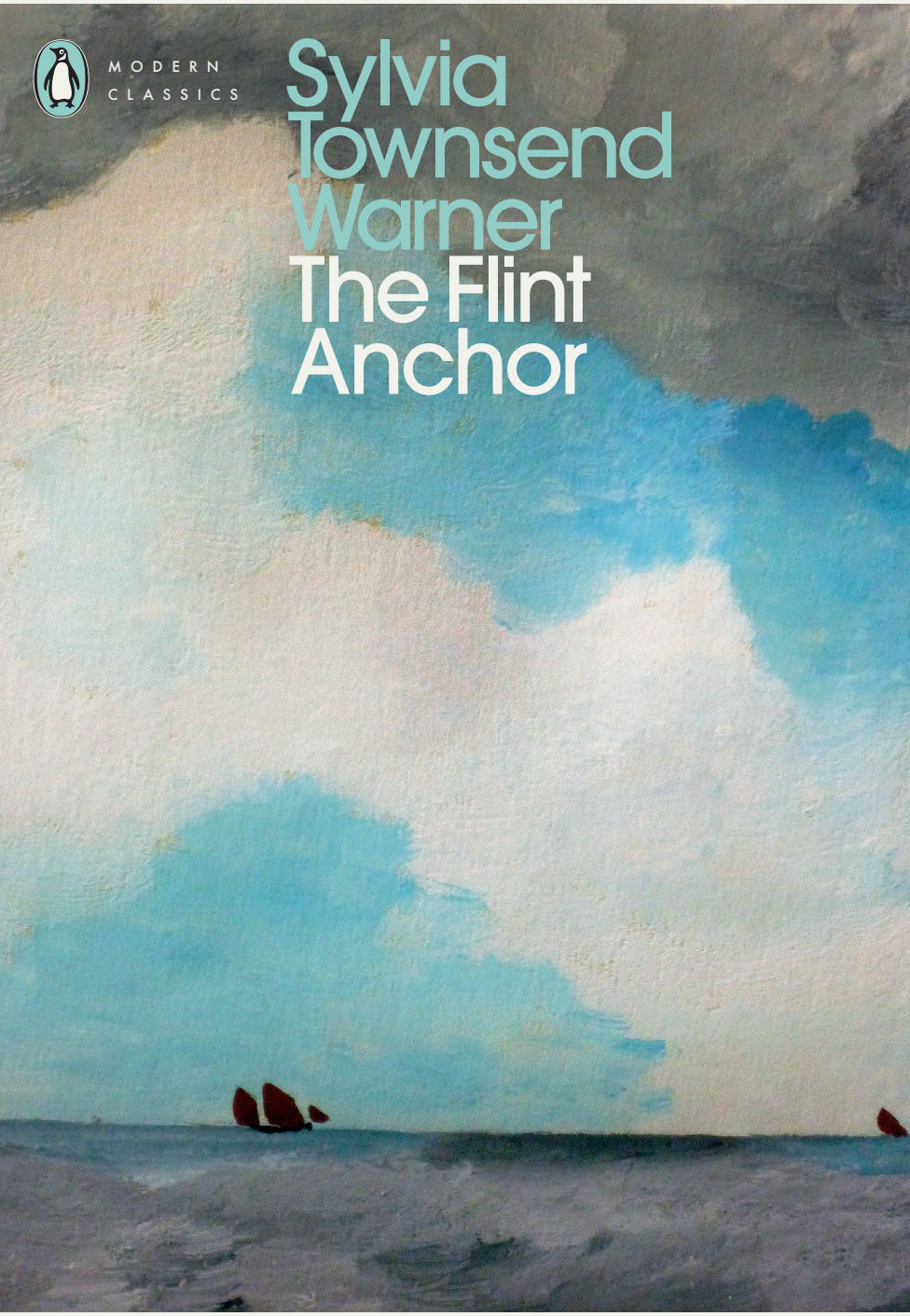
MODERN
CLASSICS
Sylvia
Townsend
Warner
The Flint
Anchor

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS

The Flint Anchor

Sylvia Townsend Warner was born in Harrow on the Hill in 1893. A home-schooled only child, she was musically gifted and initially planned to study composition in Vienna, but on the outbreak of the First World War she instead moved to London and worked in a munitions factory. After the war, she embarked on a career as a musicologist, specializing in Tudor church music. Through her work she met the much older musician Percy Buck, with whom she had a secret relationship for seventeen years. She began writing poetry in the early 1920s, and her first novel, *Lolly Willowes*, appeared in 1926. It was a great success, though she herself was dismayed that readers failed to see beyond the novel's surface: 'I felt as though I had tried to make a sword, only to be told what a pretty pattern there was on the blade', she wrote to a friend. In 1930 she moved to a village in Dorset, where she fell in love with the poet Valentine Ackland, who would become her lifelong partner. Ardently left-wing, the two women became active in the Communist Party, and in 1936 they travelled to Barcelona to work for the Red Cross during the Spanish Civil War. They spent most of the rest of their lives settled in a house on the river at Frome Vauchurch in Dorset.

Warner's subsequent novels, written from the 1920s to 1950s, include *Mr Fortune's Maggot*, *The True Heart*, *Summer Will Show*, *After the Death of Don Juan*, *The Corner That Held Them* and *The Flint Anchor*. She also wrote poetry, biography, short stories and anti-fascist articles, and translated Proust's essays. She died at home in Dorset in 1978.

Sylvia Townsend Warner in Penguin Modern Classics

Lolly Willowes
Mr Fortune's Maggot
The True Heart
Summer Will Show
After the Death of Don Juan
The Corner That Held Them
The Flint Anchor

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

The Flint Anchor

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To Anne Parish

This Tablet

(it is a brass one, large and showy)

was erected in memory of
JOHN BARNARD
son of Joseph Barnard
of this Parish,
born 20th February, 1790, died 23rd December 1863.
Deeply conscientious in the performance of every Christian and social duty, he was a devoted husband and father, an example of industry, enterprise, and benevolence to his native town, and for seventy years a regular worshipper in this Church.

