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A Nobel

BY

HENRY JAMES BYRON

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON

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PAID IN FULL.



CHAPTER I.

IN THE MIMIC WORLD.

PRISCILLA, to speak the honest truth, was not overwhelmed with delight at Horace's success with the Criterion manager. "Behind the scenes" was in her mind a very dreadful place, and she was somewhat shocked at Horace having been there. As he wished to tone down any unpleasantness he might have encountered during the morning, it is to be feared that he gave rather a too roseate hue to the description of the whole business; and as he was not in the habit of disguising his thoughts, he dwelt so enthusiastically upon the attractive

manners and charming appearance of Miss Julia Mellington, that after one or two attempts at depreciation of that popular favourite, Priscilla burst into tears, and left her dinner to sob and sulk upon the sofa. As it was injudicious at that particular season to agitate his wife, Horace mastered his indignation, and, after much persuasion and promises of new things out of the manager's cheque, coaxed her back to the cold mutton. But somehow Miss Julia Mellington got mixed up with domestic and irrelevant themes; and Horace, who always felt more charitable after his meals, ventured to declare that, no doubt, even Slagg was a good sort of fellow when one got to know him. Then he expatiated on the delights of seeing his name in big letters on playbills and posters, of hearing people speak of him as a public character, of being pointed at as a celebrity, and compared the joys of a wide popularity with the insignificance of the career of commonplace professional people or grovelling traders, such as Pulling, for instance. Priscilla scarcely saw matters through the same luminous lens, and ventured to hint that she had frequently

heard it stated that public characters were in the habit of going about a good deal without their wives; "picking up character," as they called it, and picking up very bad characters for themselves in many cases. Horace, who now gave himself all the airs of an established literary man, said it was nothing of the kind; that she knew nothing about it; that there was no class so domestic, for the mere fact of their being made so much of by a parcel of people they knew nothing about, made them appreciate more thoroughly the genuine joy of their fireside. In fact, he talked a good deal of nonsense, as was his custom when any subject ran away with him; but he did not succeed in convincing Priscilla, who, getting into better spirits as the evening wore on, became a little sarcastic on the subject of the *Criterion soubrette*, and said one or two smart things which were not received very graciously. Like all strongly satirical folks, Horace was excessively thin-skinned. He winced terribly at ridicule, and couldn't bear to be laughed at in the least. Priscilla, who had never seen an actress in her life, was accustomed to look on them

as "hussies." In her mind there was no excuse for a parcel of people wasting their time in dressing themselves up and talking nonsense, instead of stopping at home and minding their house-duties, and so on. Nobody enjoyed herself at a play more than Priscilla; but her interest in the artists ceased with the fall of the curtain; and beyond a vague wonder as to what Ophelia might be having for supper, or where Georgina Vesey got her dresses made, Priscilla's theatrical thoughts on the way home never wandered.

"So Miss Mellington was very polite, Horace," said Priscilla, with a mischievous glance.

"Yes," said Horace, "she was; and she wants to sing a song. I don't quite see how it's to come in, but—"

"But you couldn't deny her any thing, could you?"

"Don't be absurd, Priscilla. Then, what she said about Miss Pimlico was quite right."

"And what was that?"

"Oh, she said Miss Pimlico didn't speak well; and she's perfectly correct. I've often noticed her

drop her *h*'s, and say 'captin' and other dreadful things."

"Yet she drives a brougham, you say. I suppose she has a private fortune, and merely acts for her amusement."

Horace felt annoyed at this, and scarcely knew what to reply. There was nothing against Miss Mellington in Miss Pimlico driving a carriage. Neither was there any reason that Horace should stick himself up as champion for Miss Pimlico, who was one of those ladies who bring discredit upon an elevating calling, and who have no right to be confounded with the true and honest artists who have to work and study hard to gain a foremost place in their perilous profession. Miss Pimlico did not possess the slightest scintillation of talent; she was a pretty doll, who could move her eyes, and barely understood the meaning of the words she learnt parrot-like to utter. Horace felt that he could say nothing in *her* favour, and it galled him.

"Didn't you say Miss Pimlico was a 'walking' lady?" asked Priscilla, with a sly chuckle, after an unpleasant pause.

“Yes, I did,” replied Horace, very red, for he had a dim idea of what was coming.

“Then I don’t see why she should ride in a brougham,” said Priscilla, proud of her mild little joke.

“Don’t talk of people you know nothing about, Priscilla.”

“I don’t want to know any thing of them; and I hope you won’t know any thing more of them than you are obliged.”

“I shall do exactly as I please. I know my own affairs best; and if you’ll attend to yours, and leave me to mine, I shall be obliged to you.”

Horace burst out of the room with this, and was heard in his bedroom making a great noise over brushing his hair, flinging about the different things, and kicking back an obtrusive chair into its place, with a hearty denunciation of Mrs. Molloy’s furniture, finishing with fiercely slamming down the shaky old window.

Up betimes the next morning, another hurried nervous breakfast, a vain attempt at work, much

room-pacing and trying on of different neck-ties, and then half an hour before the time off to rehearsal at the Criterion Theatre. The doorkeeper knew him now, and nodded pleasantly as he passed and groped his way to the stage. There was a perilous staircase to descend and a narrow passage to traverse, and Horace was in imminent danger of breaking his neck several times on his way. Managers seldom mind how much gas they use in showing-up scenery and effects at night, but they have the greatest objection to it in the daytime; and as very little sunlight can struggle into theatres, there is a general dimness and gloom pervading them at rehearsal-time, by no means calculated to raise the spirits.

The Criterion was the dimmest and gloomiest among the dim and gloomy playhouses of the metropolis; and when Horace found himself all alone on the big dark stage, he almost imagined himself a solitary pantomime-demon in the dismal opening-scene of the "Cells of Remorse." Nobody had arrived. Horace was not aware that there is ten minutes' grace at rehearsal, and he had been

punctual ; indeed, it wanted five minutes to twelve even now. There is something rather awful in finding oneself quite alone in a theatre in the morning. The great circular front, with the private boxes in shrouds, and the big chandelier making a vain struggle at being brilliant, but succumbing miserably to the prevailing gloom. All the scenery pushed away off the stage, which reaches up to bare walls at the back ; the bricks and mortar of the work-a-day world seeming dreadfully out of place in the region of romance and unreality around. Horace walked up and down the stage nervously, and hailed the appearance of a grimy female with a broom and dustpan at the back of the pit with real pleasure. The first arrival, the prompter Mr. Minns, who, beyond taking more snuff than was good for him and continually losing the place, possessed no special qualification for his post. He was, however, a fixture ; and though the manager made a point of giving him notice on the first night of every new piece, Minns never went away ; for, as Slagg the stage-manager represented to Girdlestone, Minns was the

only man who understood his (Slagg's) way, by which that despot meant that poor Minns was the only prompter in London who would stand being abused like a pickpocket, without knocking the aforesaid despot down. Minns when muddled would certainly make more mistakes, and do more dreadful things with gongs and "crashes" at the wrong time, than any of his brother prompters. There was no knowing what he might have done, had Slagg left him to himself; but Slagg knew his man, and stuck to Minns, and swore at Minns, and pushed Minns about in such a way, that the prompter would retire to his family after the first night of a piece in a tearful and tremulous condition; but being revived with gin-and-water, would ease his mind by copious denunciations on the degraded state of the drama, when such trash as the production of that evening went down, and such barn-storming as Mr. Browzer's was considered acting.

Poor old Minns was an honest, steady, worthy man, with all his incapacity; and Girdlestone's knowledge of the many mouths the prompter's

weekly pittance went to fill had as much to do with Minns's retention at the Criterion as the arguments of the potent Slagg. Mr. Minns entered into conversation with Horace in a meek and deferential manner, and made so bold as to beg the author to say a word for little Lizzie Minns, who might stand a chance of being cast for the girl who brought on the umbrella and goloshes for Giggley, and who would speak the two or three lines of the part very nicely if Mr. Bentley would only ask Mr. Slagg to give it her. Horace said he would do what he could, and the old gentleman took three enormous pinches of snuff on the strength of it. Gradually the remainder of the "cast" arrived; Miss Pimlico, having a carriage with fast horse in it, being last, as a matter of course. Miss Mellington looked lovely. As Horace heard her ringing laugh and bright cheery voice, he felt his heart beat quickly, and the pressure of her prettily-gloved hand sent a thrill through him. She wore the wickedest little bonnet, trimmed with the most charming taste, and her dress was neatness itself. She

carried a tiny umbrella, which she whirled about in a saucy way as she spoke, and with which she playfully poked Giggley in the ribs the instant that popular comedian made his appearance. Giggley was not in a good humour; he seldom was. It was generally believed that he had made a vow in early life never to be agreeable at rehearsal. Having missed his omnibus, and been forced to take a cab, the parsimonious comedian was in a worse temper than usual, and saluted those present with a general scowl. Montrose, very radiant in a pink tie and a white hat, was making himself most agreeable to Miss Pimlico, who was laughing tremendously at his imitations of his landlady. Montrose was the funniest fellow in the world in private; in his professional capacity he was not so entertaining. A rickety table and two or three chairs having been placed at one side of the stage, Slagg gave the word, and the rehearsal commenced. It was a curious fact that with the very first word of the piece, there commenced a tremendous hammering from a carpenter who had hitherto been perfectly quiet. It

appeared to the sensitive Horace as if the hammerer had only waited for the first word to begin. Slagg, however, after a short and fierce verbal contest with the carpenter, succeeded in stopping the noise, and Giggley was permitted to go on. Giggley was rather short-sighted, and his part was not copied as clearly as it might have been, there being a profusion of erasures, a recklessness as regarded blots, and an eccentricity of punctuation, which, together with Giggley's natural or assumed obtuseness, considerably marred the effect of Horace's opening speech. The young author sat uneasily upon his chair, nervously biting at his finger-nails, and wondering if Giggley gave every other dramatic writer as much annoyance. If Giggley possessed the power, as he undoubtedly did, of investing pointless lines with fun which their author had not found for him, he could certainly rob a droll speech of its humour at rehearsal in the most remarkable manner. He even seemed, as Horace thought, to take a delight in doing it. The brilliant Montrose had left his part at home, which did not add

to the general clearness; and Miss Pimlico giggled so much over her few speeches that Slagg was insolent to her, and Miss Pimlico burst into tears; and Horace wished in his heart that the stage-manager would be rude to Miss Mellington, for he felt convinced that the popular *soubrette* would give Slagg a setting-down that would serve him for some time. The wished-for small storm burst very shortly. Miss Mellington had not yet commenced her part. She did not appear at the beginning of the piece; but at length the cue for her entrance was given, and she came smiling on to the stage, neat gloves, distracting bonnet, and coquettish little *parapluie*, and all.

“Halloo, halloo!” exclaimed Slagg, who had snatched the manuscript indignantly from the feeble hands of Mr. Minns; “what’s that you’re saying, Miss Mellington?”

“I beg your pardon,” observed Miss Julia with a sweet smile.

“Why don’t you commence with the dialogue with Miss Pimlico?”

“Oh, I’ve cut that out.”

“Cut it out, madam!”

“Yes, it seemed to drag a little there, and so—”

“Seemed to drag! I think I’m the best judge of that.”

“I beg to differ with you there.”

“I’m the stage-manager, and I won’t allow it!”

