

Chapter X  
THE WIDENING CIRCLE

It was very burdensome to Ursula, that she was the eldest of the family. By the time she was eleven, she had to take to school Gudrun and Theresa and Catherine. The boy, William, always called Billy, so that he should not be confused with his father, was a lovable, rather delicate child of three, so he stayed at home as yet. There was another baby girl, called Cassandra.

The children went for a time to the little church school just near the Marsh. It was the only place within reach, and being so small, Mrs. Brangwen felt safe in sending her children there, though the village boys did nickname Ursula "Urtler", and Gudrun "Good Runner", and Theresa "Teapot".

Gudrun and Ursula were co-mates. The second child, with her long, sleepy body and her endless chain of fancies, would have nothing to do with realities. She was not for them, she was for her own fancies. Ursula was the one for realities. So Gudrun left all such to her elder sister, and trusted in her implicitly, indifferently. Ursula had a great tenderness for her co-mate sister.

It was no good trying to make Gudrun responsible. She floated along like a fish in the sea, perfect within the medium of her own difference and being. Other existence did not trouble her. Only she believed in Ursula, and trusted to Ursula.

The eldest child was very much fretted by her responsibility for the other young ones. Especially Theresa, a sturdy, bold-eyed thing, had a faculty for warfare.

"Our Ursula, Billy Pillins has lugged my hair."

"What did you say to him?"

"I said nothing."

Then the Brangwen girls were in for a feud with the Pillinses, or Phillipses.

"You won't pull my hair again, Billy Pillins" said Theresa, walking with her sisters, and looking superbly at the freckled, red-haired boy.

"Why shan't I?" retorted Billy Pillins.

"You won't because you dursn't" said the tiresome Theresa.

"You come here, then, Teapot, an' see if I dursna."

Up marched Teapot, and immediately Billy Pillins lugged her black, snaky locks. In a rage she flew at him. Immediately in rushed Ursula and Gudrun,

and little Katie, in clashed the other Phillipses, Clem and Walter, and Eddie Anthony. Then there was a fray. The Brangwen girls were well grown and stronger than many boys. But for pinafores and long hair, they would have carried easy victories. They went home, however, with hair lugged and pinafores torn. It was a joy to the Phillips boys to rip the pinafores of the Brangwen girls.

Then there was an outcry. Mrs. Brangwen *would not* have it; no, she would not. All her innate dignity and standoffishness rose up. Then there was the vicar lecturing the school. "It was a sad thing that the boys of Cossethay could not behave more like gentlemen to the girls of Cossethay. Indeed, what kind of boy was it that should set upon a girl, and kick her, and beat her, and tear her pinafore? That boy deserved severe castigation, and the name of *coward*, for no boy who was not a *coward* — etc., etc."

Meanwhile much hangdog fury in the Pillinses' hearts, much virtue in the Brangwen girls', particularly in Theresa's. And the feud continued, with periods of extraordinary amity, when Ursula was Clem Phillips's sweetheart, and Gudrun was Walter's, and Theresa was Billy's, and even the tiny Katie had to be Eddie Ant'ny's sweetheart. There was the closest union. At every possible moment the little gang of Brangwens and Phillipses flew together. Yet neither Ursula nor Gudrun would have any real intimacy with the Phillips boys. It was a sort of fiction to them, this alliance and this dubbing of sweethearts.

Again Mrs. Brangwen rose up.

"Ursula, I will *not* have you raking the roads with lads, so I tell you. Now stop it, and the rest will stop it."

How Ursula *hated* always to represent the little Brangwen club. She could never be herself, no, she was always Ursula-Gudrun-Theresa-Catherine — and later even Billy was added on to her. Moreover, she did not want the Phillipses either. She was out of taste with them.

However, the Brangwen-Pillins coalition readily broke down, owing to the unfair superiority of the Brangwens. The Brangwens were rich. They had free access to the Marsh Farm. The school teachers were almost respectful to the girls, the vicar spoke to them on equal terms. The Brangwen girls presumed, they tossed their heads.

"*You're not ivrybody, Urtler Brangwin, ugly mug*" said Clem Phillips, his face going very red.

"I'm better than you, for all that" retorted Urtler.

"*You think you are — wi' a face like that — Ugly Mug, — Urtler Brangwin*" he began to jeer, trying to set all the others in cry against her. Then there was hostility again. How she *hated* their jeering. She became cold against the Phillipses. Ursula was very proud in her family. The Brangwen girls had all a curious blind dignity, even a kind of nobility in their bearing. By some result of

breed and upbringing, they seemed to rush along their own lives without caring that they existed to other people. Never from the start did it occur to Ursula that other people might hold a low opinion of her. She thought that whosoever knew her, knew she was enough and accepted her as such. She thought it was a world of people like herself. She suffered bitterly if she were forced to have a low opinion of any person, and she never forgave that person.

