

The Deacon's Hat

BY JEANNETTE MARKS

Jeannette Marks, well-known essayist, poet, and playwright, was born in 1875 at Chattanooga, Tennessee, but spent her early life in Philadelphia, where her father, the late William Dennis Marks, was professor of dynamics in the University of Pennsylvania and president of the Edison Electric Light Company. She attended school in Dresden, and in 1900 was graduated from Wellesley College. She obtained her master's degree from Wellesley in 1903. Her graduate studies were continued at the Bodleian Library and at the British Museum. Since 1901 she has been on the staff of the English Department at Mount Holyoke College, South Hadley, Massachusetts. Her chief courses are Nineteenth Century Poetry and Play-writing.

Miss Marks's interest in Welsh life is the result of her hiking several summers among the Welsh hills and valleys. She became intimately acquainted with Welsh peasant life. It is said that Edward Knobloch, well-known dramatist, on one of her homeward voyages from one of her summer outings in Wales, pointed out to Miss Marks the dramatic possibilities of the material she had thus acquired. *Three Welsh Plays* was the result. Two of these plays, without the author's knowledge, were entered in 1911 for the Welsh National Theatre prize contest. To her credit, the plays won the prize. The complete volume appeared in 1917.

The Deacon's Hat is a fine study of the life of the common folk of Wales.

CHARACTERS

DEACON ROBERTS, *a stout, oldish Welshman* HUGH WILLIAMS, *an earnest, visionary young man who owns Y Gegin* NELI WILLIAMS, *his capable wife* MRS. JONES, *the Wash, a stout, kindly woman who wishes to buy soap* MRS. JENKINS, *the Midwife, after pins for her latest baby* TOM MORRIS, *the Sheep, who comes to buy tobacco and remains to pray*

THE DEACON'S HAT[I]

SCENE: *A little shop called Y Gegin (The Kitchen), in Bala, North Wales.*

TIME: *Monday morning at half-past eleven.*

To the right is the counter of Y Gegin, set out with a bountiful supply of groceries; behind the counter are grocery-stocked shelves. Upon the counter is a good-sized enamel-ware bowl filled with herring pickled in brine and leek, also a basket of fresh eggs, a jar of pickles, some packages of codfish, a half dozen loaves of bread, a big round cheese, several pounds of butter wrapped in print paper, etc., etc.

To the left are a cheerful glowing fire and ingle.

At the back center is a door; between the door and the fire stands a grandfather's clock with a shining brass face. Between the clock and the door, back centre, is a small tridarn [Welsh dresser] and a chair. From the rafters hang fitches of bacon, hams, bunches of onions, herbs, etc. On either side of the fireplace are latticed windows, showing a glimpse of the street. Before the fire is a small, round, three-legged table; beside it a tall, straight-backed chair.

Between the table and left is a door which is the entrance to Y Gegin and from which, on a metal elbow, dangles a large bell.

At rise of curtain Hugh Williams enters at back centre, absorbed in reading a volume of Welsh theological essays. He is dressed in a brightly striped vest, a short, heavy cloth coat, cut away in front and with lapels trimmed with brass buttons, swallowtails behind, also trimmed with brass buttons, stock wound around his neck, and tight trousers down to his boot-tops.

Neli Williams, his wife, a comely, capable young woman, busy with her knitting every instant she talks, is clad in her market costume, a scarlet cloak, and a tall black Welsh beaver. Over her arm is an immense basket.

NELI. [*Commandingly.*] Hughie, put down that book!

HUGH. [*Still going on reading.*] Haven't I just said a man is his own master, whatever!

NELI. Hughie, ye're to mind the shop while I'm gone!

HUGH. [*Patiently.*] Yiss, yiss.

NELI. I don't think ye hear a word I am sayin' whatever.

HUGH. Yiss, I hear every word ye're sayin'.

NELI. What is it, then?

HUGH. [*Weakly.*] 'Tis all about--about--the--the weather whatever!

NELI. Ye've not heard a word, an' ye're plannin' to read that book from cover to cover, I can see.

HUGH. [*A little too quickly.*] Nay, I have no plans....

[*He tucks book away in back coat pocket over-hastily.*]

NELI. Hugh!

HUGH. [*Weakly.*] Nay, I *have* no plans whatever!

NELI. [*Reproachfully.*] Hugh--*ie!* 'Twould be the end of sellin' anythin' to anybody if I leave ye with a book whatever! Give me that book!

HUGH. [*Obstinately.*] Nay, I'll no read the book.

NELI. Give me that book!

HUGH. [*Rising a little.*] Nay. I say a man is his own master whatever!

NELI. [*Finding the book hidden in his coat-tail pocket.*] Is he? Well, I'll no leave ye with any masterful temptations to be readin'.

HUGH. Ye've no cause to take this book away from me.

NELI. [*Opens book and starts with delight.*] 'Tis Deacon Roberts's new book on "The Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon." Where did ye get it?

HUGH. [*Reassured by her interest.*] He lent it to me this morning.

NELI. [*Resolutely.*] Well, I will take it away from ye this noon till I am home again whatever!

HUGH. [*Sulkily.*] Sellin' groceries is not salvation. They sold groceries in Babylon; Deacon Roberts says so.

NELI. [*Looking at book with ill-disguised eagerness.*] I dunno as anybody ever found salvation by givin' away all he had for nothin'! 'Tis certain Deacon Roberts has not followed that way.