“I have to play the part, and I mean to do it as I’m doing it this morning, or not at all;” and Miss Mellington, without appearing in the least angry or excited, looked as if she meant what she said, and puckered up her pretty little mouth in a comically determined manner.

“You will do it as it is written, of course, madam,” spluttered Slagg, who was very red and furious. “Don’t dictate to me, Miss Mellington.”

“I didn’t dictate to you; it was the other way.”

“Well, what do you say, Mr. Bentham?” asked the stage-manager, turning to Horace abruptly. Slagg knew the author’s name well enough, but he considered it imposing to call him by a wrong one. Slagg always did this

with fresh hands, as he imagined it put them in their place, and let them see they were nobodies. The fair Julia, seeing Horace was rather at a loss how to reply, relieved him of the responsibility, and answered Slagg herself.

“ Oh, Mr. Slagg, Mr. Bentley the author and I have settled it; so there needn't be any more squabbling.”

“ Oh, if you and the author have settled it, that's a *very* different matter,” replied Slagg.

The stage-manager shrugged his shoulders as he said this, pulling down his mouth and elevating his eyebrows in the most significant manner. Giggley forgot his surliness for a moment, and winked knowingly at Miss Pimlico, who laughed immoderately; whilst Horace felt himself scarlet to the small of the back. There was no more fighting after this, the opposing parties imagining each had come off victorious; Miss Mellington having carried her point, and Slagg having, as he fancied, said something very clever and cutting. The rehearsal “dragged its slow length along,” and at length the “tag” arrived. Here

Giggley, who had boggled and stammered through his part, gave it as his opinion that the finish must be altered. Miss Mellington, being a vocalist, suggested a little musical finale. Miss Pimlico thought that if she could go off just before, and something could be done whilst she put on a riding-habit (which, as she played the wife of a milkman, was of course a most natural thing to do), the piece would receive a "fillip;" whilst Montrose declared that unless there was some rhyme all round in which he could take part, his character might as well be played by a "super." But Giggley wouldn't listen to any of these propositions. "What's the use of singing any thing when the people are all going out? and as for rhyme, I can't study any rhyme by Monday, even if it had a chance of being heard. No, look here; when I discover it's my wife, I give a shriek and a jump: you cry out, 'What! Timotheus Tootsicum, don't you know me?' We rush past each other, missing the embrace; you fly into Captain Fitzwhiskers' arms; I am about to salute Mrs. Fitzwhiskers, when she pushes me into the pan

of buttermilk ; general scream, and ‘ring down’ on the roar.”

Giggley looked round, after having said this, as if he had saved the farce. Horace, to whom every word of his dialogue was as precious as a drop of his blood, looked very blank at this proposed alteration, and ventured to observe that some explanation was necessary at the conclusion of the piece. But here every body was down upon him, declaring that no one wanted explanations at the end of a farce. And finally he was compelled by the voice of the majority to submit to the alteration. The “property”-master was then summoned, and Giggley gave him very minute instructions as to the particular articles to be used in the forthcoming farce.

“Mind, Parkin,” he said, shaking his finger at him impressively,—“mind, the umbrella is made to open *this* time ; I lost no end of laughs on the first night of the last piece of this sort we did by the umbrella being a dummy ; so do, for goodness’ sake, see to it this time. Then don’t be afraid of the flour ; let’s have plenty ; and—oh,

I say, Parkin, the churn's very particular; mind it's a real one, not a painted thing that won't look a bit like it."

So on through the long list of properties which affected the comedian's "business." "Business" was Giggley's great point. He didn't care so much about the words, give him plenty of business. There was an anecdote illustrative of the value of this same business, which Giggley was accustomed to tell with great effect, concerning a dreadful "stage-wait," when a great star in the provinces was taken suddenly faint, and couldn't come up to time, and Giggley seized a quartern loaf and a clasp-knife, and kept the audience in roars for a quarter of an hour by his antics with those two articles, the temporary absence of the great star not being noticed, or if observed, generally considered a decided boon. The knife and quartern-loaf story was Giggley's pet anecdote; and the pieces of writers who were too quiet and "talky," his soul's abhorrence. So Giggley, seeing his way to several practical, not to say pantomimic, effects in the farce, condescended to look

more favourably on Horace's production, and left off glowering. When the rehearsal was over, Horace found himself walking the same way with Miss Mellington, who was on the look-out for her omnibus; and as one or two of them were full, the fascinating *soubrette* continued walking beside the author of the new piece until she was half way home. Horace felt very important to be walking in the street with the popular favourite of the Criterion, and he was delighted when occasionally a passer-by nudged a friend, and Horace knew his fair companion was the cause.

Miss Mellington took the staring very composedly; and when an injudicious clerk, with fluffy whiskers and a white hat, said to a companion from the country, "Do you know who that is?" loudly enough for the fair Julia to hear, not the slightest flush of annoyance rose to the countenance of that lady; she was used to it; it was rude, perhaps, but there was no denying it showed her popularity. At length a 'bus with a vacant place in it came by, and Horace hailed it with an air of haughty com-

mand. A sweet smile, a gentle pressure of the little hand, and in a moment more the door slammed on the charming Julia, and bore her off to Brompton. Horace turned away when the omnibus was out of sight, and strolled back towards his lodgings. It struck him for the first time that he had been keeping Priscilla's dinner waiting. The cold mutton, cleverly metamorphosed into an appetising hash, which Priscilla was in the habit of rendering tasty by half-a-dozen little artful additions not to be found in the cookery-books of Mesdames Glass or Rundell, had been "kept hot;" and every body knows that phrase is a comprehensive one, and implies a drying-up of the gravy and incrustation of the surface, and the unwelcome addition of a smoky taste, which does not improve the dish. Priscilla had been to the window several times, and had cast many a despairing glance at the gravy, before Horace's foot was heard on the stairs. He had not hurried home, but had moved along in a thoughtful manner, noticing nothing that was going on around him, and certainly not thinking

of his dinner. The mere mention of hashed mutton would have horrified him during that slow walk home. The odour met him in the passage and sickened him. He had been in another world; and the decided dash of onion, nearly always evident in Priscilla's *cuisine*, was any thing but welcome to the young day-dreamer. If onion was evident in Priscilla's cookery, vinegar was certainly manifest in her temper. Horace thought he had never seen her rather thin lips so compressed, or her somewhat sharply outlined features so sharply outlined as on the present occasion. The tones of her voice too, as she saluted him with a shrill rebuke, contrasted most unfavourably with the soft subdued accents of the gentle Julia. As the husband cast his eye over the costume of his wife, he was forcibly struck with the superior make of Miss Mellington's dress. Priscilla made her own dresses, as we have said. Miss Mellington was not at home with the needle, and employed a clever young woman, who took especial pains with the fair *soubrette*, and received her reward in the columns

of the press, which always teemed with praise of Miss Mellington's toilette on the occasion of any new piece. Priscilla dressed her hair too in a severe and bygone fashion, braiding it closely to the head in a tight and uncompromising manner, whilst Miss Mellington allowed her ample locks to wander out on to the shoulder; and there was a studied looseness and artificial "frizziness" about it which was very distracting. Altogether Mrs. Bentley junior rather served to "throw out" Miss Mellington; and Horace, being the worst actor in the world, sat as black as thunder over his dinner, only enlivening the general gloom by occasional flashes of snappishness. Priscilla, of course, ate no dinner; wives under such circumstances never do. She simply sat bolt upright, looking at her plate and saying nothing. Horace, feeling inwardly ashamed of himself and greatly annoyed, laid the foundation of a fine indigestion for the evening by devouring a great quantity of the tepid compound in a hurried manner, scowling all the while at he knew not what.

"Don't give me this kind of dinner again,"

he exclaimed, pushing away his plate when he had finished.

“If you had been in time, you would have enjoyed it. You have often praised my hashes. I wish I'd known you were tired of them, I'd have had a joint; it would have been much less trouble to me.”

“Oh, I'm tired of legs of mutton and pieces of roast beef. I like little appetising dishes; what your highly-respectable papa called kick-shaws; I hate sawing away at a great mass of meat that never seems to end.”

A vision of Julia Mellington eating the most delicate little *entrée* had arisen to his mind's eye during his discussion of the spoilt hash. He fancied he saw her with her pretty little spotless wristlets and her alabaster hands playing lightly over a tempting dinner, where the waiters were speechless with admiration, where the wines were cool and bubbling, where a balmy summer-breeze floated in softly at the open window which disclosed a fairy garden something between Claude Melnotte's ideal one and that of the Star and

Garter, Richmond. All very wrong, no doubt; but Horace was not a hero, but a rather headstrong and very selfish youth, who had tastes beyond his means, and hardly any self-control. He had a great notion, too, that genius was not to be fettered, nor was it to be judged by the standard fixed for the measurement of ordinary mortals. If a poet didn't pay his debts, nobody had a right to interfere with him. No punishment could be too severe for the wretch who would serve genius with a writ. There were souls which could not submit to mundane trammels, and Horace's was one of them. Not that all this fine talk would pay the butcher's bill. Horace, had he not been alive to that fact, would soon have been convinced of its force by the matter-of-fact Priscilla, who was beginning to have a hearty contempt for her husband's calling. There was no doubt about the smallness of the salary he was receiving, and there was very great doubt about its continuing; for Horace was so flighty and unsettled that Priscilla trembled lest he should come home some day with the news that he and

the proprietor had parted; for this young genius was always wanting to be doing something else, and chafed over his social articles, longing to try his hand at more ambitious work. The introduction to the dramatic public which his farce was about to afford him would, thought he, no doubt give him an opportunity of showing the world what he could do; and he put aside his regular work that evening to construct the groundwork for a lengthy drama.

The illustrious Mr. Charles Tindal was the first of Horace's acquaintance to come to congratulate him on the dramatic opening he had achieved. Horace had not seen much of this gentleman for some time, as the gifted Charley had been spending a few days at a select establishment in the immediate neighbourhood of Whitecross Street. From this abode of bliss the *chevalier d'industrie* had at length emanated more greasy as to coat-collar and more shiny as to knee than ever. His hat, though worn in a more rakish manner, was limp and napless; and the boots which enveloped the Tindal extremities made

a dull plash as they were put upon the ground; there was no hardness in their heels, and their soles were snares and delusions. Closely buttoned up as far as it would go was the threadbare frock-coat of Horace's visitor, and the artistic manner in which a broad neck-tie was spread over Mr. Charley's breast by the much pulling and many pins was sufficient to awaken painful suspicions in the minds of the least sophisticated. Tindal's theory was, that when a man was at low water, then was the time to assume a high hand, and appear as if money was no object. To have seen shabby Charles Tindal swaggering down Little Green Street, Soho, one would have thought he was in a condition of pecuniary ease, to say the least of it. His knock, too, at Mrs. Molloy's door was not indicative of poverty or humiliation of any kind. There was nothing in it of the begging-letter impostor, but much of the Belgravian or Tyburnian footman.

Priscilla's head was out of the window in a moment; it was a bad habit she had acquired at Pinto's, and it had stuck to her.

