

which took place in 1813, this devotee of the rites of detached scholarship describes the event as 'an *illuminating*, though *somewhat* appalling, glimpse into the deep, silent pool of the Oriental, archaic soul' (Mary Daly's emphasis). What eludes this scholar is the fact that the 'archaic soul' was a woman destroyed by patriarchal religion (in which he is a true believer) which demands female sacrifice.

The bland rituals of patriarchal scholarship perpetuate the legitimisation of female sacrifice. The social reality, unacknowledged by such myth-masters, is that of minds and bodies mutilated by degradation. The real social context included the common practice of marrying off small girls to old men, since brahmans have what has been called a 'strange preference for children of very tender years'. Katherine Mayo, in an excellent work entitled with appropriate irony *Mother India* shows an understanding of the situation which more famous scholars entirely lack. Her work is, in the precise sense of the word, exceptional. She writes:

That so hideous a fate as widowhood should befall a woman can be but for one cause – the enormity of her sins in a former incarnation. From the moment of her husband's decease till the last hour of her own life, she must expiate those sins in shame and suffering and self-immolation, chained in every thought to the service of his soul. Be she a child of three, who knows nothing of the marriage that bound her, or be she a wife in fact, having lived with her husband, her case is the same. By his death she is revealed as a creature of innate guilt and evil portent, herself convinced when she is old enough to think at all, of the justice of her fate.^{45, 46, 47}

African female circumcision

The practice of female circumcision – predominantly on the African continent – reveals the extent to which cultural demands, determined by men, can dictate cruelty and violence in the name of 'purity'. The practice is widespread, and is a continuing phenomenon even among women who have emigrated to the West. So deep are the false symbols generated by circumcision that women – mothers and relatives – participate in the practice, even once settled in Western democracies. Mary Daly writes as follows:

*African Genital Mutilation: the Unspeakable Atrocities*⁴⁸

There are some manifestations of the Sado-Ritual Syndrome that are unspeakable – incapable of being expressed in words because inexpressibly horrible. Such are the ritual genital mutilations – excision and infibulation – still inflicted upon women throughout Africa today, and practised in many parts of the world in the past. These ritualised atrocities are unspeakable also in a second sense; that is, there are strong taboos against saying/writing the truth about them, against naming them. These taboos are operative both within the segments of phallocracy in which such rituals are practised and in other parts of the

45 Katherine Mayo, *Mother India* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1927), esp pp 81–89; 51–62.

46 Mary Daly, *op cit*, pp 115–19.

47 For a recent account of the failure of Indian law to protect women against harassment and death, see Christopher Thomas, 'Indian Law Fails to Protect Women' (1996) *Times*, 10 January 1996.

48 *Gyn/Ecology* (The Women's Press, 1991), Chapter 5.

Fatherland, whose leaders co-operate in a conspiracy of silence. 'Hags'⁴⁹ see that the demonic rituals in the so-called underdeveloped regions of the planet are deeply connected with atrocities perpetrated against women in 'advanced' societies. To allow ourselves to see the connections is to begin to understand that androcracy is the 'State of Atrocity', where atrocities are normal, ritualised, repeated. It is the 'City of Atrophy' in which the archetypal trophies are massacred women.

Those who have endured the unspeakable atrocities of genital mutilation have in most cases been effectively silenced. Indeed this profound silencing of the mind's imaginative and critical powers is one basic function of the sado-ritual, which teaches women never to forget to murder their own divinity. Those who physically survive these atrocities 'live' their entire lifetimes, from early childhood or from puberty, preoccupied by pain. Those women who inhabit other parts of the planet cannot really wish to imagine the condition of their mutilated sisters, for the burden of knowing is heavy. It is heavy not merely because of differences in conditions, but especially because of similarities which, as I will show later in this passage, increase with the march of progress of phallotechnology.

