

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society

The Unfinished Sequel to *The Corner That Held Them* (Part 1 of 2)

Sylvia Townsend Warner*

How to cite: Warner, S. T. 'The Unfinished Sequel to *The Corner That Held Them* (Part 1 of 2)'. Edited by Peter Swaab. *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society*, 2020, 20(1), pp. 8–38 • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2020.20>

Published: 9 November 2020

Copyright:

© 2020, Tanya Stobbs. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Licence (CC-BY) 4.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>, which permits unrestricted use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited • DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14324/111.444.stw.2020.20>

This is a reprint of a manuscript originally found in the Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive, Dorset History Centre; DHC reference number 'D/TWA/A15'; previous reference number at the Dorset County Museum 'STW.2012.125.1539'

Open Access:

The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society is a peer-reviewed open-access journal.

The Unfinished Sequel to *The Corner That Held Them* (Part 1 of 2)

Sylvia Townsend Warner

Abstract

This is the first part of a two-part edited presentation of an unfinished sequel to Sylvia Townsend Warner's 1948 novel, *The Corner That Held Them*.

Keywords Sylvia Townsend Warner; *The Corner That Held Them*; medieval English nunneries; pilgrimage.

Editor's note: *The Corner That Held Them* was Warner's own favourite novel. 'I think it is the best book I have ever written,' she wrote to Paul Nordoff. 'It is certainly the book that I have most written, the one that is most me.'¹ She worked on it between 1941 and 1947 and found it hard to let go. 'It has really been agony doing the final proofs of the novel. I love it so much I can't bear to part with it.'² So much so, indeed, that she didn't completely part with it but instead began a sequel, of which the Warner–Ackland Archive houses 58 typed pages.³ Warner herself set enough store by some of her unpublished and unfinished writings to collect and retain them for her literary executor William Maxwell, writing to him in 1968 that 'I spent some time neatly collecting all my unpublished & unfinished prose works (Legion) into a black japanned deed-box.'⁴ She does not mention this unfinished sequel in the published selections from her letters and diaries, but Claire Harman refers to it briefly in her biography of Warner and her introduction to the Virago reprint of *The Corner That Held Them*.⁵ The entirety is too long to print in a single issue of the Journal, so this excerpt has been called 'Part 1 of 2' and the next issue will present the remainder as 'Part 2 of 2'.

Warner had once before undertaken a sequel, continuing the story of Mr Fortune's Maggot (1927) in the long short story 'The Salutation' (1932). In this earlier case the differences of setting were wide: 'The Salutation' was set in South America as against the Pacific island of Mr Fortune's Maggot, it was separated from the earlier story by an unspecified period of time (the protagonist seems much aged by the interim) and the main figure is scrupulously referred to as 'the Englishman' but never by name. It is only from the evidence of Warner's diaries and letters that we can say unambiguously that 'The Salutation' continues Mr Fortune's Maggot. The sequel to *The Corner That Held Them* gives us a different kind of continuation. It carries on almost immediately after the conclusion of the novel. The beginning of the narrative follows Dame Sibilla, the nun who decides at the end of the book to abscond from the nunnery at Oby and join a pilgrimage headed for Jerusalem. The sections that remain show the group of pilgrims first from Sibilla's perspective, after which the centre of consciousness moves to two of the other pilgrims, Martin Hawte and Wilkin Shaw.

The narrative of *The Corner That Held Them* takes many unpredictable and ironic turns, and the centre of consciousness moves fluently from one figure to another, but even so Sibilla Dunford is an unexpected protagonist for the continuation of the story. We first meet her in chapter 10. She is the great-niece of the bishop, Walter Dunford. 'To look at, she was the image of her great-uncle, with the same slight build, small prim mouth, receding chin and vehement eyes. Unlike him, she had a loud discordant voice' (p. 195).⁶ The bishop transfers her from Allestree to Oby in a punitive spirit; she brings no dowry. When the bishop lies ill on his deathbed she goes to visit him: 'It seemed to him that he had never seen such a worldly countenance. Her cheeks were flushed with the sudden change from the cold journey to the heated room, her eyes flashed and twinkled, her teeth, protruding under her short upper lip, gave her smile an expression of carnal alacrity—and she smiled a great deal' (226). She is not the brightest, believing for instance that the spirit of her great-uncle has been reincarnated as an owl, and is at times obtuse, trivial and chatty. She has however a 'core of romantic and real piety' (236), which plays its part in her joining the pilgrimage.

Warner wrote to a friend that 'I love him [Chaucer] so much that I had the greatest difficulty keeping him out of Oby'.⁷ The characterisation of Sibilla, indeed, might well put us in mind of Chaucer's use of physiognomy in the 'Prologue' to the *Canterbury Tales*, with details that are ironic in their implications and appearances that give rise to readerly suspicions of impropriety. On a larger scale, too, the sequel embraces the Chaucerian setting of a group of pilgrims on the road, in this case heading beyond

Canterbury to Jerusalem. Although Sibilla's motives may express her core of piety, her position is insecure. First, she is an apostate nun; Eileen Power's book *Medieval English Nunneries*, upon which Warner drew, notes that 'the Church condemned the crime of apostasy far more severely than that of unchastity, since it involved the breach of all the monastic vows, instead of only one, and brought religion into dishonour in the eyes of laymen.' Power goes on to explain that 'the majority of apostates returned to their order, worn out by remorse or by persecution'.⁸ In general, moreover, the practice of nuns going on pilgrimage 'was never looked upon with any favour by the authorities of the church',⁹ largely because of the drunkenness, lechery and impropriety they would be likely to encounter. She notes that the company in the *Canterbury Tales* includes just three women: the prioress, the second nun and the Wife of Bath.

A note on the text

What remains of the sequel, so far as we know, consists of 58 typed pages in four gatherings. The pages on the first gathering (here called TS 1) are numbered from 1–22, the second (TS 2) from 16–33 and the third (TS 3) from 33–46; the last (TS 4) consists of four unnumbered pages. The text below is taken from the first two of the four gatherings of pages and represents about two-thirds of the material. It ends at a point (on page 33 of TS 2) where the typescript uses a series of crosses to mark a section break.

TS 2 starts with a revised version of pages 16–22 of TS 1, followed by a continuation of the story from the perspective of a new character, Martin Hawte. The reading text below represents pages 1–16 of TS 1 followed by the entirety of TS 2 from 16–33. Pages 16–22 of TS 1 are omitted from the main reading text, but are included as an Appendix so that readers can if they wish compare the two to see Warner's process of composition.

The typescripts are not fair copies, but do not include many slips and errors. In the text below very obvious errors in the typescript have been silently corrected.¹⁰ Other uncertain readings have been marked with square brackets or described in an endnote, for instance when a word or more of the typescript has been crossed through without smoothing out the sense of the inserted substitute reading. Paragraph breaks are occasionally uncertain since Warner's typescript sometimes indents new paragraphs, but not always. The typescript is undated.

The aim has been to produce a good reading text with some (but not exhaustive) indications of Warner's second thoughts and of passages that would have needed to be smoothed out in a further stage of composition.

During the first hour of their journey southward the city which the pilgrims had quitted¹¹ continued to recede. Whenever Sibilla stole a backward glance she saw it looking demonstrably further behind them. The bulk of the cathedral broke up into towers, transepts, sharpened pinnacles and delineations of coigns and buttresses. The lesser churches and the various buildings of religious orders and town guilds asserted themselves more, the roofs of the dwelling-houses fell into a pattern of ridge and furrow, the town walls became perceptibly a girdle to the town, and the suburbs shredded away into low, here-and-there protuberances on the open ground. Details of the immediate landscape sprang up and interposed themselves; the towers and spires were netted in the bristle of a pollard willow, or blurred by the slow coil of smoke rising from a fire the turf-cutters had lit to warm themselves against the early cold of the March¹² morning, and left to blacken out on the frosted grass of the wayside. At last, she found her backward glance resting, not on the city left behind, but on the face of the pilgrim walking behind her. It was a fleshy sprawling face, disfigured with a skin disease, and having caught sight of it she immediately lowered her eyelids and pretended to be engaged in pulling her hood more closely round her head. The poor woman, she told herself, might feel irked at finding herself looked at in what might seem an inquisitive way.

