she couldn't silence the storm in her breast. And all the events of Twm's life came to her memory. She'd had her fair share of trouble with him from time to time, but he'd never given her any pain that had left an abiding scar on her heart. And she forgot about his mischief; Twm had been a fine boy. Perhaps he would come through his current troubles, as he always had in the past. No, there was no way he could, unless –

She turned her gaze on the window suddenly, as she always did when she thought she heard footsteps.

It stopped her heart, and froze her blood in her veins. In the window she could see Twm's pale face, and a world of pain in his eyes. She got up, and went to open the door, but there was only the darkness of the night outside, and the wind sighing through the trees.

'What is it now?' said Robert Huws, opening his eyes.

'Nothing,' answered Margiad, quietly, locking the atlas in the drawer where it had spent the last decade.

Cockatrice Books
Y diawl a'm llaw chwith

The cockatrice is hatched from a cockerel's egg, and resembles a dragon the size and shape of a cockerel. The English word is derived from the Latin *calcatrix*, but in Welsh it is called *ceiliog neidr*: 'adder-cock.' Its touch, breath and glance are lethal.

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HALLOWE'EN IN THE CWM

BY OWEN WYNNE JONES

translated with an introduction by Rob Mimpriss

Owen Wynne Jones, also known as Glasynys (1828-1870) was a school-teacher and clergyman, an editor and poet, and a folklorist and short-story writer, whose contributions to the Welsh anthology, *Cymru Fu* (1864), influenced T. Gwynn Jones among others, and now, in this new translation by Rob Mimpriss, a body of his work is available to English readers.

Combining horror, romance, humour and adventure with his own moving descriptions of the hospitality and generosity of ordinary people, these stories provide an account of a way of life now vanished, and a glimpse into the extraordinary richness of the Welsh oral tradition.

'Glasynys had a message for his age, for the common people of Wales who saw him championing their heritage. A sectarian, divided, unpoetic age crushes the spirit, and defaces the life of man. Glasynys describes his dream of the common people of Wales, learned in song and dance, and living through poetry alongside fairies, monsters, spirits and dragons... We enter his world, and delight in his dream.'

Saunders Lewis

'An invaluable translation.'

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A BOOK OF THREE BIRDS
BY MORGAN LLWYD
translated with an introduction by Rob Mimpriss

Morgan Llwyd (1619-1659), the nephew of a professional soldier and magician, was a Roundhead, a millenialist, a chaplain in the army of Oliver Cromwell, and later a civil servant of the commonwealth in Wales.

His famous religious allegory, *A Book of Three Birds*, is considered the most important Welsh book of the Seventeenth Century, and an enduring masterpiece of Welsh prose. This new translation by Rob Mimpriss brings to life the pungency of Morgan Llwyd's writing, the richness of his religious and political thought, and the urgency of his drama and characterisation.

'Lucid, skilful, and above all, of enormous timely relevance.'
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THE WHITE FARM AND OTHER STORIES
BY GERAINT GOODWIN

A farmer's orphan attends the auction of her stock with the man she intends to marry and the man she loves. A retired boxer who once killed a man is challenged to fight by the local drunk. Two men and a woman stand facing each other on the wasteground behind a country fair, and a successful businessman journeys home to be reconciled with the woman he once raped.

In his eye for the unremarked drama of Welsh lives, Geraint Goodwin is the equal of Caradoc Evans or Margiad Evans, yet his feel for atmosphere and detail is reminiscent of Turgenev. In the borderlands between England and Wales, men and women reach out to each other, groping for unity whilst riven by the gap between convention and passion.

THE SCARLET FLOWER
BY VSEVOLOD GARSHIN
translated by E. L. Voynich and Rowland Smith

A young writer lies wounded, hungry and dying of thirst, by the body of the Turkish soldier he has killed. A volunteer and private on the long march to Bulgaria assaults the officer who thought of him as an equal and a friend. A prostitute scorns the marriage that could save her life, preferring death to shame, and a patient in a lunatic asylum begins a solitary battle against the flower which is the source of all evil and suffering in the world. Combining the social awareness of Orwell or Gorky with the artistry of Turgenev, these stories demonstrate the work of a writer uniquely attuned to the sufferings of his people and the imperatives of his art.

'Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoi, Dostoevsky... None of our great masters created, at Garshin's age, anything better than his work, and none can stand as so true and painfully effective a representative of the spirit of our troubled time.'
S. Stepniak

OF THE NINTH VERSE
by A. L. Reynolds

Anwen and her younger brother, Idwal, are inseparable almost from birth. The childhood they share involves harvesting the hay and looking after the newborn lambs in the Conwy valley, though Anwen sees before her the promise of a degree in Edinburgh or Durham and a career as a mathematician, while Idwal seems destined by his strength and skill to take over the running of the family farm. Then, as their feelings for each other grow darker and more complex, Anwen finds herself put to a terrifying choice. With a luminous prose that reflects the richness of the novel's inner and outer landscapes, Of the Ninth Verse explores both the violent, destructive force of passion and the fragility of the human heart.

an enthralling novel by a writer at the peak of her powers.'
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This subtly written... compelling narrative of forbidden yet irresistible love.
Angela Topping, poet and critic

REASONING: TWENTY STORIES
by Rob Mimpriss

Reasoning is the first of three collections by Rob Mimpriss. It is followed by *For His Warriors* and *Prayer at the End.*

An old man tries to assess his guilt in the marriage his daughter has destroyed. A young man tries to understand why, in the same family, he should be both hated and loved. A seventeenth-century Puritan preacher and a Cardiff woman facing divorce unite in their call to 'know your innermost heart,' while a Romanian dissident under Ceauşescu and a Welsh-language activist find themselves outwardly liberated but inwardly still in chains.

'Through the stealthy movements of his prose, Rob Mimpriss enacts the quiet enigma of people's lives and relationships. The result is an understated fiction of compelling intensity.'

M Wynn Thomas

'Rob Mimpriss could be described as a quiet writer with a loud voice. It's good to know he's planning ahead. I'll be listening for more.'

Michael Nobbs, gwales.com

FOR HIS WARRIORS: THIRTY STORIES
by Rob Mimpriss

For His Warriors is the second of three collections by Rob Mimpriss. It is preceded by *Reasoning* and followed by *Prayer at the End.*

A Welsh farmer's wife during the Second World War kills the landgirl her husband has taken as his lover. A leader of the Cornish-language revival commits her last act of protest the day Russian troops march into Berlin. A lonely man on the waterfront in Llandudno wonders whether he or his girlfriend will be first to die of Aids, and a bored man in a restaurant in Cardiff Bay invents a story of arrest and torture to amuse his petulant lover.

'Both humour and pity often arise from the characters' inability to understand themselves and those close to them. In suggesting both the truth and the self-deception Mimpriss not only engages our sympathy but makes us question our assumptions about ourselves.'

Caroline Clark, gwales.com

PRAYER AT THE END: TWENTY-THREE STORIES
by Rob Mimpriss

Prayer at the End is the third of three collections by Rob Mimpriss. It is preceded by *Reasoning* and *For His Warriors.*

A cigarette quenched in the Menai Strait makes a man vow to live a selfish life. The memory of an unborn twin makes a man regret the selfish life he has lived. An elderly shopkeeper befriends the teenagers outside his shop, and a lonely householder sets out to confront the trespassers on his land.

'In the most seemingly unremarkable of Rob Mimpriss's pieces there is a skill, and a mystery and elusiveness to that skill, which other short-story writers might envy. This is a masterful collection.'

Gee Williams

'heaving with loss, regret and familial bonds.'

Annexe Magazine

PUGNACIOUS LITTLE TROLLS
by Rob Mimpriss

In his first three short-story collections, Rob Mimpriss painstakingly mapped the unregarded lives of Welsh small-town and country-dwellers. In Pugnacious Little Trolls, he combines the skill and quiet eloquence of his earlier work with confident experimentation, with stories set among the bird-bodied harpies of Central America, among the dog-headed Cynocephali of Central Asia, among humanity's remote descendants at the very end of the universe, and in the muddle of slag-heaps and job centres that H. G. Wells's Country of the Blind has become. In the three stories at the heart of the collection is Tanwen, idealistic and timid, embarking on her adult life in the shadow of global warming and English nationalism.

'Where is the Welsh short story going? Wherever Rob Mimpriss takes it.'

John O'Donoghue

'bathed in white fire in every sense... Borges would happily own them.'

Gee Williams

Lord Penmachno, Father of all the Quarrymen
by John Thomas c. 1875. National Library of Wales

Set in the North Wales slate quarries at the end of the nineteenth century, these stories represent a time of unparalleled cultural wealth and economic hardship. With a simplicity that belies their emotional impact, they depict the quarrymen united by humour and friendship against the oppression and upheaval of their time.

Richard Hughes Williams, also known as Dic Tryfan (1878-1919), was proclaimed as a Welsh Gorky in his day, but only now has a body of his work been translated. A liberal, a secularist and an internationalist, he yet depicts his compatriots with loyalty, with humour and with never-failing compassion.

'His sympathy was always turned to the homeless, the helpless, those defeated by life, and in his stories he always showed the comic side of failure as well as the tragic... If he is forgotten, as largely he has been, his influence on the literature of Wales will remain.'

E. Morgan Humphreys

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