The maze of lies and silences surrounding the genital mutilation still forced upon millions of young girls in many African countries continues to be effective. Yet is becoming the subject of increasingly widespread attention. Fran P Hosken presents the following important definitions of the practices usually lumped under the vague and misleading expression 'female circumcision':

1. Sunna Circumcision: removal of the prepuce and/or tip of the clitoris.
2. Excision or Clitoridectomy: excision of the entire clitoris with the labia minora or some or most of the external genitalia.
3. Excision and Infibulation (Pharaonic Circumcision): This means excision of the entire clitoris, labia minora and parts of the labia majora. The two sides of the vulva are then fastened together in some way either by thorns ... or sewing with catgut. Alternatively the vulva are scraped raw and the child's limbs are tied together for several weeks until the wound heals (or she dies). The purpose is to close the vaginal orifice. Only a small opening is left (usually by inserting a slither of wood) so the urine or later the menstrual blood can be passed.⁵⁰

It should not be imagined that the horror of the life of an infibulated child/woman ends with this operation. Her legs are tied together, immobilising her for weeks, during which time excrement remains within the bandage. Sometimes accidents occur during the operation: the bladder may be pierced or the rectum cut open. Sometimes in a spasm of agony the child bites off her tongue. Infections are, needless to say, common. Scholars such as Lantier claim that death is not a very common immediate effect of the operation, but often there are complications which leave the women debilitated for the rest of their lives.⁵¹ No statistics are available on this point. What is certain is that the infibulated girl is mutilated and that she can look forward to a life of repeated encounters with 'the little knife' – the instrument of her perpetual torture. For

49 A term used by Daly throughout her work to denote, in a self-mocking manner, the work of feminists.

50 See Hosken, WIN News (1976) 2, p 30.

51 Jacques Lantier, *La Cité Magique et Magie en Afrique Noire* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1972), p 279.

women who are infibulated have to be cut open – either by the husband or by another woman – to permit intercourse. They have to be cut open further for delivery of a child. Often they are sewn up again after delivery, depending upon the decision of the husband. The cutting (defibulation) and re-sewing goes on throughout a women's living death of reproductive 'life'. Immediate medical results of excision and infibulation include 'haemorrhage, infections, shock, retention of urine, damage to adjacent tissues, dermoid cysts, abscesses, keloid scarring, coital difficulties, and infertility caused by chronic pelvic infections. In addition, we should consider the psychological maiming caused by this torture.

Yet this is an 'unmentionable' manifestation of the atrocity which is phallocracy. The World Health Organisation has refused for many years to concern itself with the problem. When it was asked in 1958 to study this problem it took the position that such operations were based on 'social and cultural backgrounds' and were outside its competence. This basic attitude has not changed. In fact there has been a conspiracy of silence:

International agencies, the UN and UN agencies, especially WHO and UNICEF (both devoted to health care) development agencies (such as the US Agency for International Development) non-governmental organisations working in Africa, missionaries and church groups concerned with health care, also women's organisations including World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, YWCA, and the Associated Country Women of the World, and others working in Africa, all know what is going on. Or they have people in Africa who know. This quite aside from the health departments and hospitals in African countries and the MDs, especially gynaecologists, who get the most desperate cases. The doctors know all. But they don't speak.

It is important to ask why such a variety of organisations and professions have other priorities. Why do 'educated' persons babble about the importance of 'tribal coherence' and 'tradition' while closing their eyes to the physical reality of mutilation? We might well ask why 'female circumcision' was reinforced in Kenya after 'liberation' and described by President Kenyatta, in his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, as an important 'custom' for the benefit 'of the people'. Hosken maintains that in the socialist countries in Africa clitoridectomy and infibulation are practised on a vast scale without comment from the governments or health departments. Again, one must ask why. Why do anthropologists ignore or minimise this horror? Why is it that the Catholic church has not taken a clear position against this genital mutilation (which is practised upon some of its own members in Africa)? Why do some African leaders educated in the West continue to insist upon the maiming of their own daughters?

These questions are profoundly interconnected. The appearance of disparateness among these groups and of their responses (or non-responses) masks their essential sameness. Even the above-named organisations whose membership is largely female and androcratic since they are willing to participate in the conspiracy of silence. Socialists, Catholics, liberal reformers, population planners, politicians of all persuasions – all have purposes which have nothing to do with women's specific well-being unless this happens to fit into the 'wider' aims.