'In life beloved, in death lamented.'

Loseby parish church is in the diocese of Norwich. The county guidebook remarks that it is notable for its flintwork, and well worth a visit. During the years when John Barnard knew it, it was notable for its funerals. As saints get a name for particular miracles, churches become renowned for particular functions, and people would come from miles away whenever there was going to be an outstanding funeral at Loseby: a shipwreck, a deathbed repentance, or the father of a large family. There are still people in Loseby, in Old Loseby, that is, of the narrow streets and flights of cobble steps twisting down to the harbour, who remember hearing about the funeral of the unknown seaman, who was cast up on the frozen beach rigidly clasping a

copy of the Swedish New Testament. And they remember too, by hearsay, John Barnard's funeral, when the snow had to be shovelled out of the grave to make room for the coffin. It had not the emotional intensity of the other, but it had a solemn quality of its own. Those who attended it knew, in some occult way, that it was the last of the real Loseby funerals, and that more than he was being buried with John Barnard.

Anchor House, where he lived, still stands, and is still called by its old name, though now it houses the Loseby Rural District Council. Visitors to the bracing East Coast resort of New Loseby recognise it as Georgian, and admire it accordingly. It is brick-built, with long narrow windows and stone coigns. Centred between the first-floor windows there is a representation of an anchor, made of cut flints embedded in the brickwork. The house is set back from the road, which gives it an air of repose and dignity, and the architect of the Rural District Council has emphasised this by fencing it with a row of little posts and chains swinging between them. At the time when John Barnard inherited Anchor House from his father, Joseph Barnard, its appearance was less pleasing. The forecourt was surrounded by a wall of dark flint, twelve feet high, surmounted by a criss-cross of iron spikes. The ironwork gates were spiked also, with bars so close set that a hand could not pass between them. These prison-like protections were put up by Joseph Barnard as a retort to the Jacobins in Paris, and as a deterrent to any Jacobins who might happen to be plotting in Loseby. Similar walls enclosed the garden at the back of the house, and a similar pair of gates closed the stable yard where the property ran out into Back Lane. Joseph Barnard was a man of independent spirit. He feared nothing but God. His fortifications were a manifesto of disapproval. They darkened the front rooms on the ground floor, and soured the garden; but he had allowed for this, and discounted it. One must be prepared to pay something for the expression of one's opinions.

The first Barnard had come to Loseby wheeling a barrow before him, which was loaded with nets of his own making. A generation later, there was a shed on the quayside, where a Barnard family mended nets and made lobster-pots, crans, and kegs. By the fourth generation, there was a thriving business that imported tar and hemp and fats from the Baltic, packed and exported herrings, and supplied ship's chandlery; and when Joseph Barnard married his second wife, he bought the house, and had the flintwork anchor set into it as a boast and commercial blazon. At the same time he laid down a cellar of port wine, for he intended to get more than daughters in his second match. One cannot manage a business without becoming literate, one cannot become literate without exposing oneself to the culture of one's day. Joseph Barnard read Burke on the Sublime, bought a Dutch canvas of Boors Carousing, installed Rumford grates, and sent his elder son to Harrow and Cambridge. The boy was nervous, slow in learning, and spoke with an accent. His schooldays were torment to him. At Cambridge, he suddenly bloomed into good looks and sensibility. He had a room of his own, he was treated like a gentleman, he was personally dear to his Maker. The college was Evangelical, and vibrated with prayer-meetings, experiences, and convictions of salvation; it was as though Jesus, detaching Himself from that awful and mysterious Trinity, had stepped forward in all the sweetness of flesh and blood to walk with John Barnard on the Gog Magog hills. In an amazement of gratitude at feeling so happy, he resolved to devote his life to some lofty purpose; perhaps he would take holy orders and convert the Jews, perhaps he would live in a cottage in Devonshire and write hymns. He was nerving himself for the interview in which, strengthened by divine aid, he would persuade his earthly father to leave the family business to Daniel, the younger son, when Joseph Barnard dropped dead in Loseby

High Street. Thankful that he had been withheld from causing his father pain, he went back to Loseby. But however difficult it might have been to persuade his father to leave the business to Daniel, it proved impossible to persuade Daniel to consider giving up his career in the Navy. Daniel had already served four years as a midshipman, he was confident of his lieutenancy and his only thought as a co-inheritor was a delighted astonishment at the amount of the family fortune, coupled with a conviction that as there was so much more money than they had supposed, all that need be done was to put a head clerk in charge.

From feeling that an intolerable burden had been cast upon him, John Barnard presently came to feel that he had been called in the nick of time. He was shocked to find that the business rested on such haphazard foundations (they were, in fact, those which it had grown up from). The father, who living had been so terrible and so venerable, reappeared as an object lesson against financial levity. Practically nothing was insured. Mr Powles, the family lawyer, was much impressed by his co-executor, so clear-headed, so painstaking, and so prudent. Daniel went to sea, John Barnard settled down in his father's place. He was well into his new life, sleeping in the best bedroom, reading Family Prayers, writing letters of good advice to Daniel, and enforcing a proper system of book-keeping in the business, when his twenty-first birthday rose up before him. Mr Powles asked what he proposed to do about it.

'Let it pass,' was the reply. 'It can only remind me that I am an orphan. Anything like a celebration would be painful to me.'

'The men will expect something, you know. A dinner, at least, and some speeches, and a tea-drinking for their wives.'

'They cannot expect me to make a speech while I am still wearing mourning for my father.'

'They expect to make speeches themselves. I happen to know that Job Ransom is rehearsing one already.'

'I am thinking of dismissing Ransom. I have found him in liquor more than once.'

'Don't dismiss him until he's drunk your health, at any rate. You don't want a hornet's nest round your ears. Touch one, touch all. You know what Loseby is like.'