HUGH. [*Still sulkily.*] A man is his own master, I say.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly, her nose in the book.*] Is he? Well, indeed!

HUGH. [*Crossly.*] Aye, he is. [*Pointedly.*] An' I was not plannin' to give away the book whatever.

NELI. [*Closing volume with a little sigh, as for stolen delights, and speaking hastily.*] An' I am not talkin' about acceptin' books, but about butter an' eggs an' cheese an' all the other groceries!

HUGH. Aye, ye'll get no blessin' from such worldliness.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly.*] Maybe not, but ye will get a dinner from that unblessed worldliness an' find no fault, I'm thinkin'. [*Her hand lingering on the book, which she opens.*] But such wonderful theology! An' such eloquence! Such an understandin' of sin! Such glowin' pictures of Babylon!

HUGH. Aye, hot! I tell ye, Neli, there's no man in the parish has such a gift of eloquence as Deacon Roberts or such theology. In all Wales ye'll not find stronger theology than his.

NELI. Ye have no need to tell me that! [*Looking for a place in which to hide the book until she returns.*] Have I not a deep an' proper admiration for theology? Have I not had one minister an' five deacons an' a revivalist in my family, to say nothin' at all of one composer of hymns?

HUGH. Yiss, yiss. Aye, 'tis a celebrated family. I am no sayin' anythin' against your family.

NELI. Then what?

HUGH. [*Pleadingly.*] Deacon Roberts has great fire with which to save souls. We're needin' that book on Babylon's wickedness. Give it back to me, Neli!

NELI. Oh, aye! [*Looks at husband.*] I'm not sayin' but that ye are wicked, Hugh, an' needin' these essays, for ye have no ministers and deacons and hymn composers among your kin.

HUGH. [*Triumphantly.*] Aye, aye, that's it! That's it! An' the more need have I to read till my nostrils are full of the smoke of--of Babylon.

NELI. [*Absent-mindedly tucking book away on shelf as she talks.*] Aye, but there has been some smoke about Deacon Roberts's reputation which has come from some fire less far away than Babylon.

HUGH. What smoke?

NELI. [*Evasively.*] Well, I am thinkin' about my eggs which vanished one week ago to-day. There was no one in that mornin' but Deacon Roberts. Mrs. Jones the Wash had come for her soap an' gone before I filled that basket with eggs.

HUGH. [*Watching her covertly, standing on tiptoe and craning his neck as she stows away book.*] Yiss, yiss!

NELI. [*Slyly.*] Ask Deacon Roberts if cats steal eggs whatever?

HUGH. [*Repeating.*] If cats steal eggs, if cats steal eggs.

NELI. Aye, not if eggs steal cats.

HUGH. [*Craning neck.*] Yiss, yiss, if eggs steal cats!

NELI. Hugh--*ie!* Now ye'll never get it correct again! 'Tis if cats steal eggs.

HUGH. [*Sulkily.*] Well, I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face.

[NELI *turns about swiftly with the quick, sudden motions characteristic of her, and HUGH shrinks into himself. She shakes her finger at him and goes over to kiss him.*]

NELI. Hughie, lad, ye're not to touch the book while I am gone to market.

HUGH. Nay, nay, certainly not!

NELI. And ye're to be on the lookout for Mrs. Jones the Wash, for Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife--Jane Elin has a new baby, an' it'll be needin' somethin'. [*Pointing to counter.*] Here is everythin' plainly marked. Ye're no to undersell or give away anythin.' D'ye hear?

HUGH. Aye, I hear!

NELI. An' remember where the tobacco is, for this is the day Tom Morris the Sheep comes in.

HUGH. Aye, in the glass jar.

NELI. Good-by. I will return soon.

HUGH. [*Indifferently.*] Good-by.

[NELI leaves by door at back centre. Immediately HUGH steals toward the shelves where she hid the book.

NELI. [*Thrusting head back in.*] Mind, Hughie lad, no readin'--nay, not even any theology!

HUGH. [*Stepping quickly away from shelves and repeating parrotlike.*] Nay, nay, no readin', no sermons, not even any theology!

NELI. An' no salvation till I come back!

[*She smiles, withdraws head, and is gone. HUGH starts forward, collides clumsily with the counter in his eagerness, knocks the basket of eggs with his elbow, upsetting it. Several eggs break. He shakes his head ruefully at the mess and as ruefully at the counter. He finds book and hugs it greedily to him.*

HUGH. [*Mournfully.*] Look at this! What did I say but that there was no salvation sellin' groceries! If Neli could but see those eggs! [*He goes behind counter and gets out a box of eggs, from which he refills the basket. The broken eggs he leaves untouched upon the floor. He opens his volume of sermons and seats himself by a little three-legged table near the fire. He sighs in happy anticipation. Hearing a slight noise, he looks suspiciously at door, gets up, tiptoes across floor to street door, and locks it quietly. An expression of triumph overspreads his face.*] Da, if customers come, they will think no one is at home whatever, an' I can read on! [*He seats himself at little three-legged table, opens volume, smooths over its pages lovingly, and begins to read slowly and halting over syllables.*] The smoke of Ba-by-lon was hot--scorchin' hot. An' 'twas filled with Ba-ba-ba-baal stones, slimy an' scorchin' hot also----

[*There is the sound of feet coming up the shop steps, followed by a hand trying the door-knob. HUGH looks up from his sermons, an expression of innocent triumph on his face. The door-knob is tried again, the door rattled.*

[*Then some one rings the shop door-bell.*

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Calling.*] Mrs. Williams, mum, have ye any soap? [*No answer. Calling.*] Mrs. Williams! Mrs. Williams!

