



***ISRAEL  
ZANGWILL***

***JINNY  
THE CARRIER***

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# **Jinny the Carrier**

EAN 8596547312192

DigiCat, 2022

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# PREAMBLE

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I'll tell you who Time ambles withal.

“As You Like It.”

Once upon a time—but then it was more than once, it was, in fact, every Tuesday and Friday—Jinny the Carrier, of Blackwater Hall, Little Bradmarsh, went the round with her tilt-cart from that torpid Essex village on the Brad, through Long Bradmarsh (over the brick bridge) to worldly, bustling Chipstone, and thence home again through the series of droughty hamlets with public pumps that curved back—if one did not take the wrong turning at the Four Wantz Way—to her too aqueous birthplace: baiting her horse, Methusalem, at “The Black Sheep” in Chipstone like the other carters and wagoners, sporting a dog with a wicked eye and a smart collar, and even blowing a horn as if she had been the red-coated guard of the Chelmsford coach sweeping grandly to his goal down the High Street of Chipstone.

Do you question more precisely when this brazen female flourished? The answer may be given with the empty exactitude of science and scholarship. Her climacteric was to the globe at large the annus mirabilis of the Great Exhibition, when the lion and the lamb lay down together in Hyde Park in a crystal cage. But though the advent of the world-trumpeted Millennium could not wholly fail to percolate even to Little Bradmarsh, a more voracious



chronology, a history truer to local tradition, would date the climax of Jinny's unmaidenly career as "before the Flood."

Not, of course—as the mention of Methusalem might mislead you into thinking—the Flood which is still commemorated in toyshops and Babylonian tablets, and anent which German scholars miraculously contrive to be dry; but the more momentous local Deluge when the Brad, perversely swollen, washed away cattle, mangold clamps, and the Holy Sabbath in one fell surge, leaving the odd wooden gable of Frog Farm looming above the waste of waters as nautically as Noah's Ark.

In those antediluvian days, and in that sequestered hundred, farm-horses were the ruling fauna and set the pace; the average of which Methusalem, with his "jub" or cross between a lazy trot and a funeral procession, did little to elevate. It was not till the pride of life brought a giddier motion that the Flood—but we anticipate both moral and story. Let us go rather at the Arcadian amble of the days before the Deluge, when the bicycle—even of the early giant order—had not yet arisen to terrorize the countryside with its rotiferous mobility, still less the motor-mammoth swirling through the leafy lanes in a dust-fog and smelling like a super-skunk, or the air-monster out-soaring and out-Sataning the broomsticked witch. It is true that Bundock, Her Majesty's postman, had once brought word of a big-bellied creature, like a bloated Easter-egg, hovering over the old maypole as if meditating to impale itself thereon, like a bladder on a stick. But normally not even the mail or a post-chaise divided the road with Master Bundock; while, as for the snorting steam-horse that bore off the young

Bradmarshians, once they had ventured as far as roaring railhead, it touched the postman's imagination no more than the thousand-ton sea-monsters with flapping membranes or cloud-spitting gullets that rapt them to the lands of barbarism and gold.

Blessèd Bundock, genial Mercury of those days before the Flood, if the rubbered wheel of the postdiluvian age might have better winged thy feet, yet thy susceptible eye—that rested all-embracingly on female gleaners—was never darkened by the sight of the soulless steel reaper, cropping close like a giant goose, and thou wast equally spared that mechanic flail-of-all-work that drones through the dog-days like a Brobdingnagian bumble-bee. For thine happier ear the cottages yet hummed with the last faint strains of the folk-song: unknown in thy sylvan perambulations that queer metallic parrot, hoarser even than the raucous reality, which now wakens and disenchants every sleepy hollow with echoes of the London music-hall.

Rural Essex was long the unchanging East, and there are still ploughmen who watch the airmen thunder by, then plunge into their prog again. The shepherds who pour their fleecy streams between its hedgerows are still as primitive as the herdsmen of Chaldea, and there are yokels who dangle sideways from their slow beasts as broodingly as the Bedouins of Palestine. Even to-day the spacious elm-bordered landscapes through which Jinny's cart rolled and her dog circumambiently darted, lie ignored of the picture postcard, and on the red spinal chimney-shaft of Frog Farm the doves settle with no air of perching for their photographs. Little Bradmarsh is still Little, still the most

reclusive village of all that delectable champaign; the Brad still glides between its willows unruffled by picnic parties and soothed rather than disturbed by rusty, ancient barges. But when Gran'fer Quarles first brought little Jinny to these plashy bottoms, the region it watered—not always with discretion—was unknown even to the gipsy caravans and strolling showmen, and quite outside the circuit of the patterers and chaunters who stumped the country singing or declaiming lampoons on the early Victoria; not a day's hard tramp from Seven Dials where they bought their ribald broadsheets, yet as remote as Arabia Felix.