John Barnard knew very well what Loseby was like. His knowledge dated from a foggy November evening, fifteen years before, when the captain of the press-gang was killed. A girl had lured him down to the beach (she knew what was coming, and had her own grievance to avenge, for the press-gang had taken her lover some months earlier). The Loseby boys had followed, barefoot and unseen, till she got him to where the freshet running out to sea made a quicksand. Then she leaped away with a yell of signal, and while he floundered in the quicksand the boys emerged from the fog and stoned him to death.

Sitting in the warm nursery with his bowl of bread and milk, he had heard the tumult, the voices hot with slaughter. 'They're mobbing a seal,' the nurse-maid told him. She was a Loseby girl, and in the secret.

Every one below the authorities was in the secret, and no one disclosed it. When the body was thrown back by the sea, and the Coroner's Court brought in a verdict of Murder by Persons Unknown, Loseby had its alibi. On the night of the uproar, the boys had found a seal on the beach, and were pelting it. Seals spoil the nets and rob men of their livelihood, and a stranded seal was always stoned. Daniel, a pet among the servants, had learned the true story, and told his brother, defying him to repeat it, or he, Daniel, would be whipped as never before for knowing and not telling Papa. From that hour, the elder brother had a trammelled conscience. It was his duty to tell, and he had not told.

At the coming of age dinner he made a speech, referring to his inadequacy to take his father's place, and announcing an intention to devote the rest of his life (he managed as only a young man can do to imply that there was not much left of it) to the improvement, moral and material, of his native town. Neither the lawyer nor the parson thought much of John Barnard's speech; the lawyer thought it impolitic, the clergyman considered that the morality of Loseby might well be left to those appointed by God and the Bishop to look after it. But his work-people clapped and cheered – not for what he said, but for how he looked while saying it. They had not realised till now what a handsome young man they had got. Under the stimulus of a public appearance, attention, applause, and a little wine, he was revealed as very handsome indeed, romantically handsome, with such glossy dark hair, such large bright eyes, and such well-made legs. Among Loseby fishermen it was taken as a matter of course that men should feel amorously towards a handsome young man. John Barnard on his twenty-first birthday was the image of a man's young man (women might feel that his forehead was too narrow and his nose too sharp); and Job Ransom, bellowing out his toast of 'Mr Barnard – bless his flesh!' summed up the mood of the occasion.

Not since leaving Cambridge had he felt such pleasurable emotions, and that night he seriously considered pulling down the wall, or, at any rate, removing the spikes. But the project remained a project. It was overlaid by other considerations, chief among them a danger from which no wall and no spikes could protect him. Try as he might, he could not evade noticing that the mothers of Loseby families were continually jostling their daughters against him. Then there were the maidservants. Though they did not directly menace his chastity, they exercised an oblique pressure against his bachelor quiet. He did not altogether trust his housekeeper to control them; if she

failed to do so, he would have to do something himself – whereas, if he took a wife, it would be her responsibility. *I am a wall, and my breasts like towers* . . . That was the voice of the church, declaring her wifely functions in The Song of Solomon. Casting about for a wall that would not be so exuberant, he remembered that he had two step-sisters, daughters of his father's first marriage. He did not know much about them, for his father had quarrelled with them; but he knew that Hannah was a spinster, and that Selina, deserted by her husband, was tantamount to a widow, and that they had very little money and lived together at Broadstairs. He invited them to Anchor House. They came, and his housekeeper left. A few months later, the husband of the tantamount widow turned up in Loseby, forced himself and a reconciliation on the fluttered Selina, and moved from the Half Moon Inn to Anchor House for what he said would be a week.

Six months later, he was still there, and John Barnard was lying awake night after night, trying to strengthen himself to turn them all out. It had to be all or none, for Hartley would not leave Selina, and Selina would not be parted from Hannah. The truth was, they were all very comfortable, and did not mean to go. Hannah and Selina saw that he was becoming restive. They countered by putting him into a rapid decline. Those bad nights, that nervous irritability, that fitful appetite, and those suddenly flushed cheeks – it was all too plain, it reminded them only too sharply of their dear and joint Aunt Gore, whose lungs would certainly have carried her off if a jaundice had not intervened. Hannah and Selina took increasing care of their step-brother. They made him flannel waistcoats, flannel nightcaps, and water-gruel, they gave him calves' foot jellies because meat would be too great a tax on his digestion, they allowed him nothing that might excite or exhaust him, while Hartley proffered lozenges and recommended a little, a very little Marsala,

because the vines grow on a volcanic soil. Having failed to get rid of them, John Barnard turned to the notion of departing himself. At no time had he intended to live much beyond thirty, so the prospect of dying rather sooner than he intended was only momentarily startling. Reconciled to an early death, and permanently underfed and over-muffled, he began to feel quite ill. Feeling ill, he began to find his step-sisters' attentions convenient, presently he was even grateful for them. Things were at this pass when a post-chaise drew up before Anchor House, the bell rang, and in came Daniel with a young woman on either arm. Daniel had just got married. One of the young women was his bride, the other was the bridesmaid, who was accompanying her on the wedding tour.

While Hannah and Selina were upstairs helping the young women to take off their wraps, and Hartley with the utmost readiness had consented to go to the kitchen to order a reviving supper, the brothers had a few words together.

'Isn't she a charmer, isn't she a sweet creature?' asked Daniel. 'I came on shore less than a fortnight ago, we met at a ball. One waltz – she waltzes divinely but the reel suits her best of all, she's Scotch, you know, Dumfriesshire – and there we were! Her father approved, her mother approved, and three days ago we were married. They're Presbyterian, so all we needed was a parlour. Goodness, John, how ill you look! Been overdoing it with the ledgers, I suppose. Have you ever seen such a picture of health, such a bloom? I expect she'll get fat later on, all Scotchwomen do. Her mother weighs fourteen stone and carries a bosom like Britannia on a figurehead. But I'd rather have her than those frights Hannah and Selina. What on earth are they doing here? And who's the seedy customer?'

