

The story takes place in Yorkshire in 1811-1812.

Peter Malone, Joseph Donne and Davy Sweeting are curates (= junior clergymen). The other character is Reverend Matthew Helstone.

With these words a person entered—a middle-aged man, in black. He walked straight across the kitchen to an inner door, opened it, inclined his head forward, and stood listening. There was something to listen to, for the noise above was just then louder than ever.

“Hey!” he ejaculated¹ to himself; then turning to Mr. Gale—“Have you often this sort of work?”

5 Mr. Gale had been a churchwarden, and was indulgent to the clergy.

“They’re young, you know, sir—they’re young,” said he deprecatingly.

“Young! They want caning. Bad boys—bad boys! And if you were a Dissenter, John Gale, instead of being a good Churchman, they’d do the like—they’d expose themselves; but I’ll—”

By way of finish to this sentence, he passed through the inner door, drew it after him, and
10 mounted the stair. Again he listened a few minutes when he arrived at the upper room. Making entrance without warning, he stood before the curates.

[...]

“I assure you, sir, we were only having a little chat together over a glass of wine after a friendly dinner—settling the Dissenters!”

15 “Oh! settling the Dissenters, were you? Was Malone settling the Dissenters? It sounded to me much more like settling his co-apostles. You were quarrelling together, making almost as much noise—you three alone—as Moses Barraclough, the preaching tailor, and all his hearers are making in the Methodist chapel, where they are in the thick² of a revival³. I know whose fault it is.—It is yours, Malone.”

20 “Mine, sir?”

“Yours, sir. Donne and Sweeting were quiet before you came, and would be quiet if you were gone. I wish, when you crossed the Channel, you had left your Irish habits behind you. Dublin student ways won’t do here. The proceedings which might pass unnoticed in a wild bog⁴ and mountain district in Connaught will, in a decent English parish, bring disgrace on those who indulge
25 in them, and, what is far worse, on the sacred institution of which they are merely the humble appendages.”

[...]

“What is it?” inquired Malone discontentedly. “There can be no funeral to take at this time of day.”

30 “Have you any arms about you?”

“Arms, sir?—yes, and legs.” And he advanced the mighty members.

“Bah! weapons I mean.”

“I have the pistols you gave me yourself. I never part with them. I lay them ready cocked on a chair by my bedside at night.”

35 “Very good. Will you go to Hollow’s Mill?”

“What is stirring at Hollow’s Mill?”

“Nothing as yet, nor perhaps will be; but Moore is alone there. He has sent all the workmen he can trust to Stilbro’; there are only two women left about the place. It would be a nice opportunity for any of his well-wishers to pay him a visit.”

40 “I am none of his well-wishers, sir. I don’t care for him.”

“Soh! Malone, you are afraid.”

“You know me better than that. If I really thought there was a chance of a row⁵ I would go: but Moore is a strange, shy man, whom I never pretend to understand; and for the sake of his sweet

1 ejaculate: exclaim

2 in the thick of: in the middle of

3 revival (here): a certain type of religious meeting

4 bog: *marécage*

5 a row (here, rhymes with ‘cow’): a quarrel, a fight

Extracts from *Shirley*, by Charlotte Brontë, published 1849 2/2

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company only I would not stir a step.”

45 “But there *is* a chance of a row; if a positive riot does not take place—of which, indeed, I see no signs—yet it is unlikely this night will pass quite tranquilly. You know Moore has resolved to have new machinery, and he expects two wagon-loads of frames and shears from Stilbro’ this evening. Scott, the overlooker, and a few picked men are gone to fetch them.”

“They will bring them in safely and quietly enough, sir.”

50 “Moore says so, and affirms he wants nobody. Some one, however, he must have, if it were only to bear evidence in case anything should happen. I call him very careless. He sits in the counting-house with the shutters unclosed; he goes out here and there after dark, just as if he were the darling of the neighbourhood, or—being, as he is, its detestation—bore a ‘charmed life,’⁶ as they say in tale-books. He takes no warning from the fate of Pearson, nor from that of Armitage—shot, one in
55 his own house and the other on the moor.”

“But he should take warning, sir, and use precautions too,” interposed Mr. Sweeting; “and I think he would if he heard what I heard the other day.”

“What did you hear, Davy?”

“You know Mike Hartley, sir?”

60 “The Antinomian weaver? Yes.”

“Besides being an Antinomian, he is a violent Jacobin and leveller⁷, sir.”

“I know. When he is very drunk, his mind is always running on regicide. The fellow exults strangely in murder done on crowned heads or on any head for political reasons. I have already heard it hinted that he seems to have a queer hankering⁸ after Moore. Is that what you allude to,
65 Sweeting?”

“You use the proper term, sir. Mr. Hall thinks Mike has no personal hatred of Moore. Mike says he even likes to talk to him and run after him, but he has a *hankering* that Moore should be made an example of. He was extolling⁹ him to Mr. Hall the other day as the mill-owner with the most brains in Yorkshire, and for that reason he affirms Moore should be chosen as a sacrifice, an oblation of a
70 sweet savour.”

1. Read lines 1 to 26.

- What is the situation? Where does the scene take place? Who are the characters? What happens?
- How does Reverend Helston behave towards other characters? What does he reveal about his worldview?

2. Read the rest of the text.

- What does Reverend Helstone want?
- What (explicit and implicit) information about the situation is exposed?
- What side does Reverend Helstone take and expect the curates to take in the conflict?

3. Analyse the character of Reverend Helston.

- What does Helston represent?
- Do you think the author shares Helstone’s values? What is the author’s aim?

4. Translate lines 1 to 14 into French.

6 In Shakespeare’s eponymous play, Macbeth, believing three witches have told him he cannot be killed, says “I bear a charmed life” minutes before being killed.

7 Levellers: radical dissenters who wanted political and economic equality (hence their name).

8 hankering: desire

9 extol: praise, compliment