In the nunnery pilgrims were spoken of slightly, as of an order of beings inherently dirty, shifty, and socially irresponsible. Once a pilgrim, always a pilgrim, was how they were summed up; irresponsible, and in the tone of voice in which one sums up the irreclaimable,¹³ such as she-cats, crab-apples, and clothes-moths. Till three days before, Sibilla could not have imagined herself exchanging the solid worth of the cloistered life in order to ramble through a secular world in the company of a number of unaccredited strangers, both male and female, held together by no order or discipline beyond a personal agreement to go on travelling in the same direction. In the past—the sentence of the nunnery continued—it was a different matter, pilgrimages were undertaken for some laudable motive, a vow or an acknowledgement of some heavenly favour, or pure love for a holy place; against such pilgrims and pilgrimages one could urge no objections; they were praiseworthy and touching; and when they were over the pilgrims, if not favoured enough to die in the blessed state of

being on pilgrimage, came home, and settled down to spend the rest of their days in thankful sobriety, a credit to the neighbourhood. But all that was long ago, when religion was purer, and travelling harder, and you thought twice and thrice before you exposed yourself to bears and Saracens; Yes, in the eleventh or the twelfth century, the term of pilgrim meant something; but not now, in the eighth decade of this fourteenth century¹⁴ so far from Christ. One takes the colour of one's surroundings; one is loyal to the corner of the world where God has placed one; and as a nun at Oby Sibilla herself had said, Once a pilgrim, always a pilgrim, in tune with the accepted intonation of those words. But three days before a new song had been put into her mouth,¹⁵ and to that tune Once a pilgrim, always a pilgrim became a sentence of dedication. In¹⁶ two days and nights she had remade herself, in obedience to this new vocation so surprisingly, yet so comprehensibly, laid upon her. This morning she had put off her nun's clothes, and since the sunrise had been a pilgrim.

Her name, not that anyone had asked it yet, was still Sibilla: a short consideration had convinced her that you are less apt to be recognised as the Sibilla christening made you if you have a name you can answer to than if you take a new one and goggle when addressed by it. Her surname by a little alteration had become Dunfold.¹⁷ Her appearance, the widow had assured her,¹⁸ was completely altered by her alteration in dress. And though the fellow-nun with whom she had been sent out begging had nevertheless recognised her it was only at such close quarters as would not be likely to happen again—and her mouth, please God, had been stopped.¹⁹ God, she told herself, would so please. He is faithful, and does not desert his clients who obey him.

She was a pilgrim, walking southward through England with between twenty or thirty others—she had not had time to count them yet. When they reached the edge of England they would go in a boat to France, and so, still walking southward, they would come to a city called Venice, where they would take another boat, and sail to Jerusalem. Nothing could be clearer. Long before then she would have become accustomed to this oddly naked feeling of walking through an unknown landscape in such a short gown, and she would know the exact number of those she walked with, and would be on friendly terms with all of them. No doubt they were all excellent people, kind-hearted and devout—and by no means the offensive persons pilgrims were represented to be by those who lived in convents with only a narrow view of the world. She had always liked the common people: there had been several cooks at the convent, and she had been on good terms

with each of them in turn; for that matter, she was almost a common person herself. A person who is almost a common person, who comes of a family which has risen in the world by unassisted merit, and whom God has hauled up a little further by the gift of a good education and polite circumstances, but who yet retains the blessedness of the poor in heart and does not put on airs, should be able to mix very comfortably in a party of pilgrims; and might, in some circumstances, be a godsend among them. Tact, for instance, is as useful as onions. There are few days when it is not an improvement to whatever may be in the pot. Learning, when you are among the unlearned, can be warmly appreciated. There is always some little matter where learning can be valuably applied. That poor woman behind her, for instance, with the unfortunate blains on her face...very probably she did not know that plantain leaves, bruised, and laid on as a poultice, and persevered with, will mend almost any kind of breaking-out. How grateful the poor creature would be to have her face healed over before the hot weather came, and the flies gathered to her sores!

Sibilla turned, and looked over her shoulder with an expression of cordiality. The woman with the skin disease had moved aside to converse with a fellow traveller. Instead of seeing her, Sibilla saw the cathedral.

They had journeyed on for a mile or more since she had last looked at it. Then, it was still naturally receding and dwindling. Now, by an appalling sleight of air it had approached, and was enormous. The rest of the city was no longer visible. The earth had swallowed it. Only the cathedral remained.

The sky, covered with an unanimous vapoury cloud, was a colour between silver and lead. In this light, at once dull and distinct, the stone of the cathedral assumed an air of being bleached—as though whatever ichor there were in stone giving it hue and vivacity had suddenly drained away. Lightless, it looked lifeless; lifeless, its impassivity became positive. Its stillness was like a threat. It was as though it were some lofty crested animal of prey, momentarily halted in the pursuit of its quarry.

The woman with the skin disease had become detached from her conversation, and was regarding Sibilla curiously. She too, had shared for a moment with the cathedral this air of being a hunting and pursuing beast, for her sprawling features had stiffened and grown arrogant in an expression of mistrust.

‘Look at the cathedral. Isn’t it beautiful?’ said Sibilla, feeling that she was speaking both to the woman and to the stone beast, halted and

regardant on the plain. 'I think it is so beautiful,' she added, since neither woman [nor] beast showed the slightest sign of having [heard]²⁰ her.

'Eh?' said the woman.

'The cathedral... the great church there. Where we heard our mass this morning. It looks so beautiful,' repeated Sibilla.

The woman gave it a careful scrutiny.

'It's plain, isn't it?' she said. But it was not possible to know from her tone whether she referred to its distinctness or its appearance. Her careful scrutiny was now resting upon Sibilla. Apparently upon consideration she thought well of her, for she smiled propitiatingly, and said in a less guarded tone that she for one would rather see a church before them than a church behind them, since where you saw a church you might see a meal also. Sibilla also smiling opined that it would be a long time before they lost sight of the church behind. Perhaps they would see it all day. Misunderstanding this as a comment upon their rate of progress the woman said, discarding her affability, that they were going along as fast as was reasonable, and that the people who galloped before prime limped before vespers. At this the second woman chimed in, and enquired how often Sibilla had been on pilgrimage.

'Never till now.'

Her candour and her lack of enterprise appeased them somewhat. They exclaimed at her admission, and said no more.

After this she took no more backward glances. It would not do to seem to thrust herself upon their attention; though they would esteem her when they knew her better, no doubt, they must be given time. The plantain poultice need not be mentioned for a day or two. They were still in the month of March, the flies would not become a serious nuisance for several weeks yet. The cathedral, too, could be left unsolicited for another mile or so. There would be a finer view of it later on, when it would not look quite so disproportionately large, so hot on her heels. For a moment or two she had been almost afraid of it, embarrassing herself with idle metaphors of being pursued. If a church could have a spirit, an anima (which was, of course, impossible, except in the way of being mystically animated by the deed of consecration) this great church of all churches would be the least likely to view her with ill-will. Had it not seen the enthronisation, the public worship and private prayers, and finally the funeral of its saintly bishop and her great uncle, Edmund Dunford.²¹ And was not she at this moment, hastening away from it on the express intimation from heaven that a pilgrimage by her would afford deep gratification to Edmund Dunford's soul?

For all that, she did not look back again (looking back had been fatal to Lot's wife, though her intentions had seemed harmless enough). She did not look back, for what is past cannot be undone, and now she was among pilgrims, and would be among them for as long as God willed, a very long time probably, as long as she lived. She must look forward to Jerusalem itself, a distant city of gold, shining and seen through a chequer of the masts of unknown ships and the stout bobbing forms of the pilgrims walking ahead of her.

When she had reached Jerusalem, if God were sufficiently gracious to her, she would die.