The components of the Sado-Ritual Syndrome are present in African excision and infibulation. The obsession with purity is evident. The clitoris is 'impure' because it does not serve male purposes. It has no necessary function in reproduction. As Benoite Groult points out, hatred of the clitoris is almost universal, for this organ is strictly female, for women's pleasure.⁵² Thus it is by nature 'impure', and the

52 *Ainsi Soit-Elle* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1975), p 96.

logical conclusion, acted out by the tribes that practice excision and infibulation, is purification of women by its removal. Furthermore, it is believed that excision encourages fidelity, that is, moral 'purity', for there is a 'decrease in sensitivity from the operation'. The term 'decrease' here is a euphemism for loss. These women have been de-sensitised, 'purified' of the capacity for sexual pleasure. The ideology among some African tribes which explains and justified this brutal robbing from women of their clitoris – the purely female organ – displays the total irony of the concept of purity. There is a widespread belief among the Bambaras and the Dogons from Mali that all persons are hermaphroditic and that this condition is cured by circumcision and excision. Since they believe the boy is female by virtue of his foreskin and the girl is male by her clitoris, the sexes are purified (that is, officially distinguished) by the rites of puberty. Thus the removal of the purely female clitoris is seen as making a woman purely female. In fact, its purpose is to make her purely feminine, a purely object object.

Infibulation goes even further, displaying yet other dimensions of the androcratic obsession with purity. For the 'sewn women' are not only deprived of the organ of pleasure. Their masters have them genitally 'sewn up' in order to preserve and redesign them strictly for their own pleasure and reproductive purposes. These women are 100% pure because 100% were enslaved. Their perpetual pain (or the imminent threat of this) is an important condition for their perpetual purity, for pain preoccupies minds, emotions, imagination, sensations, prohibiting presence of the self.

The second component of the syndrome, erasure of male responsibility, is present by virtue of male absence at the execution of the mutilation. In most cases, it is not males who perform the brutal operations, although male nurses and surgeons now do it in some modern hospitals. Moreover, there are comforting myths, ideologies, and clichés which assure political leaders and other males that they are blame-free. Together with the hermaphroditic myth, described above, there is the justification that 'this is the way of teaching women to endure pain'. There is also the belief among the Bambaras that a man who sleeps with a non-excised women risks death from her 'sting' (clitoris). The Mossis believe that the clitoris kills children at birth and that it can be a source of impotence among men. A basic belief that justifies all, erasing all responsibility, is of course that these rites keep women faithful. What is erased is the fact that these 'faithful' wives have been physically reconstructed for male purposes. They have been deprived of their own sexuality and 'tightened up' for their masters' pleasure – tightened through devices like wounding and sewing and through the tension of excruciating pain. Erasure of all this on the global level occurs when leaders of 'advanced' countries and of international organisations overlook these horrors in the name of 'avoiding cultural judgment'. They are free of responsibility and blame, for the 'custom' must be respected as part of a 'different tradition'. By so naming the tradition as 'different' they hide the cross-cultural hatred of women.

The massive spread of female genital mutilation throughout African has been noted by responsible Searchers. Accurate statistics are impossible to obtain, since the operation is usually performed in secret. Nevertheless the ritual, which is of ancient origin, is known to be widespread from Algeria in the north to the Central African Republic in the south, and from Senegal and Mauritania in the West to Somalia in the east.⁵³

53 *Gyn/Ecology* at pp 154–61.

The use of women as token torturers is horribly illustrated in this ritual. At the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women the testimony of a woman from Guinea was brought by a group of French women. The witness described seeing 'the savage mutilation called excision that is inflicted on the women of my country between the ages of ten and 12'.⁵⁴

The fact that 'women did it – and still do it – to women' must be seen in this context: the idea that such procedures, or any part of them, could be women-originated is only thinkable in the mind-set of phallocracy, for it is, in fact, unthinkable. The use of women to do the dirty work can make it appear thinkable only to those who do not wish to see. Yet this use of women does effectively blunt the power of sisterhood, having first blocked the power of the self.

Most horrifying is the fact that mothers insist that this mutilation be done to their own daughters. Frequently it is the mother who performs the brutal operation. Among the Somalis, for example, the mother does the excising, slicing and final infibulation according to the time-honoured rules. She does this in such a way as to leave the tiniest opening possible. Her 'honour' depends upon making this as small as possible, because the smaller this artificial aperture is, the higher the value of the girl.⁵⁵

It should not be thought that barbaric practices in relation to women occurred and in some instances continue to occur only in non-European countries. Much evidence exists of the practice of seeking out, placing on trial and subsequently killing women who were suspected of 'witchcraft'. As Marianne Hester explains, in the following extract, there existed common characteristics between the women put on trial: most commonly the characteristic being that the women in question were not under adequate male control and thus represented a threat to the patriarchal ordering of society.

