

TRACKS IN THE SNOW

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Tracks in the snow by Godfrey Rathbone Benson Charnwood

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GODFREY RATHBONE BENSON CHARNWOOD

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by

LORD CHARNWOOD

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CHAPTER I

ON the morning of the 29th of January, 1896, Eustace Peters was found murdered in his bed at his house, Grenvile Combe, in the parish of Long Wilton, of which I was then rector.

Much mystery attached to the circumstances of his death. It was into my hands that chance threw the clue to this mystery, and it is for me, if for any one, to relate the facts.

To the main fact of all, the death of my own friend on the eve, as I sometimes fancy, of a fuller blossoming of his powers, my writing cannot give the tragic import due to it, for it touched my own life too nearly. I had come—I speak of myself, for they tell me a narrator must not thrust himself quite into the background—I had come to Long Wilton, three years before, from a college tutorship at Oxford, to occupy the rectory

till, as happened not long after, the son of the patron became qualified to hold it. Country-bred, fond of country people and of country pastimes, I had not imagined, when I came, either the difficulties of a country parson's task or the false air of sordidness which those difficulties would at first wear to me; still less was I prepared for the loneliness which at first befell me in a place where, though many of my neighbours were wise men and good men, none ever showed intellectual interests or talked with any readiness of high things. The comradeship of Peters, who settled there a few months after me, did more than to put an end to my loneliness; by shrewd, casual remarks, which were always blunt and unexpected but never seemed intrusive or even bore the semblance of advice, he had, without dreaming of it—for he cared very little about the things of the Church—shown me the core of most of my parish difficulties and therewith the way to deal with them. So it was that with my growing affection for the man there was mingled an excessive feeling of mental dependence upon him. So it was that upon that January morning a great blank entered into my life. Matters full of interest, in my pursuits of the weeks and months that went