This was the only admission she made to herself that she was in dread before this new undertaking. For Sibilla was one of those characters who dare not assert a considerable stock of courage for fear that it should prove to be not enough. Rather than commit herself to not being afraid she would say there was nothing to be afraid of. Thrown into the jaws of a lion, she would have patted the lion, and said what a kind-looking animal he seemed. This is the christian²² variety of courage, a human phenomenon so astounding to the Romans, knowing only the blunt bodily dauntlessness of the soldier and the severely spiritual courage of the stoic, that many of them, having seen this peculiar novelty displayed in the arena, became converted out of intense curiosity, and became christian martyrs themselves—though whether they were able to see the lion, the net, the roasting-jack, and the pincers with the double vision of the eye of faith must remain a matter of doubt. Applying this christian variety of courage in the past, Sibilla had already skimmed through starvation and pestilence in her first convent,²³ overcome the antagonism towards her in the convent to which she had been transferred by being so touched at the good welcome extended to her by all, and seen such a soul of goodness in things evil that when her great-uncle the saintly bishop had died in a slow fire of [holy oils his reddened skin reminded her of roses].²⁴

She was towards the tail of the gathering, among the women; though there was no certain parting of the sexes, for a man was walking beside her. She had glanced towards him once or twice, but nothing came of it. His eyes were downcast, and he appeared to be absorbed in watching his travelling feet. 'You will find them of all sorts,' the widow had said, rolling the discarded nun's apparel into a bundle, and putting it in the chest. 'High and low, good and bad, but mostly middling, as is the way of the world. You'll need to stand up for yourself at times. But it was the same in your cloister, I daresay. Every herring must hang by its own tail.' They were now going through a scrubby woodland, where the track narrowed and

twisted, so that it give her more chance to see those walking ahead. She could see little of the diversity the widow had promised her. Bundled in cloaks and hoods against the March weather, they all seemed much the same bulk and of the same standing, and almost of the same sex. Only a few of them were so poor as to be outstanding by some detail of naked legs or patches. There was a cripple, who swung himself briskly along on his crutches, and [talked] incessantly.²⁵ She could see his gleaming eyes, and the gaps among his teeth as he swung his head from side to side as he laughed. Beside him, and laughing with him, was a remarkably sturdy and broad-shouldered woman, wearing a red hood, and behind there were two thin boys, seemingly her children, for from time to time she glanced back at them with an ownerly look. Marching on the heels of the two thin boys was a pair of men who must, from the resemblance between them, be father and son. Both were well clothed, wearing good boots, and the father had a stole of rabbit skin wound round his neck. They stood out from the rest because the elder man was leading a nanny-goat, a skinny beast, subdued by wayfaring, but wearing a fine leather collar. Going ahead of all was an elderly man riding on a mule. The mule was plump and well-groomed, and though its rider was huddled in a leather coat wrinkled with age and too large for him, his small red face, puckered like an old apple, was carried on a straight back, and he rode with a commanding oblivion of those who followed him, sometimes reining up to watch a group of hinds, or riding off into the wood, with bright spatters of water flying up where his mule trod the water-logged ground. There was a time not long distant,²⁶ when Sibilla would have compared him to Saint George, seeing him as a champion of the poorer folk on foot behind him.

But at 30 she was too old for such fancies; and during the last few hours she had made advances in realism; so what she noticed about the old man was that by riding ahead he must snuff a fresher air than she did, shuffling among ill-fed bodies in thick old clothes, and with the cheese in the scrip²⁷ of the pilgrim just in front of her smelling so strongly.

She too had a provision of food in her bundle—the widow had seen to that. And when they stopped for the midday meal it seemed to her that it was the most significant food she had ever eaten, and with a direct purpose of nourishment lacking from any community eating. They had continued to walk well beyond the ordinary dinner hour, in order to come to a shelter. Later, she was to learn that pilgrims have a rooted objection to eating out-of-doors, and on the finest May morning will squeeze in among the ticks of a sheepfold, rather than sit on the turf with the breeze in their ears. To-day they begged admission to a tucking-mill²⁸, and after

some demur were allowed to sit down in the shed where customers tied their packhorses while they came to terms with the fuller. The clatter of the wheel made talk impossible, and the pervading smell of fleeces put a taste of mutton-fat into whatever they ate. First to beg for shelter, and then to be allowed to sit among horse-droppings was a new thing for Sibilla. She was pleased to put up with it, though; it was part of going on pilgrimage, and she had allowed for something of this sort. What she had not allowed for, and found harder to accept, was the lack of cordiality among her fellow-pilgrims. After a glance at her food there seemed to be no more curiosity about her. She was prepared for curiosity, she had her answers ready; so it was mortifying, and slightly alarming, when she was not called on to make use of them. But after a while appetite overcame other things, and she grew relaxed and childishly serene, looking at the stream sliding away round the curve of the hillside, wearing its tress of foam and bubbles like a pair of beads.²⁹

She had finished her meal, the little loaf and the spiced brawn of the widow's proving, while her companions were still munching. The woman with the sores noticed this, and said 'You'll learn to spin out your dinner when you've footed it for the next hundred miles or so. House-folk can afford to gallop through their meals, seeing that it's only a step between them and the larder. Pilgrims eat to a different measure.'³⁰

She did not speak ill-naturedly, though there was a kind of ill-natured tolerance in her look. Her companion, who had been passing the spine of a red herring between her lips as though it were a jews-harp,³¹ now desisted, and added her word.

'Look at the beasts, that's what I say. Horses, oxen, sheep, all the good beasts eat slow, as if God had told them they wouldn't get much and so they'd best make the most of it. Only wolves and foxes and rich folk snap at their meals.'

'I daresay you'd snap down your meals if you could eat as rich folk do,' said the first woman.

'I might and I mightn't.'

'I'll go bound you would. If you were set down in front of a stew of mixed fish, all manner of fish in a sweet sauce, or a great pike with a stuffing of eggs in its belly, just taken off the coals, or a bit of fat venison...'

'Well, that I wouldn't,' interrupted the other, 'for I ate a piece of venison once, and it made me as sick as a dog. No more venison for me!'

'Well, I must say, I'd as soon have a good mutton ham,' said the first woman, 'or a haslet made the way my aunt, God rest her soul, would make it. She'd take a pig's liver...'

Forgetting Sibilla, they went into a conversation about haslet and chitterlings,³² and whether wild or pot marjoram had the finer flavour.

They had sat down in much the same order as they had been walking, and on her other side Sibilla was still neighboured by the silent man who had walked looking at his feet. Now he was looking at the stream, but there was still no promise of conversation about him. An old scar ran round his wrist like a snail-track, and from time to time he shivered with cold, but inattentively, as though the discomforts of his body were irrelevant. There was still a hunch of barley bread in his hand, but he held it loosely, as if he had forgotten it.

From time to time a pilgrim had come to the convent wicket for a dole or a morsel of salve³³ to rub on a sore heel; though not often, or in companies, for Oby stood away from any trodden road to a frequented shrine; and when it had been her turn to go to the wicket Sibilla had always found it very easy to converse with such travellers, asking them whither they were bound, what other pilgrimages they had made, commenting on the merits of the saint to whose shrine they were going, and wishing them god-speed. Pilgrims were no-account people, a drifting insubstantial folk; and if they laid up any good by their wanderings it was only for their own profit, like the wild humble-bees that store each its own small provision of honey in nests of the wild moorland grass. But their fleetingness made them easy to encounter, they did not reiterate themselves and their needs, like beggars and out-of-tune minstrels. They came, and took, and went on. That was how they seemed, observed from behind the wicket of a house of religion, figures for whom a perspective waited, stories that the wind would blow away.

But to be among them, to be one of them, that was different. The perspective that waited for these pilgrims waited for her too. The same weather would assail her and them, they were travelling together to the same obscurely shining Jerusalem, and packed into the hold of one ship they would all be seasick together. Seen from this new aspect, pilgrims were no longer the sort of people with whom it is easy to converse. One can, with impunity, speak what is in one's heart to an ear that by the day's end will be hearing the Angelus rung from a steeple that is still at the moment of speaking beyond the horizon. To ears that will remain in earshot for the next twelvemonth one cannot disburden oneself so blithely; and the first steps among feet that will trudge the same road day in day out should be made discreetly. The more so, thought Sibilla, since she was so much the youngest among them, having begun her pilgrimage only this morning, joining herself to travellers already seasoned and

wayworn. Yes, indeed, she must make herself the least among them, relying on that gospel assurance that in due time she would hear the command, Friend, go up higher. But for my uncle's soul, she told herself, I am ready to endure anything. Indeed, at that moment it seemed to her that she was already enduring a good deal. The wind blowing into the cartstall chilled her, and the dinner which she had eaten with too hasty appetite was lying heavily on her stomach.

The sky, too, was clouding over, and the foam of the mill race had taken on a thicker whiteness against the dulled grey of the stream. The likeness to a string of beads came back to her mind, and she realised that since that morning's distant mass she had not said a single prayer.

[The text up to here represents pages 1–16 of the first gathering of 22 numbered pages (TS 1). It continues below with the start of TS 2, a second gathering of pages, numbered 16–33. The omitted pages 16–22 from TS 1 represent an earlier draft of TS 2, pages 16–22; the text of the omitted pages follows as an Appendix on pages 30–33, so that interested readers can follow Warner's process of composition by comparing the two.]

It must be long past Prime.³⁴ It would have been more seemly to have remembered the need to pray before she gave way to the need to eat. But the other pilgrims had begun to eat at once, to have sat praying while they unpacked their scrips would have called attention to herself,³⁵ and that, whether you are in a cloister or on a pilgrimage is always a bad thing to do. Tucking her hands under her cloak and sinking her chin into her muffler, she began to say the office to herself, as unostentatiously as she could.