# CHAPTER I

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### BUNDOCK ON HIS BEAT

He comes, the herald of a noisy world,  
With spattered boots.  
Cowper, "The Task."

## I

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It had rained that April more continuously than capriciously, but this morning April showed at last her fairer face. The sunshine held as yet no sense of heat, only the bracingness of a glad salt wave. Across the spacious blue of the Essex sky clouds floated and met and parted in a restful restlessness. The great valley swam in a blue sea of vapour. Men trod as on buoyant sunshine that bore them along. The buds were peeping out from every hedge and tree, the blackthorn was bursting into white, the whole world seemed like a child tiptoeing towards some delightful future. Primroses nestled in every hollow: the gorse lay golden on the commons. The little leaves of the trees seemed shy, scarcely grown familiar with the fluttering of the birds. All the misery, pain, and sadness had faded from creation like a bad dream: the stains and pollutions were washed out, leaving only the young clean beauty of the first day. It was a virgin planet, fresh from the hands of its Maker, trembling with morning dew—an earth that had never seen its own blossoming. And the pæan of all this peace and innocence throbbed exultingly in bird-music through all the great

landscape. Over the orchard of Frog Farm there were only two larks, but you would have thought a whole orchestra.

A blot against this background seemed the blood-red shirt of Caleb Flynt in that same orchard; a wild undulating piece of primeval woodland where plum-trees and pear-trees indeed flourished, but not more so than oaks and chestnuts, briars and brambles, or fairy mists of bluebells. The task of regenerating it had been annually postponed, but now that Caleb was no longer the Frog Farm “looker,” it formed, like his vegetable garden, his wheat patch, or his wife’s piggery, a pleasant pottering-ground. He worked without coat or smock, chastening the ranker grass while the dew was still on it—or in his own idiom, “while the dag was on the herb.” White-bearded and scythe-bearing, he suggested—although the beard was short and round and he wore a shapeless grey hat—a figure of Father Time, incarnadined from all his wars. But in sooth no creature breathed more at one with the earth’s mood that morning than this ancient “Peculiar,” whose parlour bore as its text of honour—in white letters on a lozenge of brown paper: “When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”

Quietness was, indeed, all around him in this morning freshness: the swish of the scythe, the murmurous lapse of shorn grass, the drone of insects, the cooing of pigeons from the cote, the elusive cry of the new-come cuckoo, seemed forms of silence rather than of sound. And his inner peace matched his outer, for, as his arms automatically wielded the scythe, his soul was actually in heaven—or at least in the New Jerusalem which, according to his wife’s novel Christadelphian creed, was to be let down from heaven for

the virtuous remnant of earth—and at no distant date! Not that he definitely believed in her descending city, though he felt a certain proprietary interest in it. “Oi don’t belong to Martha’s Church,” he reassured his brethren of the Peculiar faith, “but Oi belongs to she and she belongs to me.”

In this mutual belonging he felt himself the brake and Martha the spirited mare who could never stand still. No doubt her argument that we were here to learn and to move forward was plausible enough—how could he traverse it, he who had himself changed from Churchman to Peculiar? But her rider: “We don’t leave the doctrine, we carry it with us,” struck him as somewhat shifty. And her move from “Sprinkling” to “Total Immersion”—even if the submergence did in a sense include the sprinkling—was surely enough progression for one lifetime. He did not like “this gospel of gooin’ forrard”: an obstinate instinct warned him to hold back, though with an uneasy recognition that her ceaseless explorations of her capacious Bible—to him a sealed book—must naturally yield discoveries denied to his less saintly and altogether illiterate self. Discoveries indeed had not been spared him. Ever since she had joined those new-fangled Christadelphians—“Christy Dolphins” as he called them—she had abounded in texts as crushing as they were unfamiliar; and even the glib Biblical patter he had picked up from the Peculiars was shown to imply at bottom the new teaching. Curtain lectures are none the less tedious when they are theological, and after a course of many months—each with its twenty-eight to thirty-one nights—Caleb Flynt was grown wearisomely learned in the bold doctrine launched by the great John Thomas that “the Kingdom of

God on earth” actually meant on earth and must be brought about there and nowhere else, and that Immortality enjoyed except in one’s terrestrial body—however spiritualized—was as absurd a notion as that it was lavished indiscriminately upon Tom, Giles, and Jerry.