'Hartley. Selina's husband.'

'I wish they weren't here. I don't want Beenie to think she's married into Rag Fair. She has a nice little fortune too. Mr Black

is shrewd, very shrewd. A property in Dumfriesshire. Well, well, Johnnie, I'm glad to see you again, even though you have filled the house with such odd beings. Whatever made you do it? I don't know what Beenie will make of it, I told her you were a handsome young man, brimful of sentiment, and living alone in bachelor meditation fancy-free. Are you fancy-free? If not, it don't agree with you, you know. You're not poxed, by the way?'

To hear such a thing spoken in his father's dining-parlour brought it home to John Barnard that the dining-parlour was in fact his, and that he was not getting the credit of it. Hannah, Selina, Hartley, Daniel, and probably those two young women upstairs, all slighted him and treated him as a nobody. He flushed, and straightened himself.

'Daniel, that's going too far. I won't have such talk in my house.'

'Oh, very well, I'm sorry I offended you. But I wish you'd tell me why they are here. I keep on asking you, and you always turn it off.'

'I invited Hannah and Selina to come and make their home with me. I have a great deal to do in the business, the Trading Acts give me a great deal of anxiety, I cannot be responsible for a household into the bargain. Besides, the maidservants were entertaining young men in the kitchen.'

'They always did,' said Daniel. 'They call them cousins.'

'Whatever they did in the past, what they do now is my responsibility. I felt it my duty to invite Hannah and Selina here. Ladies can manage these things better than we can, Daniel.'

'And did you invite Hartley to keep an eye on the stable-lad?'

'Hartley came uninvited. Selina should have repulsed him. But she was weak. As for Hannah, Hannah is short-sighted, she thinks too much of Selina's feelings and not enough of Selina's

real welfare. But I must say, Hannah is devoted to my health. She sat up for three nights when I had a quinsy.'

'You're in a devilish fix with them, I can see that. They'll stay here for ever, if you don't do something about it soon.'

'No!'

'They will, though.'

'But what can I do, Daniel? It's very difficult. You must see how difficult it is.'

'No difficulty at all. Marry, and set up a family. Get a pair of bawling twins, and you'll soon see Harriet and Hartley and Selina pack off. Marry, John! That's the answer. Marry Robina's bridesmaid, the girl that came with us. She's Scotch, too. She's an orphan, and lives with an old aunt near Peebles. Beenie will be delighted, and so will I.'

'But –'

'She'll get rid of them before a week's out. Here they come! Now, you look at her, and see if she won't do.'

The suggestion was barely decent, and ridiculous. But John Barnard went so far as to say, 'The one with blue eyes?'

'No, that's Beenie. T'other one.'

It was out of the question; but for all that, he felt a momentary regret that it was not the one with blue eyes. She was small, and slender, and ladylike. The other one had a great deal of colour, a great deal of bosom, a large wanton mouth, and no conversation. By the end of the evening, he was thinking of her very warmly. It is not conversation that one wants in a wife. Her name was Julia.

Julia Smith had more to say for herself when she was alone with Robina, but it was mostly to the tune that she would never marry an Englishman. The aunt who had brought her up, Mrs Maxwell of Phawhope, was second cousin once removed to Mrs Boswell of Auchinleck, and had many stories of Jamey B.'s coarse old Englishman, who wrote the dictionary and was

worse than a pig in a parlour. But this one, Robina explained, was something quite different: she pointed out his classical features, his interesting pallor. Julia merely granted the pallor, remarking that it was no wonder the man looked like a sprouted potato in a cellar, what else could be expected in such a house, cold as a jail, dark as a coal-pit, and everything so horridly formal except the fat man who tried to feel her leg.

'Marry him? Because you've married Daniel? Friendship goes far, Beenie, but not so far as that. I'd rather not marry at all than marry a man with two mothers and a father like a pug-dog. Yes, I know they are all step-sisters, but at that age, where's the difference? Two mothers telling him to mind his chest, and goggling Puggy pulling out his watch to see when it will be dinner-time.'

'They'd go off like the morning dew, once you set foot in the house. Whoever would think such a big strong girl as you would be afraid of marrying! But wait till he comes to see us. I've invited him. And he'll come.'

'He'll not come! His mothers won't let him. And he'd be loth to leave Puggy with the wine-cellar key.'

This conversation took place a fortnight later, when Daniel had rejoined his ship, and Robina was in country lodgings near Portsmouth with Julia keeping her company. Though the landlady couldn't cook, the lodgings were charming, with a bright fire in the grate, wedding trifles scattered about, and the ribbons sparkling on Robina's guitar. The two young women had never been so happy in their lives, eating boiled eggs for supper and wearing out their kid boots in scrambling walks. Laughing over past suitors, Geordie Biddle's anxiety about his buttons, Alexander Moir who fell into the cascade looking handsome as an angel, they were abashed when John Barnard came up the stairs. Business, he said, had brought him to Portsmouth. Business did not prevent him putting up at the inn and spending

three days in their company. But conversation was hard going. Robina could not be forever playing her guitar or asking what Daniel had been like as a little boy. Julia developed a spot on her chin, and was mortified by a suspicion that John Barnard's feet were smaller than her own. She sat on a low chair, looking like a turned-out pudding, and glancing from his boots to her slippers. To distract the eye from the spot on her chin she wore her ferronnière: a rust-coloured cairngorm set in gold and bound on her forehead by a ribbon. It was a fine large stone, but it did not make her face seem less fat, and as for countering the spot, it appeared on the contrary to be holding out an example to it. Conversation and the cairngorm drove Robina to suggest walking. It was December, the hollies glittered in the brakes, sheep moped on the frosty downs. John Barnard remembered how Daniel had arrived so unforeseenly with a young woman on either arm, one wearing a crimson pelisse and the other in bottlegreen with a fur muff and tippet. Now it was he who walked between them and supported them over the rough places, the tippet so sprightly, the crimson pelisse so pensive. The *Allegro* and the *Penseroso,* as in Milton. Daniel had asked him to be a brother to Robina, Robina had invited him, and both had insinuated that Julia also would be pleased to see him; but he did not really know why he was there. Soon he must go back; and on his return he would be welcomed to his own house, and given calves' foot jelly. Renunciation now, and shortly, death: it was the lot appointed him by an all-wise Creator, and he must not rebel at it.

