

1: The Golden Scarecrow eBook

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Page 1 I When Hugh Seymour was nine years of age he was sent from Ceylon, where his parents lived, to be educated in England. William Lasher, Vicar of Clinton St. Mary, that large rambling village on the edge of Roche St. Mary Moor in South Glebeshire. He spent there the two Christmases of and when he was ten and eleven years of age, and it is with the second of these that the following incident, and indeed the whole of this book, has to do. He was not, however, so ugly as this appearance would apparently convey, for his large, grey eyes, soft and even, at times agreeably humorous, were pleasant and cheerful. During these years when he knew Mr. Lasher he was undoubtedly unfortunate. He was shortsighted, but no one had, as yet, discovered this, and he was, therefore, blamed for much clumsiness that he could not prevent and for a good deal of sensitiveness that came quite simply from his eagerness to do what he was told and his inability to see his way to do it. He was not, at this time, easy with strangers and seemed to them both conceited and awkward. He could not throw a cricket-ball, he could not see to catch one after it was thrown to him, did he try to kick a football he missed it, and when he had run for five minutes he saw purple skies and silver stars and has cramp in his legs. He had, however, during these years at Mr. In his sleep, at any rate, he was a hero; in the wide-awake world he was, in the opinion of almost every one, a fool. He was exactly the type of boy whom the Rev. William Lasher could least easily understand. Lasher was tall and thin his knees often cracked with a terrifying noise, blue-black about the cheeks hooked as to the nose, bald and shining as to the head, genial as to the manner, and practical to the shining tips of his fingers. Mary Cricket Club, matches played, six; lost, five; drawn, one knew how to slash the ball across the net at a tennis garden party, always read the prayers in church as though he were imploring God to keep a straighter bat and improve His cut to leg, and had a passion for knocking nails into walls, screwing locks into doors, and making chicken runs. Lasher was kindly of heart so long as you allowed him to maintain that the world was made for one type of humanity only. By Jove, I can still cry over Little Nell and am not ashamed of it. Where are such men to-day! You must learn to like it. He never, of course, had a chance of saying this, nor would such a declaration have greatly benefited him, because, for Mr. Lasher, there was only one way for every one and the sooner if you were a small boy you followed it the better. The goal is to the strong. But Glebeshire has such an individuality, whether for good or evil, that it forces comment from the most sluggish and inattentive of human beings. Lasher was perhaps the only soul, living or dead, who succeeded in living in it during forty years he is still there, he is a Canon now in Polchester and never saying anything about it. When on his visits to London people inquired his opinion of Glebeshire, he would say: Lasher lived upon the very edge of Roche St. Mary Moor, a stretch of moor and sand. Mary Moor, that runs to the sea, contains the ruins of St. Arthe Church buried until lately in the sand, but recently excavated through the kind generosity of Sir John Porthcullis, of Borhaze, and shown to visitors, 6d.

Page 4 The road that ran from Clinton St. Mary to Borhaze across the moor was certainly a wild, rambling, beautiful affair, and when the sea-mists swept across it and the wind carried the cry of the Bell of Trezent Rock in and out above and below, you had a strange and moving experience. Lasher was certainly compelled to ride on his bicycle from Clinton St. Mary to Borhaze and back again, and never thought it either strange or moving. Borhaze wants waking up. Lasher it is impossible to know! Hugh Seymour thought about the moor continually, but he was afraid to mention his ideas of it in public. There was a legend in the village that several hundred years ago some pirates, driven by storm into Borhaze, found their way on to the moor and, caught by the mist, perished there; they are to be seen, says the village, in powdered wigs, red coats, gold lace, and swords, haunting the sand-dunes. God help the poor soul who may fall into their hands! He would like to find a pirate, to bring him to the vicarage, and present him to Mr. He knew that Mrs. Hugh did on one occasion mention the pirates. Pity they fill your head with such nonsense! If they read their Bibles more! He dreamt of the moor, of the pirates, of the cobbled street in Borhaze, of the cry of the Trezent Bell, of the deep lanes and

the smell of the flowers in them, of making five hundred not out at cricket, of doing a problem in Euclid to Mr. Lasher kissed him at night, of many, many other things. He was at this time a very lonely boy. Pidgen paid his visit he was most remarkably lonely. After that visit he was never lonely again. Pidgen came on a visit to the vicarage three days before Christmas. Hugh Seymour saw him first from the garden. Pidgen was standing at the window of Mr. Hugh had never before seen any one in the least like Mr. He was short and round, and his head was covered with tight little curls. His cheeks were chubby and red and his nose small, his mouth also very small. He had no chin. He was wearing a bright blue velvet waistcoat with brass buttons, and over his black shoes there shone white spats. Hugh had never seen white spats before. Pidgen shone with cleanliness, and he had supremely the air of having been exactly as he was, all in one piece, years ago. He was like one of the china ornaments in Mrs. It just slipped of itself! Pidgen would break very completely were he dropped. The first thing about him that struck Hugh was his amazing difference from Mr. It seemed strange that any two people so different could be in the same house. Lasher never gleamed or shone, he would not break with however violent an action you dropped him, he would certainly never wear white spats. They spoke for the first time at the mid-day meal, when Mr. Pidgen his mouth was full. I should know better Good enough sermon, Lasher, but a bit long. Lasher of course did not like this, and, indeed, it was evident to any one even to a small boy that the two gentlemen would have different opinions upon every possible subject. However, Hugh loved Mr. Pidgen an innings of two hundred not out and make him captain of Kent. He now observed the vision very carefully and discovered several strange items in his general behaviour. Think of the boy! He said this last one day to Mrs. Lasher, and of course she was very much astonished. She did not from the first like him at all. Lasher had been friends at Cambridge and had not met one another since, and every one knows that that is a dangerous basis for the renewal of friendship. They had a little dispute on the very afternoon of Mr. Lasher asked his guest whether he played golf. Lasher then explained that playing golf made one thin, hungry and self-restrained. Pidgen said that he did not wish to be the first or last of these, and that he was always the second, and that golf was turning the fair places of England into troughs for the moneyed pigs of the Stock Exchange to swill in. In fact, by the evening of the second day of the visit it was obvious that Clinton St. Mary Vicarage might, very possibly, witness a disturbed Christmas. It was all very tiresome for poor Mrs. IV Christmas Eve was always, to Hugh, a day with glamour. He did not any longer hang up his stocking although he would greatly have liked to do so , but, all day, his heart beat thickly at the thought of the morrow, at the thought of something more than the giving and receiving of presents, something more than the eating of food, something more than singing hymns that were delightfully familiar, something more than putting holly over the pictures and hanging mistletoe on to the lamp in the hall. Something there was in the day like going home, like meeting people again whom one had loved once, and not seen for many years, something as warm and romantic and lightly coloured and as comforting as the most inspired and impossible story that one could ever, lying in bed and waiting for sleep, invent. Page 7 To-day there was no snow but a frost, and there was a long bar of saffron below the cold sky and a round red ball of a sun. Hugh was sitting in a corner of Mr. He was sitting in a dark corner and they, because they were angry with one another, did not recognise any one except themselves. Lasher pulled furiously at his pipe and Mr. Pidgen stood up by the fire with his short fat legs spread wide and his mouth smiling, but his eyes vexed and rather indignant. It may be I would be the first to admit that, like most men, I have my weakness that I lay too much stress upon the healthy, physical, normal life, upon seeing things as they are and not as one would like to see them to be. If you or I were geniuses, Pidgen, that would be another affair. Pidgen, saw the hurt look in his eyes deepen. I want to know! He wanted to help Mr.

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