[HUGH *nods approvingly and lifts his volume to read.*

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Where are they all whatever? I will just look in at the window, [*A large, kindly face is anxiously flattened against the window. At that HUGH drops in consternation under the three-legged table.*] Uch, what's that shadow skippin' under the table? No doubt a rat after the groceries. Mrs. Williams, mum, Mrs. Williams! Well, indeed, they're out.

[*She pounds once more on the door with a heavy fist, rings, and then goes. Suddenly the door back centre opens, and NELI WILLIAMS appears.*

NELI. [*She does not see HUGH and peers around for him.*] What is all that bell-ringing about?

[HUGH *crawls out from under the table.*

HUGH. Hush, she's gone!

NELI. [*Amazed, and whispering to herself.*] Under the table!

HUGH. [*Rising and putting up his hand as a sign for her to keep silent.*] Nay, 'twas Mrs. Jones the Wash come to buy her soap whatever!

NELI. Aye, well, why didn't she come in whatever?

HUGH. [*Whispering.*] I locked the door, Neli, so I could finish readin' those essays whatever! An' then she looked in at the window, an' I had to get under the table.

NELI. [*Indignantly.*] Locked the door against a customer, an' after all I said! An' crawled under a table! Hugh Williams, your wits are goin' quite on the downfall!

HUGH. [*In a whisper.*] Aye, but Neli, those essays--an' I thought ye had gone to market.

NELI. I had started, but I came back for my purse. Put down that book!

HUGH. Aye, but, Neli----

NELI. [*Angrily.*] Much less of heaven an' much more of earth is what I need in a husband! Ye have sent away a customer; very like Mrs. Jones the Wash after soap will go elsewhere.

HUGH. Aye, but Neli....

[*Steps are heard approaching.*

NELI. Get up! Some one is coming.

[*HUGH gets up very unwillingly.*

HUGH. [*Whispering still.*] Aye, but Neli....

NELI. [*Angrily.*] Put down that book, I say! [*She crunches over some eggshells.*] Eggs? Broken?

HUGH. [*Putting down book.*] Aye, Neli, my elbow an' the eggs in Babylon....

NELI. [*Sarcastically.*] Aye, I see beasts in Babylon here together--doleful creatures smearin' one an' sixpence worth of eggs all over the floor. An' a half-dozen eggs gone last week. [*Wiping up eggs.*] An' I'm to suppose Babylon had something to do with that half-dozen eggs, too? They were put in the basket after Mrs. Jones the Wash had left whatever, an' before Deacon Roberts came.

HUGH. Neli, I did not say----

NELI. [*Still angrily.*] Well, indeed, unlock that door!

HUGH. [*Going to unlock door.*] But, Neli....

NELI. [*Disappearing through door back centre.*] Not a word! Your mind has gone quite on the downfall--lockin' doors against your own bread and butter an' soap.

HUGH. [*Unlocking door sullenly.*] But, Neli, salvation an' soap....

NELI. [*Snappily.*] Salvation an' soap are as thick as thieves.

HUGH. But, Neli, a man is his own master.

NELI. Yiss, I see he is!

[*NELI goes out, slamming door noisily.*]

HUGH. Dear anwyl, she seems angry!

[*HUGH opens street door left just as NELI goes out through kitchen, by door back centre. DEACON ROBERTS enters the door HUGH has unlocked. He looks at HUGH, smiles, and goes over to counter in a businesslike way. He is a stout man, dressed in a black broadcloth cutaway coat, tight trousers, a drab vest, high collar and stock, woollen gloves, a muffler wound about his neck and face, and a tall Welsh beaver hat. Under his arm he carries a book.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Speaking affectionately, pulling off his gloves, putting down book on counter, and beginning eagerly to touch the various groceries.*] Essays on Babylon to-day, Hughie lad?

HUGH. [*Looking about for NELI and speaking fretfully.*] Nay.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unwinding his muffler.*] Ye look as if ye had been in spiritual struggle.

HUGH. [*Drearily.*] I have.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, indeed, Hughie, 'tis neither the angel nor the archfiend here now, nor for me any struggle except the struggle to both live an' eat well--ho! ho! *an'* eat well, I say--in Bala. [*Laughs jovially.*] Ho! ho! not bad, Hughie lad--live *an'* eat in Bala!

HUGH. [*Patiently.*] With that muffler around your head, deacon, ye are enough to frighten the devil out of Babylon.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unwinding last lap of muffler.*] Yiss, yiss, Hughie lad. But I dunno but ye will understand better if I call myself, let us say the angel with the sickle--ho! ho!--not the angel of fire, Hughie, but the angel with the sharp sickle gatherin' the clusters of the vines of the earth. [*Sudden change of subject.*] Where is Neli?

HUGH. [*Vacantly.*] I dunno--yiss, yiss, at market.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Chuckling.*] Dear, dear, at market--a fine day for marketing! An' my essays on the Flamin' Wickedness of Babylon, Hughie lad, how are they? Have ye finished them?

