

## OPEN SESAME.

Interested strangers who tried to talk to Mr. Trembath about the West Country were apt to be disappointed because, although he had many memories, he found it difficult at the moment to get hold of the proper end. If you happen to be on Trevenen Quay towards the end of September you may see fishermen home from the North Sea groping in the hold of a lugger for the tail of a herring net. When found it is pulled out, not in yards, but in miles. So with Mr. Trembath's memories. A chance word more often than not apparently irrelevant, put the thread into his hand, and you found it just as well to sit down while the grey man in a toneless voice reeled you off a whole warp of his life. Only—to pursue the simile—in his case you had not only the net but all the fish as well; bright and curious, so vivid and explicit that if you had any imagination you tasted the brine on your lips, and saw the little cows over the ash-tops climbing the flank of Carn Leskys. Like the ancient mariner, Mr. Trembath found relief rather than pleasure in telling his reminiscences; indeed, it is probable that he craved forgetfulness. They did their best in

Packer's Rents to make him forget, but an inheritance of six centuries is perhaps not the best preparation for a countryman coming to live in London. The traditions of six hundred years, and the flower soft though ineffaceable impressions of sixty others by moor and sea tend to use up a man's acquisitive powers, so that the facts of to-day, however striking, are not properly assimilated, and are always novel.

Thus, after five years, Mr. Trembath still talked about the wonderful things they did in London Churchtown. If he had been capable of expressing himself clearly, or even of retaining a definite idea in his nebulous mind, he would have told you that the most surprising things in London were the milk and the children. He never found fault with the milk; it was just too perplexing for that. Mr. Trembath took in the milk because Mable Elsie, his daughter-in-law, found his invincible innocence a convenient barrier to importunate creditors. Every day when the milk had been thrown from the measure into the jug with that masterly "plop" which only the London milkman can achieve, Mr. Trembath peered into the ostentatiously foaming fluid and muttered "Well well," much as if he had seen a cat with wings. Every day he meant to look for the machinery by which the milk was made, but forgot in the fresh wonder of its appearance. He never got so far as criticism, partly from courtesy, partly because the milkman was gone before he reached the verbal stage of his meditations. The one thing that would have startled him into speech was the information that the milk came from real

cows.

The children, and there were a great many children in Packer's Rents, affected him differently. Besides wonder he had an uncomfortable feeling of responsibility about them. He never could get rid of the idea that "somebody ought to be told;" and might often have been seen lifting up a baby out of the gutter or stooping to wipe a small nose with his red pocket-handkerchief. He had come to believe that they were human children because Mabel Elsie shamelessly discussed their incidence with her friend Mrs. Ellis in his hearing. In spite of his general haziness he remembered to be glad that he had no grandchildren in Packer's Rents, and frequently said so aloud, with embarrassing disregard for Mabel Elsie's presence.

Mr. Trembath never quarrelled with his daughter-in-law. She made him wonder, but not more than when fourteen years ago his son brought her home with her voice and her clothes to Rosewithan. Most personal matters, things to be glad or sorry about, were so far off now that Mr. Trembath had ceased to grieve over the relationship. He sometimes addressed her as "my dear," and then would pull up short with a pathetic look of non-recognition. Could this be the woman his son had chosen for bed and board? The incredible idea caused him to forget his manners, and, staring at Mabel Elsie, to observe aloud in a mildly deprecating voice:

"Well, what a woman, eh?"

Then Mabel Elsie would throw back her head and scream with laughter.

“Just like the green woodpeckers down to Rosewithan, my dear,” he would say, and go on to discuss a matter which had long troubled his conscience. Years ago, tempted by the green and scarlet, he had shot a woodpecker—here he would illustrate “and a good shot it was, my dear”—in the mating season. The bird had built in one of the elms which stood in front of his door, and ever afterwards the round black hole haunted him like an empty eye-socket in which he himself had quenched the fire of life. Then Mabel Elsie would laugh again more loudly, whereat Mr. Trembath would shrink and painfully try to show her how the women laughed down to Rosewithan. But Mabel Elsie only called him a “silly ole man” for his pains.

For Mr. Trembath’s daughter-in-law had a proper sense of practical benefits, and was not easily wounded. A weak minded old gentleman whose only interest in his life annuity was to sign the quarterly cheques, was worth indulging in his conversation. When Mr. Trembath’s only son migrated to London he acquired habits, including Mabel Elsie, which did not make for material prosperity. Love of the land was not enough to make life worth while to his mother after he had left her roof and she presently died, if not of a broken heart, at least in a moral vacuum. For a time Mr. Trembath tried to forget his loneliness in his farm, but dairy farming without a mistress is a rather forlorn industry. At last the craven letters of his son who daily sank lower under the circumstances of his choice, confirmed Mr. Trembath in his disastrous

opinion that he ought to leave Rosewithan to "see what he could do for John." So he came to London, but only in time to learn that the only thing he could do for John was to bury him. Having dropped the lease which his ancestors had held under the same landlords for six hundred years, Mr. Trembath remained in London to look after John's wife.