This was maddening to many little people. All their lives, the Brangwens were meeting folk who tried to pull them down to make them seem little. Curiously, the mother was aware of what would happen, and was always ready to give her children the advantage of the move.

When Ursula was twelve, and the common school and the companionship of the village children, niggardly and begrudging, was beginning to affect her, Anna sent her with Gudrun to the Grammar School in Nottingham. This was a great release for Ursula. She had a passionate craving to escape from the belittling circumstances of life, the little jealousies, the little differences, the little meannesses. It was a torture to her that the Phillipses were poorer and meaner than herself, that they used mean little reservations, took petty little advantages. She wanted to be with her equals: but not by diminishing herself. She *did* want Clem Phillips to be her equal. But by some puzzling, painful fate or other, when he was really there with her, he produced in her a tight feeling in the head. She wanted to beat her forehead, to escape.

Then she found that the way to escape was easy. One departed from the whole circumstance. One went away to the Grammar School, and left the little school, the meagre teachers, the Phillipses whom she had tried to love but who had made her fail, and whom she could not forgive. She had an instinctive fear of petty people, as a deer is afraid of dogs. Because she was blind, she could not calculate nor estimate people. She must think that everybody was just like herself.

She measured by the standard of her own people: her father and mother, her grandmother, her uncles. Her beloved father, so utterly simple in his demeanour, yet with his strong, dark soul fixed like a root in unexpressed depths that fascinated and terrified her: her mother, so strangely free of all money and convention and fear, entirely indifferent to the world, standing by herself, without connection: her grandmother, who had come from so far and was centred in so wide an horizon: people must come up to these standards before they could be Ursula's people.

So even as a girl of twelve she was glad to burst the narrow boundary of Cossethay, where only limited people lived. Outside, was all vastness, and a throng of real, proud people whom she would love.

Going to school by train, she must leave home at a quarter to eight in the morning, and she did not arrive again till half-past five at evening. Of this she was glad, for the house was small and overful. It was a storm of movement, whence there had been no escape. She hated so much being in charge.

The house was a storm of movement. The children were healthy and turbulent, the mother only wanted their animal wellbeing. To Ursula, as she grew a little older, it became a nightmare. When she saw, later, a Rubens picture with storms of naked babies, and found this was called "Fecundity", she shuddered, and the world became abhorrent to her. She knew as a child what it was to live amidst storms of babies, in the heat and swelter of fecundity. And as a child, she was against her mother, passionately against her mother, she craved for some spirituality and stateliness.

In bad weather, home was a bedlam. Children dashed in and out of the rain, to the puddles under the dismal yew trees, across the wet flagstones of the kitchen, whilst the cleaning woman grumbled and scolded; children were swarming on the sofa, children were kicking the piano in the parlour, to make it sound like a beehive, children were rolling on the hearthrug, legs in air, pulling a book in two between them, children, fiendish, ubiquitous, were stealing upstairs to find out where our Ursula was, whispering at bedroom doors, hanging on the latch, calling mysteriously "Ursula! Ursula!" to the girl who had locked herself in to read. And it was hopeless. The locked door excited their sense of mystery, she had to open to dispel the lure. These children hung on to her with round eyed excited questions.

The mother flourished amid all this.

"Better have them noisy than ill" she said.

But the growing girls, in turn, suffered bitterly. Ursula was just coming to the stage when Andersen and Grimm were being left behind for the "Idylls of the King" and romantic love stories.

"Elaine the fair, Elaine the lovable,  
Elaine the lily maid of Astolat,  
High in her chamber in a tower to the east  
Guarded the sacred shield of Launcelot."

How she loved it! How she leaned in her bedroom window with her black, rough hair on her shoulders, and her warm face all rapt, and gazed across at the churchyard and the little church, which was a turreted castle, whence Launcelot would ride just now, would wave to her as he rode by, his scarlet cloak passing behind the dark yew trees and between the open space: whilst she, ah, she, would remain the lonely maid high up and isolated in the tower, polishing the terrible shield, weaving it a covering with a true device, and waiting, waiting, always remote and high.

At which point there would be a faint scuffle on the stairs, a light-pitched whispering outside the door, and a creaking of the latch: then Billy, excited, whispering:

“It’s locked—it’s locked.”

Then the knocking, kicking at the door with childish knees, and the urgent, childish:

“Ursula — our Ursula? Ursula? Eh, our Ursula?”

No reply.

“Ursula! Eh — our Ursula?” the name was shouted now. Still no answer.

“Mother, she won’t answer” came the yell. “She’s dead.”

“Go away — I’m not dead. What do you want?” came the angry voice of the girl.

“Open the door, our Ursula” came the complaining cry. It was all over. She must open the door. She heard the screech of the bucket downstairs dragged across the flagstones as the woman washed the kitchen floor. And the children were prowling in the bedroom, asking:

“What were you doing? What had you locked the door for?” Then she discovered the key of the parish room, and betook herself there, and sat on some sacks with her books. There began another dream.