HUGH. Nay, not yet.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Looking over counter, touching one article after another as he mentions it.*] Pickled herrin'--grand but wet! Pickles--dear me, yiss, Neli's--an' good! Butter from Hafod-y-Porth--sweet as honey! [*He picks up a pat of butter and sniffs it, drawing in his breath loudly. He smiles with delight and lays down the butter. He takes off his hat and dusts it out inside. He puts his hat back on his head, smiles, chuckles, picks up butter, taps it thoughtfully with two fingers, smells it and puts down the pat lingeringly. He lifts up a loaf of NELI WILLIAMS'S bread, glancing from it to the butter.*] Bread! Dear me! [*His eyes glance on to codfish.*] American codfish [*picks up package and smacks his lips loudly*], dear anwyl, with potatoes-- [*reads*] "Gloucester." [*Reaches out and touches eggs affectionately.*] Eggs--are they fresh, Hugh?

HUGH. [*Dreamily.*] I dunno. But I broke some of them. They might be! [*Looks at floor.*

DEACON ROBERTS. *Were* they fresh?

HUGH. I dunno.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Sharply.*] Dunno? About *eggs*?

[*Picks up egg.*

HUGH. [*Troubled.*] Neli's hens laid them.

DEACON ROBERTS. I see, Neli's hens laid 'em, an' you broke 'em! Admirable arrangement! [*Putting down the egg and turning toward the cheese, speaks on impatiently.*] Well, indeed then, were the hens fresh?

HUGH. [*More cheerful.*] Yiss, I think. Last week the basket was grand an' full of fresh eggs, but they disappeared, aye, they did indeed.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Starts.*] Where did they go to?

HUGH. [*Injured.*] How can I say? I was here, an' I would have told her if I had seen, but I did not whatever. Neli reproves me for too great attention to visions an' too little to the groceries.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Chuckling.*] Aye, Hughie lad, such is married life! Let a man marry his thoughts or a wife, for he cannot have both. I have chosen my thoughts.

HUGH. But the cat----

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Briskly.*] Aye, a man can keep a cat without risk.

HUGH. Nay, nay, I mean the cat took 'em. I dunno. That's it--
{SPACE}[HUGH *clutches his head, trying to recall something.*] Uch, that's it! Neli told me to remember to ask ye if ye thought eggs could steal a cat whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Puzzled.*] Eggs steal a cat?

HUGH. [*Troubled.*] Nay, nay, cats steal an egg?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Startled and looking suspiciously at HUGH.*] Cats? What cats?

HUGH. [*With solemnity.*] Aye, but I told Neli I'm no carin' about cats with heaven starin' me in the face. Deacon Roberts, those essays are grand an' wonderful.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Relieved.*] Yiss, yiss! Hughie lad, theology is a means to salvation an' sometimes to other ends, too. But there's no money in theology. [*Sighs.*] And a man must live! [*Points to corroded dish of pickled herring, sniffing greedily.*] Dear people, what beautiful herrin'! [*Wipes moisture away from corners of his mouth and picks up a fish from dish, holding it, dripping, by tail.*] Pickled?

HUGH. [*Looking at corroded dish.*] Tuppence.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Shortly.*] Dear to-day.

HUGH. [*Eyeing dish dreamily.*] I dunno. Neli----

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Eyes glittering, cutting straight through sentence and pointing to cheese.*] Cheese?

HUGH. A shillin', I'm thinkin'.

DEACON ROBERTS. A shillin', Hugh? [DEACON ROBERTS *lifts knife and drops it lightly on edge of cheese. The leaf it pares off he picks up and thrusts into his mouth, greedily pushing in the crumbs. Then he pauses and looks slyly at HUGH.*] Was it sixpence ye said, Hugh?

HUGH. [*Gazing toward the fire and the volume of essays.*] Yiss, sixpence, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Sarcastically.*] Still too dear, Hugh!

HUGH. [*Sighing.*] I dunno, it might be dear. [*With more animation.*] Deacon, when Babylon fell----

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Wipes his mouth and, interrupting HUGH, speaks decisively.*] No cheese. [*He removes his tall Welsh beaver hat, mops off his bald white head, and, pointing up to the shelves, begins*

to dust out inside of hatband again, but with a deliberate air of preparation.] What is that up there, Hughie lad?

HUGH. [*Trying to follow the direction of the big red wavering forefinger.*] Ye mean that? A B C In-fants' Food, I think.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Giving his hat a final wipe.*] Nay, nay, not for me, Hughie lad! Come, come, brush the smoke of burnin' Babylon from your eyes! In a minute I must be goin' back to my study, whatever. An' I have need of food!

[*HUGH takes a chair and mounts it. The DEACON looks at HUGH'S back, puts his hand down on the counter, and picks up an egg from the basket. He holds it to the light and squints through it to see whether it is fresh. Then he turns it lovingly over in his fat palm, makes a dexterous backward motion and slides it into his coat-tail pocket. This he follows with two more eggs for same coat-tail and three for other-- in all half a dozen.*

HUGH. [*Dreamily pointing to tin.*] Is it Yankee corn?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*To Hugh's back, and slipping in second egg.*] Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad, that tin above!

HUGH. [*Absent-mindedly touching tin.*] Is it ox tongue?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in third egg and not even looking up.*] Ox tongue, lad? Nay, nuthin' so large as that.