Rooks were building their nests in a spinney nearby, cawing, now in a single rhetoric, then in a chorus. They made a religious background to her prayers, she began to think of them as a canonry, and their short bobbing flights from tree to tree recalled the liturgical sallies of those passing and repassing with genuflection before the altar. No doubt the Black Canons among whom poor Sir Ralph had spent his youth³⁶ sounded, with their scotch accents, very much like the rooks. That was a long time ago; though the dance before the altar never ends and rook-nests are built year after year to the same expostulating music, the figures inside the traditional garments of cloth or feathers are always changing. The canons who were masters when Sir Ralph was a pupil among them must long ago have been put into unsurmisable graves, and poor Sir

Ralph himself was by now well established in purgatory. What a number of people were dead. She could remember a very striking sermon about that, about the vast preponderance of the dead over the living—though the exact figures escaped her; and the army of the dead is the vaster every time that one thinks of it, it is forever recruiting, and no one is ever dismissed from it, there is no wastage. If every one alive at this moment, the friar had exclaimed, were immediately to sell all his goods for masses for the dead and then, falling on his [knees],³⁷ pray out the rest of his lifetime in prayers for their welfare, it would be no more than a leaf in a forest in comparison with the legions of dead souls needing our assistance. And from this he went on to speak of how paltry is the consideration in fact that is given to their multitudinous necessities, and to point out that for the most part our charity to the dead only begins when we are dead ourselves, and the bequests of money for saying masses take effect. But at least, thought Sibilla, feeling a personal preoccupation under the flow of her thoughts, as a sleeper becomes aware of a bone or a pebble that has become included in the straw of his palliasse, at least I am doing what I can while I am still alive, since I am going to Jerusalem as fast as I may, a bedswoman for the soul of Edmund Dunford.³⁸ It was as though, out of a mass of fish squirming in a net, one had looked at her and said, Alas! In all the number of the dead, Edmund Dunford was thus living and lamentable. It is because I was with him when he died, she said to herself, and because he was my dear great uncle, that I have these feelings of concern; and those perplexing outcries he made, of being in terror, of being in damnation, no more than natural in a theologian and a man of saintly life, since the greater the vaunt, the sharper the fear of God's anger. And his chaplain had been so unsatisfactory, too. There had been no sort of unction or initiative about him. With a better chaplain, it would have been quite different.³⁹

Thinking about the chaplain's deficiencies, Sibilla regained her peace of mind,⁴⁰ and was almost asleep when a stir of hoisted bodies told her that they were again on the move. She jumped to her feet, and nearly sat down again, for a pain like a cramp ran down her legs from calf to heel. Miserere! she exclaimed, rocking from foot to foot as though the anguish in her legs could be shaken off like a climbing snake. The man beside her put out his scarred hand, and steadied her, but kept his face averted and made no answer to her thanks. The woman with the skin disease made no comment whatsoever, but her companion remarked without addressing anyone in particular that a leaf of the traveller's tree, fastened round the heel, cuts every mile to half a mile, and that it was

a pity that some clever folks did not learn such homely truths as these. Sibilla heard the words, and understood their unpleasant intention, but they fell lightly on her. Even the anguish in her legs was almost forgotten. Her attention was engaged by something she had seen. One of the pilgrims, rising to his feet along with the rest, had turned swiftly round, and kissed the wooden post against which he had been leaning. If it had been a relic, he could not have kissed it with a more intense devotion, and yet the kiss into which he had put his whole soul was given so easily and with such simplicity that it did not seem in the least extraordinary that it should be given to a weathered old post, only that it should be given so passionately. Sibilla stared with all her eyes. But all she could stare at was a man who had nothing remarkable about him. He was of low stature, his legs were rather bandy, he had a scanty grizzled beard. Like the rough-hewn piece of timber he had so passionately kissed, he looked as though he might have been cut out of any woodland and shaped to be unimportantly useful, no particular matter where.

The pilgrims climbed the slope beyond the tucking-mill, the fuller's dogs barking to see them go. Once out of the valley, the force of the wind which had been rising while they rested took hold of them, bouncing them on their stiffened feet. The nanny-goat complained, and even the elderly man who rose ahead fell silent, and sat shrugged on his beast. Only the cripple and the woman in a red hood held on as though an east wind meant nothing to them.

'If it weren't for the credit,' reflected Martin Hawte, 'I would be better off shogging⁴¹ it like the rest of them.' For a man riding catches a purer cold from the wind, and the teeth in his eastward jaw were beginning to ache. 'If it weren't for my soul,' his thought presently continued, 'I would be better at home.'

Home was five days behind him, a poor patched dwelling of clay lumps plastered to a wooden frame like a whale's jawbone, or the merry-thought⁴² of some gigantic bird. There sat Maggie, twanging on her old dulcimer and singing about love in the greenwood when the spring brings the swallows flying in pairs—and breaking off to gasp and hawk because of the smoke in her throat. There too was his tilting helmet, and his chair with the worn velvet cushion. And at this moment, maybe, Boy Willie would come stamping in with the bowl of ewe's milk and a kind word for his father's crazy wife. Maggie would come to [no] harm,⁴³ for Willie was a good bastard, stout, loyal, unpretentious; everything a man could wish his bastard to be, provided that man kept his wishes down to a moderate level.

Provided a man keeps his wishes down to a moderate level. But that was what he had never been able to do.

Forty five years ago he had come into the world, the son of an old decayed knight by a young wife. A new patch on an old garment, she had won herself a widowhood before Martin had got on a pony, and then away! down to her kinsfolk in the south-west, in the pleasant valley of the Severn. There, on ordinary days, he looked across to the outline of [—],⁴⁴ that was riven by an earthquake in the very hour of Christ's death,⁴⁵ and on high days and holidays, he stood admiring the new building of Gloucester Cathedral, and the towering east window where, instead of Christ in agony or Christ in Majesty, or the genealogy of David's line sprouting from old Jesse's belly, the blazons of the English chivalry who had fought at Cressy would shine out between the sun and the chalice. Was it this window, or the distant cry of the wolfhounds hunting over the Welsh mountains that first beguiled his ambitions into such an inordinate disproportion to his means and his person—for among his mother's folk and among whom she chose her second husband, all of them smooth and lusty and sleek haired he remained a dogged Hawte with a sharp nose and a face like a crab-apple. An ape in the hall, an angel on horseback. So the groom said, quoting some proverbial piece of groom's wisdom; and indeed, it was true, he was an excellent horseman, and on the day when he first entered the lists he knew as certainly as God's Trinity that he was in his element. To people of the locality he became a steady source of income: tilting at man or quintan,⁴⁶ he was a safe wager; but what enriched them brought in nothing to him except it might be a suit of armour, and that in a short time had to be sold to keep the moneylenders quiet. Chivalry is no career for the penniless; and his stepfather, a man both ambitious and studious, called him Martin pecheur, the kingfisher, a bird that has a long beak and gay suit and no tail. The nickname was all he bestowed.

And on one day among these years (but one does not remember on which day one saw the first swallow, only that the day when they come is the first day of spring) he met Thomas. Mass was over, he was still dawdling in the cathedral nave and a man wearing embroidered gloves came up to him and began to speak about the singing, saying that in the west country singing-boys warbled like thrushes whereas in the north country they had sharper voices and a more ringing note. There was something in the way he spoke, an ease and cordiality, that unloosed self-importance in the hearer. 'Whereabouts in the north?' 'Well,' said the man, with an air of not wishing to lay down any law, 'well, I was thinking

of the minster at York.' 'Ah, York!' Martin answered. His childhood had never got so far; but at once the great minster appeared in his mind as something appurtenant to him, and all the dales and fields and forests of the enormous shire were no more than the cradle that had rocked him. 'That is my country,' he said, artlessly. 'Indeed?' said the man, with interest; and began speaking of minsters and ports and moors and castles' watercourses like one casting a net. Surely one of these would catch the young man, he must have been born within report of one or other of them. Hearing of all these things that he had never seen, Martin might have felt embarrassed; but Thomas spoke so easily, and praised so handsomely, and covered his own knowledge with such an air of deferring to Martin as the real heir and expert that Martin felt only that it was far better to have been born in Yorkshire than to have twelve castles elsewhere; the ugly little manor of his fathers, sculking in a narrow valley and baring its teeth to the north wind, came into his mind as the dearest place on earth, and the worthiest; and in a burst of confidence he named it to the stranger. Now it was the stranger's turn to be ignorant—but with what frankness and grace! 'I have never seen it,' he said wistfully. 'Perhaps one day you will allow me to be welcome there.' Torches were lit, fires blazed, boars and beeves turned on the spit, and velvet coverlets were on both the beds as Martin in his mind's eye welcomed the man to Guithorpe. And if the man had said, I will come next month, Martin would have spurred across England to put Guithorpe in readiness for such a guest. But as it was the man said that on the day after the morrow he was going to London. And so he did, so he did. Though Martin, weeping incredulously, implored him to stay.