She was the only daughter of the old lord, she was gifted with magic. Day followed day of rapt silence, whilst she wandered ghost-like in the hushed, ancient mansion, or flitted along the sleeping terraces.

Here a grave grief attacked her: that her hair was dark. She *must* have fair hair and a white skin. She was rather bitter about her black mane.

Never mind, she would dye it when she grew up, or bleach it in the sun, till it was bleached fair. Meanwhile she wore a fair white coif of pure Venetian lace.

She flitted silently along the terraces, where jewelled lizards basked upon the stone, and did not move when her shadow fell upon them. In the utter stillness she heard the tinkle of the fountain, and smelled the roses whose blossoms hung rich and motionless. So she drifted, drifted on the wistful feet of beauty, past the water and the swans, to the noble park, where, underneath a great oak, a doe all dappled lay with her four fine feet together, her fawn nestling sun-coloured beside her.

Oh, and this doe was her familiar. It would talk to her, because she was a magician, it would tell her stories as if the sunshine spoke.

Then one day, she left the door of the parish room unlocked, careless and unheeding as she always was; the children found their way in, Katie cut her

finger and howled, Billy hacked notches in the fine chisels, and did much damage. There was a great commotion.

The crossness of the mother was soon finished. Ursula locked up the room again, and considered all was over. Then her father came in with the notched tools, his forehead knotted.

“Who the deuce opened the door?” he cried in anger.

“It was Ursula who opened the door” said her mother. He had a duster in his hand. He turned and flapped the cloth hard across the girl’s face. The cloth stung, for a moment the girl was as if stunned. Then she remained motionless, her face closed and stubborn. But her heart was blazing. In spite of herself the tears surged higher, in spite of her they surged higher.

In spite of her, her face broke, she made a curious gulping grimace, and the tears were falling. So she went away, desolate. But her blazing heart was fierce and unyielding. He watched her go, and a pleasurable pain filled him, a sense of triumph and easy power, followed immediately by acute pity.

“I’m sure that was unnecessary — to hit the girl across the face” said the mother coldly.

“A flip with the duster won’t hurt her” he said.

“Nor will it do her any good.”

For days, for weeks, Ursula’s heart burned from this rebuff. She felt so cruelly vulnerable. Did he not know how vulnerable she was, how exposed and wincing? He, of all people, knew. And he wanted to do this to her. He wanted to hurt her right through her closest sensitiveness, he wanted to treat her with shame, to maim her with insult.

Her heart burnt in isolation, like a watchfire lighted. She did not forget, she did not forget, she never forgot. When she returned to her love for her father, the seed of mistrust and defiance burned unquenched, though covered up far from sight. She no longer belonged to him unquestioned. Slowly, slowly, the fire of mistrust and defiance burned in her, burned away her connection with him.

She ran a good deal alone, having a passion for all moving, active things. She loved the little brooks. Wherever she found a little running water, she was happy. It seemed to make her run and sing in spirit along with it. She could sit for hours by a brook or stream, on the roots of the alders, and watch the water hasten dancing over the stones, or among the twigs of a fallen branch. Sometimes, little fish vanished before they had become real, like hallucinations, sometimes wagtails ran by the water’s brink, sometimes other little birds came to drink. She saw a kingfisher darting blue—and then she was very happy. The kingfisher was the key to the magic world: he was witness of the border of enchantment.

But she must move out of the intricately woven illusion of her life: the illusion of a father whose life was an Odyssey in an outer world; the illusion of her grandmother, of realities so shadowy and far-off that they became as mystic symbols: — peasant-girls with wreaths of blue flowers in their hair, the sledges and the depths of winter; the dark-bearded young grandfather, marriage and war and death; then the multitude of illusions concerning herself, how she was truly a princess of Poland, how in England she was under a spell, she was not really this Ursula Brangwen; then the mirage of her reading: out of the multicoloured illusion of this her life, she must move on, to the Grammar School in Nottingham.

She was shy, and she suffered. For one thing, she bit her nails, and had a cruel consciousness in her fingertips, a shame, an exposure. Out of all proportion, this shame haunted her. She spent hours of torture, conjuring how she might keep her gloves on: if she might say her hands were scalded, if she might seem to forget to take off her gloves.

For she was going to inherit her own estate, when she went to the High School. There, each girl was a lady. There, she was going to walk among free souls, her co-mates and her equals, and all petty things would be put away. Ah, if only she did not bite her nails! If only she had not this blemish! She wanted so much to be perfect — without spot or blemish, living the high, noble life.

It was a grief to her that her father made such a poor introduction. He was brief as ever, like a boy saying his errand, and his clothes looked ill-fitting and casual. Whereas Ursula would have liked robes and a ceremonial of introduction to this, her new estate.