HUGH. [*Dreamily reaching up higher.*] American condensed m-m-milk? Yiss, that's what it is.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in fourth egg.*] Condensed milk, Hughie? Back to infants' food again.

HUGH. [*Stretching up almost to his full length and holding down tin with tips of long white finger.*] Kippert herrin'? Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in fifth egg.*] Nay, nay, a little further up, if you please.

HUGH. [*Gasping, but still reaching up and reading.*] Uto--U-to-pi-an Tinned Sausage. Is it that?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slipping in sixth egg with an air of finality and triumph, and lifting his hat from the counter.*] Nay, nay, not that, Hughie lad. Why do ye not begin by askin' me what I want? Ye've no gift for sellin' groceries whatever.

HUGH. [*Surprised.*] Did I not ask ye?

DEACON ROBERTS. Nay.

HUGH. What would Neli say whatever? She would never forgive me.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Amiably.*] Well, I forgive ye, Hughie lad. 'Tis a relish I'm needin'!

HUGH. [*Relieved.*] Well, indeed, a relish! We have relishes on that shelf above, I think. [*Reaches up but pauses helplessly.*] I must tell Neli that these shelves are not straight.

[*Dizzy and clinging to the shelves, his back to the DEACON.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Picking up a pound of butter wrapped in print paper.*] Is it up there?

HUGH. No, I think, an' the shelves are not fast whatever. I must tell Neli. They go up like wings. [*Trying to reach to a bottle just above him.*] Was it English or American?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Putting the pound of butter in his hat and his hat on his head.*] American, Hughie lad.

[*At that instant there is a noise from the inner kitchen, and NELI WILLIAMS opens the door. The DEACON turns, and their glances meet and cross. Each understands perfectly what the other has seen. NELI WILLIAMS has thrown off her red cloak and taken off her Welsh beaver hat. She is dressed in a short full skirt, white stockings,*

clogs on her feet, a striped apron, tight bodice, fichu, short sleeves, and white cap on dark hair.

NELI. [*Slowly.*] Uch! The deacon has what he came for whatever!

HUGH. [*Turning to contradict his wife.*] Nay, Neli-- {SPACE} [*Losing his balance on chair, tumbles off, and, with arm flung out to save himself, strikes dish of pickled herring. The herring and brine fly in every direction, spraying the DEACON and HUGHIE; the bowl spins madly, dipping and revolving on the floor. For a few seconds nothing is audible except the bowl revolving on the flagstones and HUGHIE picking himself up and sneezing behind the counter.*] Achoo! Achoo! Dear me, Neli--Achoo!

NELI. [*Going quickly to husband and beginning to wipe brine from husband's forehead and cheeks; at the same time has her back to the DEACON and forming soundless letters with her lips, she jerks her head toward the DEACON.*] B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH. [*Drearily.*] Better? Aye, I'm better. It did not hurt me whatever.

NELI. [*Jerking head backwards toward DEACON ROBERTS and again forming letters with lips.*] B-U-T-T-E-R!

HUGH. What, water? Nay, I don't want any water.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Coughing, ill at ease and glancing suspiciously at bowl that has come to rest near his leg.*] Ahem! 'Tis cold here, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' I must be movin' on.

NELI. [*Savagely to DEACON.*] Stay where ye are whatever!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Unaccustomed to being spoken to this way by a woman.*] Well, indeed, mum, I could stay, but I'm thinkin' 'tis cold an'--I'd better go.

NELI. [*Again savagely.*] Nay, stay! Stay for--for what ye came for whatever!

[NELI looks challengingly at the DEACON. Then she goes on wiping brine carefully from husband's hair and from behind his ears. The DEACON coughs and pushes bowl away with the toe of his boot.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Smiling.*] 'Tis unnecessary to remain then, mum.

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] What did he get?

HUGH. [*Sneezing.*] N--n--Achoo!--nothin'!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With sudden interest, looking at the floor.*] Well, indeed!

NELI. [*Suspiciously.*] What is it?

[*He reaches down with difficulty to a small thick puddle on the floor just beneath his left coat-tail. He aims a red forefinger at it, lifts himself, and sucks fingertip.*

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Smiling.*] Ahem, Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis excellent herrin' brine! [*From the basket on the counter he picks up an egg, which he tosses lightly and replaces in basket.*] A beautiful fresh egg, Mrs. Williams, mum. I must be steppin' homewards.

HUGH. [*Struggling to speak just as NELI reaches his nose, wringing it vigorously at she wipes it.*] Aye, but Neli, I was just tellin' ye when I fell that I could not find the deacon's relish--uch, achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With finality, tossing the egg in air, catching it and putting it back in basket.*] Well, indeed, mum, I must be steppin' homewards now.

[*NELI'S glance rests on fire burning on other side of room. She puts down wet cloth. She turns squarely on the DEACON.*

NELI. What is your haste, Mr. Roberts? Please to go to the fire an' wait! I can find the relish.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] Nay, nay, mum. I have no need any more--[*Coughs.*] Excellent herrin' brine.