The worst of it was he could never be sure Martha was not in the right—she had certainly modified his belief in “Sprinkling”—and he fluttered around her “New Jerusalem” like a moth around a lighthouse. Had anybody given a penny for his thoughts as he stooped now over his scythe, the fortunate investor would have come into possession of “the street of pure gold, as it were transparent glass,” not to mention the sapphires and emeralds, the beryls and chrysolites and all the other shining swarms of precious stones catalogued in Revelation. If he had kept from her the rumour that had reached his own ears of such a treasure-city of glass actually arising in London at this very moment, it was not because he believed this was veritably her celestial city, but because it might possibly excite her credulity to the pitch of wishing to see it. And the thought of a journey was torture. Already Martha had dropped hints about the difficulties of “upbuilding” in the lack of local Christadelphians to institute a “Lightstand”: the wild dream of some day breaking bread in an “Ecclesia” in London had been adumbrated: it was possible the restless female mind even contemplated London itself as a place to be seen before one died.

But surely the New Jerusalem, if it descended at all, would—he felt—descend here, at Little Bradmarsh. A heaven that meant girding up one’s loins and wrenching out

one's roots was a very problematic paradise, for all the splendour with which his inward eye was now, despite himself, dazzled.



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From this jewelled Jerusalem Caleb was suddenly brought back to the breathing beauty of our imperfect earth, to pear-blossom and plum-blossom, to the sun-glinted shadows under his trees and the mellow tiles of his roof. The sound of his own name fell from on high—like the city of his daydream—accompanied by a great skirring of wings, and looking up dazedly, the pearly gates still shimmering, his eye followed the tarred side-wall of the farmhouse till, near the roof, it lit upon his wife's night-capped head protruded from the tiny diamond-paned casement that alone broke the sheer black surface of the wood.

A sense of the unusual quickened his pulses. It stole upon him, not mainly from Martha's face, which, despite its excited distension, wore—over wrinkles he never saw—the same russet complexion and was crowned by the same glory of unblanched brown hair that had gladdened his faithful eyes since the beginning of the century; but, more subtly and subconsciously, through the open lattice which framed this ever-enchanting vision. In the Flynt tradition, windows—restricted at best by the window tax still in force—were for light, not air. Had folks wanted air, they would have poked a hole in the wall; not built a section of it “of transparent glass.” People so much under the sky as Caleb and Martha Flynt had no need to invite colds by artificial



draughts. They were getting a change of air all day long. But their rooms—their small, low-ceiled rooms—were not thus vivified, even in their absence; the ground-floor windows were indeed immovable, and an immemorial mustiness made a sort of slum atmosphere in this spacious, sun-washed solitude. Hence Caleb's sense of a jar in his universe at the familiar, flat pattern of the wall dislocated into a third dimension by the out-flung casement: a prodigy which he was not surprised to find fluttering the dovecot, and which presaged, he felt, still vaster cataclysms. And to add to the auspices of change, he observed another piebald pigeon among his snowy flock.

"Yes, dear heart," he called up, disguising his uneasiness and shearing on.

Martha pointed a fateful finger towards the high-hedged, oozy path meandering beyond the orchard gate, and dividing the sown land from the pastures sloping to the Brad. "There's Bundock coming up the Green Lane!"

"Bundock?" gasped Caleb, the scythe stopping short. "You're a-dreamin'." That Brother Bundock, who had been prayed over for a decade by himself and every Peculiar in the vicinity, should at last have taken up his bed and walked, was too sudden a proof of their tenets, and the natural man blurted out his disbelief.

"But I see his red jacket," Martha protested, "his bag on his shoulder."

"Ow!" His tone was divided between relief and disappointment. "You mean Bundock's buoy-oy!" He drew out the word even longer than usual, and it rose even beyond the high pitch his Essex twang habitually gave to his

culminating phrases. "Whatever can Posty be doin' in these pa-arts?" he went on, with a new wonder.

"And the chace that squashy," said Martha, who from her coign of vantage could see the elderly figure labouring in the remoter windings, "he's sinking into it at every step."