Witchcraft

LEWD WOMEN AND WICKED WITCHES⁵⁶

Marianne Hester⁵⁷

European Female Witch Trials

The central feature of male supremacy as it exists today is the eroticised inequality between men and women. Taking the early modern witch-hunts as the focus, I will examine how this understanding of inequality between men and women may also be relevant to analysis of historical phenomena.⁵⁸

The witch-hunt period was a time of major social change where existing social structures, beliefs and relationships were undergoing transformations including, potentially, also men's and women's roles. At that particular time a number of

54 *Ibid*, p 163.

55 *Ibid*, p 165. Note: the refusal or failure of the mother to 'circumcise' her daughter may lead to her divorce.

56 Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches: A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1992). (Footnotes edited.)

57 At the time of writing, Lecturer in Social Studies and Adult Education at the University of Exeter.

58 Marianne Hester, *op cit*, p 107.

economic, political, legal, ideological and religious factors combined, which allowed and also prompted persecution for witchcraft. I shall argue here that the witch-hunts were an attempt at maintaining and restoring male supremacy within this context.

During the 16th and 17th centuries, primarily in Continental Europe and Scotland, but also in England and Scandinavia, thousands of people were condemned to imprisonment and death accused of the crime of 'witchcraft'. To make obvious the intensity of persecution at this time, the period has been called the 'witch-craze'. The term 'craze' is in some ways problematic because it implies that the witch-hunts were carried out by crazed individuals in the exhibition of momentary madness. Nonetheless, the early modern period does stand out as unique within the history of witchcraft, and it is important therefore, to differentiate this period where extensive witch-hunting took place.

Significantly, the witch-hunts were mainly directed against women. In England more than 90% of those formally accused of witchcraft were women, and the few men who were also formally accused tended to be married to an accused witch or to appear jointly with a woman.

Using a revolutionary feminist approach it may be shown that the witch-hunts provided one means of controlling women socially within a male supremacist society, using violence or the threat of violence, and relying on a particular construct of female sexuality. This specific instance of the social control of women, using the accusation of witchcraft, was a product of the sociohistorical context at the time. As a result only certain women – usually older, lower-class, poor, and often single or widowed – were directly affected. To understand why the social control of women took this form at this time we need to examine events leading up to, and taking place during, the witch-hunt period, which in England was largely between the mid-16th and the mid-17th centuries, and we also need to examine reasons for the eventual decline of the persecutions.⁵⁹

Legislation

While a witchcraft state of little significance existed during the reign of Henry VIII, the first important witchcraft law was placed on the statute books in 1563, soon after Elizabeth I became Queen. It has been suggested that this piece of legislation came about because it was feared that witchcraft would be used as a means to dethrone the Queen. Mary Queen of Scots was said to be involved in such an anti-Elizabeth plot.⁶⁰ The 1563 law saw witchcraft as a serious offence involving the following penalties:

- 1 Bewitching an individual to death warranted the death penalty (hanging).
- 2 Other use of witchcraft or sorcery to injure people or animals warranted one year's imprisonment for a first offence and the death penalty for a subsequent offence.

Most of those who were brought to trial for witchcraft were either acquitted or imprisoned, and those sentenced to death were hanged. In Europe and Scotland the death penalty was carried out by burning, and it is often thought that the same applied to England. But that was not the case. In England 'burning to death' was only the penalty for treason or petty treason. Treason was defined as threat to, or murder of, the monarch by his/her subjects, and petty treason was murder of the master or mistress by his/her servants, and murder of a husband

59 *Ibid*, pp 107–08.

60 See W Notestein, *The History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1728* (1911) (New York, Thomas Y Crowell, 1968), pp 18–19.

by his wife. Thus in England a woman would be burnt to death if she was deemed to have used witchcraft to kill her husband, employer, or monarch.

James I had a new witchcraft law which was placed on the statute books in 1604 and harsher than the previous. That law remained in force until 1736 when the witchcraft legislation in England was repealed. James I's law extended the use of the death penalty to instances where evil spirits had been used to cause harm, and thereby placed much greater onus on the accused having 'spirits' or 'familiar'. This change came about because of the wish, by the judiciary, for stricter standards regarding proof of witchcraft: what they now wanted was sworn evidence that the witch kept a familiar or bore the devil's mark on her person; most decisive of all, they hoped for her free confession that she had entered into a pact with Satan.⁶¹ To us this might seem rather odd 'proof', but for many Jacobean judges familiars were an actuality, as was the devil. Like the Elizabethan law, James I's law also had imprisonment as the penalty for other use of witchcraft, extending this to the death penalty for a second offence.