[*Goes toward door.*]

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] Take him to the fire, Hugh. 'Tis a cold day whatever! [*Insinuatingly to DEACON.*] Have ye a reason for wantin' to go, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Going.*] Nay, nay, mum, none at all! But, I must not trouble ye. 'Tis too much to ask, an' I have no time to spare an'----

NELI. [*Interrupting and not without acerbity.*] Indeed, Mr. Roberts, sellin' what we *can* is our profit. [*To HUGH, who obediently takes DEACON by arm and pulls him toward fire.*] Take him to the fire, lad. [*To DEACON.*] What kind of a relish was it, did ye say, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Having a tug of war with HUGH.*] 'Tis an Indian relish, mum, but I cannot wait.

HUGH. [*Pulling harder.*] American, ye said.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] Yiss, yiss, American Indian relish, that is.

NELI. Tut, 'tis our specialty, these American Indian relishes! We have several. Sit down by the fire while I look them up. [*Wickedly.*] As ye said. Mr. Roberts, 'tis cold here this morning.

DEACON ROBERTS. There, Hughie lad, I must not trouble ye. [*Looks at clock.*] 'Tis ten minutes before twelve, an' my dinner will be ready at twelve. [*Pulls harder.*]

NELI. [*To HUGH.*] Keep him by the fire, lad.

DEACON ROBERTS. There, Hughie lad, let me go!

[*But HUGH holds on, and the DEACON'S coat begins to come off.*]

NELI. [*Sarcastically.*] The relish--American Indian, ye said, I think--will make your dinner taste fine and grand!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Finding that without leaving his coat behind he is unable to go, he glowers at HUGH and speaks sweetly to NELI.*] 'Tis a beautiful clock, Mrs. Williams, mum. But I haven't five minutes to spare.

NELI. [*Keeping a sharp lookout on the rim of the DEACON'S hat.*] Well, indeed, I can find the relish in just one minute. An' ye'll have abundance of time left.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Trapped, and gazing at clock with fine air of indifference.*] 'Tis a clever, shinin' lookin' clock whatever, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI. Have ye any recollection of the name of the maker of the relish, Mr. Roberts?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Putting his hands behind him anxiously and parting his freighted coat-tails with care; then, revolving, presenting his back and one large, well-set, bright-colored patch to the fire.*] Nay, I have forgotten it, Mrs. Williams, mum.

NELI. Too bad, but I'm sure to find it. [*She mounts upon chair. At this moment the shop door-bell rings violently, and there enters MRS. JONES THE WASH, very fat and very jolly. She is dressed in short skirt, very full, clogs on her feet, a bodice made of striped Welsh flannel, a shabby kerchief, a cap on her head, and over this a shawl. NELI turns her head a little.*] Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, in a minute, if you please. Sit down until I find Deacon Roberts's relish whatever.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Sits down on chair by door back centre and folds her hands over her stomach.*] Yiss, yiss, mum, thank you. I've come for soap. I came once before, but no one was in.

NELI. Too bad!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. An' I looked in at the window an' saw nothin' but a skippin' shadow looked like a rat. Have ye any rats, Mrs. Williams, mum, do ye think?

NELI. Have I any rats? Well, indeed, 'tis that I'm wantin' to know, Mrs. Jones the Wash!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Well, I came back, for the water is eatin' the soap to-day as if 'twere sweets--aye, 'tis a very meltin' day for soap! [*Laughs.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. 'Tis sweet to be clean, Mrs. Jones the Wash.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Laughing.*] Yiss, yiss, Deacon Roberts, there has many a chapel been built out of a washtub, an' many a prayer risen up from the suds!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Solemnly.*] Aye, Mrs. Jones the Wash, 'tis holy work, washin' is very holy work.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Touched.*] Yiss, yiss, I thank ye, Deacon Roberts.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, I must be steppin' homeward now.

NELI. [*Firmly.*] Nay, Mr. Roberts. I am searchin' on the shelf where I think that American Indian relish is. Ye act as if ye had some cause to hurry, Mr. Roberts. Wait a moment, if you please.

DEACON ROBERTS. Well, indeed, but I am keepin' Mrs. Jones the Wash waitin'!

NELI. [*To MRS. JONES.*] Ye are in no haste?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Thoroughly comfortable and happy.*] Nay, mum, no haste at all. I am havin' a rest, an' 'tis grand an' warm here whatever.

NELI. [*Maliciously to DEACON.*] Does it feel hot by the fire?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Experiencing novel sensations on the crown of his bald head.*] Mrs. Williams, mum, 'tis hot in Y Gegin, but as with Llanycil Churchyard, Y Gegin is only the portal to a hotter an' a bigger place where scorchin' flames burn forever an' forever. Proverbs saith, "Hell an' destruction are never full." What, then, shall be the fate of women who have no wisdom, Mrs. Williams, mum?

NELI. [*Searching for relish.*] Aye, what? Well, indeed, the men must know.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Nodding her head appreciatively at HUGH.*] Such eloquence, Mr. Williams! Aye, who in chapel has such grand theology as Deacon Roberts!

[*She sighs. The bell rings violently again, and TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP enters. He is dressed in gaiters, a shepherd's cloak, etc., etc. He carries a crook in his hand. He is a grizzle-haired, rosy-faced old man, raw-boned, strong, and awkward, with a half-earnest, half-foolish look.*

NELI. [*Looking around.*] Aye, Tom Morris the Sheep, come in an' sit down. I am lookin' out an American Indian relish for the deacon.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, mum. I am wantin' to buy a little tobacco, mum. 'Tis lonely upon the hillsides with the sheep, whatever.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Hastily.*] I must go now, Mrs. Williams, mum, an' ye can wait on Tom Morris.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Nay, nay, Mr. Roberts, sir, there is no haste.