Tears were running down his cheeks now—but from cold. The patchy warmth of the morning was gone, whitish clouds were amassing on a sky of grey cloud; one would almost say that there was snow in the sky. And here he was, an old man riding along over wind-bitten wolds, with half a hundred shapeless pilgrims for his retinue. 'If I could tell the story of my life to some one of intelligence,' he thought, 'he would find it a good story—for I tell it well, having told it to myself so often; and a moral story too, for it is undeniably moral. But I am nearing fifty, and I have not told it yet, and I never shall. I am quite out of the way of finding listeners, now.'

But the itch to speak tormented him. He drew rein, and called back to the crippled pilgrim. 'Are you sure that we are not out of our way? It seems to me that we should have taken the track that turned off to the left, half a mile back—where we are now, the track is scarcely trodden at all.'

'It is the true one, for all that,' the cripple shouted. 'This is the pilgrim's way; the other goes to a sheep-fair. No, no, ride on, Sir Knight, march on pilgrims. Have no fear. Thanks be to God, I know every inch of the way.'

His confidence was annoying, though no doubt it was justified, for the man had spent the greater part of his life going about in pilgrimages, he was an old hand. Martin said,

'I think it is going to snow.'

'So do I,' the cripple shouted back. 'March on, folk. God knows what weather is best for us.'

His wife threw back her hood, as if the east wind were nothing to her, and began to roar out 'Regina coeli.'

What a voice, thought Martin, shutting his eyes as though he could keep it off by so doing. She squalls like a wildcat. It was a sorry thought that he would be going to Jerusalem in the company of a woman with such a voice and such inexhaustible lungs. If he had waited a year or so longer, and sold the roan stallion, he could have gone with a more expensive and respectable pilgrimage. But he had set out with this one, and could not turn back. And in a year or so, Boy Willie might be married, and less kindly as a caretaker to poor Maggie.

What a voice, thought Sibilla. And what a pronunciation. She has picked up her latin as a starling might. And so she began to sing herself, more melodiously and more correctly. One does not live for two thirds of one's life a nun among nuns without developing some degree of sensitivity to what impression one makes. Sibilla had not sung a couple of lines before she knew that she was being heard with disapproval, and censured for showing-off. Her wits told her she should not have begun to sing, her instinct told her that having begun, it would make things worse if she left off. She continued to sing; and the others, who had begun to sing themselves in order to shout her down presently sang themselves into self-satisfaction and forgot their mistrust of this new pilgrim, who had jumped herself in among them so oddly, and was so suspiciously not of their world.

The world of the two women who immediately neighbored her, and of most of the other pilgrims was a world that Sibilla had not set foot in since she rode away from [—] Fairbehind⁴⁷ the manservant who attended the cellars of the house of the Holy Trinity at Allestree.⁴⁸ She was then in her twelfth year, old enough to be heartily sick of being a tradesman's daughter in a provincial town, of running errands down narrow alleys, of hearing talk of costs and bargains, cheating customers

and lazy apprentices, quarrels and feasts of the Guild. Old enough, her mother said, to learn to work as a woman, to chop sausage meat and wash baby clouts; old enough, her father said, to go with him to [—] Fair⁴⁹ and learn how to handle customers. Among the customers was the Allestree cellaress, and while she was holding out against increase in the price of altar candles she happened to notice the sickly girl child who stared at her with such devotional eyes, and remarked that what such a child needed was good broth. ‘She gets broth enough,’ said the candle-maker. ‘What she needs is appetite... though we are always telling her that she must eat better if she is to grow stout enough to become a nun. For that’s what she’s set on—to be a nun and go to her aunt at Ramsey.’ ‘That is very true,’ replied the cellaress, a big comfortable woman, who had in her the stuff to furnish out three ordinary nuns; and turning to the cold she went on to say that our Lord, like any mortal husband, is best pleased with healthy brides, and that if Sibilla wished to be a nun she must get rid of her cough and prepare herself for the fasts of a convent by eating plenty of mutton now. Sim Dunford, thinking that the cellaress might bargain more mildly if she appreciated the piety of the Dunford family began to recount how many of Sibilla’s relations were already in the religious life, no less than five of her aunts, and three of her uncles, by the grace of God, and among them, the flower of the flock, her great uncle Edmund, whom the cellaress, perhaps, might have heard preach. ‘I have heard him spoken of,’ said the cellaress, listening to the child’s cough. ‘Really, it seems to me that what she needs is a good mess of snails and honey. Dame Lucy, our infirmaress, stops all our lenten coughs with that. Lent is a terrible season among novices. It is a pity that you cannot come as far as our convent, or she would give you some. But I will bring a pot when I come to the fair next year—and if your girl is still alive then, you can take it home for her. As for the candles, you should consider that this is a regular order.’

‘And has been madam, since my father’s day, and my grandfather’s. You cannot think that after all these years we would overcharge the Holy Trinity.’

‘It is the thought of all those many years that makes me unwilling to take our custom elsewhere. But really, the times are so bad...’

As she spoke she ran her eye over the neighbouring booths where candles were also for sale. But she did not bargain with the whole of her attention, for she was trying to recollect what she had heard about Edmund Dunford.⁵⁰ The candlemaker was explaining that ever since the great Pestilence, fifteen years earlier,⁵¹ the bees had been making their

combs so slovenly that it was twice the labour to purify the wax, when the recollection darted upon her:⁵² Edmund Dunford was that priest who during the pestilence had shown what christian zeal and courage should be—⁵³ it was such men, there were not many of them, who propped the church, who washed its garments white again, and bought men's devotion at the price of their own health and strength.

'We will not haggle any longer,' she exclaimed. 'We will take the child, and nurse her till she is strong and sound. You will not think the rebate too high a price to pay for your child's health, I am sure.'

And so, when the cellaress had finished her shopping, Sibilla was hoisted on to the dappled horse and rode out of the fair towards Allestree. Her reception was not flattering. 'A Dunford,' the Abbess exclaimed. 'A Dunford—the church of God is full of Dunfords. They swarm in like mice and now I hear that that rascally great-uncle of hers, an intriguer if ever there was once, is to be made an archdeacon. God's teeth, I don't want any Dunfords nibbling here. What will you bring back from the Fair next year? Last year it was the parrot, and the year before that, a cure for the itch. Well, cure her cough, and send her packing. I would rather pay twice as much for our candles than keep a Dunford.'⁵⁴

But once in the convent, Sibilla rooted like ivy. Her pliability, her powers of arithmetic, her attentions to the parrot—to whom, in fact, the Abbess was devoted—all reinforced her claim to have a vocation. She was a novice within a year, and a perpetuity of candles eked out the lean dowry which was all that Sim Dunford said he could afford. She was in God's house, whence she could look out in safety at the odious world she had quitted: the bargaining and the banging, the drudgery, the taxes and the impending fate, hot on the back of her neck like the breath of a pursuing animal, of a marriage; after which your teeth fell out and you were forever squealing in bed, either for a baby or for a husband. But the cellaress had come to [—] Fair,⁵⁵ and at the mention of great-uncle Edmund had carried her off to become a nun. It was the first of the miracles that had shaped her life—perhaps not quite a miracle, but certainly a providential interposition; and she owed it to Edmund Dunford.

It was because of Edmund Dunford that she was now limping along the rutted track with such anguish in her legs and something like discouragement freezing her heart. But there could be no real doubt but that this too, was another providential interposition—it was not beginning quite so swimmingly as the others, that was all. There was no

singing now, and as the last voice, discovering itself to be the only one, had fallen silent as a frozen bird falls off the bough before the first rays of the thawing sun, the haze on the landscape had suddenly turned to dusk and the whine of the east wind had grown louder and sharper. She did not know how much longer they had to walk on, nor where they would stay for the night. No doubt the other pilgrims knew. They seemed to know all the ropes of a pilgrimage. The two rather disagreeable women who walked just behind her were talking in slow mumbling voices about the city where they had spent the previous night, and saying what changes there had been since they had been there before. The changes were mainly for the worse, it appeared. The candles burning before the shrine of St Wilfred many fewer in number and the booth at the foot of Farthing St that sold the savoury faggots quite gone. The woman with the sores remarked that in an alley turning off just beyond the sign of the Bird and Hand there was a shop where one could buy good faggots; Margery Hind, walking ahead there, had directed her to it, and indeed they were excellent.

