"The Tale is Soon Told": Working-Class Storytelling in Sylvia Pankhurst's "Thrift" and May Westoby's "The Injustice of the King"

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Abstract

From 1880 onwards British Socialists produced a substantial body of short fiction using working-class oral literary traditions to frame their narratives. Women remain underrepresented in scholarship on this aspect of literary studies in part because much of what they wrote has been lost to history or remains hidden. Retrieving Sylvia Pankhurst's "Thrift" (*The Woman's Dreadnought*, June 1914) and May Westoby's "The Injustice of the King" (*Justice*, November 1910) from the archives, and republishing them for a contemporary audience, contributes to restorative projects by scholars seeking to broaden the scope of writing on Socialist women's creative activism by expanding the existing body of available work to include unpublished or neglected fiction, plays and poetry. These short stories, originally published in British newspapers, are examples of Pankhurst and Westoby's ability to appeal to a socially situated readership of working men and women by simulating oral literatures, and more specifically, forms typical of the parable, fairy tale, moral tale, and working-class life writing. These stories exemplify how Socialist writers brought non-fiction and fiction into dialogue to simplify complex ideas, humanize the cold constraints of politics, draw connections between the social and the political, and pay tribute to British working-class culture and traditions.

Keywords

Sylvia Pankhurst, May Westoby, oral literature, fairy tale, working-class, Britain, short story, women's writing, politics, socialism

> "Experience that is passed from one mouth to the next is the source from which all storytellers have drawn. And of all who have written down their stories, the greatest are those whose writing differs the least from the speech of the many anonymous storytellers."
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> Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" (Trans. T. Lewis, 2019)

In British working-class communities passing oral literatures down through the generations was (and in some places, still is) a common cultural practice. From 1880 onwards, a substantial number of Socialist authors recognized the political affordances of this practice and adapted forms typical of the parable, fable, fairy tale, and moral tale as vehicles for ideology (Rosen, 2018, p.6). Men *and* women wrote short fiction, and yet the latter remain underrepresented in

edited collections and scholarship.[1] One possible reason is that, despite growing interest in working-class literature, and literature written for working-class readers, there is still considerable work to be done to uncover and give due consideration to stories by women.[2] Until recently, May Westoby's two-part serial "The Injustice of the King" (*Justice,* 1910)[3] and Sylvia Pankhurst's "Thrift" (*The Woman's Dreadnought,* 1914)[4] were two of those lost stories.[5] Recovering fiction by well-known historical figures like Pankhurst, and previously unrecognized writers like Westoby contributes to restorative projects by scholars like Rachel Holmes who published Pankhurst's play *Between Two Fires* in 2022. Holmes and others are doing the important work of expanding the existing body of publicly accessible fiction by Socialist woman authors, which in turn expands scholarship to include women's contribution to British Socialism, creative activism, working-class culture and readerships, and literary production in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The republication of "Thrift" and "The Injustice of the King" is timely. There is renewed interest in Pankhurst's life and politics which has been well documented, most recently in Holmes' *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* (2020), Marion Wynne-Davies' "Sylvia Pankhurst Poetry and Politics" (2021), and Eileen Luscombe's *History and Legacy of the Suffragette Fellowship Calling all Women!* (2024). Her creative activism has received some attention in scholarship on the poetry that she wrote while serving a sentence in Holloway Prison (*Writ on Cold Slate*, 1922)[6] but her fiction is typically sidelined because of a consensus that, in Patricia Romero's words, she "was not a writer of uncommon ability and she often used an old-fashioned, nineteenth-century style which serious poets of the 1920s and 1930s had long since abandoned" (1987, 178). Pankhurst wrote the majority of her fiction and poetry in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century – a period in literary history defined by the rise of modernism, challenges to conventional narrative and poetic forms, and the advent of the literary critic. This was of no consequence to her. She was not interested in infiltrating

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[1] See Michael Rosen's *Workers' Fairy Tales: Socialist Fairy Tales, Fables, and Allegories* (2018), for example.

[2] In their introduction to the first volume of *Working-Class Literature(s): Historical and International Perspectives* (2020), editors John Lennon and Magnus Nilsson speak to a renewed global interest in working-class literature and literary culture reflected in a growing body of constantly evolving scholarship. In his chapter, "British Working-Class Writing: Paradox and Tension as Genre Motif" (2020, pp. 159-195), Simon Lee provides a comprehensive overview of important scholarship on British working-class writing, including special issues of journals like *Women's Studies Quarterly* (1995) and *Victorian Poetry* (2001). Pamela Fox has done important work on British novels by working-class women in studies like *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel 1890-1945* (1994), which includes engagement with books by Ethel Carnie Holdsworth and Ellen Wilkinson. There is very little on short fiction, and less on Socialist short fiction written by women for a working-class readership. Although Westoby and Pankhurst were middleclass writers, they were committed to the Socialist cause and wrote primarily for working men and women.

[3] See Appendix I

[4] See Appendix II

[5] To the best of my knowledge these stories have not appeared in collections of these authors' works, short story collections or in any other format since their initial publication. Permission to reproduce Sylvia Pankhurst's "Thrift" and May Westoby's "The Injustice of the King" was provided by THE BRITISH LIBRARY BOARD. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. With thanks to The British Newspaper Archive. See www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

[6] In "Sylvia Pankhurst Poetry and Politics" (*Women's Suffrage in Word, Image, Music, Stage and Screen* 2022) Marion Wynne-Davies does the important work of bringing these, and some previously unpublished poems, into dialogue with works by Jamaican poet Claude McKay. She builds on Jane Dowson and Alice Entwistle's comparison between *Writ on Cold Slate* and the poetry in the 1912 Suffragette anthology *Holloway Jingles* (*A History of Twentieth-Century British Women's Poetry* 2005). There are rare exceptions, including Kathryn Dodd's useful compilation of works by Pankhurst in *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader* (1993) which provides an overview of fiction and non-fiction that traces her progression from a young, idealistic Suffragette, to a radical Socialist.

modernist circles. She wanted to make the "struggle for a better world… beautiful, aesthetically uplifting and inspiring" (Connelly, p.8).

While Pankhurst is a known name, there is very little written about Westoby outside of the occasional fleeting mention of her works for theatre (Leach, 2023, p.44), and friendship with Lizzie Glasier (Rosen, 2014). She succeeded Glasier as editor of the youth magazine *The Young Socialist*. *Roseland,* a play about the transition from capitalism to Socialism was performed by the children at North Islington Socialist Sunday School as part of their annual Christmas party in 1917 ("North Islington Socialist Sunday School," p.8). *The Young Socialist* was created, in the words of Fred Glasier, to encourage "the development of imagination in childhood by publishing folklore and fairy tales" (Rosen, 2014, n.p). The 9 December 1920 edition of *Justice* advertised Westoby's *Through the Ivory Gates*, a collection of "fairy tales produced by Socialists for the children of Socialists" (p.7). The republication of "The Injustice of the King" adds to and lengthens the current roster of fairy tales written by Socialist woman writers for working-class children and adults.