Mabel Elsie would have put it the other way, and indeed, she was eminently able to take care of herself. She certainly managed Mr. Trembath's income. Money so easily come by was naturally not handled in a narrow spirit of economy; hence the friendship of Mrs. Ellis and others; for the less recreative consideration of daily bread, as also for appearances, Mabel Elsie worked in a box factory. On the fluctuating margin of these economies, and to enable him to sign the quarterly cheques, Mr. Trembath was badly fed, worse clad, and allowed to do pretty much as he liked.

What he liked was usually not inconvenient to the general disorder of Packer's Rents. But with the progressive clouding of his mind to the immediate present and recent past, Mr. Trembath's memories of Rosewithan became clearer though less coherently related. This would not have mattered if he had been able to indulge his fancies at will, but they were rather thrust upon him like the gift of prophecy, and you never knew when a careless word would set him going. Sometimes, too, the urgency of his recollections and his inability to place them in point of time, drove him to action. He would get up very early in the morning and disturb the house looking for

his gaiters, because in the night there had been borne in upon him the pressing necessity to cut furze. The spectacle of a tall, thin old man with a vacant eye stalking down Tarbuck Street armed with a furze hook naturally caused people to intimate to Mabel Elsie that she ought to take more care of her father-in-law in the interests of the general public.

Mr. Trembath also suffered from the obsession of market day. Packer's Rents came to spending Thursday between the doorstep and sharing pints on the off chance of Mr. Trembath being run in. Greengrocers were apt to misunderstand his motives in selecting samples of their wares "to show to friend Trevorrow," and he once came perilously near horse-stealing. Loitering in the neighbourhood of the "Duke of York" he recognised his own horse and gig standing at the street corner. A clock striking five warned him that it was time to be driving home to Rosewithan. He crossed the road, and giving twopence to the boy who held the horse, patted him on the head, bade him be a good lad, and was preparing to climb into the gig when it's owner came out of the "Duke of York." This man failed to appreciate Mr. Trembath's courteous offer of a lift, and was for haling him to the police station. Luckily Bill Ellis was attracted by the little crowd, and with difficulty set matters right by explaining that Mr. Trembath was "a bit barmy."

Mr. Trembath was indebted to Bill in more ways than one, for it was through little Elfred Ellis that he came to grips with his memory, and made smooth his way to the Rosewithan

of his dreams. As Blondel to the Captive Richard, Elfred revealed his proper self by whistling "We wont go home till morning." That belonged to Rosewithan sure enough ; how and why Mr. Trembath could not at first remember. He saw something in Elfred's face which reminded, but with observation, escaped him. When the teasing recollection at last found words Mr. Trembath gripped Elfred by the arm and said, somewhat testily for him :—

"Yes, yes, that was the tune, but he didn't whistle it ; he played it on some sort of instrument ; it was a—no" he loosed his hold and shook his head ; "you must excuse me, but I can't remember." Nor did Mr. Trembath appreciate the ironical fact that it was John's perseverance in the spirit of the song which brought him to an early grave and himself to Packer's Rents.

Elfred for his part was attracted by the old man's courtly gravity so different from anything in Packer's Rents ; the discovery that, like all men of his native place, Mr. Trembath could play marbles cemented their friendship and freshly vindicated Mabel Elsie's opinion that her father-in-law was "a silly ole man."

Thus Elfred became a link between the past and the present. Mr. Trembath talked to him familiarly about Rosewithan affairs, Sally's calf and the relative merits of Tango and Spot as hunting dogs, and Elfred remembered ; so that the old man and the little child reached a common ground in the forgetfulness of the one, the ignorance of the other of the

distance in time and place. Very naturally it happened one morning that Mr. Trembath took Elfred by the hand and proposed that they should go and look for bull gurnards in the pullans. Elfred thought they were a long time getting to the sea, but kept implicit faith in Mr. Trembath until his aimless conduct at a crossing attracted the notice of a policeman. Then the youngster began to howl dismally, though it was from him rather than his elder that the man in blue discovered whence they came.

When the two, Elfred still blubbering, appeared at the corner of Packer's Rents, Mrs. Ellis was in the act of telling how much she gave for Elfred's button boots to a group of sympathisers who speculated exactly how long Bill would get for bashing her when he learned that his offspring was missing. It was the sudden change in her voice from woe to piercing anger which caused the others to turn their heads. In a moment Elfred was being shaken to pieces. Whenever Mrs. Ellis paused for breath a supporter yelled in the boy's ear what he would get supposing he were her child. Until Mrs. Ellis in a dangerously quiet voice reminded all and sundry that she owned a monopoly in Elfred. The little group already cheated of a sensation trailed away sniffing their sentiments.