‘But there’s no pepper in them,’ replied her companion. ‘And they’re not a patch on the others.’ ‘Ah, now, those were faggots indeed,’ said her companion. ‘I remember as though it were yesterday eating a couple of them, and then I went to St Wilfred and the candles warmed me as though I had stood before a fire. That was a pleasant hour of my life, it was indeed! Five years ago and more, but I remember it as though it were yesterday. But he’s fallen on bad days, he has, that good saint.’

‘Neither more nor less than the rest of the world, then. Why, even nuns have to leave their cushions and their cloisters and come out into the world to beg. I must say, it astonished me to see those two who stood in the porch, holding out their alm’s bowls, last night, and there again this morning. One of them was such a bold little thing, too. Held her dish right under my nose, as though she were selling whelks not begging an alms.’⁵⁶

Listening in terror, Sibilla yet felt a bounce of annoyance at hearing this description of herself.

‘They’re all as bold as wolves in winter,’ said the first woman, ‘when it comes to getting money from us.’

Since she had been begging overnight from these same pilgrims among whom she now walked it was not surprising that she should hear them refer to her. In her thoughts, she had allowed for something of this kind to happen—though she had not quite allowed for the comments to

be so ill-natured and censorious. For all that, Sibilla's confidence shrivelled when what she had allowed for became something actually taking place, and the danger of being recognised became as real as the pain in her legs.⁵⁷ I must be very humble, I must look no one in the face, she thought. A moment later, a fleeting laugh behind her made the flesh shake on her bones.

'Ha-ha-ha! I wonder what he's feeling like this cold evening, with no hand to rub against the other. This frost will bring the pain out, till he writhes again.'

'Why, what do you mean? Who are you talking about?'

'Who am I talking about? That thief we saw them leading off this morning, to have his right hand hacked off.⁵⁸ Don't you remember? They went by with him just as we were coming out after hearing our mass?'

'Yes, yes, so we did to be sure. But I'd forgotten it.'

'He hasn't forgotten it, though. No, not he. No hand, and a burned stinging stump, the pitch still searing it. Oho, he'll be grinding his teeth this evening, wherever he may be, whether he's still in prison for more sport to be had with him, or whether they've turned him out to shiver in the wind, and look at henroosts.'

'It's true enough, any wound hurts more if the cold gets to it. A winter whipping, they say, [smarts till midsummer].⁵⁹

All this is very disagreeable, Sibilla thought. The two women went drawing on about executions they had witnessed and martyrdoms they had learned of, not appearing to make any distinction between them. She looked wearily about for something else to be interested in, and her eye fell on the man with the scar. Under his coat she could see that his body was twitching as if with a fever—so violently that his wrappings shook like the pelt of an animal. The thought of some one sick, and who might accept her ministrations, elated her. She edged herself forward so that she could steal a glance at his face. It wore the same morose expression and his eyes were still bent on the ground. Under cover of the conversation of the two women, whose voices had now risen as they debated whether St Lucy or Saint Appalonia had experienced the greater torment, she whispered, touching him lightly on the shoulder, 'What ails you?' He started and turned his head. For the first time she saw his eyes, round and staring like the eyes of a bird of prey, and almost without colour. Looking at her with intense dislike, he pulled the hood further over his head and said nothing. Since there seemed to be nothing else she could look at, she looked at the sky. Woolpack clouds were moving calmly towards the west, badged with tawny light

from the setting sun. The easternmost clouds were pale and ghostly, and as they moved forward each in turn put on roundness and solidity as though their vapour had turned into flesh. She watched them till she was too dimly to watch them any longer. Levelling her gaze, she seemed to herself to have been plunged into darkness. For the track they followed had now taken a downward turn into a valley. The slopes on either side were covered with a pelt of furze, pricked, here and there with a posturing leafless oak tree. The frost was taking hold of the ground. In hac lachrymarum valle.⁶⁰ It was indeed the very picture of the woeful valley in the *Salve Regina*. This is the world, she thought, and I have come out into it. At Oby now, in the convent, the nuns have turned their backs on another day, and are thinking of their beds; and each one knows what bed she will lie in, and what the morning will bring.

The old man's horse whinnied, and at the same moment the cripple called out, 'Take heart, pilgrims! Our day is over. I can hear the noises of good townsfolk.'

The noise of his good townsfolk was a frightful yelping and barking. 'Yes. That's a town. And the dogs have got wind of us already,' said the woman with him.

'Be ready with your staves,' shouted the cripple. 'Keep together, and hit out at them. Here they come!' he exclaimed.

Yelling and bristling, the dogs came streaming up the hillside. The horseman rode out, and broke up their pack, they took a wide circle round him, and closed in on the pilgrims further back in the troop, barking furiously, setting up their backs, grabbing at cloaks and bundles. The pilgrims shouted, and struck at them. Sibilla, to do as the rest did, hit out with her stave, and whacked it against the legs of the small man who had kissed the wooden post. He gave a nimble leap, but fended off the dog which had seemed to her as large and red-mouthed as a wolf. She began to beg his pardon, but he had run on, chasing off the dog with flourishings of his stave and cries of, 'Boo! Boo!' 'Look at Wilkin', said the woman behind her. 'Did you ever see such a little fellow. He can trudge all day, and then dance with a dog at the end of it.' Her companion only answered with a long groaning sigh of exhaustion. They are tired too, thought Sibilla. It reassured her that she should not be the only pilgrim tired out by a day's walking.

* * * * *

Appendix

[The first version of pages 16–22, from TS 1.]

Prime—it must be past Prime;⁶² but not so far beyond, she hoped, that it would be too late to say the office to herself.⁶³ Devotion led into absorption, and she was almost asleep when a stir of hoisted bodies and brisker voices told her that they were again on the move. She jumped to her feet, and nearly sat down again, for a pain like a cramp ran down her legs from the calf to the heel. *Miserere!* she exclaimed, rocking from one foot to the other, as though the anguish in her legs could be shaken off like a climbing snake. The man put out his scarred hand, and steadied her, but kept his face averted and made no answer to her thanks. The woman with the skin disease made no comment whatsoever, but her companion remarked that a [—] leaf⁶⁴, fastened to the heel, cuts a mile to half a mile, and that it was a pity that some clever folks did not learn such home truths so these.

They climbed the slope beyond the tucking-mill, the fuller's two dogs barking to see them go. Once out of the valley the force of the wind which had been rising while they rested took hold of them, bouncing them on their stiffened feet. The nanny-goat bleated disconsolately, and even the old man who rode ahead had given up joking and sat shrugged on his beast. Only the cripple and the woman in the red hood held on as though an east wind meant nothing to them.

'If it weren't for the credit,' reflected Martin Hawte, I would be better off shogging it⁶⁵ like the rest of them.' For a man riding catches a purer cold from the wind, and the teeth in his eastward jaw were beginning to ache. 'If it weren't for my soul,' his thoughts continued, 'I would be better at home.' Home was five days behind him, a poor patched dwelling of clay lumps plastered to a wooden frame shaped like a whale's jawbone, or the merrythought bone⁶⁶ of some gigantic bird. There sat Maggie, twanging at her old dulcimer and singing about love in the greenwood when April brings the swallows flying in pairs, and breaking off to gasp and hawk because of the smoke in her throat. There was his tilting helmet, and his chair with the old velvet cushion. And at this moment maybe Boy Willie would come stamping in with the bowl of ewe's milk, and a kind word for his father's crazy wife. She would come to no harm, for Willie was a good bastard, stout, loyal, unpretentious, everything a man could wish his bastard to be, provided that man kept his wishes down to a moderate level.

Provided a man keeps his wishes down to a moderate level. But that was what he had never been able to do.

Thirty seven years ago⁶⁷ he had come into the world, the son of an old decayed knight by a young wife. In the same year that he was born a flighty nun in a Benedictine convent called Oby, hidden away somewhere in the fens, had vowed a spire to the holy virgin, and with the pertinacity and good luck of the flighty had got herself made Prioress, and survived the pestilence, and carried out her intention.⁶⁸ He was nine years old,⁶⁹ a sharp affable gay-spirited lad, when he had heard the story from a mason called Edmund [Gurney],⁷⁰ who had come with his band of workers to do some repairs to the parish church—the west wall had given way in the year before the great pestilence, and while every one was busy either dying or wondering when death would call him no repairs had been done beyond a bar of wood fixed across the gap in the wall; and the cattle had soon shoved that aside, scrambling over the fallen masonry, to press in for shelter during the winter weather. But after people had left off declaiming against the scandal and the sacrilege, and had become accustomed to hearing Sir John roaring at the beasts to get out before he started his morning mass,⁷¹ to envying him the supply of cow-dung which he afterwards scraped up for fuel and garden, the priory of Etchingdon which owned the living had sent a clerk to assess the damage, and six months later the masons came to repair it.