'Oh, do look at that sheep! Isn't it exactly like Mr Frazer giving out the psalm?'

She was a Presbyterian, too. Another difficulty.

On the last day of his visit the weather changed. Rain drove them back from their afternoon walk. 'We can't have Mr Barnard catching cold,' Robina said. A bottle of port was fetched

from the inn, the landlady supplied a little saucepan, sugar, and a spicebox, and Robina brewed a bishop. Suddenly they became gay, intimate, intensely amusing. They sang The Merry, Merry Christchurch Bells, London's Burning, and Three Blind Mice. They played the paper game called Heads and Bodies, and Julia drew a sideways camel below John's classical head of Minerva. Finally, John and Julia pursued each other round a chair to the music of Robina's guitar. It was the little chair on which Julia had sat looking like a turned-out pudding, but one would never think it now. The saucepan was left too long on the hob, and scorched. Mrs Darby removed it uncomplainingly, remarking to Mr Darby in the back kitchen that we are only young once.

The next morning Robina turned green and was sick. She was sick again on the morning after, and the morning after that. She was with child.

She was eight months gone, unrecognisably majestic, her blue eyes starting from her face, her white throat distended, when she attended the wedding. John Barnard had not seen her for a couple of months. Her appearance terrified him. No amount of common sense, no degree of submission to the laws of God and of nature, could abate his horror. Was this what women were really like, was this what marriage created them into? He could not believe that this stately monstrosity had been expanded from Robina who played the guitar and brewed the bishop. And he would have to do it to Julia.

So far, all that he had had to do to Julia had proved much easier than he had dared expect. But now, the speed and smoothness of his courtship, the marriage settlements going through so satisfactorily, Aunt Maxwell's blessing, Julia's acceptance of the Church of England, the delightful sensation of buying clothes for himself and pearls for Julia, with everybody in such good humour because of the end of the fighting and Napoleon disposed of on the island of Elba, all this, that had been so

smiling, seemed positively sinister. It was the honey that gilds the wasp-trap, it was the broad leafage that conceals the serpent. He had not thought enough of what he was undertaking. Marriage is an arduous thing, and fraught with perils: if it were not so, the Church would not have made a sacrament of it. Even the ease with which Hannah, Selina, and Hartley had been despatched seemed ominous. Julia had said she would do it, and a couple of days later, it was done. When he enquired what methods she had employed, she laughed and told him that women have their own way of managing such things. No doubt of it, Julia had a strong character. Probably, it was stronger than Robina's, just as she was taller than Robina, and more robust. Yet she was not unwomanly; he could not have fallen in love with an unwomanly woman; and her methods, whatever they were, had not been quite all she supposed, for he had had to pay a considerable sum to Hartley. This reflection comforted him. All the same, he wished that he had thought more attentively about the state of matrimony, and he wished that he had someone older than himself, a father who partook also of the milder nature of a mother, to whom he could turn for advice, and he very nearly wished that he had not got to pluck that priceless jewel, a maidenhead, from Julia. Would it, or would it not, be made easier by going to Paris? – for Julia and he were going to Paris. He could not speak French.

Julia's French was perhaps not quite so good as she supposed; but it enabled her to buy gloves and laced handkerchiefs, and to be assured that she spoke it like a native. She and her cousin, Baby Logan, who supplied the obligatory female companionship, took to Paris like ducks to water. They adored the ices, they adored the Cossacks, they adored being splashed by the spray from the fountains. John Barnard was less impetuous. It was hard to assimilate a town so unlike Loseby or even Cambridge, and it perplexed his sense of justice that the city

which until a few months before had been the seat of iniquity, first worshipping the Goddess of Reason and then glorifying the Corsican Ogre, should look so totally unrepentant and so very prosperous. Yet after a night of love with Julia it was wonderfully pleasant to go riding in the Bois. He felt so well, the horse was so shiny, he knew himself handsome and desirable, and the avenue seemed to dapple him with approval. He consented readily enough when Julia said that they must revisit Paris in the spring.

This proved impossible. For one thing, Napoleon had escaped from Elba. For another, Julia was about to lie in. Baby Logan's sweetheart was killed at Quatre Bras, Geordie Biddle was mortally wounded at Waterloo, Napoleon was finally put down, the Allied Sovereigns met all over again to congratulate themselves, Britannia was Triumphant and Peace Restored, as it said on the mugs that sold in such quantities at Loseby Fair; but Mr and Mrs Barnard never revisited Paris. The first child was a boy, named Joseph. A year later, a girl was born, and named Euphemia, after Aunt Maxwell. Then came George, and after George, Susan. Both were remarkably promising infants, but later they dwindled, and were snuffed out by the whooping-cough. Then came Mary, followed by twin boys, Samuel and Julius. The next child, a boy, died at birth. After this, Julia gave birth to a fourth daughter, Ellen. She had intended to call this child, if a girl, Robina, but the baby's face was blemished with such a large port-wine stain that Robina was out of the question. Then came a daughter who lived just long enough to be christened Robina. The boy born after her was christened Wilberforce and survived. After that, there was nothing but a few miscarriages.