Then Mrs. Ellis turned her attention to Mr. Trembath, who was patiently trying to make out what all the noise was about. As a result of her communicated views about himself, his appearance, his family and his family's failings, Mabel Elsie and Mrs. Ellis did not speak for several weeks, and Mr.



Trembath and Alfred were deprived of each other's society.

The approach of August Monday however, mended all that. After five reconciliatory jugs contributing to the decision that Hampstead and Greenwich were both played out, Mr. Trembath was told that if he "kep out of mischief and didn't cause no more rows" he should be taken to the Crystal Palace. Mr. Trembath was moved, but with an emotion more pressing than gratitude.

"Yes, my dear," he said, nodding. "Now I'll tell you about that. If you'll look upon the left hand side of the cove just above the boulders you'll see a square block of granite all finished off beautifully. That was made for the pedestal of an obelisk or monument, if you will, weighing eighteen tons and taken out of the Rosewithan Quarry to be sent to the Great Exhibition of '51. The obelisk was sent, but the pedestal never followed because old Cap'n Hosken who leased the quarry went scat."

"Oh, chuck it!" cried Mabel Elsie. "Who wants to hear your mouldy stories."

"But my dear," said Mr. Trembath patiently, "this is important, because it was the only time I ever went to law with any man. Cap'n Hosken had hired horses of me, and seeing that his affairs were in the Court I thought it only just to put forward my claim. They awarded me—"

"For Gawd's sake," said Mabel Elsie in desperation, "go along to the corner for a quart and don't muddle your silly ole 'ead with drinking out of the jug."

This was Mabel Elsie favourite joke, and invariably recalled her father-in-law to his dignity.

"You know, my dear," he said, "we are all Rechabites down to Rosewithan and don't belong to touch anything except perhaps a little sloe or blackberry wine hot and with sugar, at Christmas time. That is good for the system and cheerful as well."

Mr. Trembath was infected with the excitement of August Monday, though he had a very hazy notion of what was going forward. Long before Mabel Elsie had finished curling her hair he had shaved and brushed his clothes, and stood in everybody's way consulting his watch. Though he did not realise that he paid the score, he still was persuaded that he was in command of the party. Bill Ellis good humouredly undertook to keep the old man out of mischief, leaving his wife and Mabel Elsie free to celebrate or to quarrel as their fancy led them. Bill, who perfectly recognised the distance between himself and Mr. Trembath, regarded him vaguely as a thing which might be broken; he always addressed him as "Sir," and with the extraordinary gestures and grimaces which every Englishman knows are necessary to reach the intelligence of the foreigner.

Mr. Trembath caused some trouble in the train by insisting that they had passed Exeter and must presently come to the sea; but on the whole behaved tolerably well. At the Palace, however, he became a nuisance. Misled by certain objects he remembered, or thought he remembered, from '51 he

wanted to act as showman, though, as Mabel Elsie said, she had'nt come to see things or to be preached to, but to enjoy herself; which apparently meant laughing very loud without visible reason, and taking varied refreshments with the still more varied acquaintances of half an hour. Bill Ellis as a distinct personality grew vaguer and vaguer, and finally was absorbed into a beery crowd. To the relief of the women Mr. Trembath actually did find the obelisk and asked nothing better than to be left beside it. Here he sat with the pathetic air of an unaccustomed traveller clinging to his luggage, but with something of proprietorship as well. Quite a number of people were interested in the dignified old man, and went away persuaded that he was an unusually affable official told off for the special convenience of visitors.

Sitting half asleep under the great stone Mr. Trembath dreamed vivid but incoherent pictures of the valley when, with a jerk, they fell into relation like the pieces of glass in a kaleidoscope. Somewhere out of sight someone was haltingly playing a familiar air as if of the upper notes of a harmonium. It was the one emotional touch wanting, bringing everything into focus, yet Mr. Trembath could not place the sound either in time or character. It was familiar, yet so familiar that he felt he had not taken due note of it at the time, as a man may be at a loss when suddenly asked the colour of his friend's eyes. Then other noises intervened, and the painfully groped for memory was lost. Yet the germ of it must have remained, for in the brutal rush for the station, something glittering on a

stall caught Mr. Trembath's eye. He hesitated, felt in his pocket, but was swept away. Bill Ellis, who had emerged from the crowd morally and physically the least happy version of himself, was clamouring for a policeman; not, as he carefully explained, because he bore any ill-will to the force, but because he felt an urgent desire to confide in one particular member, and resented his absence.

During the journey home Mr. Trembath was quiet, but with so shining a face that Mabel Elsie and Mrs. Ellis exchanged uneasy glances, and the former cautiously questioned him:

“ Well, father, enjoyed yourself ? ”

His answer, all about heather, was not illuminating, and Mabel Elsie cut him short with “ Garn you silly 'ole man ” in a tone of great relief.