She made a new illusion of school. Miss Grey, the headmistress, had a certain silvery, schoolmistressy beauty of character. The school itself had been a gentleman's house. Dark, sombre lawns separated it from the dark, select avenue. But its rooms were large and of good appearance, and from the back, one looked over lawns and shrubbery, over the trees and the grassy slope of the Arboretum, to the town which heaped the hollow with its roofs and cupolas and its shadows.

So Ursula seated herself upon the hill of learning, looking down on the smoke and confusion and the manufacturing, engrossed activity of the town. She was happy. Up here, in the Grammar School, she fancied the air was finer, beyond the factory smoke. She wanted to learn Latin and Greek and French and mathematics. She trembled like a postulant when she wrote the Greek alphabet for the first time.

She was upon another hill slope, whose summit she had not scaled. There was always the marvellous eagerness in her heart, to climb and to see beyond. A Latin verb was virgin soil to her: she sniffed a new odour in it; it meant something, though she did not know what it meant. But she gathered it up: it was significant. When she knew that:

$$x^2 - y^2 = (x + y)(x - y)$$

then she felt that she had grasped something, that she was liberated into an intoxicating air, rare and unconditioned. And she was very glad as she wrote her French exercise:

*“J’ai donné le pain à mon petit frère.”*

In all these things there was the sound of a bugle to her heart, exhilarating, summoning her to perfect places. She never forgot her brown “Longman’s First French Grammar”, nor her “Via Latina” with its red edges, nor her little grey Algebra book. There was always a magic in them.

At learning she was quick, intelligent, instinctive, but she was not “thorough”. If a thing did not come to her instinctively, she could not learn it. And then, her mad rage of loathing for all lessons, her bitter contempt of all teachers and schoolmistresses, her recoil to a fierce, animal arrogance made her detestable.

She was a free, unabateable animal, she declared in her revolts: there was no law for her, nor any rule. She existed for herself alone. Then ensued a long struggle with everybody, in which she broke down at last, when she had run the full length of her resistance, and sobbed her heart out, desolate; and afterwards, in a chastened, washed out, bodiless state, she received the understanding that would not come before, and went her way sadder and wiser.

Ursula and Gudrun went to school together. Gudrun was a shy, quiet, wild creature, a thin slip of a thing hanging back from notice or twisting past to disappear into her own world again. She seemed to avoid all contact, instinctively, and pursued her own intent way, pursuing half-formed fancies that had no relation to anyone else.

She was not clever at all. She thought Ursula clever enough for two. Ursula understood, so why should she, Gudrun, bother herself? The younger girl lived her religious, responsible life in her sister, by proxy. For herself, she was indifferent and intent as a wild animal, and as irresponsible.

When she found herself at the bottom of the class, she laughed, lazily, and was content, saying she was safe now. She did not mind her father’s chagrin nor her mother’s tinge of mortification.

“What do I pay for you to go to Nottingham for?” her father asked, exasperated.

“Well, Dad, you know you needn’t pay for me” she replied, nonchalant. “I’m ready to stop at home.”



She was happy at home, Ursula was not. Slim and unwilling abroad, Gudrun was easy in her own house as a wild thing in its lair. Whereas Ursula, attentive and keen abroad, at home was reluctant, uneasy, unwilling to be herself, or unable.

Nevertheless Sunday remained the maximum day of the week for both. Ursula turned passionately to it, to the sense of eternal security it gave. She suffered anguish of fears during the week-days, for she felt strong powers that would not recognize her. There was upon her always a fear and a dislike of authority. She felt she could always do as she wanted if she managed to avoid a battle with Authority and the authorised Powers. But if she gave herself away, she would be lost, destroyed. There was always the menace against her.

This strange sense of cruelty and ugliness always imminent, ready to seize hold upon her this feeling of the grudging power of the mob lying in wait for her, who was the exception, formed one of the deepest influences of her life. Wherever she was, at school, among friends, in the street, in the train, she instinctively abated herself, made herself smaller, feigned to be less than she was, for fear that her undiscovered self should be seen, pounced upon, attacked by brutish resentment of the commonplace, the average Self.

She was fairly safe at school, now. She knew how to take her place there, and how much of herself to reserve. But she was free only on Sundays. When she was but a girl of fourteen, she began to feel a resentment growing against her in her own home. She knew she was the disturbing influence there. But as yet, on Sundays, she was free, really free, free to be herself, without fear or misgiving.

Even at its stormiest, Sunday was a blessed day. Ursula woke to it with a feeling of immense relief. She wondered why her heart was so light. Then she remembered it was Sunday. A gladness seemed to burst out around her, a feeling of great freedom. The whole world was for twenty four hours revoked, put back. Only the Sunday world existed.