It was after Ellen that Julia took to a sofa and to Madeira. It was called keeping her strength up. Knowing how necessary it is for the mother of a family to keep her strength up, John Barnard thought the Madeira laudable rather than otherwise, an

aspect of the general vinosity of fruitful wives, twining like fruitful vines over the dwelling of the man whom the Lord has blessed with increase. He was more inclined to be critical about the sofa. A wife on a sofa can so easily give an impression of ill-health, whereas Julia's health was excellent. Dr Kitter said so, expatiating on the number of teeth she had retained. Teeth are useful, but there is not much consolation in them. Lying on her sofa, her powers of self-criticism increasingly clouded by Madeira, Julia cast a backward look towards her youth: towards Paris, towards the first years of her maternity, when little Joseph was so wonderful, and little Euphemia so amusing, and the current suckling at her breast so touchingly weak and dependent (after the first four babies, she ceased to think of them as weak or dependent – they were trampling tyrants); above all, to those airy few weeks in the lodgings near Portsmouth, before Robina began being sick. Now she was half as old again as she had been in the lodgings, and almost twice as heavy. Children die, teeth decay. Only weight accumulates and faithfully remains. It was a providence, after all, that her feet were large; if they had been as small as she then wished them, they could not have borne the matron Julia, she would not have been able to get off her sofa at all, not to meals, not to church, not to bed. Her pleasure in bed had outlasted her pleasure in maternity. Even now, there seemed to be wistful sparks of it about her, lurking somewhere inside her sheer bulk. 'Here, a sheer bulk, lies poor Tom Bo-ow-ling' . . . Lying on her sofa, lit by the summer sun and wrapped in a Paisley shawl (for as well as being perpetually fat she was almost perpetually cold), Julia sang the first line of Dibdin's ballad in a husky voice, and laughed at her poor little joke till tears ran down her cheeks; and after that, wept, touched by finding herself amusing. No one else in the house would have been amused.

Perhaps it was the wall, perhaps it was her husband, so

serious and so very sensitive – none of her children laughed at unexpected jokes. A joke had to be prepared, introduced, and sanctioned, before they could laugh at it. She sometimes thought it was a pity that the wall should be so very high, so high that even in the garden there was always a territory of shadow. From the day they left the nursery and came downstairs to begin lessons, and to be held responsible for their actions, and to remember their Creator in the days of their youth, the children came under the domination of the wall, and began to stammer, and to be dainty about their food, and to scream at night. After the deaths of George and Susan, who seemed in their coffins almost like deformed children, their heads being so much too large for their narrow bodies, the robust symmetry of their babyhood an incompatible memory, she had spoken out about the wall. Barnard replied that the wall could be pulled down, if she wished: its removal would give work to local men who needed it; but that to expect anything more than that would be idle. He, too, once out of babyhood, had begun to stammer, to scream at night, to be dainty, and peevish, and sullen. It was not the wall, but the children's common inheritance from Adam, and a particular inheritance from him, that brought about these changes in their children.

'But the wall was there then,' she said. 'You and Daniel grew up inside it.' He gave a sad shrug. The mention of Daniel brought Daniel before her eyes, romping with his children as though they were his cubs, and she said no more about the wall.

If she had spoken a few years sooner, she would have met a warmer response. In the early 1820s, John Barnard had half a mind to pull down the wall, which had become odious to him, both for what it contained and for what it kept out. The speed with which Julia had made him a husband had been matched by the speed with which she was making him a patriarch, and

a further process, as swift and compelling, turned babies, which were charming, into growing boys and girls who were naughty, noisy, and malodorous, who snatched each other's toys and scratched each other's faces and then suddenly fell sick and re-arrayed themselves in the piteousness of infancy. His father's house, which he had grown up to revere as a variety of temple, was turned into a mart of procreation, where he was jostled by midwives, wet-nurses, dry-nurses, nursery-maids, and Julia's breeding acquaintances. Escaping to his office, he passed through the iron gate to the further side of the wall, and there, too, was disillusionment. Britannia was triumphant and Peace restored. At every public dinner some well-fed person rose up to say that England had saved Europe by her example. Europe had exchanged Bonaparte for the Papacy, and England was starving. Every day as he walked to his office some beggar came up and implored him; and these were not the established Loseby unfortunates, whose circumstances he knew and whose pleas he could decide on, but desperate vagrants, weavers from Norwich thrown out of work by the new manufactories in the North of England, or cottagers dispossessed by an Act of Enclosure. The weavers were burning with religion and rebellion, and at first he was shocked to hear Saving Grace and living wages tossed up together; but as he listened, he recognised the evangelical fervour which had thrilled him at Cambridge. Inflamed by this discovery, he said and did things that Loseby found unaccountable. Mr Powles began to eat his words about John Barnard. High-minded and gentlemanly – yes, no one denied it. Open-handed? – yes, and rather too much so. God-fearing? – undoubtedly, but scarcely fitted to be a churchwarden. A good employer? – well, yes, it was an old-established business; he would not care to say what Mr Barnard would have made of it in ten years' time, unless he gave up some of his present opinions. But just as Mr Powles was about

to use the word Democrat, the fever burned out, John Barnard returned to his senses, and the wall ceased to be a symbol of social injustice and was no more than the wall put up by Joseph Barnard – possibly a protection against thieves, and certainly a protection against watchdogs; for if it had come down, there would have had to be a dog in a kennel, and John Barnard disliked dogs.

This change of mind had not come about because he was happier, or the world less full of misery. People were still workless and starving, and in his own heart he was still intimidated by being the father of a family, and irked by a sense that in some way he had been wronged. But a new ingredient had been thrown into his ferment of anxiety, conscience, and idealism. The new ingredient was love, passionate, romantic love, and its object was his third daughter, Mary. Such a love does not cast out fear. It invites and fattens it. Trembling with prudence, he looked round on a world of dangers, and looking up to heaven for help, saw, eyeing him out of infinity, that other father, the father in heaven. His liberalism shrivelled and fell away. It was no more than a gown he had worn at Cambridge, the apparel of a young man. And, just as in Europe the republics and the brief mild monarchies had been swept away, and the old regime reinstated, the brief mild Jesus was supplanted by the God of Abraham sacrificing Isaac, the God who visits the sins of the fathers upon the children, and is not mocked. Charity is a Christian duty, and he continued to help the poor; but now his charity came from a well-ordered conscience, there was no threat to society in it, and Mr Powles could praise him without reservation.