The particular nature of the crime of witchcraft is very important. This varies between England and different European and Scandinavian countries, for instance, in Europe the direct linkage with Satanism is important. Unlike crimes such as theft or robbery, witchcraft was not merely a crime or sin related to an individual person – although that is often how it appeared in the English trials – it was a crime directly against God, because the perpetrator sided specifically with the devil. Perhaps by inference, it was also a crime against mankind because of the way men were seen as being closer to God than women, reflected within the church as well as political hierarchies.⁶²

Numbers

Use of witchcraft to cause harm was one of the major crimes throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. In Essex during Elizabeth I's reign it was the third most common crime after theft and burglary; and during James I's reign it came fifth after theft and burglary, homicide/infanticide and highway robbery.⁶³

The number of executions for witchcraft, primarily of women, which took place throughout the witch-hunt period in England have been estimated by Ewen at 'less than 1000' between 1542 and 1736 – that is, between the passing of the first witchcraft statute and the repealing of the last.⁶⁴

The vast majority of witchcraft cases coming before the courts occurred in England during the reign of Elizabeth I, that is between 1563 and 1603. The numbers do, of course, refer to recorded figures, including those accusations of witchcraft not ending up in court, were probably much larger. It might seem surprising that Elizabeth allowed many fellow women to be imprisoned or murdered for the crime of witchcraft during her reign, and somewhat ironic that the only rule by a female monarch during the witch-craze period saw the greatest number of cases. However, Elizabeth I's rule is not characterised by positive legislation or other support for women. She has been described as an 'honorary male' who 'having established herself as an exceptional women, did nothing to upset or interfere with male notions of how the world was or should be organised'.⁶⁵ As with Margaret Thatcher and other exceptional women today,

61 K Thomas *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971).

62 *Ibid*, pp 126–27.

63 Marianne Hester, *op cit*, pp 126–28.

64 LC Ewen, *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials* (1929) (Frederick Miller, 1971).

65 A Heisch, 'Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy' (1980) 4 *Feminist Review*.

Elizabeth I was able to act as a monarch contrary to the view of women at the time, because she continued to express her support for the prevalent gender ideology. She was able to remain unmarried, for instance, by becoming the one respectable alternative allowed: a virgin queen, married to England in the way nuns were married to God.

During James I's reign, from 1603 to 1620, the recorded figures for witchcraft accusations were much lower than those in the Elizabethan period. The underlying trend was of a decrease from then until the repeal of the witchcraft legislation in 1736, although accusations of witchcraft seem to have continued at a local level until the 20th century, and indeed also precede the witch-hunt period.

It is perhaps surprising that the number of prosecutions should have continued to decrease during James I's reign, because of his instrumental role in fuelling the Scottish witch-hunts during the 1590s. As King of Scotland, James wrote *The Daemonology* (1597) stressing that witches did indeed exist, that they were a threat to the social order, and that they should preferably be eradicated. He had come to these conclusions after witchcraft had supposedly been used to harm his bride-to-be, Anne of Denmark, and himself. James, however, had always maintained some scepticism regarding witches' supposed powers, believed that fraud or delusion was often involved in 'bewitching', and was consequently involved in facilitating the decrease in prosecutions towards the end of his reign.⁶⁶

Gender Relations and the Economy

There is some general agreement amongst historians and social scientists that the 16th and 17th centuries were part of the period that saw the transition from feudalism to capitalism, characterised by petty commodity production. This largely pre-industrial period exhibited various capitalist and industrial, as well as feudal features of production. Within the context of this book, it is important to ask what the links were between male-female relations and the capitalist economic development taking place at the time.⁶⁷

Having examined the respective economic roles of men and women, Marianne Hester concludes that:

Overall, then, women were finding it difficult throughout the period to make a living and their income was generally lower than men's. If single they might find work as servants, if married, they were dependent on their husbands. But if widowed they could be in either a threatening or vulnerable position, sometimes able to carry out a trade or craft left them by their husbands, but if unable to do this more likely to be dependent on others for financial support. Alternatively, widows might end up owning land, and proportionately women lower down the social scale inherited larger amounts of land than their aristocratic sisters. Generally, however, women at the lower end of the social scale, widowed and with children seem to have been some of the most vulnerable individuals in the community. Since women in the peasantry tended to marry late, precisely because of problems of financial security, older women were also likely to have young children.