This was in May. Sir John had sent a village woman to say that he could not come to give his usual morning's tutoring because his bees had swarmed, and he must attend to them. He would come in the afternoon instead, and meanwhile Martin must exercise himself in writing, copying out the *Alma Redemptoris Mater* five times without turning the tails the wrong way. The woman who brought the message was streaming with the astonished sweat of early summer, and twirled a cowslip in her hand: and as she was leaving she paused at the kitchen door and cried out 'The masons came last night, and they've started to tear down the church already, and Alice has lost a duck.' After one copy of *Alma Redemptoris Mater* Martin had slipped off and run through the woods to the village... a longer way than across the great field, but less liable to observation. Seeing the men so busy around the west end of the church he had felt shy of them, so he had gone in by the priest's door, and so doing found himself close to the back of a large man who was standing with his arms akimbo surveying the three great tombs of Joscelyn, Adam, and Geoffrey Hawte that between them filled up the south chapel.

Those are the Hawte tombs, he had said.

The man turned around, looking from the pudding face of Adam in effigy to the face of the boy beside him.

‘Kindred of yours?’

Blood will out, the young Martin had thought, pleased to have such an upholding proof of it—for the words had not been out of his mouth before he had begun to regret them as unadvised and childish. He nodded, and turned a calm glance to his ancestors. The man’s large dusty hand took hold of him by the jaw.

‘Chops don’t change,’ he remarked.

And this was Edmund Gurney, who after the first painful shock of this encounter became so friendly, so substantial a figure, and who told him about the nun and her spire. And when the repairs were done, and Edmund Gurney and his men had packed themselves and their goods on three ox-carts and gone away through the mists of a September morning the wind went out of the sails of life, and the events of everyday living seemed dull and thumbed and flat as the letters in a hornbook.⁷² Hunting with his father, playing page to his mother, book-learning with Sir John, he knew all the events of the winter, and how long the leaves would hang on the oakshaws, and how the guisards⁷³ would come round after Christmas, smelling first of snow and then as they warmed up of stable. In the New Year he would be eleven years old, and still at home. Chops don’t change, Edmund Gurney had said. Hawte chops didn’t, that was certain. Hawtes stayed in the same house, and brought out the same mazers⁷⁴ for the same festivities, and the same proportion of spices went into the same brawn; when either of his two step-brothers came to the manor they would say, looking round them, This place doesn’t change, anyhow. They were both in religious houses, being the younger sons of the first bed. Of the two elder sons one had been killed at Cressy, and the other, a prisoner, had disappeared. It was when this Geoffrey’s son had died that Martin’s father had married again to get an heir-male. And the heir-male had been got, and another boy who died in the cradle, and that was all of the second family, so there was no hope that Martin would ever ramble from his function of being a Hawte of Hawtestown; he was as much imbedded there as Joscelin, Adam, and Geoffrey in the south chapel.

His particular chops had not begun to pimple when he was married to a tall red-haired girl five years older than he. When he was fifteen she died, and he was immediately married again, this time to a dumpling of ten. It seemed that he would never get into bed with a wife, nor yet into his father’s seat; for the old man lived on, wagging like a dead leaf on the topmost bough. But his second marriage did this much for him, it sent him to Cambridge, for his new mother in law had made it a stipulation

in the bargaining over the daughter's dowry, that she should not marry a country clodpate.

Switching his ambitions from gilded armour and tournaments to polished learning and songs that would astonish court, he went to Cambridge, and at Cambridge he was colder than he had ever been in his life, caught ague, and killed his first man. This was in a quarrel between students and townsmen, one gusty evening in autumn. The quality of the hour had just turned from day to night, for when the man's blood spurted out on the steps it looked not red but black; he had time to notice this, in that long moment after any decisive act, before his companions pulled him away. He hadn't meant to kill the man, only to trip and fell him, a more arrogant deed; but having killed, his ambition fastened on it. Thinking, I can't bed a wife, and my father won't die, but at least I have killed, he rushed into new forays, shouting out taunts and defiances—but in fact fighting to little purpose, for his mind was lost in the man he had killed, so that during the remainder of the riot he was only a sleep-walking combatant. Afterwards there was an enquiry, and the dead man's father, a little hopping old man who had been hallooing and giving advice during the fray, identified him and demanded his punishment. Nothing came of it; his friends with one voice declared that he had been set on, and was only acting in self-defence when he killed his man. More was added, comments on his short stature, his youth, his weakness from ague. Coming off on such a plea took most of the flourish from the deed, and the rest was lopped away by the bias of the university authorities, who said with one voice that their students were cheated and oppressed by the townsmen, and no more than lambs among wolves, lambs who were forced to pay four and five times the price for a coat or a dish of pease porridge by extortionate tradesmen.

Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland Archive,
Dorset History Centre; DHC reference number 'D/TWA/A15'; previous
reference number at the Dorset County Museum 'STW.2012.125.1539'

Notes

1. To Paul Nordoff, 30 October 1948 (Warner–Nordoff Correspondence, New York Public Library).
2. To Paul Nordoff, 3 June 1948 (Warner–Nordoff Correspondence, New York Public Library). See also her letter of 16 May 1948 to William Maxwell: 'I finished one [a novel] months ago, and can't quite forgive myself for having been

- such a damned improvident maniac. Nobody really wanted it but me, and now I've gone and parted with it': *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and William Maxwell, 1938–1978*, ed. Michael Steinman (New York: Counterpoint, 2001), p. 12.
3. The typescript is listed not quite accurately in the Warner–Ackland Archive as 'Extracts in typescript form of *The Corner That Held Them* in 4 sections' (Dorset County Museum reference 'STW.2012.125.1539'; Dorset History Centre reference 'D/TWA/A15').
 4. *The Element of Lavishness*, p. 185; letter of 5 February 1968.
 5. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 217; *The Corner That Held Them* (London: Virago Press, 1988), p. x.
 6. Unattributed page references in the Editor's Note all come from the Virago Press 1988 reprinting of *The Corner That Held Them*.
 7. Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982), p. 110; to Marchette Chute, 8 March 1949.
 8. *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), p. 441: online <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39537/39537-h/39537-h.htm>. For Warner's reading of Eileen Power, see 'Notes on *The Corner That Held Them*', *Sylvia Townsend Warner Journal 2020:1*, pp. 3–7.
 9. *Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 371.
 10. Giving the instances as 'typescript / emended reading', these include in the order in which they appear: 'or beast / nor beast'; 'galloped / galloped'; 'a sprit / a spirit'; 'chuch / church'; 'looking back / looking back'; 'cheuqer / chequer'; 'there were now going / they were now going'; 'Match weather / March weather'; 'along his his crutches / along on his crutches'; 'scip / scrip'; 'in shed / in the shed'; 'off this sort / of this sort'; 'tit's only a step / it's only a step'; 'absorbtion / absorption'; 'ewes milk / ewe's milk'; 'Spril / April'; 'message streaming / message was streaming'; 'man large dusty hand / man's large dusty hand'; 'either his two step-brothers / either of his two step-brothers'; 'acting in self-defense / acting in self-defence'; 'masses take effect / masses takes effect'.
 11. The city is not named but must presumably be Norwich, the 'cathedral city' (*The Corner That Held Them*, p. 295; subsequent references to the book will be in the form *TCTHT* 295).
 12. The typescript has 'march', altered here on the grounds that names of months always take capital letters in the published version of *TCTHT*.
 13. Variant spelling of 'irreclaimable': '2. That cannot be reclaimed, reformed, or called back to right ways' (*OED*). Three of the five examples in the *OED* come from theological works.
 14. *TCTHT* ends in March 1382, so this should more properly be the ninth decade of the century.
 15. In the final lines of *TCTHT*, 'the pilgrims swept on unimpeded. Their singing swelled out like a banner on the wind as they fell into step and marched southward' (310).
 16. The typescript deletes 'For' and substitutes 'In'.
 17. Her actual surname is 'Dunford'.
 18. The widow, who 'admired her profoundly' (*TCTHT* 233), had accommodated her in 1377 when she visited her dying great-uncle, Bishop Walter Dunford (*TCTHT* 302–3), and according to Sibilla colluded with her escape in 1382 at the end of *The Corner That Held Them* (*TCTHT* 309–10).
 19. See *TCTHT* 309–10; the fellow-nun is Dame Lilius.
 20. The typescript has 'or beast', and 'heard' has been crossed out.