"Ay, the mud's only hazeled over. Whatever brings the silly youth when the roads be in that state?"

"It'll be the Census again!" groaned Martha.

Caleb's brow gloomed. He feared Martha was right, and anything official must have to do with that terrible paper-filling which had at last by the aid of Jinny been, they had hoped, finally accomplished some weeks before. Ever since the first English census had been taken in the first year of the century, Martha had been expecting a plague to fall upon the people as it had upon the Israelites when King David numbered them. But although she had been disappointed, there was no doubt of the plague of the Census itself.

"Haps it's a letter for the shepherd," hazarded Caleb to comfort her.

"Who'd be writing Master Peartree a letter? He can't read."

"Noa!" he answered complacently, for his wife's learning seemed part of their mutual "belonging." The drawbacks of this vicarious erudition were, however, revealed by his next remark; for on Martha crying out that poor Bundock had sunk up to his knees, Caleb bade her be easy. "He won't be swallowed up like that minx Cora!"

But Martha's motherly heart was too agitated to recognize the Korah of her Biblical allusions—she vaguely

assumed it was some scarlet woman englutted in the slimy saltings of Caleb's birthplace. "Run and lead him into the right path," she exhorted.

But Caleb's brain was not one for quick reactions. Inured for nigh seventy years to a world in which nothing happened too suddenly, even thunderbolts giving reasonable notice and bogs getting boggier by due degrees, he stood dazedly, his hands paralysed on the nibs of his arrested scythe. "Happen the logs Oi put have sunk down!" he soliloquized slowly.

"If I wasn't in my nightgown I'd go myself," said Martha impatiently. "'Tis a lesson from the Lord not to lay abed."

"The Lord allows for rheumatics, dear heart," said Caleb soothingly.

"He'll be up to his neck, if you don't stir your stumps."

"Not he, Martha. Unless he stands on his head." Caleb meant this as a literal contribution to the discussion. There was no wilful topsy-turveydom. He was as unconscious of his own humour as of other people's.

"But he'll spoil his breeches anyways," retorted Martha with equal gravity. "And the Lord just sending his wife a new baby."

"Bundock's breeches be the Queen's," said Caleb reassuringly. But laying down his scythe, he began to move mazedly adown the orchard, and before the postman's mud-cased leggings had floundered many more rods, the veteran was sitting astride his stile, dangling his top-boots over a rotten-planked brook, and waving in his hairy, mahogany hand his vast red handkerchief like a danger signal.

"Ahoy, Posty!"

Bundock responded with a cheerful blast on his bugle. "Ahoy, Uncle Flynt!"

"Turn back. Don't, ye'll strike a bog-hole."

"I never go back!" cried the dauntless Bundock. And even as he spoke, his stature shrank till his bag rested on the ooze.

"The missus was afeared you'd spoil the Queen's breeches," said Caleb sympathetically. "Catch hold of yon crab-apple branch."

"Better spoil her breeches than be unfaithful to her uniform," said the slimy hero, struggling up as directed. "I've got a letter for you."

Caleb's flag fell into the brook and startled a water-rat. "A letter for us!"

He splashed into the water, still dazedly, to rescue his handkerchief, avoiding the plank as a superfluous preliminary to the wetting; and, standing statuesque in mid-stream, more like Father Neptune now than Father Time, he continued incredulously: "Who'd be sendin' us a letter?"

"That's not my business," cried Bundock sternly. He came on heroically, disregarding a posterior consciousness of damp clay, and picking his way along the grassy, squashy strip that was starred treacherously with peaceful daisies and buttercups, over-hung by wild apple-trees, and hedged from the fields on either hand by a tall, prickly tangle and congestion—as of a vegetable slum—in which gorse, holly, speedwell, mustard, and lily of the valley (still in green sheaths), strove for breathing space. At the edge of a palpable mudhole he paused perforce. Caleb, who, when he recovered from his daze at the news of the letter, had

advanced with dripping boots to meet him, was equally arrested at the opposite frontier, and the two men now faced each other across some fifteen feet of flowery ooze, two studies in red; Caleb, big-limbed and stolid, in his crimson shirt, and Bundock, dapper and peart, in his scarlet jacket.