Under the eye of this reinstated God, John Barnard applied himself more zealously to his obligations as a father – the father of a family and not only the father of Mary Barnard. Mary would not be spoiled by over-indulgence, or made vain by

being singled out from the rest, he was too much afraid of the God of Abraham for that. Besides, what he felt for her was nothing so weak as preference; it was passion, a thing incompatible with choice or comparison. But as the gardener, for the rose's sake, appears to ignore the rose while searching the rose-tree for greenfly to be sprayed and small grubs to be nipped between the nails of finger and thumb, Mary's father now took particular pains to oversee the development of her brothers and sisters. Loseby parents were of the opinion that whatever the little Barnards might lack through Mrs Barnard being so continually poorly was more than made up to them by having such a devoted father. Where else in Loseby, it was asked, would you find such a handsome apartment as Mr Barnard's own study given over to the boys' lessons?

It was this privilege which had made Julia ask if the wall could not be pulled down, for the handsome apartment gave on to the forecourt, and no sunlight came into it. But John Barnard had a purpose in choosing it as the room where his sons did their lessons with Mr Moore, the tutor, and prepared their work in the evenings, while he made the best he could of the morning-room at the back; he chose it, so that his children should realise the importance of education. For the same reason, no change was made in the furniture. A cheap deal table only promotes the trick of spilling the ink. Joseph and George, and afterwards Samuel and Julius, sat, each in studious isolation, at a vast mahogany table, on chairs whose polished legs recorded the slightest inclination to kick; and if they raised their eyes from their books, the walls admonished them with Flaxman's illustrations to the plays of Aeschylus – Orestes the suppliant, naked, classically unprotected by a slight cloak, and the Furies coldly, classically furious, with blindly rolling eyes and whips of serpents. These last were theoretical. The Barnard children were never whipped. Careful thought had convinced John Barnard

that his own frequent whippings had done him no real good; the pain was so preoccupying that one tried to forget it, instead of concentrating one's faculties on the sense of being in fault. Censure and ostracism were more likely to be effective. Censure and ostracism had seemed to be working very well on George, until he died, but failed with Joseph. Perhaps Joseph was an exceptionally frivolous child, or perhaps his father was not so skilful in the application of censure and ostracism when he first began to lay them on. Whatever the reason, Joseph did better after he was sent to Harrow, where old-fashioned methods were used. After the first few terms (which are inevitably disconcerting for those brought up in Christian homes), he came back for the holidays looking – not personable, for he was lankily built with a foolish freckled face – but agile and popular, like a mongrel dog that has found a kind master.

On each return, Joseph would ask Euphemia as soon as he could get her alone if Mary was as good as ever; and on Euphemia's affirmative, he gave a sigh of relief. By the word good, he did not mean moral goodness. It was Mary's efficacy he enquired after – did Mary still retain her halcyon-like quality of soothing Papa when he was vexed? Sailors are a superstitious race. No doubt there were always some who during the profoundest of halcyon calms remained on their guard, looked with dubious eye on the long cloudless sunsets, and forbade any whistling on board. Joseph and Euphemia had already learned, by experience and observation, how babies, which are helpless and blameless, grow into boys and girls, and become reasons for anxiety, and even disappointment. There was no envy in their minds as they saw Mary's exemption from the common lot. They were far too much obliged to her to feel envy, just as they were too well-schooled in their own inferiority to attempt emulation. But they did sometimes wonder what it was about Mary, and they wondered with trembling concern how much longer it could

hold out. For her part, Mary felt neither conceit nor speculation. From her earliest recollections, poor Brothers and Sisters had been naughty children, and often a grief to Papa, and she had been Papa's dear open-hearted child. She took such a state of things for granted, like the greenness of trees in summer and the bareness of trees in winter; greenness was pretty, and bareness was not pretty, and one and the other were aspects of the universe.

Mary's placid disposition was apparent while she was yet in the womb, and Julia said to herself that after so many pregnancies, one on the heels of the other, she was really getting into the way of it. But the birth had been appalling. She fell in labour on an April evening, the night and the day went by, and it was night again. By then she had ceased to demand a surgeon.

'Now, dear, make an effort, do! Bounce yourself, give one good push.'

So at intervals the midwife implored her. And obstinately, she continued to answer, 'I'm dying.' On the red sweating face that hung over her, breathing out a strong smell of cloves, she saw to her despair the persisting expression of knowing better. But sooner or later, it would be true, she would be dying, she would be dead. Either the pains would be too much for her, or, after the child was out, a flooding would carry her away, as slops emptied into the gutter sweep off a dead kitten. She must wait, that was all. She felt the midwife's sweat falling on her face, servants came to the door with trays, and in the dressing-room her husband was walking up and down in creaking slippers. Later, she heard him praying. The thought of his prayers oppressed her – there was already wasted effort enough without praying to deaf ears. 'Tell him to go and have breakfast,' she gasped, and the midwife replied that it was three in the morning. Timelessly later, she felt the child wrenched out, and saw the midwife holding it in bloodied hands. Afterwards,

when clean linen had been spread over her, and the windows had been thrown open to get rid of the smell, Barnard stalked in on tiptoe. He was unshaven, his face was haggard, he looked like some melancholy thief creeping to her bedside.

'Julia, my poor wife, how you have suffered!'

She nodded. Tears ran down his cheeks. The midwife offered him the bundle that was the baby. He looked into it solemnly, his face contorted with emotion. The midwife said something about a fine child, and well worth waiting for. Turning back to Julia, he said, 'She has cost you so much – she will always be my dearest child.'