“It’s your beautiful friend, Tindal,” she exclaimed with a sneer, for of course she was not partial to the money-borrowing, shabby, sponging Charles. She looked upon him, too, as the cause of Horace’s ruin; for she had already made up her mind that he *was* ruined, though at present he had done nothing but earn money and work rather hard for it. The Molloy, or rather the particular Molloy whose duty it was to open the front door, being at that moment engaged in backing himself for large imaginary sums in a family steeple-chase down the balusters, waited to see the result of the contest before admitting Mr. Tindal. A good start having at length been effected, and Master Augustus Molloy declared winner by half a pinafore, the door was opened by that triumphant youth, and the visitor shown in. After a short and fierce discussion between Horace and his wife, carried on in an undertone, the latter retired to her room, leaving her husband to enjoy uninterruptedly the society of his “beautiful friend.” The beautiful friend’s boldness had evaporated in the passage; for he had a wholesome

fear of Mrs. Bentley junior, and was in the habit of giving out to his acquaintances that "young Bentley had married a Tartar, and no mistake." Mingled with a certain liking for Tindal, there was in Horace's mind an overwhelming amount of contempt; but with all the selfishness of the young husband's nature, he was not the man to turn his back upon a friend in difficulties, and he advanced to meet his visitor very cordially. Tindal walked in on tip-toe, looking round mysteriously with eyes like two great notes of interrogation. Horace jerked his head significantly to show the coast was clear.

"Any thing wrong?" asked Tindal.

"Nothing," replied Horace.

"Right!" said Tindal, and he sat down. Sitting down was not a sudden operation, though. It was gradual, and appeared to give Tindal some trouble. Having settled himself to his satisfaction, he placed his hat very gingerly under a chair and said it was very hot. Horace took the hint, and the infant Molloy, who "fetched errants," was despatched to the nearest tavern for beer. Tindal

believed in beer. He had once observed at a licensed-victuallers' dinner, where, by some accident he responded for "the press," that "beer was the backbone of Britain," which alliterative piece of imagery had been received with much cheering. Fortified with a lengthy pull at the welcome beverage, Mr. Tindal became less nervous in his manner; fortified still further by the assurance that Priscilla was not likely to come into the room, he gradually became his former self, and gave Horace a picturesque description of the scene of his recent incarceration. From Tindal's account a debtors' prison must have been a delightful place; indeed he spoke of it quite regretfully, and alluded to the probability of a speedy return with an air of hopefulness.

"I came to you first of all my friends, Bentley my boy," he said cheerily, filling his tumbler, "because I like rising men. There's no humbug about me. I hate poor people; they're detestable. At this present moment, my contempt for Charles Tindal, Esquire, is ineffable! Who can respect a man with boots like these?"

Horace admitted it was difficult.

“By George, Horatius Cocles” (Tindal called it ‘Cockles’), “you’re coming out; you are! That last article of yours about the Brownsmith Court-Martial was immense, im-mense! I read it out to a select circle in Spike Hotel, and we would have drunk the author’s health under—hem!—more auspicious circumstances. But I do it now, sir. Allow me to propose the toast of the evening. ‘Here’s long life and success to Mr. Horace Bentley and his farce. Hooray!’” and Tindal rapped the table in approval of his observations.

“Now, my boy” (always “my boy”), he continued, after having drunk the toast with enthusiasm; “how have they cast your piece?”

“Well, there’s Giggley——”

“Never speaks a line till the third night; but they roar if he says ‘Come in!’ so *he’s* all right.”

“Montrose.”

“Dances well; but don’t let him sing any thing. He has the very smallest tenor voice I ever encountered, and a falsetto which is peculiarly irritating.”

“ He doesn't sing ; only plays a walking-gentleman, and not a good one either.”

“ Ah, struts about with a new hat, and ‘ feeds’ Giggley. What's the female element ?”

“ Miss Pimlico ——”

“ No brains ; but always perfect.”

“ And—a—Miss Mellington.”

Now, why should Horace have blushed when he mentioned the latter lady ? He did, decidedly ; and it was not lost upon the vivacious Tindal, who gave a prolonged low whistle, intended to express extreme knowingness.

“ What are you whistling at, you stupid idiot ?” asked Horace, with no tone of annoyance in his question ; scarlet, notwithstanding, to the tips of his ears.

“ I am whistling, *not* for want of thought, as the poet would have probably expressed it, had he been in my position. If you get Miss Mellington to play in a last piece, all I can say is, that *some* people have a marvellous power of persuasion. Why, she refused a magnificent part in *The Curse of the Co-respondent, or the Divorce-Court*

and the Dungeon, which I did with young Critchett, because it wasn't possible to bring her on in the last scene. We took it over, however, to the 'Surrey side,' where we met with less money but more enthusiasm. The great scene where Gowley (the co-respondent) pitched himself off a rock, and was transfixed on the bayonet of the sentry underneath, thrilled 'em, sir; thrilled 'em! But Critchett wouldn't do his next piece with *me*! Tried a tepid comedy at the Elysium, which sent small audiences to sleep for six nights, and then retired from the bills."

This same Critchett had been one of the smart young men whom Tindal had picked up, and attached himself to, getting him to do all the work, and generously dividing the spoil; an arrangement which, with increased experience, appeared one-sided to Critchett, who abruptly dissolved the partnership, thereby making Tindal his enemy for life.

Horace declared no undue influence had been used to induce the fair Julia to play in his farce; but Tindal was incredulous, and poked his host in

the ribs, and told him to mind what he was about, and was very jocular indeed.

The subject and the beer being simultaneously exhausted, the volatile Tindal rose to depart.

“You must send me a lot of orders, and I’ll bring a phalanx of supporters,” said Charley.

Horace had chivalrous notions of leaving the fate of his farce in the hands of the paying public; but Tindal declared such squeamishness to be absurd. The former, too, had no great faith in the proper conduct of the class of supporters Tindal was likely to bring; and he shuddered at the dreadful effect which would ensue if the “phalanx” was turned out for unruly behaviour. He ventured to impart his fears to Tindal, who seemed wounded at his friend imagining he would send in any but good men and true, trained to their work, and warranted not to applaud at the wrong place. After having relieved Horace’s mind, Tindal still lingered. He again alluded to the boots, and was particularly droll about the napless state of his hat. Horace, fearing an encounter with Priscilla in the pas-

sage, hurried a loan into his visitor's hand, and felt considerably relieved when the front door closed upon him. Something told Horace he would find Priscilla in tears, and so he did. Horace was anxious to finish the evening amicably; but Priscilla had a most unfortunate way of saying disagreeable things at the wrong time. Her first remark on her husband's appearance was—

“How much did your friend borrow *this* time?”

This put an end to all pleasure for the evening; and Horace sat to his work with a heavy frown, whilst Priscilla sulked over her sewing.

More rehearsing and less worry, as the farce became smoother; but on Monday, when every thing was so perfect for the evening, the scene was declared unfinished. At this Giggley proposed that the piece should be put off; at which Mr. Girdlestone, who had come down from his sanctum to see the rehearsal, lost his temper, and was rude to Giggley; then Giggley was rude to Mr. Girdlestone; and the servile Slagg,

siding with the management, got snubbed by both parties, much to the delight of Miss Pimlico, who tittered tremendously for some minutes, whilst the stage-manager went and bullied an unfortunate carpenter. Every thing had appeared settled and ready on Saturday ; but on the Monday nobody seemed prepared with any thing. It was not until Girdlestone had administered a liberal verbal castigation all round, that the rehearsal was permitted to proceed, which it did in disjointed and unsatisfactory manner, every body being out of temper ; Giggley in particular addressing all his remarks to his boots.

Horace made up his mind that the piece would be hooted at the finish, if indeed it ever would come to a finish, which was problematical, he thought. He was too nervous to say much to Miss Mellington even ; and he did *not* keep the dinner waiting, for a wonder. Nothing, however, would persuade Priscilla that he had not been taking a hearty lunch, for he ate scarcely a mouthful, though he declared he was not a bit nervous. The long hours between the early din-

ner and the opening of the Criterion Theatre appeared endless to the excited Horace, who could not sit still, or read or write, or do any thing but walk up and down the room and look at his watch. Priscilla had flatly refused to go to see the piece, and Horace had not pressed her, for he was nervous about the result of the performance, and he dreaded his wife hearing the hisses. Priscilla kissed him when he left; but she said nothing kind about the farce. She regarded the prospect of popularity with very different feelings from her husband, and she stuck to her colours with obstinate determination. So Horace shrugged his shoulders and set off to the Criterion. Business recently had not been good at that establishment. The fact of the theatre being (at least so said the advertisement) "the best-ventilated in the world," may have accounted for the extreme coolness of the audience; for certainly Mr. Pendragon's new play, founded on classical models and several unclassical plots, had with the warm weather combined to "ventilate" the Criterion very effectively. A vitiated public presumed to call the composition

dull, and dulness is the worst of all vices in a dramatist; playgoers, however much they may be preached to by stern purists, preferring to be amused to being sent to sleep. No one ever knew this better than Shakespeare, who wrote to please his audiences; and did please them, too, by means which, if employed by a dramatist of to-day, would bring down a torrent of virtuous horror upon the head of the luckless scribbler. So Girdlestone, whilst he concurred in the condemnation indulged in by dramatic alarmists (he was wedded to tradition, for he had been brought up to believe in it), was only too glad to come to an agreement with a much-abused but generally successful writer to construct him a drama which should at least possess the merit of being intelligible, whilst if the piece allowed of the introduction of one or two of those exciting "situations" which it was the habit of the day to term "sensational," Girdlestone was not the man, the author well knew, to be niggardly in carrying out his intentions. Looking, therefore, impatiently forward to the day when it should

grow cooler, and the author should be ready with his piece, Girdlestone was obliged to carry on with his classical failure, deriving what consolation he could from the pages of those papers which praised him hugely for his excellent intentions. The performance of the long dreary play before Horace's trifle might operate either as an incentive to mirth, or by its exhaustive dullness it might so weary out the audience that even Giggley would not be able to extract a laugh from them. Slagg had kindly given it as his opinion in the morning that the latter would be the case; and Horace walked up to the portico with a loudly beating heart and a very pale face. As he arrived at the doors, a printed bill caught his eye; it was pasted over the play-bill, and ran thus:

“Miss Julia Mellington having met with a severe accident this afternoon, the management respectfully request the indulgence of the public for Miss Clarence, who will read the part of Sally Swindleby in the new farce.”

Horace held on to the arm of Charley Tindal, who came up at the moment, or he would certainly have fallen in a faint on the front steps of Mr. Girdlestone's theatre.

CHAPTER II.

FELICIA PENROSE PERFORMS HER TASK WELL.

LITTLE dreaming that he was followed and watched, Mr. Ledbitter strolled on quietly, amusing himself by looking in the shop-windows, and once pausing to refresh himself with a bottle of ginger-beer; for the evening was a little sultry, and Ledbitter was one of those sleek comfortable men who soon get warm. A pleasant little chat too had the valet with the foreign gentleman who served him; a very sallow-faced and unkempt foreign gentleman, with a pair of unsavoury-looking sleeves rolled up to the elbows of two not over-cleanly arms. An Italian foreign gentleman, to judge from his name over the door, and one who was evidently doing well in an uncongenial clime; for whilst Mr. Ledbitter calmly waited until the froth had settled down, and improved the mo-

ments by speaking a few Tuscan sentences with a most undeceptive and insular pronunciation, there was an uninterrupted flow of copper into the Italian till, and there was no rest for the arms in the cloudy shirt-sleeves. A casual customer would have imagined there was then nothing on the mind of the pleasant-looking little gentleman who paraded his little vocabulary with many smiles, and nodded at the fluent replies of the proprietor, as if he perfectly understood them. With a patronising but polite bow, the valet left the shop, humming an operatic air, and rather red-eyed from the effects of the ginger-beer's effervescence; and as he slightly quickened his pace, the veiled female with the black eyes, who had been suddenly attracted by a *Punch* a month old in the window of a coffee-shop opposite, slightly mended hers. Through unpleasant back-streets Mr. Led-bitter wended his way, his step a little faster now, and with no eyes for the cheap allurements of the small shops he passed. At length he turned into a street near Seven Dials, and the heart of the young woman in the veil beat loudly, for she had

a horror of low life, and where on earth was Mr. Ledbitter going?