By looking at the material concerning socio-economic changes in the 16th and 17th centuries, it begins to become apparent that those accused of witchcraft also

66 Marianne Hester, *op cit*, pp 128–29.

67 *Ibid*, p 137.

tend to be those who were among the most vulnerable in the economy, that is, labouring women, widowed and possibly older, and poor. Or otherwise those in competition with men for work in lucrative areas, that is, women carrying out a craft or trade, and most specifically, widows, who were more able to do so.⁶⁸

In England, prior to divorce becoming available as a judicial (as opposed to parliamentary) process in 1857 – and then on discriminatory and limited grounds – the remedies for marital breakdown were predominantly informal. Simple separation through the disappearance of (usually) the husband, was an effective means of severing relationships. While the ecclesiastical courts adopted a punitive view of separation and subsequent informal unions, and would punish those who were detected, the risk taken represented the only practical means of family realignment. Evidence exists, however, of a more formal practice of ‘disposing’ of an unwanted wife – that of wife-sale – whereby, with or without the connivance of the wife, the husband would publicly ‘transfer ownership’ of the wife to another man.

Wifesale

THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE⁶⁹

Thomas Hardy

‘For my part I don’t see why men who have got wives and don’t want ‘em, shouldn’t get rid of ‘em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses,’ said the man in the tent. ‘Why shouldn’t they put ‘em up and sell ‘em by auction to men who are in need of such articles? Hey? Why, begad, I’d sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her.’

‘There’s them that would do that,’ some of the guests replied, looking at the woman, who was by no means ill-favoured.

‘True,’ said a smoking gentleman, whose coat had the fine polish about the collar, elbows, seams, and shoulder-blades that long-continued friction with grimy surfaces will produce, and which is usually more desired on furniture than on clothes. From his appearance he had possibly been in former times groom or coachman to some neighbouring county family. ‘I’ve had my breedings in as good circles, I may say, as any man,’ he added, ‘and I know true cultivation, or nobody do; and I can declare she’s got it – in the bone, mind ye, I say – as much as any female in the fair – though it may want a little bringing out.’ Then, crossing his legs, he resumed his pipe with a nicely adjusted gaze at a point in the air.

The fuddled young husband stared for a few seconds at this unexpected praise of his wife, half in doubt of the wisdom of his own attitude towards the possessor of such qualities. But he speedily lapsed into his former conviction, and said harshly – ‘Well, then, now is your chance; I am open to an offer for this gem of creation.’

She turned to her husband and murmured. ‘Michael, you have talked this nonsense in public places before. A joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often, mind!’

‘I know I’ve said it before; I meant it. All I want is a buyer.’

68 *Ibid*, pp 143–44.

69 (1886) Macmillan (1975) pp 32–36.

At that moment a swallow, one among the last of the season, which had by chance found its way through an opening into the upper part of the tent, flew to and fro in quick curves above their heads, causing all eyes to follow it absently. In watching the bird till it made its escape the assembled company neglected to respond to the workman's offer, and the subject dropped. But a quarter of an hour later the man, who had gone on lacing his furmity more and more heavily, though he was either so strong-minded or such an intrepid torper that he still appeared fairly sober, recurred to the old strain, as in a musical fantasy the instrument fetches up the original theme. 'Here – I am waiting to know about this offer of mine. The woman is no good to me. Who'll have her?'

The company had by this time decidedly degenerated, and the renewed inquiry was received with a laugh of appreciation. The woman whispered; she was imploring and anxious: 'Come, come, it is getting dark, and this nonsense won't do. If you don't come along, I shall go without you. Come!' She waited and waited; yet he did not move. In ten minutes the man broke in upon the desultory conversation of the furmity drinkers with, 'I asked this question, and nobody answered to it. Will any Jack Rag or Tom Straw among ye buy my goods?' The woman's manner changed, and her face assumed the grim shape and colour of which mention has been made.

'Mike, Mike' said she, 'this is getting serious. O! – too serious!'

'Will anybody buy her?' said the man.

'I wish somebody would,' said she firmly. 'Her present owner is not at all to her liking.'

'Nor you to mine,' said he. 'So we are agreed about that. Gentlemen, you hear? It's an agreement to part. She shall take the girl if she wants to, and go her ways. I'll take my tools, and go my ways. 'Tis simple as scripture history. Now then, stand up, Susan, and show yourself.'