Mr. Trembath had found out what he wanted, and with a definite need he grew very cunning. Mabel Elsie held that he was not fit to be trusted with pocket money, and his opportunity seemed a long while coming, but one Saturday evening he found sixpence on the corner of the dresser. Too instinctively honest to justify himself with the argument that it was his own money, he pounced upon it without hesitation. A theft so artless was certain to be discovered, but Mabel Elsie forgot her anger before this glaring vindication of her apparent harshness. She made the most of her opportunity, and called in witnesses to prove that nobody but Mr. Trembath had access to the coin, but for once the old man turned stubborn.

Though he did not deny the accusation he would neither produce the sixpence, nor say what he had done with it. It was a fine moment for his daughter-in-law, and won her floods of sympathy.

She soon had genuine cause for anxiety, for Mr. Trembath's health began rapidly to decline. He seemed very contented, but kept his own room and refused society. As Mabel Elsie confided to Mrs. Ellis over a quart of bitter, he could not live for ever, and with him the annuity ended. Not that she minded that, for she was prepared to swear before any Court in the land that she never saved a penny out of her father-in-law—which was perfectly true—let alone his pilfering habits; but there was the funeral to be considered. If Mr. Trembath died between two quarter days, when the one cheque was well disposed of on his behalf, the next would never be paid. That she understood, was the iniquitous rule; and she left it to Mrs. Ellis' judgment how awkward it would be for her to have to bury him at her own expense.

"Thanks; if its me you're meaning," said Mrs. Ellis bitterly; "I'm sure I've no wish to be beholden to *anybody* for what the Doctor orders me; and I'm not one to be over fond of a glass but the spirit in which it is offered, Misses Trim-bath." Mabel Elsie hastened to assure her, to the extent of another jug, that nothing of the sort was implied, but that she trusted she knew her duty better than to allow Packer's Rents an opening for criticism when her father-in-law was taken. Ultimately Mrs. Ellis was dissolved to a correct appreciation

of Mabel Elsie's grievance.

"The mean ole scut to go and take to 'is bed after all you done for 'im," she said, and assured her hostess that let her hear any nasty talk among the neighbours she would have a word to say in the matter.

With the dismal foresight of their class the neighbours discussed Mr. Trembath's death as a fact accomplished. Packer's Rents was not superstitious, but the presence of a man who already might be considered dead aroused a morbid interest which presently became whispering.

There were the noises. One hinted, another swore that while Mabel Elsie was at the box factory things went on in number seventeen which could not be explained on any human grounds. Mrs. McGrath was frankly of the opinion that Mr. Trembath had celestial visions, and announced her fervent desire to visit his chamber on behalf of her daughter three years in Purgatory. For some time consideration for Mabel Elsie kept the whispering under a forcing pot, as it were; until the tales engendered were too horrible, and heads began to shake. Finally Mrs. Ellis out with it and declared that while she had a tongue in her head no neighbour of hers should have her character taken away, and tearfully made her way to Mabel Elsie's door. Mabel Elsie took it the wrong way.

A pack of scandal mongering hussies. Hadn't her father-in-law all that a man could want, and didn't she hope she might drop dead where she stood if she had ever touched a penny of his dirty money beyond what was her lawful due from

a troublesome lodger? Father-in-law or no father-in-law, she should like to know which among them would have refrained from prosecuting when the very change out of their Saturday's shopping was stolen from the dresser? It was time folks looked nearer home, and talking of that, how could Mrs. Ellis afford a new sofa out of Bill's wages and him always at the corner?

"And I'm sure I never breathed a word," panted Mrs. Ellis, "and if you ask me its more a matter for the parson than the police"; and a sympathetic murmur went up about the judgment of God. All this took place in the passage down stairs, and in the midst of it came a thin sound from Mr. Trembath's bedroom. The women drew together; but all agreed that though they were sorry for Mabel Elsie it couldn't have happened at a better moment. Mabel Elsie's jaw dropped, and she turned white and red.

One suggested that it was like a child singing, though Mrs. McGrath, as the mother of seven, firmly asserted that no earthly babe could make a noise like that. She was for going upstairs, but Bill Ellis happened to come in the nick of time.

"W'y its a 'cordion!" he cried. "Listen, the ole juggins is tryin' to play 'We wont go 'ome till mornin'";" and with uplifted finger he hoarsely sang the words. Some time was wasted in argument, and the sound brokenly ended. At last Bill took his courage in both hands, and with a great deal of unnecessary noise ascended the stairs. But when he reached Mr. Trembath's room he found the grey man lying dead,

clasping in his hand a sixpenny mouth organ. From his peaceful expression it may be surmised that the morning had come.

CHARLES MARRIOTT.