The postman's face was lightly pockmarked, but found by females fascinating, especially under the quasi-military cap. Hairlessness was part of its open charm: his sun-tanned cheek kept him juvenile despite his half-century, and preserved from rust his consciousness of a worshipping womanhood. Caleb, on the contrary, was all hair, little bushes growing even out of his ears, and whiskers and beard and the silver-grey mop at his crown running into one another without frontiers—the “Nonconformist fringe” in a ragged edition.

“Sow sorry to give ye sow much ill-convenience,” he called apologetically. “Oi count,” he added, having had time for reflection, “one of our buoy-oys has written from furrin parts. And he wouldn't be knowing the weather here.”

“'Tain't any of your boys,” said Bundock crossly, “because it comes from London.”

“That's a pity. The missus'll get 'sterical when she hears it's for us, and it's cruel hard to disappoint her. There ain't nobody else as we want letters from. Can't you send it back?”

“Not if I can deliver it,” said Bundock stiffly.

“But ye can't—unless you chuck it over.”

The slave of duty shook his head. “I daren't risk the Queen's mail like that.”

“But it’s my letter.”

“Not yet, Uncle Flynt. When it reaches your hand it may be considered safely, legally, and constitutionally delivered. But, till then, ’tis the Queen’s letter, and don’t you forget it.”

Caleb scratched his head.

“If ’twas the Queen’s letter, she could read it,” he urged obstinately.

“And so she can,” rejoined Bundock. “She has the right to open any letter smelling of high treason, so to speak, and nobody can say her nay.”

“But my letter ain’t high treasony,” said Caleb indignantly. “And if Wictoria wants to read it, why God bless her, says Oi.”

Bundock sighed before the bovinity of the illiterate mind.

“The Queen has got better things to do than read every scribble her head’s stuck on to.”

“Happen Oi could ha’ retched it with a rake,” Caleb mused. “What a pity you ain’t got spladges, like when Oi was a buoy-oy, and gatherin’ pin-patches on the sands. And fine and fat they was too when ye got ’em on the pin!” His tongue clucked.

Bundock looked his contempt. “A pretty sight, Her Majesty’s uniform lumbering along like a winkle-picker!”

“Bide a bit then,” said Caleb, “and Oi’ll thrash through the hedge and work through agen in your rear.”

It was a chivalrous offer, for a deep ditch barred the way to the freshly ploughed land, and a tough and prickly chaos to the pasture land; but Bundock declined churlishly, if not unheroically, declaring there was a letter for Frog Cottage too. And when Caleb, recovering from this vindication of his

wife's prophesyings, offered to transmit it to the shepherd, "What guarantee have I," asked Bundock, "that it reaches him safely, legally, and constitutionally? Nay, nay, uncle, a man must do his own jobs."

"Then work through the bushes yourself. Don't, ye'll be fit to grow crops on."

"Lord, how I hate going round—circumbendibus!" groaned Bundock. "I might as well be driving a post-cart."

"There's a mort of worser things than gooin' round," said Caleb. "And Oi do be marvelling a young chap like you should mind a bit of extra leg-work, bein' as how ye've got naught else to do but to put one leg afore the 'tother."

"Indeed?" snapped Bundock, this ignorant summary of his duties aggravating the moist clayey consciousness that resided at the seat of Her Majesty's trousers.

"Ef ye won't keep to the high roads, you ought to git a hoss what can clear everything," Caleb went on to advise.

"And break my neck?"

"Posty always had a hoss when I was a cad."

"Or lay in the road with a broken back and Her Majesty's mail at the mercy of every tramp?" pursued Bundock. "No, no, one cripple in a family is enough."

Caleb looked pained. "You dedn't ought to talk o' your feyther like that. And him pinchin' hissself and maybe injurin' his spinal collar to keep you at school till you was a large buoy-oy!"



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Bundock's irritation at his Bœotian critic was suddenly diverted by the spectacle of a female figure bearing down upon him literally by leaps and bounds—it seemed as if the steeplechase method recommended by Caleb was already in action. The postman felt for his spectacles, discarded normally in the interests of manly fascination. "Lord!" he cried. "Has your missus joined the Jumpers?" Caleb turned his head, not unalarmed. With so skittish a theologian anything was possible. But his agitation subsided into a smile of admiration.

"She thinks of everything," he said.

The practical Martha was in fact advancing with an improvised leaping-pole that had already carried her neatly over the brook and would obviously bring Bundock over the boglet. But why—Caleb wondered—was she risking her "bettermost" skirt? His own mother, he remembered, had not hesitated to tuck up her petticoats when winkles had to be gathered. And why was Martha's hair massed in its black net cap with a Sunday stylishness?