NELI. [*To TOM MORRIS.*] Sit down there by the door, if you please.

[*TOM MORRIS seats himself on other side of door by back centre.*

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, mum. [*Touches his forelock to MRS. JONES THE WASH.*] A grand day for the clothes, Mrs. Jones, mum.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss, an' as I was just sayin' 'tis a meltin' day for the soap!

NELI. [*Significantly.*] An' perhaps 'tis a meltin' day for somethin' besides soap! [*She looks at DEACON.*]

HUGH. [*Earnestly.*] Yiss, yiss, for souls, meltin' for souls, I am hopin'. [*Picking up the book from the little three-legged table, and speaking to the DEACON.*] They are enlargin' the burial ground in Llanycil Churchyard--achoo! achoo!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Slyly moving a step away from fire.*] They're only enlargin' hell, Hughie lad, an' in that place they always make room for all. [*He casts a stabbing look at NELI.*]

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Nodding head.*] True, true, room for all! [*Chuckling.*] But 'twould be a grand place to dry the clothes in!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Severely.*] Mrs. Jones, mum, hell is paved with words of lightness.

HUGH. [*Looking up from book, his face expressing delight.*] Deacon Roberts, I have searched for the place of hell, but one book sayeth one thing, an' another another. Where is hell?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, where is hell?

[*The bell rings violently. All start except NELI. MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE enters. She is an old woman, white-haired, and with a commanding, somewhat disagreeable expression on her face. She wears a cloak and black Welsh beaver and walks with a stick.*]

NELI. Yiss, yiss, Mrs. Jenkins the Midwife, I am just lookin' out a relish for the Deacon. Sit down by the fire, please.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Seating herself on other side of fire.*] Aye, mum, I've come for pins; I'm in no haste.

NELI. is it Jane Elin's baby?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Aye, Jane Elin's, an' 'tis my sixth hundredth birth.

HUGH. We're discussing the place of hell, Mrs. Jenkins, mum.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Well, indeed, I have seen the place of hell six hundred times then. [*Coughs and nods her head up and down over stick.*] Heaven an' hell I'm thinkin' we have with us here.

HUGH. Nay, nay, how could that be? Tell us where is the place of hell, Deacon Roberts.

[*All listen with the most intense interest.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Nodding.*] Aye, the place of hell-- [*stopping suddenly, a terrified look on his face, as the butter slides against the forward rim of his hat, almost knocking it off, then going on with neck rigid and head straight up*] to me is known where is that place--their way is dark an' slippery; they go down into the depths, an' their soul is melted because of trouble.

NELI. [*Pausing sceptically.*] Aye, 'tis my idea of hell whatever with souls meltin', Mr. Roberts!

HUGH. [*Tense with expectation.*] Tell us where is that place!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Neck rigid, head unmoved, and voice querulous.*] Yiss, yiss. [*Putting his hand up and letting it down quickly.*] Ahem! Ye believe that it rains in Bala?

HUGH. [*Eyes on DEACON, in childlike faith.*] I do.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Yiss, yiss, before an' after every birth whatever!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss, who would know better than I that it rains in Bala?

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, amen, it rains in Bala upon the hills an' in the valleys.

DEACON ROBERTS. Ye believe that it can rain in Bala both when the moon is full an' when 'tis new?

HUGH. [*Earnestly.*] I do.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Wearily.*] Yiss, any time.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, all the time.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE.. Yiss, yiss, it rains ever an' forever!

NELI. [*Forgetting the relish search.*] Well, indeed, 'tis true it can rain in Bala at any time an' at all times.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Paying no attention to Neli.*] Ye believe that Tomen-y-Bala is Ararat?

HUGH. [*Clutching his book more tightly and speaking in a whisper.*] Yiss.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE.. Yiss, the Hill of Bala is Ararat.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Yiss, I have driven the sheep over it whatever more than a hundred times.

NELI. [*Both hands on counter, leaning forward, listening to DEACON'S words.*] Aye, Charles-y-Bala said so.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Still ignoring NELI and lowering his coat-tails carefully.*] Ye believe, good people, that the Druids called Noah "Tegid," an' that those who were saved were cast up on Tomen-y-Bala?

HUGH. Amen, I do!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Nodding her old head.*] Aye, 'tis true.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss, yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Amen, 'tis so.

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Moving a few steps away from the fire, standing sidewise, and lifting hand to head, checking it in midair.*] An' ye know that Bala has been a lake, an' Bala will become a lake?

HUGH. Amen, I do!

NELI. [*Assenting for the first time.*] Yiss, 'tis true--that is.

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Dear anwyl, yiss!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*With warning gesture toward window.*] Hell is out there--movin' beneath Bala Lake to meet all at their comin'. [*Raises his voice suddenly.*] Red-hot Baal stones will fall upon your heads--Baal stones. Howl ye! [*Shouting loudly.*] Meltin' stones smellin' of the bullocks. Howl, ye sinners! [*Clasping his hands together desperately.*] Scorchin' hot--Oo--o--o--Howl ye!--howl ye! [*The DEACON'S hat sways, and he jams it down more tightly on his head. Unclasping his hands and as if stirring up the contents of a pudding-dish.*] 'Round an' round like this! Howl, ye sinners, howl!