Pankhurst wrote across genres, often combining or adapting them to enhance her intended message. At first glance, and if read out of context, "Thrift" could be mistaken for non-fiction.[7] The reader becomes aware of the fictional nature of the narrative by the fairy-tale-like opening describing "two little cottages covered with a tangled mass of roses and honeysuckle, and with their little garden plots ablaze with close-growing old-fashioned flowers. In the most flowery of these two cottages lived an old woman, well over 90 years of age" (p.2). The introduction primes the reader to expect a story located within the familiar tradition of folklore and storytelling. When the story evolves into the narrator's account of various interactions with an old woman, the reader does not mistake this for a record of real events. It is a parable (containing the familiar motif of the unhappy family) that cautions against willful ignorance while paying tribute to working-class life writing (anecdotes, observations and snippets of conversations).

"Thrift" perfectly illustrates Elizabeth Wanning Harries' point that "if we continue to read only a restricted list of fairy tales, limited by common assumptions about their requisite shape and concerns, we will miss some of the most interesting and challenging examples of the genre" (2003, p.5). The same applies to "The Injustice of the King" which, if assumptions remain intact, resembles a traditional fairy tale. Reading it in context shows the ways that Westoby adapts and toys with the genre when writing for an adult readership. She complicates the cast typical of a fairy tale, a Royal and a distressed damsel, by assigning these characters multiple roles. The King is the villain, the hero, and in need of saving. The damsel appears to need rescuing but becomes the hero. The common motif of the abduction and imprisonment of a young girl is contained in a story-within-the-story. It serves two functions. First, Westoby foregrounds the idea that "The Injustice of the King" only exists because of the traditions that precede it by making the oral tradition of storytelling the catalyst for what transpires between the King and the woman who tells the tale. Second, the fairy-tale-like story that Lucilla tells is

[7] This was a method that Pankhurst used often in her short fiction. The second instalment of "Co-Operative Housekeeping" (1920) that Kathryn Dodd published in *A Sylvia Pankhurst Reader* (1993) could easily be mistaken for an account of real events, and especially considering Pankhurst's trip to Russia to attend the Second Congress of the Communist International and her reports on co-operative living in the Soviet Union. The opening paragraphs of the first instalment, published in *The Woman's Dreadnought* on 21 August 1920, make it clear that Pankhurst was not reporting on a lived experience. The narrative centers on two fictional women in a Utopian post-Revolution society, conversing in a way reminiscent of the characters in William Morris' 1888 novel *A Dream of John Ball*.

true but the King accuses her of lying – a reference to and critique of the gendered parallels between folklore and "Old wives' tales— that is, worthless stories, untruths, trivial gossip, a derisive label that allots the art of storytelling to women at the exact same time as it takes all value from it" (Carter, 1990, p.xi).

The fairy tale, parable, moral tale and fable are part of a politically charged working-class literary history dating back to the seventeenth century when the oral transmission of stories in the folk tradition was heavily discouraged. J. Paul Hunter attributes this phenomenon to Puritanism, and a distaste for the traditions of the lower classes that extended to "intellectuals and moralists of many progressive stripes" including "prophets of modernity like Hobbes, Tillotson, and Locke who did not necessarily share Puritan values" (1990, p.143). This was grounded in a "disapproval of oral tradition, distrust of a folk heritage that mixed pagan and Christian practices indiscriminately…moral objections to fictions as forms of false representation, and general suspicion of communal activities in which levity could become infectious" (p.143). In the eighteenth century, the ruling classes and moral watchdogs were faced with the increasing popularity of the novel. In the nineteenth century, education reforms accounted for a rapidly expanding reading public, and the fear of oral literatures was replaced with a fear of working-class reading habits. In the late 1880s, social anthropologist Fanny Mayne, alarmed and surprised by her findings, issued the warning that the working classes are "to a great extent, a reading people; a reading and a thinking people!" (as cited in Dalziel, 1957, p.5.).

The reading, thinking working classes often read fiction in affordable and readily available print media like William Morris' *Commonweal.* The journal published fiction and non-fiction side-by-side with "one aim – the propagation of Socialism" (William Morris, 1885, p.1). The combination of reportage and creative activism was designed to "awaken the sluggish, to strengthen the waverers, instruct the seekers after truth" (p.1). Socialist newspapers like *Justice*, Pankhurst's *Woman's Dreadnought* (later *The Workers' Dreadnought*) and her short-lived literary periodical, *Germinal,* fulfilled a similar function. They carried art, poetry, short stories and creative non-fiction alongside book reviews, news articles, extracts from works by philosophers like Karl Marx, and speeches by prominent political figures like Vladimir Lenin. For Pankhurst, art, visual and literary, was inseparable from life, and therefore inseparable from politics. Taking inspiration from *Commonweal*, she advertised *Germinal* in the 4 August 1923 edition of *The Worker's Dreadnought* as "Just the right magazine for all workers. Good stories, pictures, poetry and reviews" (p.7). She prefaced Volume I by stating that it was "intended to assist in the artistic expression of current thought, in order to bring art into contact with daily life and to use it as a means of expressing modern ideas and aspirations" (1923).

Artists and authors contributing to *Commonweal, Germinal* and *The Woman's'/Workers' Dreadnought* were not restricted by race, class, gender, genre or style. As Jonathan Rose notes in *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (2001), working-class autodidacts struggled for centuries "to assume direction of their own intellectual lives, to become individual agents in framing an understanding of the world. They resisted ideologies imposed from above in order to discover for themselves the word of God, standards of beauty, philosophical truth, the definition of a just society" (pp.13-14). For the working classes, oral literatures were crucial for capturing and preserving a wealth of experience that class bias threatened to (or did) erase. Simulating storytellers' voices in print was a way for Socialists to signal their respect for these traditions and speak to readers in a language that they understood, with an intimacy that invited them to listen and receive the politics woven into the fabric of the narrative.

Telling Tales

Socialist newspaper serials or short stories were often strategically placed so that they spoke to the reports, editorials, transcribed speeches and letters printed around them. The first instalment of "The Injustice of the King" appeared next to a letter by Marx: "Mr. George Howell's History of the International Working Men's Association"(1878).[8] In his letter, Marx addressed "spurious literature on the International's history" written by Howell who exploited his authority as an ex-workman and member of the First Communist International General Council to support his "spurious literature on the International's history" (p.8). Marx pointed out that Howell disregarded facts and evidence and ignored eye-witness testimony to, "for purposes of his own," reshape history (p.8). The letter, originally published 32 years prior in the *Secular Chronicle* (4 August 1878), was not an account of recent events, it was a slice of history that functioned as a cautionary tale against believing slander, and the damaging effects of trying to please the upper classes. Instead of pride in his "former fellowship with a Working Men's Association, which won world fame and a place in the history of mankind," Howell approached his topic from a "lofty standpoint," pandering to the "cultured people of the Nineteenth Century" with the information "that the International was a failure" (p.8). As Marx noted, the International did not fail, it evolved.