21. A slip; in *TCTHT* her great-uncle is Walter Dunford.
22. *TCTHT* sometimes has a lower case 'c' for 'christian' and 'christianity' (for instance on pages 16, 119, 184 and 273), so Warner's typescript 'christian' (with its contrast to 'Romans' later in the sentence) is retained here and later in the paragraph.
23. When Sibilla arrived at Oby in *TCTHT* 'She was twenty-one and had been for nine years a nun in a small house called Allestree. Pestilence and a cattle plague had brought the house to the brink of ruin' (*TCTHT* 195).
24. The nine words in square brackets have been supplied editorially so as not to leave the sentence incomplete; the typescript has a lacuna after the 'fire of', at the start of an otherwise blank line. The 'slow fire' relates to the account of Bishop Walter's death in *TCTHT*: 'They had waited till he seemed past speech before giving him the holy oils. Half an hour later he began to writhe, and muttered that the oil was burning him, was eating his flesh away; and to their horror they saw his dry skin reddened and rise up.
After his death the marks were as plain as if branded with an iron. [...] She [Sibilla] replied that to her they looked like roses.' (231)
25. The typescript reads 'and talking incessantly', with no punctuation and a page-break after 'incessantly'.
26. The first, crossed-through, version of the sentence in the typescript reads 'Ten years before, when she was romantic, Sibilla would have compared ...'.
27. 'Scrip': 'A small bag, wallet, or satchel, esp. one carried by a pilgrim' (*OED*).
28. *OED* glosses 'tucking-mill' as a mill for 'the fulling and dressing of cloth' and notes that it is 'a West of England term'. 'Fulling': 'a manufacturing process to cleanse and thicken woollen cloth'.
29. At this point, in the middle of page 12, the typescript changes from a red ribbon to a black one.
30. The typescript reads 'eat to a different tune (measure)', suggesting that Warner had still to decide which word she preferred.
31. A musical instrument, also sometimes called jaw's harp, juce harp, mouth harp, or guimbard.
32. 'Haslet': 'a piece of meat to be roasted, esp. the entrails of a hog' (*OED*); chitterlings: 'the smaller intestines of beasts' (*OED*).
33. The typescript has 'a dole or a spoonful of sweet oil', with 'of sweet oil' lightly crossed through, and 'morsel of salve' written by hand above the line.
34. Eileen Power explains that 'The monastic day was divided into seven offices and the time at which these were said varied slightly according to the season of the year. The night office began about 2 a.m., when the nuns rose from their beds and entered their choir, where Matins were said, followed immediately by Lauds. The next service was Prime, said at 6 or 7 a.m., and then throughout the day came Tierce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline, with an interval of about three hours between them' (*Medieval English Nunneries*, p. 286).
35. The typescript has 'looked ostentatious called attention to herself'; 'ostentatious' has been crossed through.
36. The Black Canons, who lived under Augustinian rule, were named from the colour of their habits; for Ralph Kello's childhood, see *TCTHT* 22, 25–6.
37. The word 'knees' is not in the typescript.
38. A slip; in *TCTHT* her great uncle is Walter Dunford; see note 21 above.
39. See *TCTHT* 225–33.
40. The passage between 'long past prime' on page 19 and 'regained her peace of mind' is an addition to the narrative of TS 1.

41. 'Shog': '3. To walk, ride or move with a succession of bumps or jerks; to jog along' (*OED*).
42. 'Merrythought': 'the furcula or forked bone between the neck and breast of a bird' (*OED*), sometimes used like a wishbone.
43. TS 2 omits 'no', supplied here for the sake of the sense and supported by TS 1 (see page 30).
44. TS 2 leaves a lacuna for the name of the hill.
45. See Matthew 27: 50–1: 'Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent.'
46. 'Quintan', variant spelling of 'quintain': 'a stout post or plank, or some object mounted on such a support, set up as a mark to be tilted at with lances or poles, or thrown at with darts, as an exercise of skill for horsemen or footmen' (*OED*).
47. There is a lacuna in TS 2 before 'Fairbehind', presumably for a first name worthy of his surname.
48. See *TCTHT* 195.
49. TS 2 leaves a lacuna before 'Fair'.
50. See notes 21 and 38.
51. 'The great Pestilence': the Black Death. Sibilla entered Oby in 1374 or 1375, nine or ten years after the meeting between Sim and the cellaress. The Black Death is generally dated between 1347 and 1351 (or sometimes 1346 and 1353).
52. On the verso of this typed sheet is an untitled 12-line typed poem:

The limping bell across the snow
 Prints a footfall on my waking,
 Saying that Christ is laid anew
 In wine for pouring and bread for breaking.

Holy stone cold is the chancel,
 Remote as snow and wan as water,
 Until the verger takes a spill
 And lights the candle on the altar:

Summer out of the awakened
 Wax exhales her pagan mantle.
 To a brief warmth the word is taken
 And in a melting bosom cradled.

53. See *TCTHT* 160–1. 'In that time [...] Walter Dunford became known as a man almost angelical in energy' (160).
54. The verso of this page includes what seems to be dialogue between Sibilla's father and mother: "But it is only until she is sound," the father said. "A matter of a few months, I suppose. And then they will return her, and presently I can hold out for a fair price again."
 "Return her? When she is full of nun's notions, too delicate to take hold of a broomstick? I would not give that for her. Let them keep her for good."
55. See note 49.

56. Sibilla and Dame Liliās are the two nuns described here, begging in Norwich to replace the cost of the altar-cloth and treasures the convent has lost in the late uprisings; see *TCHT* 303–9.
57. TS 2 has ‘pain her legs’.
58. See *TCHT* 307–8.
59. The final three words have been typed over.
60. ‘Ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes in hac lachrymarum valle’: ‘To you we sigh, mourning and weeping in this valley of tears’ (from the Marian antiphon ‘Salve Regina’).
61. Page 33 of TS 2 marks the end of a section with this series of crosses. The next gathering of pages (TS 3) begins on another page 33 and continues as far as page 46.
62. See note 34.
63. The typescript continues with three lines crossed out by hand: ‘Presently she noticed that the scarred man beside her had turned his head and was looking at her attentively. Noticing this, she lowered her eyelids and continued with greater devotion.’ Page 16 of TS 2 begins with the sentence ‘Devotion led into absorption...’.
64. The typescript leaves a blank space before ‘leaf’, presumably for the later addition of the kind of leaf.
65. See note 41.
66. See note 42.
67. The typescript has ‘Forty’ crossed through, and ‘Thirty seven’ added by hand.
68. ‘When Prioress Isabella first began to gasp and turn blue Dame Alicia de Foley framed a vow to Saint Leonard, patron of the convent and of all prisoners, that if their tyrant should die of her plum-stone a spire, beautiful as art and money could make it, should be added to their squat chapel.’ (*TCHT* 12, which dates the choking to 1345.)
69. The typescript has ‘ten’, changed by hand to ‘nine’.
70. The typescript on this page erroneously calls the mason ‘Edmund Dunford’, confusing him for a moment with Bishop Dunford and Sibilla, his great-niece. However, the following pages name him correctly as ‘Edmund Gurney’, the mason in charge of building the Oby spire in *TCHT*.
71. Two short words have been written by hand above ‘morning mass’; the first word is illegible and the second word is ‘not’.
72. ‘Hornbook’: ‘a primer’ (*OED*).
73. *OED* does not include ‘oakshaws’; it defines ‘guizard’ as ‘a masquerader, a mummer’.
74. ‘Mazer’: ‘a bowl, drinking-cup, or goblet’ (*OED*).

Bibliography

- Dorset County Museum reference
‘STW.2012.125.1539’.
- Dorset History Centre reference ‘D/TWA/A15’.
- Harman, Claire. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989).
- Power, Eileen. *Medieval English Nunneries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922). Accessed 26 August 2020. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39537/39537-h/39537-h.htm>.
- Steinman, Michael, ed. *The Element of Lavishness: Letters of Sylvia Townsend Warner and William Maxwell, 1938–1978* (New York: Counterpoint, 2001).

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *The Corner That Held Them* (London: Virago Press, 1988).
Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *Letters*, ed. William Maxwell (London: Chatto & Windus, 1982).

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 'Notes on *The Corner That Held Them*', *The Journal of the Sylvia Townsend Warner Society* 2020:20, pp. 3–7.
Warner–Nordoff Correspondence, New York Public Library.