



## Come Rack! Come Rope!

Robert Hugh Benson

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Robin Audrey and Marjorie Manners, both aged seventeen, are secretly engaged. They both come from recusant Catholic families in Derbyshire, but she is the more devout of the two. Robin's mother died when he was about seven, and his father has continued to practise the Catholic faith, despite having to pay heavy fines for refusing to attend services in the established Church of England. The two families meet several times a year, when Mass is being secretly offered by a priest. The story begins when Robin visits his fiancée and tells her that his father has announced that he can no longer tolerate the persecution and fines, that he will take the bread and wine in the Anglican church at Easter, and that Robin must do the same. Marjorie advises her lover to leave the area for Easter, so that his father will have time to accept that his son will not follow him. She gives him a rosary which belonged to the recently executed priest Cuthbert Mayne, kisses him for the first time, and urges him to trust in God. When he arrives home, Robin finds his friend Anthony Babington waiting for him. Anthony is also a Catholic, fanatically devoted to the imprisoned, Catholic Queen of Scots. Robin tells Anthony of his troubles. Later, the two men are out riding, and pass three other men. One of them, Mr. Garlick, recognises Anthony, having heard Mass in his house, and on being assured that Robin is also a Catholic, introduces the newly ordained Mr. Simpson and his travelling companion Mr. Ludlam to the two friends, telling them that Mr. Simpson will say Mass the following Sunday. Robin realises, as he goes home, that he must not mention this to his father. Robin's troubles at home increase, as he has to cope with his father's anger and sneers. Meanwhile, Marjorie is tormented by unexpected but persistent ideas that perhaps God is calling Robin to the priesthood. She feels that if a love higher than hers is calling, she must not stand in the way, but is unsure whether such thoughts come from God or from her own imagination. She talks to Mr. Simpson, but he is unable to advise her. She is afraid to mention it to Robin, in case she has merely imagined this to be God's will, yet feels she should at least sow a seed in his mind. She prays for guidance, thinking that "a broken heart and God's will done would be better than that God's will should be avoided and her own satisfied."



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