Marx's response to the working man who betrayed his class by lying to the upper classes is reflected thematically in the first instalment of Westoby's story. The benevolent and fair young King Justus finds himself seated before a mother who is asking for help rescuing her daughter, Myra, from the "nobleman" who kidnapped her while she was picking flowers with Lucilla. The mother asks Lucilla to tell the King what happened, and "the tale is soon told" that the King was the one who took her (p.8). The King denies the accusations against him. His subjects are quick to believe him over Lucilla, betraying one of their own, who in an act of bravery and resistance tells the King and his subjects: "I spoke the truth, though I feared to do it" (p.8). The people "had always found [the King] generous and gay. These things blinded them to his look of evil now" (p.8). What they have been led to believe about the King clouds their judgement. They allow themselves to become active and willing participants in Lucilla's persecution, calling for her to be killed. The King takes a different, symbolic route. He blinds her because she saw the truth before sending her away so that she can no longer speak it. He returns Myra to her mother and secures their silence with a house and servants.

The failure to recognize the root cause of class disparity – to be blind to it, or willingly accept it – was a pervasive theme in Socialist fairy tales and other oral literatures. In 1912, in a story told to the children at the Socialist Labour Party Sunday School in Glasgow, Tom Anderson emphasized that if a lie is repeated often enough it can be mistaken for truth: "The great men you are told about by the lackeys of the master class live in big houses and have servants to attend to them, they own a great deal of wealth, and you are told stories about them and of their greatness, to cloud your brain and make you servile" ("Mary Davis; or the Fate of a Proletarian Family", *Workers' Tales,* p.230).[9] In Ethel Carnie Holdsworth's[10] "The Vendetta" (*Daily Herald* 1920), a vendetta between two families, each believing that the other is better off, leads to tragedy. The Merwyns' developmentally challenged child finds himself at the Granger's

[8] *Justice* made sure to point out that *The Secular Chronicle* was edited by Harriet Law, the only woman to sit on the First Communist International General Council.
[9] Tom Anderson's story was later printed in the periodical, *The Socialist*, for a wider audience of all ages.
[10] Activist, factory worker, and author Carnie Holdsworth enjoyed a successful writing career from 1907 through to the mid-1930s, producing poetry, novels and short stories, including four volumes of fairy tales. Carnie Holdsworth is one of only a few women widely celebrated for her contribution to working-class fiction.

home where Agnes Granger, spotting an opportunity for revenge, tries to think up a way to kill him. While she plots, the boy takes in the condition of her "hovel" and observes: "You – are poor – like us" (p.10). She manages to lure him to the "rotten-runged bridge that went near the water-wheel" but recalls his words, realizes the futility of the vendetta, and drowns in her efforts to save him. At the end of the story, Carnie Holdsworth draws attention to the idea that the misplaced blame that fueled the vendetta kept the families ignorant of the true origins of their poverty. The Grangers and the Merwyns walk away from Agnes' grave "to toil again – to the end, as Agnes had toiled. They had no hatred towards those who exploited them all generation after generation. They did not know" (p.10).

Pankhurst's "Thrift" concludes with a similar message to the one that Carnie Holdsworth left with her readers. The old woman routinely expresses her gratitude to the Lord whose estate has been maintained by her family, generation after generation. Only her father had earned a wage for managing one of the farms, while his wife and daughters earned nothing for taking care of the lambs and chickens. Her husband had been employed on the estate since he was a boy, eventually becoming principal gamekeeper. Together the old woman and her husband had "managed a large farm for the Lord with numbers of men and women under them" for which her "husband was never paid more than a pound a week, and she nothing at all" (p.2). Her son took over from her husband, who fell ill but continued to work until he died. After her husband's death, the agent wanted to evict the old woman, but she appealed to the Lord who let her stay. When the narrator points out that it's the least he could do after "years of unpaid work," the old woman smiles and replies: "Lord doesn't understand all that I have done for him" (p.2). At the close of "Thrift", after the son's wife dies leaving behind a debt, the old woman and her son "blamed not the Lord for whom they had done so much in return for so little, but that poor dead woman who had gone on working until the day she died" (p.2). In both Pankhurst and Carnie Holdsworth's stories the families fail to recognize that the events culminating in death and tragedy only come about because of an unequal society in which the rich profit from the labor of the poor. Both stories also hint at conflict within working-class communities and the ways that status and respectability distract from the realities of class disparity.

The title of Pankhurst's story is fraught with meaning. At its origins, thrift, from the Middle English 'thryfte' referred to a condition of prosperity. But, as Alison Hulme points out in *A Brief History of Thrift* (2019), from as early as the fourteenth century "the meaning of thrift (as thriving) was distorted and used as part of various economic and theological discourses. It came to be understood as an economic and cultural practice based on frugality and frequently linked to respectability" (p.3). Hulme illustrates the significance of the evolution of the term in nineteenth century discourse with the example of British pastor William Blackley who,

> described the change in the meaning of thrift from thriving and good fortune, to careful spending and providence, as a shift from an emphasis on the human condition, to the human character or 'habit'. The choice of such words as character and habit was typical of an increasingly individualistic morality of the era that was quick to judge society's subjects, far less the mechanisms of state and society itself (p.3).

In "Thrift", Pankhurst addressed the moral judgement that Hulme describes by referencing two areas of concern that would have been familiar to an audience of working-class women readers: household thrift, and funerals. The contentment and the fantasy (fairy tale) that the old woman constructs for herself with its kind Lord and idyllic setting are disrupted by the debt that her son George's wife has accumulated. When George dismissed his impoverished oldest daughter,

saying that "she had chosen her own lot, and that nothing was to be given to her […] her mother had gone on helping her in secret whenever she could" (p.2). When she could no longer afford to provide for her daughter while running her own household, she took out a loan. According to Nicola Verdon, "an important premise attached to women's domestic management…was that her expertise and proficiency could promote careful household economy and thrift" ("The Modern Countrywoman", p.91). The old woman's criticism of her daughter-in-law is partly that she failed to conform to the domestic role expected of her:

> "She hadn't been doing right for a long time," said the old woman. "I'd watched her and I knew she wasn't going straight. People like us can't afford to go putting beef steak on for dinner for a lot of hungry men as she did, instead of making it into a pudding so as it'd go further. She got that she hadn't the strength to take trouble as she should and when she knew she was going, she let things slide (p.2).

