

# 1

**A**nn Rainey leaned over the half-door and looked about her. On the other side of the road a green field sloped up to the rectory grounds, and stopped at a high hedge covered with hawthorn. A row of poplars, whose leaves chattered in cool monotones all through the summer, stood on the other side of the hedge. When the poplars were in leaf, the rectory was almost hidden from view, but in autumn, when the leaves fell, and lay in little, rustling drifts on the grass, Gape Row came into its own again, and saw with one well-trained eye all that it wanted to see.

It started cheerfully with a spirit-grocery at one end, and finished with the post office at the other. A straight line of low, whitewashed cottages ran between. The postmaster followed the trade of shoemaking in the room over the post office. He went up by means of a rung ladder and trap-door, and once he was up it was a difficult matter to bring him down. When a customer rapped long enough on the counter with her knuckles a pair of reluctant feet appeared on the top rung, and if the matter was urgent he came a step further and parleyed. For an ordained minister he would descend slowly and with indignation, and once, through the strategy of Mrs Murphy, he came down at break-neck speed. She had sent her little daughter for a pen'worth of note-paper and a postal order, and he had called down to her that this was no time of day to come bothering him, and besides the only postal order about the place had been promised to a man from the hills a fortnight ago. "I'll hould you I'll bring him down brave and smart," said Mrs Murphy grimly, and later in the day she put her head in at the door, and called up in agitated tones:

"Och, Tommy dear, I doubt your goat's a corp!"

He flung himself down the ladder, and passing her in the narrow hall with an energy which almost capsized her, ran as he had not run