Such a wretched street: dirt and gin the presiding genuses; misery every where; misery, grim and hollow-eyed, peering from open windows; misery making itself more miserable at bright bars of tawdry public-houses, where the swing-doors were held back to let in what air there was stirring—and there was very little of it stirring in St. Giles's that sultry summer-night. Round the doors of the foul shops hung panting families who had wearied of their four bare walls, and found the noisy crowded street a trifle less choking than their wretched rooms. The poor human rats who lived in the cellars had come from their holes to breathe a draught of something scarcely so polluting as the fever atmosphere of their foul retreats; and here and there on the shaky roofs of their rickety houses, top-story dwellers had scrambled, and sat perched amongst the perilous chimney-pots, proud of their elevated position, but regretting there was no public-house upon the parapets. Where a bit of wall inter-

vened between the shops or cellars, a row of half-fed indescribable men would sit, their feet stretched out upon the hot pavement; and wretched wan women, with scanty shawls pulled tightly over their shoulders, stood about at the corners of courts and narrow passages, conversing in a languid and dispirited manner, occasionally varying the monotony by trying to lure their husbands from the gin-palace, or snatching their poor pale children from beneath the wheels of some passing vehicle. How those seething swarms of infants were not daily decimated by the score was always a marvel to the stranger who found himself driven through the squalid playground by some adventurous cabman, pleased at the opportunity of demonstrating his knowledge of short-cuts. Here and there a hairy-capped bull-necked youth or two might be seen furtively glancing up and down the street as they talked in an undertone. There was a marvellous family likeness amongst these youths, which would have led a casual observer to imagine they were all related by closer ties than the broad freemasonry of

crime. Swart young burglars, waiting impatiently for the foggy nights of winter with its many chances for the footpad, now compelled to devote himself to the inglorious calling of pocket-picking, occasionally enlivened by a raid upon remote areas; shiny-haired, bright-eyed young thieves, lithe and slippery in their movements, saucy in the security of not being "wanted," and doing nigger-dances on the kerb beneath the very nose of the policeman. Many of the street denizens with dogs too—dogs of hideous aspect, with no thoughts of "play" about them; heavy-jowled brutes, with the marks of many battles on their dingy hides, and in some cases with tails and ears which manifested the artistic eccentricity of their owners: a babel of bad English and bad Irish and bad language generally; a sight to sicken the heart of any man who saw it for the first time.

On that particular organ in the breast of Mr. Ledbitter the sight did not produce that unpleasant effect. He had evidently been down the street very frequently; for he did not look about

him, but walked straight on until he arrived at the shop of Mr. Cooney, dealer in rags, bones, metals, and in fact almost any thing. The atmosphere of the narrow street being foul enough in all conscience, Mr. Cooney was doing his best to make it fouler by puffing great whiffs of the rankest tobacco-smoke at his opposite neighbour, who, not to be behindhand, was doing much the same thing over the way. Cooney was not the sort of man to feel the weather, for he was an unimpassioned reticent individual, who felt nothing but the dulness of trade, and when business was bad, Cooney would talk a little, only a little; when things were flourishing, Cooney was silent as night, speaking in monosyllables, and seldom venturing a sentence except under severe provocation, when his remarks were apt to be limited, but exceedingly strong. Like all men who are surly and say very little, Cooney was universally considered a wealthy man; and he was in the habit of fishing-up money from almost inaccessible parts of his clothing after many angular contortions and much grunting,—for he

kept no till, but was generally believed to have an immense account at a large bank, though the most intimate of his friends had never seen his cheque-book.

There were many ugly dwellers in that dreadful street and its surrounding courts, as indeed there are in most streets, patrician or plebeian, and most courts English and foreign; but the palm of perfect hideousness was certainly the due of Cooney. He was a little man, with a great head, with big protruding blue eyes, which were large enough to have plenty of expression, but which had none whatever beyond a kind of vacant dulness and fishy oblivion. Cooney's nose had been broken in boyhood, and was flat and buttonlike in shape; and Cooney's mouth was large and cruel, ugly enough when closed, but a terrible feature to contemplate when distended by an evil grin, on which occasions it would display a half-dozen or so of such enormous fangs that one involuntarily wondered if Cooney had been born with the regular dental allowance, and if so, where the remainder had found room. It

was probably a knowledge of his extreme ugliness that induced Cooney to neglect those abstinatory exercises which would have only served to expose his personal shortcomings in all the deformity of cleanliness. Cooney dirty was an unpleasant sight; but the most vivid imagination shrunk from the mental picture of Cooney clean. At the end of his very long arms were very long fingers tipped with very long nails, which he was accustomed to drum upon his counter during any bargain with a customer; and this habit of his he made serve him in lieu of conversation, of which he was very chary, many of his closest bargains having been concluded without a dozen words coming from his lips, but with a patter on the counter from his finger-nails like a dozen telegraph-clerks working all at once.

Cooney was not in one of his best tempers on the evening in question; for trade, enervated probably by the extreme heat, had been a little languid during the week, and the returns were considerably below the average. So Cooney puffed his pipe with surly rapidity, and he looked at his

opposite neighbour askance scowlingly, and occasionally drummed with his finger-nails upon the side of his shop-door, and glowered upon the policeman as he passed him; for Cooney had a contempt for the force, but a wholesome dread of the law, which kept a moderately sharp eye upon dealers in the less precious metals. Under the generic term "door-handle," it was marvellous the quantity of brass which found its way to the premises of Cooney; pewter being a welcome commodity, many a flattened pint-pot was in Cooney's melting-pot before mine host had missed it; mean-looking lads, with hunger in their eyes, had deposited plate with other initials than their own, and a crest to which they had no claim, upon it, with Cooney, before now; and if at a time of pecuniary pressure, a gentleman in a velveteen coat, a greasy cap, and a cropped head, required money for an article of jewelry or a gold watch, Cooney was not the man to ask impertinent questions; for, as we have before observed, he was of a reserved disposition, and spoke very little either in business or out of it. Coarse-minded persons, who

are in the habit of calling a spade a spade, would have described Cooney as a "fence," or receiver of stolen goods; but Mr. Ledbitter, not being a coarse-minded person, was content to believe in the legend over the shop-window; and so he saluted Mr. Cooney as affably as he would have done Swan and Edgar, had he known those eminent tradesmen, and seen them smoking long pipes at the corner of Piccadilly.

The marine-store dealer jerked his head in the direction of the stairs at the back of his shop, as a sign that his visitor might go up; and up the visitor did go, with a gentle and almost cat-like softness of tread. Casually taking his lack-lustre eye from the form of his opposite neighbour, Cooney's glance lighted upon the form of a closely-veiled female, who was apparently absorbed in the interesting rhymes which invited all who might be troubled with a superfluity of bones, or rags, or grease, or old metal, to try the liberal proprietor of the present establishment. These poetic effusions were mostly surmounted by rude coloured woodcuts of a comic nature, representing ladies and

gentlemen originally in service, but, in consequence of a few visits to Cooney, now enabled to dress in fashionable and even dazzling attire, and who were mutually expatiating on the magnificent chance which had directed them to the Golconda in question. As people were frequently apt to come to Cooney's in a furtive, not to say suspicious, manner, and occasionally required a little coaxing before disclosing the real object of their visit, the marine-store dealer at once set down the young woman as a lady's-maid, who had come across some valuable trifles by one of those unaccountable accidents which will happen in the best-regulated families; and as such lucky finders were very often unwilling to come directly to the point, Cooney winked one of his big pale eyes at her, and remarked in a gruff undertone,

“Got any think?”

The veiled damsel advanced, and, looking into the shop to see that Ledbitter was not present, walked in, Cooney following with much rapidity.

“Has that man been here before?” asked Felicia Penrose.

Cooney's jaw dropped. Could the visitor be some one who suspected Ledbitter of visits to the marine-stores for felonious purposes? The safest thing to do, determined Cooney, was to speak the truth. It was unprofessional; but there was no help for it.

"Often; comes to a sick lodger of mine; what of it?"

"A sick lodger? Where does your lodger live? up there?" And Felicia shuddered as she looked at the rickety stairs.

Cooney nodded.

"Who pays for the lodger?" asked Felicia.

"Come, you ain't at all inquisitive, you ain't!" replied Cooney, with a half grin.

"I don't mean him any harm; I only want to know one or two matters about him; and I'll pay you if you'll let me see him for a moment."

Cooney stared at his visitor. He had heard of female detectives, and he felt uncomfortable. He caught sight of the money in Felicia's hand, and felt more so. Felicia carried a porte-monnaie, and wore well-fitting green-kid gloves, and was very

genteel and mincing. There was no imagination in Cooney; no idea that there might be something mysteriously romantic in the matter; that possibly the lodger might be of noble family, though disowned by his relations; none of the vague notions that would certainly have suggested themselves to the mind of Mrs. Cooney, had there been such a person, came across that of the marine-store dealer. He was not accustomed to seek for motives beneath the surface, and his one line of policy through life was to keep on the right side of the hedge in his business, and deny every thing unless he was paid higher terms to speak out. His motto was, that silence was golden; and that the melting-pot, like charity, covered a multitude of sins. Here was a young lady offering him something to see somebody. If somebody got into trouble, that was his own look-out; and as Felicia produced a sovereign, the marine-store dealer settled that somebody should be seen.

The rickety stairs creaked so beneath her tread that Felicia was afraid she might be seen; but, in order to avoid the possibility of discovery, the art-

ful Cooney went before her, and, entering his lodger's room, drew Ledbitter aside, and spoke to him for some moments at the window. The lodger's face was turned towards where Felicia stood, and through the space between the wall and the door she saw him plainly. Having looked at him long enough to feel assured she could describe his appearance correctly, Miss Penrose stepped down into the shop in a gingerly manner, and Cooney very shortly followed her. He had, with business-like forethought, secured the sovereign before going up-stairs ; and so there was nothing further for him to do but to nod a "good evening" at his visitor, who passed out of the shop and up the crowded street very hurriedly, and was soon lost to the gaze of the marine-store dealer.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Mrs. Gaunt impatiently, as Felicia entered the housekeeper's room.

"Well, mem, I followed Mr. Ledbitter to a dreadful marine-store shop in a horrid street by the Seven Dials, and I got a peep of the person as he goes to see ; such a awful-looking man, with a

great broad face, and a red beard,—leastways not a beard, but he have not shaved lately,—and heavy eyebrows, *tremenjious* heavy eyebrows, and something odd with one eye; not exactly a squint, but a sort of a cast, and—Good 'evans, Mrs. Gaunt, how pale you are!”