The daughter chose "her lot" and her failures as a wife and mother are, according to her father, grounds for punishment. By refusing to let her daughter and grandchildren starve the mother failed as a wife by not exercising careful economy and thrift in her own home. George tells the old woman, "She hasn't been the good wife I thought her…I didn't think she'd have done it" (p.2).

Pankhurst complicates the idea of household thrift by introducing another loan into the story. George has to "pay off the money" for the funeral implying that it was borrowed (p.2). In contrast to the loan that the mother takes to support her daughter, the old woman and George see the funeral loan as a necessary expense that will maintain the social standing of the family. In the chapter "Thrift" in Maud Pember Reeves' *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913) she noted that without burial insurance the working classes ran "the risk of burial by the parish" or being forced into "borrowing the sum necessary to pay the funeral expenses, or of undergoing the disgrace of a pauper funeral" (p.67). The pauper's funeral was considered "wanting in dignity and in respect to their dead," amounting to a "political and social degradation of a perfectly respectable family" (p.68). The cost of the funeral factors into the moral judgement that the old woman and George pass on the mother. For them, the pauperization that they avoided by giving her a proper burial is cancelled out by the financial burden that they are left with and the disgrace of her failure as a wife. They blame the mother, instead of the social and economic inequalities that contributed to her daughter's destitution, forced her to borrow money, led to her death and left the old woman and her husband in debt.

Pankhurst takes the moral of her story to its conclusion by drawing her readers' attention to what inspired her to write "Thrift":

> That never ending painful contriving to make ends meet on little wages with so many mouths to feed weighs down the hearts of poor working mothers and warps the whole current of their lives…Last week three cases of mothers' suicide were reported in the newspapers. One woman's husband had given way to drink. The husbands of the other two were out of employment. It was only just possible for these women to make ends meet when their husband's small weekly wages were coming in regularly. They could not face the future with an added load of debt that they might never be able to pay off (p.2).

There were an astounding number of suicides, mostly by working-class women, in the week that Pankhurst refers to.[11] A report that comes close to one of the incidents that may have informed Pankhurst's story is the death of Eliza Alice Seddon, a mother who drowned herself in the Rochdale Canal in Newton Heath on 6 June 1914. *The Manchester Evening News* reported that her husband, John William Seddon, was unemployed, and hadn't been living with his wife for a few weeks prior to her death ("Woman's Suicide: Strange Affair in Newton Heath," p.4). Pankhurst makes the connection between fiction and non-fiction to alert her readers to the reality underlying the fairy tale about a kind Lord, a dutiful son, and a wicked daughter-in-law that the old woman tells herself. The mother in "Thrift" was not being irresponsible or cruel. She was trying to spare her daughter from the same fate as women like Alice.

The Woman Problem

Like Pankhurst, Westoby was a proponent of women's rights. The first instalment of "The Injustice of the King", printed side-by-side with Marx's letter, is about storytelling and speaking truth to power. The second instalment (12 August 1910) was printed on a page with the headline "Our Women's Circle" (p.5). The story was flanked by Margaretta Hicks' tips for retaining interest in the Women's Socialist Circles, ideas for topics to be discussed at meetings and a list of freely available essays on everything from taxes and rent to health regulations (p.5). Just before Westoby's story, readers were invited to take in Dora B. Montefiore's attack on Ramsay MacDonald's statement about women at the Independent Labour Party (ILP) Conference on the Minority Report. In part two of "The Injustice of the King", the King falls ill and realizes that he can only be saved by confessing to his people. He admits to the Chief Councillor: "I stole the child Myra for a sudden whim that took me as I saw her in the woods. I left her housed without the city, and by the morrow had well-nigh forgotten her until Lucilla accused me, and I – oh! brute beast that I am – fearing to lose the popularity I had won – for so mean a reason – lied" (p.5). After Lucilla has returned to the castle and forgiven him, he falls back into brutish ways and makes "love" to her seemingly without her consent, "Frighten[ing] her terribly" (p.5). He convinces himself that he has always loved her, and asks her to marry him, becoming angry when she refuses: "Lucilla found a dozen reasons against her queenship. He would hear of none" (p.5). The King is both villain and savior. He kidnaps Myra on "a whim", forgets about her, and then 'rescues' her from where he imprisoned her. He 'rescues' Lucilla from the destitution that he caused by blinding and banishing her. He is a ruler who professes to care for his people but also kidnaps women, forgets about them, lies, and then punishes the witness to his crimes.

[11] To name a few, Jane Elizabeth Powell, wife of a railway employee, and a mother who had displayed signs of deep depression after the birth of her child, took her life while loudly singing hymns on 15 June 1914 ("Suicide While Singing," p.2). Edith Maud Camp, a domestic servant, hanged herself on 5 June 1914 after her fiancé broke off their engagement ("Broken Engagement: Girl Found Hanging Near Halesworth," p.7). Martha Bagwell shot herself at her husband's shooting gallery on 6 June 1914 ("Shot Through the Head: Wakefield Woman Suicide at Shooting Gallery," p.5). Maude Emmeline King, who worked at a Butcher's shop, was found drowned after leaving the house holding a letter. According to *The Reading Standard*, she was "very distressed about a family matter" (p.11). On 5 June 1914, Suffragette Joan Lavender Guthrie overdosed on barbiturate veronal ("Suffragette's Suicide: Painful London Case," p.6). Guthrie had developed a dependency on the drug after taking it to ease the pain caused by the forced feedings she was subjected to while incarcerated in Holloway Prison in 1912 for involvement in one of the WSPU's direct action campaigns. In a letter left for her mother she mentioned that she had been taking the drug every night (p.6). The courts and the media used Guthrie's death to vilify the Suffragettes and Socialism by making it appear that her activities with the former, and interest in the latter, had made her unstable.

The relationship between the King and Lucilla complicates the plot of a typical fairy tale. Lucilla's refusal to marry him is both a refusal of the role of hero that he wants to play and of the role that she is expected to play as a submissive damsel in distress. This narrative pairs well with Montefiore's response to MacDonald who, in her words, "was good enough to state from the chair that "women were the problem of the hour" ("The Family as the Unit of Society," *Justice,* p.5).[12] Montefiore was resisting the idea – an idea that MacDonald supported – that the traditional family unit is the economic foundation of society:

> With all deference to Mr. MacDonald's perturbations, we Socialists look upon poverty, and not women, as the problem of the hour, and that problem of poverty can only be solved by the social and economic revolution about which Mr. MacDonald is so tired of hearing. The woman who is working as an economic unit of society will benefit by that revolution equally with the man; and together they will solve the various human problems as they arise; for "the worker, having made everything, he can destroy everything, and he can remake everything." (p.5).