'Don't, my chiel,' whispered a buxom staylace dealer in voluminous petticoats, who sat near the woman; 'yer good man don't know what he's saying.'

The woman, however, did stand up. 'Now, whose auctioneer?' cried the hay-trusser.

'I be,' promptly answered a short man, with a nose resembling a copper knob, a damp voice, and eyes like buttonholes. 'Who'll make an offer for this lady?'

The woman looked on the ground as if she maintained her position by a supreme effort of will.

'Five shillings,' said some one, at which there was a laugh.

'No insults,' said the husband. 'Who'll say a guinea?'

Nobody answered; and the female dealer in staylaces interposed. 'Behave yerself moral, good man, for Heaven's love! Ah, what a cruelty is the poor soul married to! Bed and board is dear at some figures, 'pon my 'vation 'tis!'

'Set it higher, auctioneer,' said the trusser.

'Two guineas!' said the auctioneer; and no one replied.

'If they don't take her for that, in ten seconds they'll have to give more,' said the husband. 'Very well. Now, auctioneer, add another.'

'Three guineas – going for three guineas,' said the rheumy man.

'No bid?' said the husband. 'Good Lord, why she's cost me fifty times the money, if a penny. Go on!'

'Four guineas!' cried the auctioneer.

'I'll tell ye what – I won't sell her for less than five,' said the husband, bringing down his fist so that the basins danced. 'I'll sell her for five guineas to any man that will pay me the money, and treat her well; and he shall have her for ever, and never hear aught o' me. But she shan't go for less. Now then – five guineas – and she's yours. Susan, you agree?'

She bowed her head with absolute indifference.

'Five guineas,' said the auctioneer, 'or she'll be withdrawn. Do anybody give it? The last time. Yes or no?'

'Yes,' said a loud voice from the doorway. All eyes were turned.

Standing in the triangular opening which formed the door of the tent was a sailor, who, unobserved by the rest, had arrived there within the last two or three minutes. A dead silence followed his affirmation.

'You say you do?' asked the husband, staring at him.

'I say so,' replied the sailor.

'Saying is one thing, and paying is another. Where's the money?'

The sailor hesitated a moment, looked anew at the woman, came in, unfolded five crisp pieces of paper, and threw them down upon the table-cloth. They were Bank-of-England notes for five pounds. Upon the face of this he chinked down the shillings severally – one, two, three, four, five.

The sight of real money in full amount, in answer to a challenge for the same till then deemed slightly hypothetical, had a great effect upon the spectators. Their eyes became riveted upon the faces of the chief actors, and then upon the notes as they lay, weighted by the shillings, on the table.

Up to this moment it could not positively have been asserted that the man, in spite of his tantalising declaration, was really in earnest. The spectators had indeed taken the proceedings throughout as a piece of mirthful irony carried to extremes; and had assumed that, being out of work, he was, as a consequence, out of temper with the world, and society, and his nearest kin. But with the demand and response of real cash the jovial frivolity of the scene departed. A lurid colour seemed to fill the tent, and change the aspect of all therein. The mirth-wrinkles left the listeners' faces, and they waited with parting lips.

'Now,' said the woman, breaking the silence, so that her low dry voice sounded quite loud, 'before you go further, Michael, listen to me. If you touch that money, I and this girl go with the man. Mind, it is a joke no longer.'

'A joke? Of course it is not a joke!' shouted her husband, his resentment rising at her suggestion. 'I take the money: the sailor takes you. That's plain enough. It has been done elsewhere – and why not here?'

'Tis quite on the understanding that the young woman is willing,' said the sailor blandly. 'I wouldn't hurt her feelings for the world.'

'Faith, nor I,' said her husband. 'But she is willing, provided she can have the child. She said so only the other day when I talked o't!'

'That you swear?' said the sailor to her.

'I do,' said she, after glancing at her husband's face and seeing no repentance there. 'Very well, she shall have the child, and the bargain's complete,' said the trusser. He took the sailor's notes and deliberately folded them, and put them with the shillings in a high remote pocket, with an air of finality.

The sailor looked at the woman and smiled. 'Come along!' he said kindly. 'The little one too – the more the merrier!' She paused for an instant, with a close glance at him. Then dropping her eyes again, and saying nothing, she took up