She loved the very confusion of the household. It was lucky if the children slept till seven o'clock. Usually, soon after six, a chirp was heard, a voice, an excited chirrup began, announcing the creation of a new day, there was a thudding of quick little feet, and the children were up and about, scampering in their shirts, with pink legs and glistening, flossy hair all clean from the Saturday's night bathing, their souls excited by their bodies' cleanliness.

As the house began to teem with rushing, half-naked clean children, one of the parents rose, either the mother, easy and slatternly, with her thick, dark hair loosely coiled and slipping over one ear, or the father, warm and comfortable, with ruffled black hair and shirt unbuttoned at the neck.

Then the girls upstairs heard the continual:

“Now then, Billy, what are you up to?” in the father’s strong, vibrating voice: or the mother’s dignified:

“I have said, Cassie, I will not have it.”

It was amazing how the father’s voice could ring out like a gong, without his being in the least moved, and how the mother could speak like a queen holding an audience, though her blouse was sticking out all round and her hair was not fastened up and the children were yelling a pandemonium.

Gradually breakfast was produced, and the elder girls came down into the babel, whilst half-naked children flitted round like the wrong ends of cherubs, as Gudrun said, watching the bare little legs and the chubby tails appearing and disappearing.

Gradually the young ones were captured, and nightdresses finally removed, ready for the clean Sunday shirt. But before the Sunday shirt was slipped over the fleecy head, away darted the naked body, to wallow in the sheepskin which formed the parlour rug, whilst the mother walked after, protesting sharply, holding the shirt like a noose, and the father’s bronze voice rang out, and the naked child wallowing on its back in the deep sheepskin announced gleefully:

“I’m bading in the sea, mother.”

“Why should I walk after you with your shirt?” said the mother. “Get up now.”

“I’m bading in the sea, mother” repeated the wallowing, naked figure.

“We say bathing, not bading” said the mother, with her strange, indifferent dignity. “I am waiting here with your shirt.”

At length shirts were on, and stockings were paired, and little trousers buttoned and little petticoats tied behind. The besetting cowardice of the family was its shirking of the garter question.

“Where are your garters, Cassie?”

“I don’t know.”

“Well, look for them.”

But not one of the elder Brangwens would really face the situation. After Cassie had grovelled under all the furniture and blacked up all her Sunday cleanliness, to the infinite grief of everybody, the garter was forgotten in the new washing of the young face and hands.

Later, Ursula would be indignant to see Miss Cassie marching into church from Sunday school with her stocking sluthered down to her ankle, and a grubby knee showing.

“It’s disgraceful!” cried Ursula at dinner. “People will think we’re pigs, and the children are never washed.”

“Never mind what people think” said the mother superbly. “I see that the child is bathed properly, and if I satisfy myself I satisfy everybody. She can’t keep her stocking up and no garter, and it isn’t the child’s fault she was let to go without one.”

The garter trouble continued in varying degrees, but till each child wore long skirts or long trousers, it was not removed.

On this day of decorum, the Brangwen family went to church by the high road, making a detour outside all the garden hedge, rather than climb the wall into the churchyard. There was no law of this, from the parents. The children themselves were the wardens of the Sabbath decency, very jealous and instant with each other.

It came to be, gradually, that after church on Sundays the house was really something of a sanctuary, with peace breathing like a strange bird alighted in the rooms. Indoors, only reading and tale telling and quiet pursuits, such as drawing, were allowed. Out of doors, all playing was to be carried on unobtrusively. If there were noise, yelling or shouting, then some fierce spirit woke up in the father and the elder children, so that the younger were subdued, afraid of being excommunicated.

The children themselves preserved the Sabbath. If Ursula in her vanity sang:

“Il était un’ bergère  
Et ron-ron-ron petit patapon,”

Theresa was sure to cry:

“*That’s* not a Sunday song, our Ursula.”

“You don’t know” replied Ursula, superior. Nevertheless, she wavered. And her song faded down before she came to the end.

Because, though she did not know it, her Sunday was very precious to her. She found herself in a strange, undefined place, where her spirit could wander in dreams, unassailed.

The white-robed spirit of Christ passed between olive trees. It was a vision, not a reality. And she herself partook of the visionary being. There was the voice in the night calling, “Samuel, Samuel!” And still the voice called in the night. But not this night, nor last night, but in the unfathomed night of Sunday, of the Sabbath silence.

There was Sin, the serpent, in whom was also wisdom. There was Judas with the money and the kiss.

But there was no *actual* Sin. If Ursula slapped Theresa across the face, even on a Sunday, that was not Sin, the everlasting. It was misbehaviour. If Billy played truant from Sunday school, he was bad, he was wicked, but he was not a Sinner.

Sin was absolute and everlasting: wickedness and badness were temporary and relative. When Billy, catching up the local jargon, called Cassie a “sinner”, everybody detested him. Yet when there came to the Marsh a flippetty-floppetty foxhound puppy, he was mischievously christened “Sinner”.