Mrs. Gaunt *was* pale; every trace of colour had vanished from her countenance, and there was a visible tremor in her bloodless lips. Her chest heaved rapidly, and her large hand clasped the back of the chair she sat on in a powerful and most unfeminine grasp. Gradually there broke over her countenance a wild smile, in which there was something more terrible than her lowering frown; but it soon passed from her face, and she ground her teeth in undisguised fury, as she rose and paced the room with great manly strides. Suddenly stopping in her walk, she turned abruptly to Felicia, and told her to leave her; but as the girl was going from the room, the housekeeper held her by the arm, and patted her approvingly on the head.

“Felicia, you are a most excellent young wo-

man; don't mind my temper; I've had a great deal of worry in the course of my life,—a very great deal indeed," said Mrs. Gaunt, in a voice less harsh than usual.

CHAPTER III.

THE GLENBURNS GO OUT OF TOWN.

MORE than one member of Lord Glenburn's household observed the peculiar and marked change which came over the manner of Mrs. Gaunt about this time. Her loud metallic voice was toned down to something more nearly approaching human, and was less frequently heard in fierce argument with refractory underlings. Trembling dependents, who had been accustomed to walk on tip-toe when in the neighbourhood of the house-keeper's room, now plucked up a spirit and strode about the passages erect and fearless. To what this change was due, nobody could determine. Cook considered it might be the result of a tender passion for somebody; but this was scouted by the rest of the domestics, who wouldn't have Mrs. Gaunt's name coupled with the affections at any

price. But from whatever cause it might arise, there was no denying the agreeable fact that matters were more comfortable below-stairs than they had been; and the establishment, without bothering itself about the cause of the alteration, was content to rest and be thankful. When by chance the housekeeper met the valet about the house, she would no longer knit her big brows and frown with ferocity upon him; but would droop her head, and pass him with a quick nervous step, flushing and apparently abashed.

Mr. Ledbitter was politer than ever after the little scene in Mrs. Gaunt's room. He would salute her with a most cavalier-like bow, and would ask after her health in a tone of solicitude that was really touching. But after his back was turned, and Mrs. Gaunt's step had died away in the distant passages, a peculiar smile would play about the mouth of the polite Ledbitter, and a light would sparkle in his eyes: neither the smile nor the light betokening any feelings of pleasure; the smile subsiding very abruptly and disagreeably into a hard cruel look, strangely out of place

upon the calm unruffled countenance of the bland valet.

Glenburn's gout leaving him very weak and dispirited, a change of air was ordered by the doctor, and Ledbitter was told to make immediate arrangements for a speedy departure from town. Her ladyship had striven to make up for lost time, and had devoted herself with almost obtrusive attention to her husband. But Glenburn was not one who bore pain with fortitude, and his temper was by no means easy to bear with. By a hundred little half-hints a day Ledbitter contrived to keep his master in a continual state of irritability; and, too late for her own peace of mind and complete power over her husband, Lady Glenburn discovered the folly of her recent selfishness, thoughtlessness, or whatever it might be termed, in not devoting more time to her husband. Mrs. Gaunt appeared to be in such a mental whirl and confusion that she was no longer capable of advising her mistress. Indeed this was rather to Lady Glenburn's advantage; for the housekeeper's advice had never been worth much, being frequently rash and dictated

by some strong feeling of annoyance: a bold bad woman, she had very few brains, and her temper played the tyrant over her actions. This same temper being apparently subdued of late, Mrs. Gaunt simply moved about as a big machine which had lost its power. She was harmless, but served no object; and Lady Glenburn looked in vain for advice from her, and acted entirely on her own convictions. She had, however, remembered Mrs. Gaunt's strong remarks touching her neglect of Glenburn, and she now strove to make up for lost time; but with trifling success. In the midst of society, flushed with excitement, and dressed in exquisite taste, the white-armed stately lady of the house had shown to great advantage; but she was not suited to the domestic sphere. She was not born for the breakfast-table: she lighted up gloriously, like theatrical scenery, which looks somewhat crude and coarse by daylight, but resembles fairy-land in the glow of the gas. Glenburn cared little for what are termed home-pleasures; he had never been what the world calls a domestic man; he didn't know really what "home" was. That

sacred word belonged to the vocabulary of a sealed volume,—a volume he had never cared to open, and the contents of which were as unknown to him as the source of the Nile, or the secret of the philosopher's stone. He had heard that there were persons who led quiet dull lives in back-streets, with a piano in the drawing-room, a game at whist, and bed long before the small hours; but if he had been asked what was the charm which fenced-in such families with a magic circle, he would certainly not have known how to reply. He had never mixed with domestic folks; his acquaintances and those he had called his friends had been nomadic nobles, wandering dervishes of the peerage, gipsy gentlemen without homes, who looked on life as one long restless journey. Amongst the many thoughts which crowded upon him during his illness, there was one predominant. He was sick of excitement: he would leave London and live in some peaceful place, where he should get rid of the noise and worry and garish glitter of the artificial pleasures he had worn out; he would turn over a new leaf; he was unfitted for

the whirl of fashionable gaiety, and had never really liked the life he had been leading since his marriage. Then he was gouty, and his hair was gray, and he stooped, and his eyes were sunken. There was no real enjoyment for him in the parties to which he was dragged, or in those he gave at his own house. He had been moody in the midst of the mirth; and his beautiful wife had moved about the rooms young and happy, a constant reproach to him, and a perpetual contrast. He had commenced by delighting in the praises he heard on all sides of the handsome woman he had married. He had hung about doors to hear men speak of her, and had been pleased beyond measure at the universal admiration he heard expressed. He had never thought this pleasure might pall, or, worse than that, change to a jealous pang at the admiring mention of his wife. He had passed his life in a disbelief of all that was pure and true in woman; but he had never applied this scepticism to his own case; and no dark suspicious dream had ever crossed his mind, until that day when Ledbitter spoke so injudiciously

and was so sorry afterwards,—that faithful fellow, who was always so considerate for his master's feelings, but who, of course, could not be expected to keep his thoughts to himself upon every occasion. Why should Lady Glenburn have kept away from him? There was but one reply: she was in the company of those she preferred; she was in the vortex, and could only be snatched from it by one strong sudden grasp. She should be taken out of town to a quiet home, where she should look after the garden and the poultry, and attend to her husband and his gout. It would be very dull; but it could not be more so for Glenburn than his isolated condition in the midst of that London brilliancy which simply bored him. As to its being dull for her ladyship, that thought never entered his head. It would be much safer for his peace of mind, which was enough for him. It would be cheaper too; and that was a consideration. But cheap or dear, dull or lively, Glenburn had determined upon doing as he wished, and immediately. Part of the family property consisted of a sombre old country-house on the

south coast, nor far from the sea. The country round about was bleak and cheerless; there were few trees, and nothing much to look at but the ocean. The house had been constructed by an eccentric relative of Glenburn's, and had been untenanted a considerable time, an old couple taking care of it; a misanthropic old couple with the asthma, who had grown very nervous from living so long in the big melancholy house, and who, whenever there was any noise in the night for which they could not immediately account, made up their minds that the French were landing. The house had apparently been constructed with a view to frightening away any intending purchaser, for it had a cold, dismal, severe, and comfortless look, and stared out on to the sea with great dark windows like black eyes. There was a formal and most ugly portico of dingy stone; and the rest of the mansion was built of a dull yellow brick, which was peculiarly depressing. It was the kind of house which seemed as if it wouldn't look warm if it was on fire. There was an uncared-for lawn in the front, of unwholesome-

looking grass, and a gritty gravel-walk that was never rolled. It was big without being imposing, a cold hungry-looking tenement, the last place where one would have wished to spend a Christmas-day, or be taken ill at, or have any thing to do with, in fact, in any way,—a brick-and-mortar scarecrow; a moral warning to mariners, who might, as they sailed by it, feel emboldened to boast about the comfort of British homes.

Tempted by the cunningly-worded advertisements which artful house and estate agents had inserted in the papers, describing Hernshaw House as a “commodious mansion, beautifully situated,” &c., an occasional visitor had knocked at the front-door, and presenting the agent’s card, had asked to look over the cheerful building. The rapid manner in which said visitor would make his exit from the “commodious mansion,” and the significant shudder which he would give as the big door closed upon him, were sufficient comments on the dismal property. Grim cheerless rooms, with an unhealthy smell about them, were those through which the visitor would pass, led by the

old woman, who was supposed to light a fire in them now and then to keep them aired. There were melancholy old pictures on the walls of Glenburn's ancestors; and there was a dreadful library, in which a man could surely never have written any thing more lively than an essay on suicide; a low-roofed dark room, with sombre furniture, and the panelling occasionally relieved by a stained map. On his return to England, Lord Glenburn had run down to have a look at Hernshaw House, and had expressed his opinion that it must have been built for a lunatic asylum or a county-gaol, at which the nervous old couple who minded it laughed in a melancholy manner, and said it was "lonesome like sure-ly;" and Glenburn, after a hasty look through the mansion, left for London, without feeling any great pride in his property. It was just the kind of place to suit his present humour. A sulky sort of house; a house to break a proud spirit in; the sort of house for my lady, in fact; just the very spot.

"I have made up my mind to go down to

Hernshaw House," said Glenburn to his wife abruptly.

"To Hernshaw House? that is a very dull stupid place, is it not?"

"It is according to what you call dull and stupid. I consider Portman Square dull and stupid. I look upon these parties as the perfection of dulness and stupidity. I am tired of town. The old operas bore me; and the new ones are all banging and row. Plays I can't sit out. Parties I always hated. I don't dance—never did; and dinners make me ill. I am getting misanthropical here; and I mean to leave it. We start the day after to-morrow; so rub out all your engagements. Your excuse is my health, which requires an immediate change."

Lady Glenburn bit her lip with intense annoyance. Had he selected any of the watering-places, it would have been endurable; but a dismal house on the sea-coast; no society in the neighbourhood; and nothing to see out of the windows but the dull weary ocean, was a prospect of the most miserable nature; and the husband was not slow to perceive

the disappointment and vexation his announcement had caused his wife. He was rather pleased at this. Had she complied with a good grace, he would have felt disappointed; but as it was, it was just as he wished; and he watched the impatient tapping of her ladyship's foot with internal satisfaction.

“Surely a damp place like Hernshaw can't suit you in your present state?”

“Who said it was damp? It's as dry as a bone; a healthy bracing place, with a fine sea-view.”

“Why, you said when you went down to see it, that it gave you the dumps for a week.”

Her ladyship's language was not always over refined when she was off her guard; and she had been even known to drop an occasional *h* when excited and away from the eyes and ears of a censorious world.

“Did I, my dear?” said Glenburn with a sinister smile; “well, perhaps I did.”

Her ladyship continued tapping her foot upon the floor; and the more she thought of the prospect, the more she disliked it.

“The day after to-morrow is so excessively soon.”

“Not at all, not at all; I wish I'd gone a month back.”