[*All moan and sway to and fro except NELI.*]

NELI. [*Sceptically.*] What is there to fear?

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Groaning.*] Nay, but what is there not to fear?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Aye, outermost darkness. Och! Och!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Have mercy!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Shouting again.*] Get ready! Lift up your eyes! [*Welsh beaver almost falls off and is set straight in a twinkling.*] Beg for mercy before the stones of darkness burn thee, an' there is no

water to cool thy tongue, an' a great gulf is fixed between thee an' those who might help thee!

NELI. [*Spellbound by the DEACON'S eloquence and now oblivious to hat, etc.*] Yiss, yiss, 'tis true, 'tis very true!

[*She steps down from chair and places hands on counter.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*His face convulsed, shouting directly at her.*] Sister, hast thou two eyes to be cast into hell fire?

NELI. [*Terrified and swept along by his eloquence.*] Two eyes to be burned?

[*All lower their heads, groaning and rocking to and fro.*]

DEACON ROBERTS. [*The butter trickling down his face, yelling with sudden violence.*] Hell is here an' now. Here in Bala, here in Y Gegin, here with us! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners!

[*All moan together.*]

HUGH. [*Whispering.*] Uch, here!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Yiss, here!

MRS. JONES THE WASH. Yiss.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. [*Terrified.*] Aye. Amen! Yiss!

NELI. [*Whispering.*] Here in Y Gegin!

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Clapping his hands to his face.*] Stones of Baal, stones of darkness, slimy with ooze, red-hot ooze, thick vapors! Howl ye, howl, ye sinners! [*All moan and groan. Takes a glance at clock, passes hand over face and runs on madly, neck rigid, eyes staring, fat red cheeks turning to purple.*] Midday, not midnight, is the hour of hell; its sun never sets! But who knows when comes that hour of hell?

NELI. [*Taking hands from counter and crossing them as she whispers.*] Who knows?

ALL. [*Groaning.*] Who knows?

HUGH. [*Voice quavering and lifting his Welsh essays.*] Who knows?

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Big yellow drops pouring down his face, his voice full of anguish.*] I will tell ye when is the hour of hell. [*He points to the clock.*] Is one the hour of hell? Nay. Two? Nay. Three? No, not three. Four? Four might be the hour of hell, but 'tis not. Five? Nor five, indeed. Six? Nay. Seven? Is seven the hour, the awful hour? Nay, not yet. Eight? Is eight the hour--an hour bright as this bright hour? Nay, eight is not. [*The DEACON shouts in a mighty voice and points with a red finger at the clock.*] 'Tis comin'! 'Tis comin', I say! Howl ye, howl! Only one minute more! Sinners, sinners, lift up your eyes! Cry for mercy! [*All groan.*] Cry for mercy! When the clock strikes twelve, 'twill be the hour of hell! Fix your eyes upon the clock! Watch! Count! Listen! 'Tis strikin'. The stroke! The hour is here!

[*All dropped on their knees and turned toward the clock, their backs to the street door, are awaiting the awful stroke. The book has fallen from HUGH'S hands. NELI'S hands are clenched. MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE is nodding her old head. MRS. JONES THE WASH on her knees, her face upturned to the clock, is rubbing up and down her thighs, as if at the business of washing. TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP is prostrate and making a strange buzzing sound between his lips. The wheels of the clever old timepiece whir and turn. Then in the silent noonday the harsh striking begins: One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, Twelve.*

DEACON ROBERTS. [*Yelling suddenly in a loud and terrible voice.*] Hell let loose! Howl ye! Howl, ye sinners! [*All cover their eyes. All groan or moan. The clock ticks, the flame in the grate flutters, NELI'S bosom rises and falls heavily.*] Lest worse happen to ye, sin no more!

[*The DEACON looks at them all quietly. Then he lifts his hands in sign of blessing, smiles and vanishes silently through street door. All remain stationary in their terror. Nothing happens. But at last NELI fearfully, still spellbound by the DEACON'S eloquence, lifts her eyes*

to the clock. Then cautiously she turns a little toward the fire and the place of DEACON ROBERTS.

NELI. Uch! [*She stands on her feet and cries out.*] The Deacon is gone!

HUGH. [*Raising his eyes.*] Uch, what is it? Babylon----

NELI. Babylon nothing! [*She wrings her hands.*

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Groaning.*] Is he dead? Is he dead?

NELI. [*With sudden plunge toward the door.*] Uch, ye old hypocrite, ye villain! Uch, my butter an' my eggs, my butter an' my eggs!

[*NELI throws open the door and slams it to after her as she pursues the DEACON out into the bright midday sunshine.*

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. Well, indeed, what is it? Has she been taken?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Getting up heavily.*] Such movin' eloquence! A saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Aye, a saintly man is Deacon Roberts!

HUGH. [*Picking up his book and speaking slowly.*] Aye, eloquence that knoweth the place of hell even better than it knoweth Bala whatever!

MRS. JENKINS THE MIDWIFE. [*Very businesslike.*] Aye, 'twas a treat--a rare treat! But where's my pins now?

MRS. JONES THE WASH. [*Very businesslike.*] Yiss, yiss, 'twas a grand an' fine treat. But I'm wantin' my soap now.

TOM MORRIS THE SHEEP. Have ye any tobacco, Hughie lad?

CURTAIN