The Brangwens shrank from applying their religion to their own immediate actions. They wanted the sense of the eternal and immortal, not a list of rules for everyday conduct. Therefore they were badly behaved children, headstrong and arrogant, though their feelings were generous. They had, moreover — intolerable to their ordinary neighbours — a proud gesture, that did not fit with the jealous idea of the democratic Christian. So that they were always extraordinary, outside of the ordinary.

How bitterly Ursula resented her first acquaintance with evangelical teachings. She got a peculiar thrill from the application of salvation to her own personal case. “Jesus died for me, He suffered for me.” There was a pride and a thrill in it, followed almost immediately by a sense of dreariness. Jesus with holes in His hands and feet: it was distasteful to her. The shadowy Jesus with the Stigmata: that was her own vision. But Jesus the actual man, talking with teeth and lips, telling one to put one’s finger into His wounds, like a villager gloating in his sores, repelled her. She was enemy of those who insisted on the humanity of Christ. If He were just a man, living in ordinary human life, then she was indifferent.

But it was the jealousy of vulgar people which must insist on the humanity of Christ. It was the vulgar mind which would allow nothing extrahuman, nothing beyond itself to exist. It was the dirty, desecrating hands of the revivalists which wanted to drag Jesus into this everyday life, to dress Jesus up in trousers and frock coat, to compel Him to a vulgar equality of footing. It was the impudent suburban soul which would ask, “What would Jesus do, if he were in my shoes?”

Against all this, the Brangwens stood at bay. If any one, it was the mother who was caught by, or who was most careless of the vulgar clamour. She would have nothing extrahuman. She never really subscribed, all her life, to Brangwen’s mystical passion.

But Ursula was with her father. As she became adolescent, thirteen, fourteen, she set more and more against her mother’s practical indifference. To Ursula, there was something callous, almost wicked in her mother’s attitude. What did

Anna Brangwen, in these years, care for God or Jesus or Angels? She was the immediate life of today. Children were still being born to her, she was throng with all the little activities of her family. And almost instinctively she resented her husband's slavish service to the Church, his dark, subject hankering to worship an unseen God. What did the unrevealed God matter, when a man had a young family that needed fettling for? Let him attend to the immediate concerns of his life, not go projecting himself towards the ultimate.

But Ursula was all for the ultimate. She was always in revolt against babies and muddled domesticity. To her Jesus was another world, He was not of this world. He did not thrust His hands under her face and, pointing to His wounds, say:

“Look, Ursula Brangwen, I got these for your sake. Now do as you're told.”

To her, Jesus was beautifully remote, shining in the distance, like a white moon at sunset, a crescent moon beckoning as it follows the sun, out of our ken. Sometimes dark clouds standing very far off, pricking up into a clear yellow band of sunset, of a winter evening, reminded her of Calvary, sometimes the full moon rising blood-red upon the hill terrified her with the knowledge that Christ was now dead, hanging heavy and dead upon the Cross.

On Sundays, this visionary world came to pass. She heard the long hush, she knew the marriage of dark and light was taking place. In church, the Voice sounded, re-echoing not from this world, as if the Church itself were a shell that still spoke the language of creation.

“The Sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair: and they took them wives of all which they chose.

“And the Lord said, My spirit shall not always strive with Man, for that he also is flesh; yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

“There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the Sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children unto them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.”

Over this Ursula was stirred as by a call from far off. In those days, would not the Sons of God have found her fair, would she not have been taken to wife by one of the Sons of God? It was a dream that frightened her, for she could not understand it.

Who were the sons of God? Was not Jesus the only begotten Son? Was not Adam the only man created from God? Yet there were men not begotten by Adam. Who were these, and whence did they come? They too must derive from God. Had God many offspring, besides Adam and besides Jesus, children whose origin the children of Adam cannot recognize? And perhaps these children, these sons of God, had known no expulsion, no ignominy of the fall.

These came on free feet to the daughters of men, and saw they were fair, and took them to wife, so that the women conceived and brought forth men of renown. This was a genuine fate. She moved about in the essential days, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men.

Nor would any comparison of myths destroy her passion in the knowledge. Jove had become a bull, or a man, in order to love a mortal woman. He had begotten in her a giant, a hero.

Very good, so he had, in Greece. For herself, she was no Grecian woman. Not Jove nor Pan nor any of those gods, not even Bacchus nor Apollo, could come to her. But the Sons of God who took to wife the daughters of men, these were such as should take her to wife.

She clung to the secret hope, the aspiration. She lived a dual life, one where the facts of daily life encompassed everything, being legion, and the other wherein the facts of daily life were superseded by the eternal truth. So utterly did she desire the Sons of God should come to the daughters of men; and she believed more in her desire and its fulfilment than in the obvious facts of life. The fact that a man was a man, did not state his descent from Adam, did not exclude that he was also one of the unhistoried, unaccountable Sons of God. As yet, she was confused, but not denied.