There was nothing to be done, then, but to pack up and prepare for immediate departure. Lady Glenburn was not good at deception; and she sulked in a straightforward manner, which rather tickled his lordship. Felicia Penrose and Mrs. Gaunt gave their minds to the packing; and the housekeeper seemed greatly pleased at the prospect of getting away from town. She reasoned and argued with her mistress upon the injudiciousness of her ladyship's distant manner to Glenburn; but with little effect. There was much of Mrs. Gaunt's obstinacy about Lady Glenburn, who stamped her foot at the housekeeper when that excellent woman remonstrated for the fifteenth time on the day before departure, and bid her mind her own business in a very loud and petulant tone. As she did so, Felicia Penrose, who was present, observed a flush rise to Mrs. Gaunt's cheek and a sudden sparkle of indignation in her eye; but

the housekeeper said nothing in the upper-servant's hearing, though she shrugged her shoulders and sniffed loudly for some time, pitching the wearing-apparel into the box as if it was so much rubbish.

Ledbitter's mode of packing was very different from Mrs. Gaunt's. He moved about the room without flurrying himself; and folding his master's garments with tender care, put them in their proper places with gingerly attention, dexterously avoiding creasing any thing, and getting through an immense amount of labour without the least noise or bustle. As the time approached for quitting town, Lady Glenburn became more than ever dispirited and gloomy. Close observers might have discovered traces of tears even, for there was a most suspicious fulness beneath the eye, and the lids were abnormally pink. Not that she cried before her husband. His appearance produced quite a different effect. She flushed at his approach, and her chest heaved indignantly. She was beginning to dislike her husband; and we might possibly use a stronger word with truth.

She had never noticed how close his eyes were together before. She remembered having seen the portrait of a notorious malefactor which strongly resembled Glenburn. There was a cold sneering tone in his harsh voice, which had never jarred so unpleasantly on her ear as it did now; and he stooped terribly. He had aged very much during the last few months too. There was no denying that he was abominably selfish, or why should he have grumbled at her not having devoted more of her time to him when he was confined to his room? How could he have expected her to leave her friends to sit up with him in his close stuffy room? It was monstrous to imagine himself slighted. Besides, had he not Ledbitter with him all the while—Ledbitter, who knew his ways and had been with him so long? How utterly absurd it was to leave town at such a time! The season scarcely commenced; London full. What would people say? Would not the world look upon her as a poor injured wife, dragged away from the only place worth living in, to mope and mew in a dull house staring out on to the sea, with no society

but a village parson and one or two county families no one had ever heard of? It was wonderful how high and mighty my lady had grown since her marriage. She might have been born to a coronet, to hear her speak of persons who were nobodies. It was a sight indeed to behold her sweep past second-rate people at fêtes and flower-shows; it was something worth listening to, to hear her marvel how professional folks of moderate means managed to get on without their opera-box and other dainties. She would even indulge in these remarks when alone with Mrs. Gaunt, who would chuckle grimly as she listened to her mistress, and occasionally pass her big hand over her ladyship's beautiful hair in a half-tender, half-admonitory way, and bid her not talk at random so, but with a certain pleasure at her ladyship's remarks too. But all the housekeeper's arguments were thrown away in the one matter of leaving London. Her ladyship liked to enjoy life; and Hernshaw House meant misery. However, she was powerless, and stepped into the carriage with the air of a victim for the guillotine. The country through which

they travelled was pretty enough ; but the green fields, the sprouting hedgerows, the trees putting forth their greenest leaves to greet the summer, possessed no charms for Lady Glenburn ; the birds might carol till they were hoarse, but they were discord compared to the rattle of the carts and carriages in Portman Square. She tried to read a novel, but the mist of tears blurred the print ; and her thoughts were in town,—town, from which her selfish, heartless husband was hurrying her away.

The sky became overcast as the train approached the nearest station to Hernshaw ; and a low sighing wind arose and swept over the flat country with moans like a restless spirit. A cold sharp air necessitated a wrapper ; and as the keen blast chilled the invalid, it did not improve his temper. Possibly a slight reactionary feeling may have come over him as he looked across the country in the direction of his “ spacious family mansion,” which rendered his manner even harsher than it had been of late ; at all events, he was very short and unpleasant ; and to do her lady-

ship justice, she was not behind her husband in general disagreeableness. The look on Lady Glenburn's face, as each fresh turn in the road revealed some new natural ugliness, expressed a kind of dogged resignation, as much as to say, "This is a charming place, really; as soon as we arrive at the Great Desert of Sahara, perhaps you'll be good enough to mention it." Occasionally the creaking cart of a small farmer would jog by; but there were no carriages, no powdered footmen, no prancing horses in glittering harness. A policeman even would have been a relief to the London-loving eye of her ladyship; but surely such a beat as that must have been reserved especially for the misanthropes of the force, blue recluses with souls above areas. There were no policemen; but there were two soldiers, two lounging men of a line regiment, who were quietly strolling along the road, one smoking a short pipe, the other twirling a twig, with which he struck off any particularly obtrusive offshoot from the hedgerow at his side. The red jackets of two soldiers lent an additional air of dreariness

to the dull landscape, even as the inevitable old woman in a scarlet cloak serves to show up the snow and black clouds of a schoolgirl's crayon drawing. With a dreamy unconsciousness was her ladyship looking out of the carriage as the two privates in the line passed by. Her eye lighted upon them for a moment; and as it did so, her entire expression changed. Her cheek flushed suddenly, and she gave a short quick gasp. This was unnoticed by Lord Glenburn, who was looking in the opposite direction with an expression of countenance by no means calculated to impress any passing native in his favour.

It was very remarkable, and could not be traced to any alteration for the better in the scenery; but there certainly was an instantaneous improvement in the temper of Lady Glenburn. She actually condescended to bow graciously to an old peasant, who took off his hat humbly; and she observed to Glenburn that the manners of the country people were superior to the lower orders in London. At this Glenburn remarked that it would be a precious bore were every common

fellow in the street to touch his hat; and for his part he could never understand what made the Duke of Wellington return the salute of every snob. He supposed it was the penalty of being a hero, which he thanked his stars *he* was not. Glenburn was in the right; he was not a hero—even to his *valet de chambre*. Not beaten by the repulse she met with on her first conversational attempt, her ladyship tried again and again; but her husband held out, and only grunted acquiescence, or, when the sentiments expressed were not in accordance with his own, simply vented his objection to them in a feeble sneer. At length the carriage drove up to the formal portico of Hernshaw House. Ledbitter, who had gone on before, was standing in the doorway ready to receive them. He bowed very politely to her ladyship as she passed him, and also to Mrs. Gaunt, whom he assisted to the ground with extreme care, as if she had been the most timid young traveller. As the big door closed upon the housekeeper, she felt as if she had entered a prison, and that Ledbitter was her bland but remorseless

jailer. There was a faint musty smell in the house, though the windows had been kept open to air the rooms; and just as the owners found themselves safe beneath the shelter of the family roof, the rain, which had been threatening to come down, did so in a steady and determined manner, adding the only depressing touch requisite to make the view from the drawing-room windows a perfect triumph of dreariness. Glenburn scowled at the weather, and at his wife, and at the comfortless old-fashioned furniture of the principal apartment. Prim, uncompromising, angular, and antique were the chairs and tables in that dismal room. Wonderfully well made, no doubt, and strong, though slight; but comfortless to the eye as to the figure. Stiff, upright, unyielding backs had all the chairs—backs that were a continual caution to lazy people, who didn't care to sit like pokers as a permanency; chairs with hard seats, suggestive of second-class railway-carriages; chairs that plainly said, "We object to the act of sitting down upon principle, and we do our best to render its performance as uncomfort-

able as possible." The easy-chairs were practical jokes in upholstery, and presented arms at the would-be recliner with a dogged defiance of his attempts at comfort. There were two or three sofas, with hard wooden bordering to the back, which caught the nape of the neck in a pleasant manner when one leant back, and produced a sensation approaching apoplexy; and all these man-traps for the weary—chairs, sofas, and ottomans—were covered with a drab damask, which, having successfully defied the dust for some years, had at length succumbed. There were some mirrors on the walls, and a few brackets for candles, but no pictures. The green wood, which was doing its best to light up in the grate—for Glenburn had roared out for a fire the instant he put his foot into the room—crackled, and spluttered, and fizzed, as the rain fell upon it down the wide chimney, and an occasional gust blew the smoke out in a dense volume, necessitating the opening of a window, which brought in a cutting damp wind from without, though it did very little good to the refractory fuel, for the chimney was evi-

dently averse to fires in the spring, as indeed it was at any time, according to the account of the old woman who had minded the house for so long. There never was such a house, according to the description given by this dismal crone. There wasn't a window in it that didn't rattle, or a door that would shut properly. The stairs creaked so that she fully expected they would come down suddenly some day, as she had often told her good man. The roof might as well have been off altogether for any good it was,—would his lordship come up and see the state of the garrets? As Glenburn listened to the depreciatory description of Hernshaw House, he no longer wondered at his commodious family mansion not having been seized upon as a profitable investment by speculators in house-property, or persons seeking snug quarters for the summer. The summer! what would it be like in the winter? This was too terrible a theme to pursue; so he went to his room much surprised at the altered manner of his wife.

She *had* altered very considerably during the

last half hour or so. She evinced no surprise or annoyance at the dismal appearance of the house's interior, and took the smoky chimney as a matter of course. She said that the rain would do good to the country, and bring the flowers out! Flowers! she had not yet seen the garden—the garden in which the husband of the afore-mentioned elderly lady, who had lighted the fire, had pretended to devote himself to horticulture; but had stood every summer with a hoe in his hand in the midst of wild luxuriance, awed by the profusion of the weeds, powerless to repress their growth, sadly oppressed by the cruel kindness of a too beneficent Nature. At times he would nerve himself to the task, and rising early would rush forth and make feeble raids upon the degenerate intruders. As well might Tom Thumb have attempted to snip off the heads of Hydra with a pair of embroidery scissors; the weapon of the mannikin would have been as efficacious for the task as was the hoe in the grasp of that gray-headed old gardener—that Gulliver amongst the weeds of Brobdignag. Not that Lady Glenburn cared much for flowers—

except artificial ones. Florally considered, Burlington Arcade would have transcended Eden in her estimation, and she had no eye for the beauties of nature, scarcely knowing a primrose from a pelargonium. Still she said she should enjoy gardening; at which Mrs. Gaunt sniffed significantly, and wondered what had come over the child.

The fact was, rapidly as the carriage had passed, and dim as was her sight at the moment, she had seen the numbers on the soldiers' caps; the three numbers that told the regiment they belonged to had changed her manner and softened her temper with the magic power of a wizard's wand.

"There's a regiment quartered at Barnstoke, my lord," said Ledbitter, as he was opening the travelling-cases of his master, and taking out the trifles necessary to his toilet. Ledbitter said "ridgement," which always irritated his master, as any vulgarism did at all times. So he made no reply, but continued his operation of hunting for his last prescription in his desk.

“The military will give a slight dash of liveliness to that most melancholy town, my lord, at all events,” continued the valet. Ledbitter’s weakness was the army, though he looked upon himself as a perfect embodiment of the entire Peace-society. Glenburn hated soldiers, which may have accounted for his servant’s losing no opportunity of sounding their praises.

“Shouldn’t wonder if they were to give a ball or so whilst we’re here,” muttered the valet. “If so, it will be pleasant for my lady; for she’ll be sadly moped here without something to amuse her. By the way, my lord, isn’t the hundred-and-ninetieth Captain Atherton’s regiment?”

Glenburn started, and replied,

“Curse Captain Atherton! how do I know?”

“I’m almost sure it *is* his regiment,” continued Ledbitter, pausing in his unpacking, with his fingers on his chin, and looking up reflectively.