"Morning, Mrs. Flynt," cried Bundock, becoming as genial as the weather. Females, even sexagenarian, so long as not utterly uncomely, turned him from an official into a man.

"Morning, Mr. Bundock!" Martha called back across the mudhole. "I hope your father's no worse!"

Bundock's brow clouded. Still harping on his father.

"He's not so active as you," he replied a bit testily.

"Thank the Lord!" said Caleb fervently. Then, colouring under Bundock's stare, "For the missus's legs," he explained.



And to cover his confusion he snatched the pole from her and hurled it towards Bundock, who had barely time to jump aside into a still squidgier patch. But in another instant the dauntless postman secured it, and with one brave bound—like Sir Walter Scott’s stag—had cleared the slimiest section, and his staggering, sliding form was safely locked in Caleb’s sanguineous shirt-sleeves. Safely but not contentedly, for at heart he was deeply piqued at this inglorious position of Her Majesty’s envoy; the dignified newsbearer, the beguiler of loneliness, the gossip welcomed alike in the kitchens of the great and the parlours of the humble. Morbidly conscious of his unpresentable rear, he kept carefully behind the couple, while Caleb explained the situation to Martha, breaking and blunting the news at one hammer-blow.

“There’s a letter for us! From Lunnon!”

Martha was wonderful. “What a piece! What a master!” he thought. One might live with a woman for half a century, yet never fathom her depths. Not a gasp, not a cry, not a sigh of vain yearning. Merely: “Then it’ll be from Cousin Caroline. When she went back to London at Michaelmas she promised to let us know if she reached home safe, and if your brother George was better.”

“Ay, ay!” he assented happily. “Oi’d disremembered Cousin Caroline.”

It was a merciful oblivion, for his Cockney cousin had come from Limehouse in August and stayed two months, protesting that it was impossible to bide a day in a place where there wasn’t a neighbour to speak to except a silly shepherd who was never at home; where water was scooped filthily from a green-scummy pond instead of

flowing naturally from a tap; where on moonless nights you could break your leg at your own doorstep; where frogs croaked and cocks crowed and pigeons moaned and foxes barked at the unholy hours; where disgusting vermin were nailed on the trees and where you broke out in itching blotches, which folks might ascribe to “harvesters,” but which were susceptible of a more domestic explanation. Moreover, Cousin Caroline had brought a profuse and uninvited progeny, whose unexpected appearance in Jinny’s cart, though vaguely comforting as recalling the days when the house resounded with child-life, was in truth at disturbing discord with the Quakerish calm into which Frog Farm had subsided after the flight of its teeming chicks. As Caleb came along now, convoying Bundock through the lush orchard grass, the echo of Cousin Caroline’s querulous voice rasped his brain and made him wish she had pretermitted her promise to write. As for his ailing brother George, information about whom she was probably sending, it was obvious that he was no worse, else one would assuredly have heard of his funeral. Had not George carefully let him know when he got married? Caroline was a Churchwoman—he remembered suddenly—she had compromised Frog Farm by eking out Parson Fallow’s miserable congregation. And now she had sent her letter just at a season to plague and muddy a worthy Dissenter.

“Sow sorry to give ye sow much ill-convenience, Mr. Bundock,” he repeated, as they reached the farmhouse.

## **IV**

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Frog Farm, before which Bundock stood fumbling in his bag, was—as its name implies—situated in a batrachian region, croakily cheerless under a sullen sky, a region revealed under the plough as ancient sedge-land, black with rotted flags and rushes. But the scene was redeemed at its worst by the misty magnificence of great spaces, whose gentle undulations could not counteract a sublime flatness; not to mention the beauty of the Brad gliding like the snake in the grass it sometimes proved. The pasture land behind the farmhouse and sloping softly down to the river—across which, protected by a dyke and drained by little black mills working turbine wheels, lay the still lower Long Bradmarsh—was the salvage of a swamp roughly provided with a few, far-parted drains by some pioneer squatter, content—on the higher ground where a farmhouse was possible—to fell and slice his own timber and bake his own tiles. At the topmost rim, on a road artificially raised to take its wagons to the higher ground or “Ridge” of the village, rose this farmhouse with its buildings, all dyked off from the converted marsh by a three-foot wall of trunk-fragments and uncouth stones, bordered by bushes. The house turned its back on the Brad, and had not even hind eyes to see it—another effect of the window tax—and had the rear of the house not been relieved by the quaint red chimney bisecting it, the blankness would have been unbearable. But if little of good could have been said of its architecture behind its back, and if even in front it ended abruptly at one extremity like a sheer cliff or a halved haystack, with one gable crying for another to make both ends meet, it was as a whole picturesque enough with all that charm of rough wood,