Her main argument was that women were treated as creatures apart. She and other women (evident in the Women's Circles advertised by Hicks) were focused on "the *human* problems of the day that if we were looked upon more as human beings and less as creatures of sex by some of these gentlemen with the reformer's concept, we, as human beings, might perhaps be able to solve our own problems more cleanly and concisely than could any brainy statesman or fussy reformer" (p.5). At the end of "The Injustice of the King" Lucilla agrees to be Queen, but only after her sight is returned and the people have called for her crowning. Westoby emphasizes that without Lucilla's guidance, and "knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men and women…many a [law] that might have worked evil was refused the King's sanction" (p.5). The implication is that before she became Queen, laws like this had been passed due to the King's ignorance of the real conditions of his people, and his people, blinded by his benevolence, had mistaken them for justice. To borrow from Montefiore, Lucilla can solve problems more cleanly and concisely than anyone in the ruling class. It is only through an equal partnership between a man and a woman, a noble and someone from the lower classes that society is reformed in a way that benefits the Kingdom. Notably, Lucilla is never described as a wife or mother, only as a Queen.

1910, when "The Injustice of the King" was written and published next to Marx's letter and Montefiore's challenge to the ILP, was a critical year in the fight for gender equality in Britain. In 1905, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), tired of being sidelined and ignored, adopted a policy of direct action. Ethel Mannin (another underrecognized Socialist author who wrote short fiction) provided a brief overview of what that entailed in her book *Women and the Revolution* (1938):

> members of parliament were lobbied, ministers' houses picketed, pavements and walls chalked with the battle-cry "Votes for Women" and "No Taxation with Representation"; mass meetings and processions were organised all over the country, leaflets and handbills and suffragist papers distributed and sold; the full machinery of militant propaganda was in action, and accelerated as time went on (p.75).

[12] MacDonald was at the helm in the 1920s and 1930s when the Labour Party replaced the Liberal Party as the primary opposition to the Conservative Party. He was a firm proponent of the traditional family structure.

The WSPU was founded in 1903 by Emmeline, Christabel and Sylvia Pankhurst who determined that the women in the ILP needed their own organization if their voices were to be heard. In 1910, the policy of direct action turned from disruption to destruction when 300 women, including Pankhurst, protested outside Parliament. 18 November 1910 became known as Black Friday after the women were met with extreme State violence and police brutality ("Suffragette Raid: Women Brought up at Bow Street," 1911, p.1). The ILP was a Socialist organization, but as Montefiore's letter makes clear, it was flawed when it came to representing the interests of women, and especially working-class women. After 1910, the WSPU began to move away from Socialist ideals entirely, and by 1914, when Pankhurst wrote "Thrift" it was no longer engaging in radical action. As Britain entered the First World War, Pankhurst was expelled from the WSPU for refusing to break ties with Socialist politics and the Labour movement. She questioned the Feminism that her mother and sisters championed, which was limited to efforts to abolish inequality between upper-middleclass and middleclass men and women.

Pankhurst saw the struggle for gender equality as inseparable from the struggle to emancipate the working classes and liberate the colonies. Pankhurst, Montefiore and Westoby agreed on the basic idea proposed at the end of "The Injustice of the King" that people across class lines should work together towards a common goal: a Socialist society in which "*human beings,*" regardless of race, class and gender lived side-by-side as equals. Pankhurst, taking steps to achieve this goal, founded the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS) in one of the poorest areas in London, set up a base of operations for *The Woman's Dreadnought*, and invited men to join her organization. She then set to work creating spaces in Bromley and elsewhere where meals could be purchased for a penny (or provided free of charge in cases of destitution). The building served as a "pure milk depot and babies' clinic," with plans to open "a crèche where young children of women at work may remain during the day" ("Cheap Meals for East End Poor," p.4). In addition, Pankhurst campaigned for a state-funded minimum wage for housewives in response to what she saw as the "gross underpayment of women's labour" ("A Minimum Wage for Women," p.2). "Thrift" was written in response to the plight of working-class women who performed unwaged labour. The pressure to make ends meet often came at the cost of their health, the stability of the family unit, or in the case of Alice Seddon, their lives.

Fictional literary illustrations or interpretations of political ideas in print media bridged the gap between doctrine and the people who received it. Children's stories typically relayed a simple, clearly spelt out political idea. There is no ambiguity in the message of Keir Hardie's 1893 fairy tale "The History of a Giant: Being a Study in Politics for Very Young Boys": "High over the Tent of Labour a gallant standard is floating proudly in the breeze, and on it are emblazoned in letters of gold the words – "INDEPENDENT LABOUR PARTY," and under that flag will be found those who love Humanity more than material greatness" (*Labour Leader,* p.3). Tales published in newspapers and journals directed at an adult readership worked differently. Pankhurst and Westoby's stories are examples of how fact and fiction were brought into dialogue to simplify complex ideas, humanize the cold constraints of politics, draw connections between the social and the political, and pay tribute to British working-class culture and oral traditions. While fiction by Socialist woman authors like Pankhurst and Westoby stays hidden in archives or is dismissed because it appears old-fashioned or unsophisticated, studies on

British creative activism, working-class concerns, politics and literary history will remain incomplete.[13]

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Carrie Timlin holds a PhD from the University of the Witwatersrand. Her most recent article "“The Workers Must Strive if the Butterflies Must Live”: Ethel Mannin’s “Love’s Winnowing”, the Socialist Romance Novel, and British Working-Class Women” appears in the 2024 Fall issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature.* She is currently working on a monograph mapping the intersection of activism, literature and International Socialism in the works of Ethel Mannin, Nancy Cunard and Sylvia Pankhurst.

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[13] This article arose out of research conducted at the University of the Witwatersrand, funded by the Oppenheimer Memorial Trust, The Adrian Nathan Grant, and the University of the Witwatersrand Humanities Research Publication Grant. With thanks to the guardians of knowledge in libraries and archives.

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Appendix I

The Injustice of the King: A Story[14]

May Westoby

Part one: *Justice*, 5 November 1910

In the great hall of judgement, the young King Justus was growing weary. It was exceedingly hot, and the appeals for justice had been very many.

Already noon was far past, and the Court grown restless. As one case was disposed of, and the offenders in it led away to prison, the King turned top his chief councillor, an old man" "I am so hungry I could eat an ox," he laughed. "After this next appeal we will dismiss the people."
"Some of them have come far, sire, to claim justice of him who is accounted the most just of living princes."

Justus blushed like a girl.

"We will not send them away. See that those who must wait are well cared for and comfortably lodged until tomorrow. Ah! what is this?

Two women had approached the throne, one old, one young. The elder, who was a widow, stretched her hands in supplication towards the King. Kneeling, she raised her eyes, red-rimmed and dimmed with much weeping, beseechingly, while she spoke brokenly.