Again she heard the Voice:

“It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into heaven.”

But it was explained, the needle's eye was a little gateway for foot passengers, through which the great, humped camel with his load could not possibly squeeze himself: or perhaps at a great risk, if he were a little camel, he might get through. For one could not absolutely exclude the rich man from heaven, said the Sunday school teachers.

It pleased her also to know, that in the East one must use hyperbole, or else remain unheard; because the Eastern man must see a thing swelling to fill all heaven, or dwindled to a mere nothing, before he is suitably impressed. She immediately sympathized with this Eastern mind.

Yet the words continued to have a meaning that was untouched either by the knowledge of gateways or hyperboles. The historical, or local, or psychological interest in the words was another thing. There remained unaltered the inexplicable value of the saying. What was this relation between a needle's eye, a rich man, and heaven? What sort of a needle's eye, what sort of a rich man, what sort of heaven? Who knows? It means the Absolute World, and can never be more than half interpreted in terms of the relative world.

But must one apply the speech literally? Was her father a rich man? Couldn't he get to heaven? Or was he only a half-rich man? Or was he merely a poor

man? At any rate, unless he gave everything away to the poor, he would find it much harder to get to heaven. The needle's eye would be too tight for him. She almost wished he were penniless poor. If one were coming to the base of it, any man was rich who was not as poor as the poorest.

She had her qualms, when in imagination she saw her father giving away their piano and the two cows, and the capital at the bank, to the labourers of the district, so that they, the Brangwens, should be as poor as the Wherrys. And she did not want it. She was impatient.

"Very well" she thought "we'll forego that heaven, that's all — at any rate the needle's eye sort." And she dismissed the problem. She was not going to be as poor as the Wherrys, not for all the sayings on earth — the miserable squalid Wherrys.

So she reverted to the non-literal application of the scriptures. Her father very rarely read, but he had collected many books of reproductions, and he would sit and look at these, curiously intent, like a child, yet with a passion that was not childish. He loved the early Italian painters, but particularly Giotto and Fra Angelico and Filippo Lippi. The great compositions cast a spell over him. How many times had he turned to Raphael's "Dispute of the Sacrament" or Fra Angelico's "Last Judgment" or the beautiful, complicated renderings of the Adoration of the Magi, and always, each time, he received the same gradual fulfilment of delight. It had to do with the establishment of a whole mystical, architectural conception which used the human figure as a unit. Sometimes he had to hurry home, and go to the Fra Angelico "Last Judgment". The pathway of open graves, the huddled earth on either side, the seemly heaven arranged above, the singing process to paradise on the one hand, the stuttering descent to hell on the other, completed and satisfied him. He did not care whether or not he believed in devils or angels. The whole conception gave him the deepest satisfaction, and he wanted nothing more.

Ursula, accustomed to these pictures from her childhood, hunted out their detail. She adored Fra Angelico's flowers and light and angels, she liked the demons and enjoyed the hell. But the representation of the encircled God, surrounded by all the angels on high, suddenly bored her. The figure of the Most High bored her, and roused her resentment. Was this the culmination and the meaning of it all, this draped, null figure? The angels were so lovely, and the light so beautiful. And only for this, to surround such a banality for God!

She was dissatisfied, but not fit as yet to criticize. There was yet so much to wonder over. Winter came, pine branches were torn down in the snow, the green pine needles looked rich upon the ground. There was the wonderful, starry, straight track of a pheasant's footsteps across the snow imprinted so clear; there was the lobbing mark of the rabbit, two holes abreast, two holes following behind; the hare shoved deeper shafts, slanting, and his two hind feet came down together and made one large pit; the cat podded little holes, and birds made a lacy pattern.

Gradually there gathered the feeling of expectation. Christmas was coming. In the shed, at nights, a secret candle was burning, a sound of veiled voices was heard. The boys were learning the old mystery play of St. George and Beelzebub. Twice a week, by lamplight, there was choir practice in the church, for the learning of old carols Brangwen wanted to hear. The girls went to these practices. Everywhere was a sense of mystery and rousedness. Everybody was preparing for something.

The time came near, the girls were decorating the church, with cold fingers binding holly and fir and yew about the pillars, till a new spirit was in the church, the stone broke out into dark, rich leaf, the arches put forth their buds, and cold flowers rose to blossom in the dim, mystic atmosphere. Ursula must weave mistletoe over the door, and over the screen, and hang a silver dove from a sprig of yew, till dusk came down, and the church was like a grove.

In the cowshed the boys were blacking their faces for a dress rehearsal; the turkey hung dead, with opened, speckled wings, in the dairy. The time was come to make pies, in readiness.

