

In the year of 'twenty-six people in our part of the country often went hungry. The strike lasted so long that a man forgot the feel of pick and shovel, and ached for work as a lover aches for his lost mistress.

One fine Sunday evening in one of the summer months of this year, a man and his wife and child left the little chapel on the hill. The service was over, the evening was young, the fields were ripe unto harvest, and they decided to go for a walk.

So into the fields they went, the fields that were full of the fruit of the rich soil, the fields hemmed in by hedges and fences and ditches. The man and his wife walked sedately, talking of sermons and strikes, of anything but supper. The child ran ahead and looked for birds' nests in the hedges, singing and shouting. There were few nests, but the brambles were heavy with black velvet fruit. Soon, his mouth was stained with the purple of the fruit.

The man saw this and smiled. He saw also the fields of living bread, the proud-headed wheat surging in the breeze, and the flocks of sparrows intent on the eating of the sweet, ripe grain. He saw the turnips and the potatoes, row after row of them, the green tops swaying.

The child came running back to them. 'Da, come and see what I've found.' He tugged at his father's hand and took him to the field. It was a turnip field. They were early, almost ready.

'Here', ~~said the boy, and pointed to a heap of turnip leaves and peelings with a half-eaten turnip showing its ravaged face.~~ 'Has somebody been eating the turnips, Da?' He asked.

'Stealing,' ~~said the man briefly.~~ 'When Ah was a boy we often went into turnip-fields and cut ourselves sweet turnip, but that was wrong. The Book says: Thou shalt not steal.' The woman came up. 'Dost say in t'Book: Thou shalt starve before thou steals?' ~~she said.~~ It was more a statement than a question.

~~The man looked at her for a long time, then gently said,~~ 'Now, Annie...!' They proceeded with their walk, the child running and singing in lyrical delight, the parents trying to forget the problem that loomed large above all others - food.

The sun was now beginning to sink beneath the distant Pennines, not in blood, but in silver. The child became tired and began to cry for home. So home they turned, and the dusk gathered up their retreating forms.

That night the child slept soundly and, after a restless hour or so, the wife fell into a deep sleep. But the man lay awake, thinking. Soon his thought resolved itself into action. He turned quietly and slipped from the bed. His wife was not disturbed. The moonlight showed her pale face and the braided hair; one arm was outstretched. The child murmured in his sleep; and for a moment the man stood silently watching. Then he went downstairs, picked up a bag, and went out into the night.

The fields were different in the moonlight; everything was etched in black and white. Keeping to the shadows, he made his way to field after field, taking his toll as he went. His bag was soon full. The night's work finished, he made his way home. The short night was almost over and dawn began to break as he entered the house. As

(Grace before Meat)

he set the bag down on the kitchen table the church clock struck four. ~~One~~, thou; ~~two~~ shalt; ~~three~~, not; ~~four~~, steal. The words of the commandment came like finality with each stroke. He stood a moment, then shook his head. Five minutes later he was in bed.

She asked no questions. Only men make moral and ethical codes. The dinner was served at noon. The child sat on a stool with a couple of cushions to make height. A simple dinner. New potatoes, turnip and beans, with Yorkshire pudding and a cheap cut from the butcher's down the road; and the wife sat down.

There was a deep silence. The woman and the child gazed expectantly at the man. He bowed his head and they followed his example. 'We thank Thee for this food in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.' ~~The grace was almost inaudible, then a sudden ecstasy seized the man, as if a revelation had suddenly come to him.~~ 'For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Amen.'

Sid gave me this specially because I didn't
'do' the dialect!

I performed it many times + loved doing it.

Anne.