"Justice, most just King! Give me back my fatherless daughter – my only child. Yesterday she was stolen away by some great lord."
Her grief choking her, she ceased speaking to gain control of herself. Justus bade her rise, saying kindly:
"Take comfort, dame. Assure yourself that if it be within out power your daughter shall soon be in your arms. But we must know more of the story. How came this robbery about?"

The widow, calmer now, turned to her companion. "Lucilla, speak! Thou was with the child." Then to the King: "I besought this maiden to accompany me because all I know she has told me."

The King's eyes dwelt with admiration on Lucilla. She was a tall girl of slight build, having the delicate beauty of her face framed in chestnut curls. Either for fear or shyness, she had kept her eyes on the ground, but, at the King's command to speak, she raised them, and looked at him. He wondered at her. She spoke collectedly, yet in her low, clear tones an odd sense of unwillingness surprised her hearers.

"Sire," she began, bowing low, as custom demanded, "the tale is soon told. Yesterday I went with Myra to the woods to gather flowers. We went each a different way to see which should have her basket soonest filled. We were to call to each other when this was done. I was fortunate, so that my basket soon overflowed, but I forgot to call Myra because horses' hoofs

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on the road drew my attention. I watched the coming rider unseen, and could not look away. I know not why." (Here Lucilla flushed scarlet, but paled again quickly, and went on.) "So it is that his face and form, his attire, and even the caparisoning of his horse, are fixed in my memory. He rode past, but drew rein a little further on, and, leaning from his saddle, looked smiling into the wood. Then I lost sight of him, for, still silent, I took a few steps in the direction I thought Myra might be, and the trees hid him from me. Just as I remembered I had not called, I heard Myra's voice distinctly. She cried for help again and again. I ran towards the sound, when a turn in the path again showed me that road. The horse was galloping away, but I could see Myra's golden hair and blue gown where she was held in the rider's arms, and I heard her cries grow fainter until all were out of sight."

Lucilla stopped, and once more looked on the ground. As for Justus, he had ceased to look on her long before, and throughout her narrative had fidgeted with a chain he wore about his neck. Now he fixed a curious gaze on her.

"You say you would know this man if you saw him?" he asked deliberately.
"Yes, sire."
"Describe him."
Lucilla turned paler, if that could be. Everyone saw her tremble.

"Sire," she said, so low scarce any could hear her, "it was thyself."
The Chief Councillor looked at Justus and was surprised to see anger furrow his brow, and a cruel curve new to it creep about his mouth. He rose, and towered above the trembling Lucilla.

His voice was harsh.
"Speak again, and beware how though liest."
In the dead hush succeeding his command, the slightest whisper would have sounded loud.
"I spoke the truth, though I feared to do it," Lucilla breathed, and fell forward, so that her hair lay all about the King's feet.

He did not look down, did not seem to know that she had fallen, but stood motionless for the moment that passed ere several of his nobles started forward to her aid. Then he waved them back, but said nothing still. His figure was tall and erect, his presence commanding for one so young, and his people thought him like a god. They had always found him just, generous, and gay. These things blinded them to his look of evil now. He spoke suddenly. Folk breathed more freely.

"Before you all was the accusation, before all shall be judgement. Judge, oh my people! Between the maiden and your King. She names me thief of women."
The crowded hall swayed to one impulse. "Let her die," was thundered.
Justus lifted a hand for silence. His brow had cleared a little.

"Nay," he declared; "that were too hard a fate. But her eyes which led her into temptation shall do so no more."
He turned for the second time to his Chief Councillor.
"My lord duke, be pleased to see to this matter. Let the girl be blinded" – he hesitated, then added – "with as little pain as possible."

As they raised Lucilla to carry her away, her hair dragged on the buckle of his shoe. Bending, he disentangled it with a slight shiver. His people thought him magnanimous, but the Chief Councillor, for the first time in his life, failed to understand him and was thereby troubled.
The mother of the stolen maid would have pleaded for Lucilla, but it was not allowed.
"Go in peace, Dame," said Justus. "Thy daughter shall be found. If any man hath harmed her, he shall be punished. Let it be told in writing what manner of maid she is."

With this Justus went from the hall of judgement, followed by his suite, leaving a people fed full of excitement, but hungry for more satisfying food. Proclamation was made at once for Myra's restoration, unhurt to her mother. Next day Justus, having found her family of good name, but poor, added that a dowry should accompany her. He himself gave her mother a house and servants far from her former dwelling, so that, as Myra did not know of Lucilla's sin and punishment, her mother being forbidden by the King to tell her, she continued to love her friend as of old.

Meanwhile the Chief Councillor went about his sad work with but little stomach for it.
"Either Justus is guilty, or he is sadly changed, and that suddenly. His old self – innocent – would have laughed at the girl, and made a friend of her," he mused.

Yet what was done to Lucilla the great Minister did himself, only employing a physician to apply healing unguents. Then he sent Lucilla to her stepfather, under careful escort. He bade her good-bye in enigmas.
"Go, Lucilla," he said, "but pray unceasingly that this trouble be lifted from thee."
The poor maid would have promised him anything for his kindly handling of her.
"Oh! My Lord," she said brokenly, "I am thankful my last sight was of thy sorrowful face. I could never have borne anger and contempt."

In a month – no less indeed – the scandal died down – to be forgotted unless renewal brought remembrance. Only the Chief Councillor watched the King. That Justus was out of sorts became evident to all. He did his work, it is true, with even greater zeal than before, but woe be to whoever lagged behind him. Yet, up to this time he had been an indulgent master. He sought pleasures, too, that he has heretofore despised, and was more restless than the very waves of the sea.

(*To be continued.*)

The Injustice of the King: A Story[15]

Part two: *Justice*, 12 November 1910

(*Continued from last week.*)

Once or twice nobles old enough to be his father, or, in one instance at least, his grandfather, hinted at marriage. He was blankly unaware of them. One morning he fiercely cursed a sightless man begging alms in the town, then gave him what made the man bless him in the jargon beggars use.

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"Remorse," reflected the Chief Councillor, "eats at a noble heart," and "a cowardly act is a canker in the mind of a brave man."

At last Justus could bear it no longer. The people's shouted praise of his justice sickened him. He took a fever which had been gone in a few days save for his disturbed mind. As it was he grew really ill/ He sent for his Chief Councillor, and everyone else away.

"My physicians cannot heal me," he complained.
"Do you know your Majesty's disease?"
"No my lord duke, they treat my body while it is my mind that is sick."
The chief Councillor, who had loved the King from the time when he was a tiny child, put a cool hand on his hot forehead.
"My son," he said tenderly, "if thou canst, tell me thy trouble."