which still seems to keep its life-sap, and beside which your marble hall is a mere petrification. Weather-boarded and tarred, it faced you with a black beauty of its own, amid which its diamond-paned little lattices gleamed like an Ethiopian's eyes. In the foreground, haystacks, cornricks, and strawstacks gave grace and colour, fusing with the spacious landscape as naturally as the barns and byres and storehouses, the troughs and stables and cart-sheds and the mellow, immemorial dung.

But what surprised the stranger more than its lop-sidedness was the duplication of its front door, for there were two little doors, with twin sills and latches. It had, in fact, been partitioned to allow a couple of rooms to the shepherd-cowman, when that lone widower's cottage was needed for an extra horseman. Master Peartree's new home became known as Frog Cottage. The property was what was here called an "off-hand farm," the owner being "in parts," or engaged in other enterprises, and for more than a generation Caleb Flynt had lived there as "looker" to old Farmer Gale, the cute Cornish invader who had discovered the fatness of the oozy soil, and who had been glad to install a son of it as a reconciling link between Little Bradmarsh and "the furriner." Caleb belonged to that almost extinct species of managers who can dispense with reading and writing, and his semi-absentee employer found his honesty as meticulous as his memory. While the Flynt nestlings were growing up, the parent birds had found the nest a tight fit, but with the gradual flight of the brood to every quarter of the compass, the old pair had receded into its snugger recesses—living mainly by the kitchen fire under

the hanging hams. Thus when last year Farmer Gale's son, succeeding to the property and foolishly desiring a more scientific and literate bailiff, delicately intimated that having bought all the adjoining land, he had been compelled to acquire therewith the rival looker, the old Flynts were glad enough to be allowed for a small rent the life-use of the farmhouse and the bits of waste land around it, subject to their providing living room for old Master Peartree, who was to pasture his flock of sheep and a few kine in the near meadows. Martha, indeed, always maintained that Caleb had made a bad bargain with the new master—did not the whole neighbourhood pronounce the young widower a skinflint?—but Caleb, who had magisterially negotiated with the new bailiff the swapping of his wood-ashes for straw for her pet pig, Maria, limited his discussions with her to theology. “When one talks law and high business,” he maintained, “we must go back to the days afore Eve was dug out of Adam.”

## V

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Bundock, restored to his superiority by the deprecatory expectancy of the old couple, observed graciously that there was no need to apologize: anybody was liable to have a letter. Indeed, he added generously, with nine boys dotted about the world, Frog Farm might have been far more troublesome.

“Eleven, Mr. Bundock,” corrected Martha with a quiver in her voice.

“I don’t reckon the dead and buried, Mrs. Flynt. They don’t write—not even to the dead-letter office.” He cut short a chuckle, remembering this was no laughing matter.

“And the other nine might as well be dead for all the letters you bring me,” Martha retorted bitterly.

“No news is good news, dear heart,” Caleb put in, as though to shield the postman. He was not so sure now that this unfortunate letter had not disturbed her slowly won resignation. “We’ve always yearned of anything unpleasant—like when Daniel married the Kaffir lady.”

“That was Christopher,” said Martha.

“Ow, ay, Christopher. ’Tis a wonder he could take to a thick-lipped lady. Oi couldn’t fancy a black-skinned woman, even if she was the Queen of Sheba. Oi shook hands with one once, though, and it felt soft. They rub theirselves with oil to keep theirselves lithe.”

Martha replied only with a sigh. The Kaffir lady, for all her coloured and heathen horror, at least supplied a nucleus for visualization, whereas all her other stalwart sons, together with one married daughter, had vanished into the four corners of the Empire—building it up with an unconsciousness mightier than the sword—and only the children who had died young—two girls and a boy—remained securely hers, fixed against the flux of life and adventure. Occasionally indeed an indirect rumour of her live sons’ doings came to her, but correspondence was not the habit of those days when even amid the wealthier classes a boy might go out to India and his safe arrival remain unknown for a semestrium or more. The foreign postage, too, was no inconsiderable check to the literary