“Well, and suppose it is, what does it signify?”

“Nothing, my lord, only it’s odd.”

“Odd!”

“I’m sorry, my lord, to have touched upon a tender topic. It was mere inadvertence. My lady didn’t know that the hundred-and-ninetieth were quartered at Barnstoke, of course. I didn’t, and I know most of the military stations, I fancy.”

“If she did, she showed no particular desire to come to Hernshaw, Ledbitter,” said Glenburn, gliding unconsciously into his old familiar manner with his valet.

“No, my lord; why should she?”

Ledbitter had—unwittingly perhaps—turned the conversational tables on his noble employer.

“No; there was no reason why she should, exactly; but then, as you yourself told me, one or two babbling fools had remarked that she seemed more than ordinarily amiable in her manner towards Atherton, forgetting that her manner is free and open to most people. She isn’t a bit of a humbug; and if she had been glad to hear of the hundred-and-ninetieth being in the immediate neighbourhood, she’d have lighted up at the

thoughts of coming here. It only shows what asses people are who try to make much out of trifles."

"Quite true, my lord. Perhaps Captain Atherton is not with this portion of the regiment. Some of them are at the Cape. Let's hope so."

There was something more than ordinarily stinging in the half-mysterious, half-soothing tone of Ledbitter's voice. It was dimly suggestive of danger in Atherton's being near to Hernshaw, but it did not compromise him. Glenburn could not select a remark to reply upon stormily, as he would have liked to have replied if he could. To say the truth, the place had already begun to dispirit him. He had been undergoing a severe course of depressing doctoring, and he was below par considerably. His nerves were unstrung and his pulse was feeble. He had not a friend in the world to speak to and confide in, and he felt his loneliness very sadly when he looked out upon the dismal country and heard the melancholy moaning of the wind. In days gone by, when he suffered

from the blue-devils, he had been accustomed to take those hypochondriacal demons by the horns, and indulge in deep potations until he felt himself a man again. But he could no longer have recourse to liquor to lend him an artificial courage. He was tied down to a rigid rule of living, and he was a very poor subject to play abstemious tricks upon. He fretted and chafed under the strict regimen prescribed by his physician, and but for the stern supervision of Ledbitter he would more than once have broken bounds and drowned his dismal reflections in the bowl. But the suspicious chalk-stones in his noble knuckles, and the easily excited inflammation in his aristocratic feet, forbade the indiscriminate use of intoxicating drinks; and so Glenburn growled at the family gout, and sipped his sherry-and-water with a very wry face, sighing over the sins of this youth between the intervals of spelling through the fashionable gossip of the *Morning Post*.

More than ever was Ledbitter invaluable to his master. The slight estrangement between Glenburn and his wife had served to reseal the par-

tially loosened friendship of the twain. Glenburn felt himself equal to combating her ladyship, but Mrs. Gaunt was too much for him without the coöperation of his valet, so it fell out that the two relapsed into their old mutually familiar way; and the superciliousness which the master had assumed towards his faithful servant on his marriage completely disappeared during the first two dismal days in Hernshaw House; and Mrs. Gaunt—who could no longer listen at the door, for the tell-tale planks in the passages announced her presence with the loudest creaks—trembled as she passed her placid enemy and found him more polite than ever; for she knew that his power was as great as of old, whilst she saw her ladyship's diminishing day by day.

Atherton *was* with his regiment at Barnstoke, and he lost no time in paying his respects at Hernshaw House. Oddly enough, he called when Glenburn was out, and Ledbitter did not fail to comment very considerably thereon. His lordship, on returning from a visit to a tenant in the neighbourhood, found his wife all smiles and gracious-

ness. She at once told him that Atherton had been, and would call again in the hope of finding Glenburn at home. His lordship smiled sneeringly, and observing that really Captain Atherton did him very great honour, passed on to his room.

“You’ll invite the captain to dinner of course, my lord?” suggested Ledbitter. “It will look better, as he is in the immediate neighbourhood, and will put a stop to any banter at the mess.”

Glenburn invited Atherton and a brother officer to dinner the day after. Ledbitter was always right, and soldiers were apt to be sarcastic; they had no brains for any thing better. Lady Glenburn was twice as long as usual over her toilet that day. She tried on one dress after another, and drove her French maid to desperation by her uncertainty as to which style of wearing the hair suited her best; she covered her wrists with bracelets, and then took all off save one—one Atherton admired and had examined very closely when on the owner’s arm one night in town. Mrs. Gaunt looked on in an uneasy and dissatisfied manner,

occasionally giving it as her opinion that Atherton was "no gentleman" to force himself into a house where he wasn't welcome. My lady heeded her not, but continued the pleasant task of self-adornment with a heightened colour and a heaving chest. From her window she could see the large yard of the stables, and before she had thoroughly finished arraying herself, Atherton and his companion drove into the yard. He drove a light springy dog-cart, with a long-backed bay full of blood. An elaborately-embroidered over-coat sheltered Atherton from the cold wind which still swept across the country from the sea. He sat very upright, and looked every inch a handsome gallant young Englishman, born to shine in any society and distinguish himself alike amidst women or warriors. My lady sailed down into the drawing-room, and as she entered it her eye lighted on her husband. Low living had not improved his looks, and the black dye on his shining locks stood out in strong relief from his pale face. A short time back the sight of his brilliant wife in her rich attire would have

charmed him ; but her youth and her beauty failed to do so now, and he turned to his own reflection in the glass with a growl concerning modern extravagance, which was quite lost on the lady of the house.

Atherton was so thoroughly and innately a gentleman, had seen so much, and had so pleasant a way of talking about people he had known and places he had been at, that it was impossible to listen to him without pleasure. Glenburn found himself interested and amused, in spite of himself. Possibly Atherton tried his very best to please his host. He certainly succeeded ; for Glenburn, in whom selfishness was the predominant characteristic, urged his visitor to talk, and was content to listen, tacitly admitting by his eager face that he was charmed with Atherton's discourse. If ever there was a splendid foil for a brilliant conversationalist, that foil was Major Tannett. The major had a marvellous appreciation of the good things of this life ; and so long as dishes were placed before him, he was content to allow Atherton to have all the talk to himself. Of this the captain

availed himself thoroughly, but he possessed the happy knack of not boring people, and of drawing out his companions in the course of his remarks; selecting subjects that he thought would interest them, and leading Glenburn on to say more than he had ever been known to utter at his own table within the memory of his wife. She, however, had no ears for any one but Atherton. Glenburn addressed some remark to her, but he had to repeat it a third time before she comprehended his meaning. Major Tannett, who had been in India, expatiated rapturously on the qualities of some horrible *entrée*, in which pepper had it all its own way; but the hostess heeded not a word he said. A new footman, nervous beneath the severe eye of his master, dropped a plate, at which Glenburn swore; but she heard nothing, saw nothing, save the captain in the hundred-and-ninetieth regiment of foot.

Captain Atherton was a man of the world *pur et simple*. He was not, however, by any means pure or simple in the vulgar acceptation of those terms. He was the soul of honour in his tailor's

eyes, and his agent looked upon him as a pattern. He had gone into the army to amuse himself; for he had a fair income, and could have lived an idle life had he chosen; but he preferred a career of action, and he had distinguished himself on more than one occasion by bravery and coolness in situations of danger. He had a very trifling lameness from a wound in battle, just sufficient to make him interesting in a woman's eyes, not enough to prevent his walking rather better than most men. He subscribed to the code of morality which regulates so many honourable persons. He looked upon a man who deceived a friend in money-matters as a snob not to be recognised for the future; the fellow who sheltered himself under the shielding shadow of a lie, or an underhand evasion, as not fit for the society of gentlemen; a man who did not meet his debts of honour as company only for the *canaille*. But as he sat at the dinner-table of Lord Glenburn, and fixed his full searching eyes upon his host's wife, bringing the warm blood to her willing cheek, he would have sneered at the voice of conscience which could suggest that he was acting

dishonourably and in defiance of hospitality's most sacred rights. This handsome young creature, wedded to a battered elderly peer, was in his path. He had not pursued her; she was there to his hand. It was not the result of any plotting or planning; it was the result of chance; he was not to blame—certainly not. These were the sentiments of that honourable and gallant soldier Captain Atherton; and amongst "men of the world" he was no exceptional case; he was, in fact, superior to most of his class; he accepted the situation, but he scarcely sought it. When Lady Glenburn rose to leave the room, it was natural and only proper that Atherton should open the door and stand by it as she passed him. As she did so, she looked him full in the face, with an expression which said "Come soon" as distinctly as words could have done. Glenburn was balancing himself on his best leg with difficulty, and did not see his wife's look. Major Tannett did; but he had eaten and drunk himself into a purple and plethoric state, and noticed nothing, holding on with one hand to his chair and with the other to

the table with a solemn effort at severe sobriety which amused his host amazingly. Relieved from the society of her ladyship, the gallant major became another man. He told old garrison stories scarcely suited for publication with immense gusto; stories that delighted his host, and in which the major generally figured as the hero. This was all after Glenburn's own heart, and he led the laugh and tossed off his wine in defiance of the doctor, but with furtive glances round to see that Led-bitter wasn't looking on. At length Atherton proposed they should go upstairs, which was indignantly received by Major Tannett, who had another capital story on the tip of his tongue. Glenburn was amused and didn't care to stir; so Atherton, not being a great wine-drinker and having heard Tannett's stories a thousand times he said, went up to the drawing-room by himself. Lady Glenburn was sitting alone, evidently bored with her own dull company. She brightened suddenly at Atherton's approach, and did not appear disappointed at the non-appearance of Glenburn and the major. Atherton reclined,

or tried to do so, upon one of the comfortless couches by the tea-table, and waited whilst his handsome hostess poured him out a cup of the cheering beverage, watching her white fingers as they moved about amongst the silver and china, and envying Glenburn a good deal in his heart. Her ladyship was not a flirt in the ordinary sense. There was an unblushing straightforward air about her which was not so much boldness as perfect self-possession. She was evidently pleased at Atherton's attentions; she made no disguise of her liking for his company; but there was none of the stock-trickery of the practised coquette in her manner towards him. She levelled no fatal shots at him from behind a masked-battery, but brought out the heavy artillery of her big dark eyes, and fired her glances at him in open and undisguised fashion. But there was nothing peculiarly unusual in her manner. She was noted for a certain original air of blunt freedom which Glenburn called simplicity, but which other people were at a loss to properly describe. When she shook hands, she did so heartily, and not with a

tepid air of friendship. When she spoke to strangers, she looked them full in the face; and if she laughed, she seemed to enjoy it thoroughly. She was as inartificial as possible, but somehow lacked the charm of inartificiality. She had no talent; but her remarks were seldom silly. She was a handsome piece of human mechanism, and she had only recently discovered that she had a heart. But there was no flirting, no tender side-look, no sigh. There was something, however, in her manner which told to Atherton the state of her mind as plainly as if she had breathed her thoughts in words. He had studied her, and she was a woman who required little study. He was not enraptured with her by any means; he thought her a handsome, showy, and not particularly interesting woman; but he was flattered by her appreciation and good taste, and made up his mind to act—like a man of the world. He had never yet been entirely alone with Lady Glenburn, and he made the most of the opportunity, speaking low, and making great play with his earnest eyes. Her ladyship listened to the voice of the military

charmer as many a woman had done before. Considering Ledbitter's knowledge of proper behaviour in a servant, he should have known better than to burst into the drawing-room very abruptly and then beg pardon, saying he wanted his master, and thought he was there. Yes, it was certainly most reprehensible on the polite valet's part, and really made Captain Atherton—who was examining a book of foreign engravings her ladyship held on her lap—look considerably more foolish than he had done for many a long day.