The expectation grew more tense. The star was risen into the sky, the songs, the carols were ready to hail it. The star was the sign in the sky. Earth too should give a sign. As evening drew on, hearts beat fast with anticipation, hands were full of ready gifts. There were the tremulously expectant words of the church service, the night was past and the morning was come, the gifts were given and received, joy and peace made a flapping of wings in each heart, there was a great burst of carols, the Peace of the World had dawned, strife had passed away, every hand was linked in hand, every heart was singing.

It was bitter, though, that Christmas Day, as it drew on to evening, and night, became a sort of bank holiday, flat and stale. The morning was so wonderful, but in the afternoon and evening the ecstasy perished like a nipped thing, like a bud in a false spring. Alas, that Christmas was only a domestic feast, a feast of sweetmeats and toys! Why did not the grown-ups also change their everyday hearts, and give way to ecstasy? Where was the ecstasy?

How passionately the Brangwens craved for it, the ecstasy. The father was troubled, dark-faced and disconsolate, on Christmas night, because the passion was not there, because the day was become as every day, and hearts were not aflame. Upon the mother was a kind of absentness, as ever, as if she were exiled for all her life. Where was the fiery heart of joy, now the coming was fulfilled; where was the star, the Magi's transport, the thrill of new being that shook the earth?

Still it was there, even if it were faint and inadequate. The cycle of creation still wheeled in the Church year. After Christmas, the ecstasy slowly sank and changed. Sunday followed Sunday, trailing a fine movement, a finely developed transformation over the heart of the family. The heart that was big with joy, that had seen the star and had followed to the inner walls of the Nativity, that there had swooned in the great light, must now feel the light slowly withdrawing, a



shadow falling, darkening. The chill crept in, silence came over the earth, and then all was darkness. The veil of the temple was rent, each heart gave up the ghost, and sank dead.

They moved quietly, a little wanness on the lips of the children, at Good Friday, feeling the shadow upon their hearts. Then, pale with a deathly scent, came the lilies of resurrection, that shone coldly till the Comforter was given.

But why the memory of the wounds and the death? Surely Christ rose with healed hands and feet, sound and strong and glad? Surely the passage of the cross and the tomb was forgotten? But no — always the memory of the wounds, always the smell of graveclothes? A small thing was Resurrection, compared with the Cross and the death, in this cycle.

So the children lived the year of christianity, the epic of the soul of mankind. Year by year the inner, unknown drama went on in them, their hearts were born and came to fulness, suffered on the cross, gave up the ghost, and rose again to unnumbered days, untired, having at least this rhythm of eternity in a ragged, inconsequential life.

But it was becoming a mechanical action now, this drama: birth at Christmas for death at Good Friday. On Easter Sunday the life- drama was as good as finished. For the Resurrection was shadowy and overcome by the shadow of death, the Ascension was scarce noticed, a mere confirmation of death.

What was the hope and the fulfilment? Nay, was it all only a useless after-death, a wan, bodiless after-death? Alas, and alas for the passion of the human heart, that must die so long before the body was dead.

For from the grave, after the passion and the trial of anguish, the body rose torn and chill and colourless. Did not Christ say, "Mary!" and when she turned with outstretched hands to him, did he not hasten to add, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my father."

Then how could the hands rejoice, or the heart be glad, seeing themselves repulsed. Alas, for the resurrection of the dead body! Alas, for the wavering, glimmering appearance of the risen Christ. Alas, for the Ascension into heaven, which is a shadow within death, a complete passing away.

Alas, that so soon the drama is over; that life is ended at thirty three; that the half of the year of the soul is cold and historiless! Alas, that a risen Christ has no place with us! Alas, that the memory of the passion of Sorrow and Death and the Grave holds triumph over the pale fact of Resurrection!

But why? Why shall I not rise with my body whole and perfect, shining with strong life? Why, when Mary says: Rabboni, shall I not take her in my arms and kiss her and hold her to my breast? Why is the risen body deadly, and abhorrent with wounds?

The Resurrection is to life, not to death. Shall I not see those who have risen again walk here among men perfect in body and spirit, whole and glad in the flesh, living in the flesh, loving in the flesh, begetting children in the flesh, arrived at last to wholeness, perfect without scar or blemish, healthy without fear of ill health? Is this not the period of manhood and of joy and fulfilment, after the Resurrection? Who shall be shadowed by Death and the Cross, being risen, and who shall fear the mystic, perfect flesh that belongs to heaven?

Can I not, then, walk this earth in gladness, being risen from sorrow? Can I not eat with my brother happily, and with joy kiss my beloved, after my resurrection, celebrate my marriage in the flesh with feastings, go about my business eagerly, in the joy of my fellows? Is heaven impatient for me, and bitter against this earth, that I should hurry off, or that I should linger pale and untouched? Is the flesh which was crucified become as poison to the crowds in the street, or is it as a strong gladness and hope to them, as the first flower blossoming out of the earth's humus?