Justus went silent. His friend waited. At last the King raised himself in bed, and words tumbled out of his mouth.
"I have been a liar and a coward. I am so despicable I fear to think of it, and can scarcely tell even you. Yet I must tell the whole world."
"And if *I* know?"
"Dost thou?" he breathed, his fever-bright eyes fixed on his companion. "Dost thou know that I stole the child Myra for a sudden whim that took me as I saw her in the woods. I left her housed without the city, and by the morrow had well-nigh forgotten her until Lucilla accused me, and I – oh! brute beast that I am – fearing to lose the popularity I had won – for so mean a reason – lied."

He stopped for breath, and wrung his hands. "I cannot right the wrong," he cried, "but what I can I will. All shall know me for what I am." He sank back on the pillows muttering, "Liar – coward."

"My son," said the Chief Councillor again, "thou sayest rightly, but these things are for the future when thou shalt leave this bed. For they present peace let me advise thee to ask the maiden's forgiveness."
"That I shall never win, Forgiveness! The saints in heaven would not forgive so foul a wrong. No, no! I will do as I have said."
"Give me leave to send for Lucilla, sire."

The fevered brain of Justus took hold upon the idea that his recovery rested with the wronged girls. If she forgave him, he would live, if not he must die.

"At once," he said, after a long interval he did not know had occurred. "At once." Then he sighed deeply, and muttered to himself. "But she will not, she cannot, forgive."

Messengers were dispatched for Lucilla. She was to come at once, to stay for nothing. One messenger returned with tidings that her stepfather had turned her away from his house, and had her left to do what she could in the nearest town across the river, where none knew her. He went on to say that his companions had gone further, seeking her. This sent Justus into delirium. He raved about eyes that were the lights of the world; he cursed himself for quenching them.

When Lucilla came he was sensible again. She was brought in just as she was – a beggar woman. Such had been the orders – to wait for nothing. Her feet were bare – clothes soiled and

ragged. Her cheeks were sunken, and the bright curls dulled. The black discs over her eyes gave her a terribly death-like appearance.

“Child, child!” cried the Chief Councillor, who had not expected things to be so bad, and, taking her hand, he led her to a chair. Lucilla knew his voice.
“You, my lord duke! Ah! You, at least, will tell me what the King desires of me. Is it to kill me?” (Her voice was weary.) “He should have done that at first.”
“Hush, my child! The King is ill.”
“Ill, my lord duke? Does he think the sight of me will restore him to health?”
Lucilla’s tone was bitter now, so that the Chief Councillor began to fear her mood. The King saw the embodiment of death in her.
“Lucilla,” the Duke said gently, taking her hand again, “the King is *very* ill. He wishes to know if you can forgive him!”

There was silence. Justus held his beath and shut his eyes. He did not see the panting of Lucilla’s wasted breasts. She spoke as if ashamed of herself.

“I have forgiven him long ago,” she whispered.
“Bring her to me,” Justus cried, choking back a sob, “bring her to me, and leave us alone.”
The Chief Councillor did as he was desired. The startled girl, who had not known the King was present, suffered herself to be led to his bedside. What a torrent of repentance was poured into her ears no one knows but herself. At length, as his voice grew weaker and weaker, Lucilla loosed her hands from his grasp, and stood up to call for help.

“You must never leave me again, Lucilla,” was heard as the door opened. As soon as the King could speak again, Lucilla was given over to the Chief Councillor. Justus begged that the Duchess would mother her. “You must never come to me without her,” he concluded. The doctors ruled that the King’s wishes must be met.

When Justus saw Lucilla again, the black disks no longer disfigured her eyelids. Only tiny gold stitches showed her inability to open her eyes. Justus thought her saint-like in the white robes they had dressed her in. he saw her with lover’s eyes; he had loved her all the time, he told himself. He now mended rapidly, and began to ask the earliest date when he might make a public address. His physicians told him in three weeks if no relapse intervened. He cut the period down to fourteen days, and insisted on having it proclaimed so.

Lucilla, quite unconscious it was for her sake, begged him to defer it. He remained obstinate. He saw Lucilla alone three times before his public confession. The first time he made love to her, and frightened her terribly. The second time he asked her to be his wife. She refused point-blank. The third time he heaped reproaches on his own head, and accused her of being unforgiving after all. “Thou hast not forgiven, Lucilla. Thou canst never love me. These are my deserts.”

Poor Lucilla, driven in a corner, made haste to soothe him.
“Sire,” she said, with cheeks aflame and locked hands, “I have loved thee ever since I saw thee ride by in the sunshine. That is why I was so sure.”
He caught her, kissed her, would not be denied.
“My queen, my queen,” he cried.
Lucilla found a dozen reasons against her queenship. He would hear of none.

At last she said: “The Queen must be an able woman. Wouldst thou give the nation one who can but just distinguish day from night?”
He knelt down and looked at her eyelids as though he could pierce them.
“Canst thou indeed tell light from dark?” he asked hoarsely. “Then, Lucilla, thou art not quite blind.”
It was fortunate that the Chief Councillor returned at this moment. Justus was behaving like a madman. He dragged the Duke on to a balcony that ran one side of the room. When the latter understood, he said quietly:
“Yes, perhaps we might have the stitches taken out. Maybe the work was ill done. My heart was not in it.”

Justus let the words pass. He wanted a doctor. The Chief Councillor thought that the room should be darkened. When this was done, and the stitches out, the King dismissed the physician instantly, so that Lucilla’s eyes fell first on her last sight. Her tone was absolutely expressionless.

“When last I saw your face, my lord duke, it was sorrowful – now you smile.”
Then, as before her blindness, she fainted away. Justus also was quite calm, dazed with joy and relief. When Lucilla was restored to her senses, “I claim my queen,” he said directly.
“No! Oh, no!” cried Lucilla, rosy red as she had been deathly pale. Her thoughts then centred themselves on her benefactor, and , rising, she threw her arms about his neck, and kissed him, thanking him in broken phrases.

“My eyes – my eyes,” she repeated again and again. He said nothing, only smiled at her.
“Take me to the Duchess,” she cried at last. “I must thank her for having such a husband.”
The men both laughed, but the elder saw wisdom in the words.
“Yes, yes,” he assented. “Or we shall have you in a fever next.”

He led her away to sit in a darkened room until her eyes were strong enough to bear the full light. Justus was on thorns, for he wished her to hear his confession. She would never have let him have his way had she known. Her face blanched as he began the tale to a quickly spellbound audience. As he went on, sparing himself no whit, she wept for love and pity. She would have stopped him had not the Duchess forcibly prevented her, whispering the while:
“It is better so. It is better so. They will love him the more.”

In the silence that followed his last words, Justus led Lucilla forward. Her marvellous eyes were still wet with tears. Justus never doubted the result, or he would not have asked: “Will you take Lucilla for your Queen?”
Nothing could have pleased the people better. They shouted themselves hoarse to show their pleasure. The Court was thunderstruck at this master move. Lucilla would have resisted, but none heard her.