'Quite right, sir. Very properly expressed,' the midwife remarked.

Julia thought to herself, 'I'll hold him to that bargain.' But nothing of the sort had been necessary. Five years later, ten years later, Mary was still unwavering and devotedly loved. Unlike Joseph, who caused so much anxiety because of his weak character, or Euphemia, who was undersized and too reserved to be amiable, or George and Susan, who were dead, or Samuel and Julius, who were growing noisy and petulant, or Ellen, who humanly speaking must be considered a cross, Mary remained without flaw. It was as if he had received a licence with her, an unconditional permit to love one child, free of tax or charges against deterioration. And though Julia could not feel quite as Barnard did about the obligation to love something that had cost two nights and a day of extreme anguish, she was very grateful to Mary for remaining an unqualified pleasure to her Papa.

So Julia supposed, for she was unspeculative, and hopeful of pleasure. If she saw a cake covered with sugar icing, she expected it to be sweet inside. Looking at Mary, she saw blue eyes, regular features, a well-made frame, a disposition ready to be loved – in short, a creditable little Miss Barnard. From that she went on

to think of blue ribbons, flannel, mutton-broth, music-lessons, and the dangers of catching cold, growing too fast, or turning her toes in.

But when John Barnard looked at Mary he began to think of angels and of worms. Once a week at least, usually on Sunday evenings, he asked himself whether, if it were God's will to take her, he could give her up without rebellion or despair. The answer took one or other of two forms. If Mary were taken from him, he must despair and die. If he saw Mary threatened by sin or contamination, he would relinquish her gladly, that she might be preserved from the wrath to come. But he could not be sure which answer came truly from his heart. He knew it should be the second, and he tried to exercise himself into making it the only answer. If anything should happen to Mary – consumption, gipsies, mad dogs, softening of the brain, scarlet fever – then the angels would take her, and the worms would devour her flesh; and it would be more than he could endure. But there was also the worm that dieth not, and Mary's soul, that soft, bright, flowerlike thing, would be an irresistible target for the arrows of Satan. Rather than see her fall a prey to that worm, let her die, let her be taken from him! And then he would lash himself with the thought that his love might already have blinded him to serious faults in her character, that the devil might already have a foot in her, and that it is not enough to teach a child Christian principles, one must also put them to the test. So he would put Mary's principles to the test: a sweetmeat left unguarded on his desk, a trinket, an interrogation that might trip her in a lie. The traps never closed on her. She would ask for the sweetmeat in serene confidence that it would be given; and if he withheld it (a provocation to anger) she would turn her mind to something else. A coral necklace or a reference to her curls left her unmoved, except to be pleased at pleasing him, and she was open as the day. Since, for the time being, he

really could not find much wrong with her, and since her health was excellent, he fell back on tormenting himself with imaginations of future contingencies. Suppose, for instance, that she fell in love, a young girl's tremulous first love, with a Mohammedan, or a Roman Catholic? Suppose she developed a high soprano voice and wished to become an opera-singer? Suppose – his thought jibbed, but he forced it on – suppose she were debauched? Lathered in sudden sweat, his imagination reared and he was unseated. There are limits, even to parental solicitude.

Meanwhile, he allowed no one to know that Mary was more to him than any other of his children.

'Any one might suppose that she is his firstborn, and that he gave birth to her himself – out of his hat,' commented Robina, who had come to Anchor House for the christening of her namesake. 'Not that I wonder at it, for she is a sweet little witch. I see more than a look of Baby Logan in her.'

'Baby Logan?' Julia bestirred herself. 'What became of her? I don't seem to have heard of her for a long time.'

'Oh, it is a shocking story! She took to wearing a sort of mantilla, and sat up all night writing poetry.'

'I know. She sent me some, Stanzas to E., and E. meant Euphemia. All about blights and whirlpools – more like Lord Byron than Baby. But that was long ago. What happened next?'

'My dear child, she became a Papist. Worse than that, she went into one of their convents, and became a nun.'

'A nun?' said Julia, not showing so much reprobation as Robina had expected. – 'A nun? Fancy that! But I suppose it's a peaceful life. We saw nuns walking about in Paris, and they looked peaceful.'

Baby Logan had become a nun, and Robina had been to Calcutta and wore a false front of hair much more golden than the ringlets that had drooped over the guitar. Barnard said that

Robina had grown hard. Julia was glad when the visit was over. Whether or no Robina had grown hard, she herself had grown soft, and the sensation of Robina darting through her like a bodkin had been disturbing. Heaped on her sofa, she set herself to forget everything that Robina had said except the assurances that Mary looked the picture of health. Time went on. With Mary, and Madeira, and comfortable middle-aged servants, and the last miscarriage remaining the last, Julia began to think her lot, in its way, no worse than a nun's. The business was doing well, in spite of hard times, and there was plenty of money. She would have liked to spend it more freely, and enjoy some of the solid ostentation and richly rowdy festivities that had prevailed at Aunt Maxwell's, but as Barnard was born a wet-blanket she contented herself by adding touches of richness and rowdiness to the family acts of charity, pink sugar icing on the orphans' buns, and wine to the good gravy soup for lying-in women. She was monstrous to the eye; but no one looked at her except those who saw her so habitually that they looked at her without seeing more than the pattern on a new shawl. Except for Mary, her children were variously imperfect; but either they would improve, or their imperfections would be rendered less glaring by a patina of time. Joseph in his first year at Cambridge seemed to have run through his epoch of misfortune. Barnard certainly expected it to be so, remarking that Cambridge had made a great difference to him, he had been much improved by the change from school to university.

It was the autumn of 1832, John Barnard was no longer suspect for his advocacy of the Reform Bill, for the Reform Bill had been passed, and Wilberforce was almost through with teething, when the postman brought a letter from Joseph's tutor to Joseph's father. But he put it aside unread because at the same minute three new-made widows came to the door. A