“Crown her – crown her,” was shouted on all sides, and the King, placing Lucilla on his throne, held his crown lightly above her head.

He was really delighted with the uproar, and thanked his people graciously before leaving them. Some of the nobles opposed the match. Justus was deaf. The Chief Councillor blamed himself more than the King, but forbore interreference.

But neither Justus, nor his nobles, nor any of his people ever regretted his choice. Lucilla was so loving, and so lovely, and had such a gentle dignity, that she forbade contempt to small minds, and held aloof no great ones. Then, too, through her misfortunes, she had some knowledge of all sorts and conditions of men and women. Many a law for good was passed; many a one that might have worked evil was refused the King's sanction, through that knowledge.

Even at this time, when all the days are gone that have come between then and now, the people may be heard to say:
"This good came to us through the love of Lucilla, Saint and Queen," or "Justus, most just of earthly princes, gave us this law."

<u>Appendix II</u>

Thrift[16]

Sylvia E. Pankhurst

The Woman's Dreadnought, 20 June 1914

It was in a wide park and the path led through wonderful old oaks and chestnuts and broad open spaces, where there were flocks of sheep and deer.

Where the ground dipped into a hollow where two little cottages covered with a tangled mass of roses and honeysuckle, and with their little garden plots ablaze with close-growing old-fashioned flowers. In the most flowery of these two cottages lived an old woman, well over 90 years of age. Her clothes were always of plain black stuff and her dresses, copied one from another, were always made with the skirt full, the bodice very straight and plain, and the sleeves without a cuff, as country women wore them when she was young.

Her father worked on his estate all his life, managing one of the nearby farms for the Lord who owns the park. Her mother worked too, and she and all her sisters, milking and caring for the lambs and poultry but only her father was paid a wage. Her husband had also been employed here from a boy and in time had become the principal game-keeper. For years, in addition, he and she had managed a large farm for the Lord with numbers of men and women under them. All this time her husband was never paid more than a pound a week, and she nothing at all. Yet she, like her mother before her, had washing and cooking and cleaning to attend to for the work people, and milking, and dairying, and poultry keeping beside. The children from the great house always found a welcome in her kitchen, and had come to her regularly on baking day for home-made cakes.

"That work at the farm was a bit too much for us, it turned us into old people: for, of course, he had always the game to think of beside, and had most of the farm to see to, the last years

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when he began to get ill." Very often she said this to me, but always added: "I've worked hard for the Lord and now he does a lot for me."

After her husband died the agent had at once told her that she must leave the cottage, and only a personal appeal to the Lord had won her the right to stay. Then the Lord had said that she might live rent free in the cottage and have as much skim milk from the farm as she could drink. "It's little enough to give you, after all your years of unpaid work!" I used to say to her, but she would smile and answer: "Lord doesn't understand all that I have done for him."

She was still wonderfully quick and active, when I first knew her, in spite of her ninety old years, and could climb nimbly over the five barred gates and stiles. She lived alone in the cottage and did all her own housework and, as who could wonder, she lived largely on the Lord's skim milk, which she always kept warming in a jug on the hob. Until quite recently she had made her own dresses, and still was always busy with darning or mending, or patchwork quilts.

She was able even to do a little mending and cooking for her son, who lived next door and who worked for the Lord, as his father had done, and had a big family of sons. His wife had just died and one of his daughters, who was engaged to be married in a week's time, came home to stay a few days with her father and brothers, and on her wedding morning finished cleaning down the house, and was pumping water from the well and whitening the doorstep within an hour of the wedding.

"People ask me if I am not lonely and whether I am not afraid to live by myself, " the old woman said to me. "Of course I am not lonely. I should be very wicked if I were. Haven't I got my dear son living next door to me? It's true he and the boys are out all day, but look at the beautiful flowers and the birds I have got all around me. Listen to that dear little thing singing away there now. Why should I be afraid indeed? Nobody wants to harm me. God can look after me just the same wherever I am, and I am sure I shan't die until he wants me to."

So she would talk on, rambling as solitary people do, who are glad to have found someone to listen well, and always she spoke kindly and seemed sweet tempered and generous to all.

Sometimes she mentioned her son's wife, who had just died pf phthisis, with the gentle sorrow and regret for a friend and companion who was gone. But one morning she seemed strangely agitated and for a time seemed hardly able to speak. Then she began to talk of the dead woman. Her son had just discovered that his wife had died owing £5 to the tradespeople.

"She hadn't been doing right for a long time," said the old woman. "I'd watched her and I knew she wasn't going straight. People like us can't afford to go putting beef steak on for dinner for a lot of hungry men as she did, instead of making it into a pudding so as it'd go further. She got that she hadn't the strength to take trouble as she should and when she knew she was going, she let things slide. But she should have had more thought for those who'd be left when she was gone. Many a time I've seen her stop and lean with her hand on the table and gasp for breath, and I've asked her 'can't you get on with your work?' 'Oh I'll manage', she'd say and then I've seen her go out and cough."

The old woman spoke with bitterness as though her daughter in law's physical weakness had been a shameful fault. We used to take the bread in for each other", she went on "and more than once the man has asked me when she was going to pay." I never said anything, but I knew

things weren't going right. And I know where some of that money's gone to, and I've told my son." Then she explained that her son's eldest daughter was married to a man who was chronically out of work and had three little children. She had been always coming round to ask the mother for food and money. Her father said that she had chosen her own lot, and that nothing was to be given to her, but her mother had gone on helping her in secret whenever she could.

For this reason, and because of her own growing weakness and lessened ability to cope with the cares of housekeeping, the debt so crushingly large to these poor people, gradually accumulated. "I don't know how George'll ever manage to pay off the money," the piteous old voice went on. "It's been a hard struggle to pay for the funeral as it is. He only found out last night that she owed anything."

"She hasn't been the good wife I thought her, mother," he said, "I didn't think she'd have done it."

And so they shook their heads together and wondered however that money was to be paid; and in their trouble they bitterly blamed not the Lord for whom they had done so much in return for so little, but that poor dead woman who had gone on working until the day she died. How tragic, that after 30 years of sacrifice and labour for them, she should be thought to have lost all right to the affection and gratitude of her family because of this paltry debt.

That never ending painful contriving to make ends meet on little wages with so many mouths to feed weighs down the hearts of poor working mothers, and warps the whole current of their lives. Where every penny must be closely counted, an accident, an illness, or misfortune, means getting into debt and borrowing from pawnbrokers and moneylenders who charge outrageously high interest to the poor.

Last week three cases of mothers' suicide were reported in the newspapers. One woman's husband had given way to drink. The husbands of the other two were out of employment. It was only just possible for these women to make ends meet when their husband's small weekly wages were coming in regularly. They could not face the future with an added load of debt that they might never be able to pay off.