CHAPTER IV.

JULIA AT HOME.

WHEN Horace Bentley almost fell into the arms of Mr. Tindal, the latter gentleman's restorative views took instantaneously an alcoholic direction, and he suggested brandy-and-water as the best thing in the world to sustain what he was pleased to denominate his companion's "pecker." It was Tindal's stock-remedy for all complaints, a panacea of more comprehensive healing virtue than those of Parr and Professor Holloway combined. Horace, however, refused; and after having re-read the announcement, rushed into the theatre to ascertain the facts. Having found herself late, Miss Mellington had entered a cab, directing the driver to take her as quickly as possible to the theatre. The driver, in taking a sharp turning, had been run into by an omnibus which could not pull up

in time, and the popular favourite of the Criterion had been thrown out and considerably shaken and hurt. Horace turned faint as he heard the account, which was dwelt upon with savage prolixity by Slagg, who was loud in his abuse of cabmen and the evils of being late for any thing. Slagg was never late; he prided himself on his punctuality. First at rehearsal, first at night, first for his salary on Saturdays, Slagg was invariably up to time. Pity for poor Julia was upon every lip. Many were the inquiries for her address at the stage-door; but the stern porter invariably refused to give it. Not so, however, that great practical joker Jenkins, the second violin, who gave a false direction to one enthusiastic youth, and was much delighted at hearing him roundly abused by an ascetic old gentleman who lived opposite Jenkins, and whose address the artful violinist had given as Miss Mellington's. There was considerable condolence, too, for the manager; and even Giggley was considered to have suffered by the piece's non-production (for Miss Clarence couldn't be found, having taken

advantage of her first holiday for two years to go to another theatre, as actresses always do), and was received in the farce which was substituted as if he had suffered some family affliction. Not a word of compassion for the poor author, however, was there heard within the walls of the Criterion. Girdlestone was furious. Had his Christmas pantomime, which paid his rent for the year and left a handsome balance, proved a failure, he could not have behaved with greater violence. He paced up and down his room, inveighing against cabmen, actresses, authors, and omnibuses; declared those flimsy farces for the time were a disgrace to the authors who wrote them, the managers who paid for them, and the public who applauded them. He said it served him right for bringing out the work of an untried writer, when he had a drawer full of farces by popular people, manuscripts of all kinds which he never had time to read. He vowed he would give up management and retire to a country cottage, and never go into a theatre again. He declared he would stop Miss Mellington's salary till she was well

again, as a warning to the others; though the kind-hearted Girdlestone felt he was talking nonsense as he said it, and that as soon as his annoyance had subsided, he should write a kind note telling her not to come back until she was quite well, and that of course her salary would be paid regularly until she returned. Violent of speech but kindly of heart was the Criterion manager; it was terrible to hear him blow up the ballet and shriek invective at the carpenters; but they all knew his bark was worse than his bite, and preferred him greatly to the smooth-tongued manager of the Elysium, who had a bland smile for every body, but very often salary for none.

Uncomfortable are the sensations of an author who has been hissed; for be it understood the actor scarcely ever fails, the author frequently. Nobody (except of course the author himself) ever declares a failure to result from an imperfect rendering on the actor's part. The chief "situation" of the drama may have been utterly marred by the non-appearance of Smith at the exact moment intended; the most serious part of the piece may

have been turned into nonsense by the inopportune accident of a misplaced *h* on the part of Brown; the climax of the composition may have been completely ruined by the oblivious Jones, who is notoriously imperfect, as a rule, for the first three nights; but neither Smith, Brown, nor Jones *fail*. Robinson, the writer of the piece, retires to his home crushed, and reads a column of contemptuous criticism in the papers next morning, which does not surprise him; but he also reads that every thing was done by those popular favourites, Messrs. Smith, Brown, and Jones, for Mr. Robinson's play, which *does* surprise the luckless Robinson very considerably. Horace, though he had not been hissed, was in a most peculiar and unpleasant position. He had undergone all the hopes and fears of an unfledged dramatist for nothing. No, not exactly for nothing. He had received and spent Girdlestone's cheque; at least, not all of it. He had changed it, and given the greater portion of it to his wife; but he had reserved a small sum, with a view to—well, with no particular view perhaps; but he certainly did keep a five-pound note in the cor-

ner of his purse, and concealed its existence from Priscilla. Mrs. Horace Bentley was sitting up for him when he arrived at his home. She had felt some anxiety about the night's results, though she had not chosen to admit as much to her husband. She scarcely knew whether to be pleased or sorry at the news of Miss Mellington's accident. Not at the accident itself, of course, but at its immediate effect on Horace's prospects. Her horror of the dramatic world had increased daily. She took no pains to sift the corn from the husks; she classed all persons connected with the stage together; and, without knowing any thing about them, despised and hated them very heartily. Something whispered to her that the popular Julia would cause her many a heartache. By instinct Horace knew the workings of his wife's mind, and he mentioned Miss Mellington always with a tone of reserve. He never descended to the deception many men would have used. He admired the Criterion favourite, and he did not care to deny it. The respected Mr. Pinto himself, a most unimpressionable person, had declared,

on coming home after having been at the theatre (with an order, of course), “that Miss Millington, or Mallington, or whatever her name was, seemed a remarkably clever and attractive girl—re-markably so.” But Pinto hadn’t the entrée behind the scenes, and Horace had. Then Priscilla had heard her husband indulge in very dreadful sentiments regarding the soul of genius—that it was not to be fettered—that great writers must mix in every kind of company in order to pick up character and depict life in all its varied phases. Matrimonially considered, Priscilla was a Tory of ultramarine dye. Horace was a downright democrat, a red republican, a rebel, every thing revolutionary and dreadful. Priscilla had no objection to his mixing in the society of coalheavers; he might spend the evening with costermongers if it was in the interest of his calling. If it was necessary that he should see life in its lowest walks—as he had always said it was when he had been out with Tindal—why he might do so and welcome; but she objected to his dramatic proclivities on principle. Had all the actresses been

old and ugly, it might have been otherwise. Poor Julia Mellington was as innocent of a wish to cause Mrs. Bentley any uneasiness as she was of a design upon the heart of the policeman in the gallery. There was a puritan primness, a straightness of back, and an angularity of limb about Priscilla, which was always suggestive of the Society of Friends. She objected to flaring colours in her dress, and carried her liking for a certain deadly-lively hue, which combined the dull respectability of drab with the scarcely less solemn sobriety of slate, to such an extent that it was generally supposed by those who did not know to the contrary, that she only possessed one dress in the world. As her husband was somewhat apt to go to the other extreme, the contrast was marked and peculiar.

As Priscilla presided at the breakfast-table, on the morning after Miss Mellington's accident, her husband's eye rested with no very pleasant expression upon the prim stone-coloured dress of his wife. Horace was in what Priscilla called "one of his humours;" and instead of attempt-

ing to dispel the gathering clouds by an extra display of sunshine, she met him fully halfway in the matter of frowning, and drew her thin lips tight, and took her tea in a sharp mechanical manner, as if breakfast was a disagreeable but necessary duty, to be got over as soon as possible. This was one of Priscilla's greatest mistakes. She never could be brought to appreciate the virtue of that "soft answer" which is proverbially noted for "turning away wrath." There was something almost feline in her rapid manner of taking affront; a word, and her back was up, and her mental claws ready for the combat.

"I wish, my dear, you'd wear some other dress; I am so heartily tired of that old merino," said Horace.

"Would you like me to run you up a bill at the linen-draper's, when I have as many dresses as I want?" replied Priscilla, very quietly.

That was the worst of Priscilla, thought Horace; she would always be so abominably sensible. Her sound common-sense was a standing reproach to him. Had she committed an occasional in-

discretion,—such as being cheated in the weight, or losing her purse in an omnibus,—he would have been delighted. But Priscilla the wary had her lynx-eye upon the butcher's-boy, and Mrs. Molloy possessed an unerring pair of scales; whilst Priscilla the economic made a point of never entering a 'bus when by any possibility she could reach her destination by walking. Walking was one of her boasts; her leading features were her feet; and it would be a paradox to say that her boots were her weak point, for she took a pride in having the strongest she could get, and merged the minor consideration of shape in the one great object—durability. She would venture forth, encased in her stout boots, and grasping her large alpaca umbrella, and after trapesing over the wet flags to market, return proud in the possession of dry feet; whilst gingerly Horace tossed aside his dandified patent-leathers, soaking and spoilt for ever. Not that he often gave the rain an opportunity of wetting his delicate garments; for at the slightest symptom of a shower he would hail a hansom, generally discharging him at the corner

of the street; for, as a braver of the elements herself, Priscilla had no patience with such effeminate ways—not she!

“Well,” said Horace, “I do hope, Priscilla, that when you get a new dress, it will be of a more cheerful hue than those in which you generally indulge. You ring the changes upon grays and pale-browns, and drabs and stone-colour, until the eye becomes bored by such permanent respectability. Couldn’t you give us an occasional blue or a green, or at all events something a little less suggestive of the late highly-respected Mrs. Elizabeth Fry?”

Priscilla could not stand ridicule, and Horace was master of that dangerous weapon.

“I’m sorry,” she replied, flushing, “you do not appreciate my attempts to keep down our expenses. Some wives would go to the opposite extreme. *One* of us must be economical, if we want to keep a roof over our heads.”

Horace could bear allusions to any thing but the possibility of poverty. This always irritated him terribly. It was now his turn to colour, and

he did so very deeply. He felt, too, that he was in the wrong, and this always adds an extra sting to a proud spirit. But he was obstinacy itself, and made a point of never giving in.

“ I dress myself properly because I am before the world, and don't want every one to know I live upon Snelling's salary and nothing else. I wish my wife to look as well as I do ; and let me tell you, Priscilla, once for all, I will not have you make yourself look a dowdy. You do it on purpose, I believe, in order to excite sympathy.”

It was said hastily, and he was sorry for it directly afterwards. The tears came to Priscilla's eyes ; they seldom did, but she was in a low state of health, and there was no excuse for her husband's unkindness. He felt guilty as he saw the big tears coursing down his wife's cheeks, and he would have said something to make amends for his churlishness, but Priscilla burst out with—

“ There, there, go out and inquire after Miss Mellington ; I know you are dying to do so, and pray don't let me prevent you.”

There was an almost hysterical earnestness

in Priscilla's way of saying this. Horace was flushed before, but his face was crimson now. How could his wife have read his intentions? He had meant of course to call at Miss Mellington's lodgings, and inquire after—possibly see her; but how could Priscilla have divined it? As if she had not noticed the care with which he had attired himself; the scrupulous folding of his handkerchief; the assumption of the new summer-waistcoat, though the day was rainy; the pulling on of the thin, tightly-fitting, shiny boots; the continual gazing at the weather, and a dozen other “unconsidered trifles,” which went to prove the correctness of the wife's suspicions.

“Well, and what if I am going to inquire after Miss Mellington's health,” said Horace, in a loud and blustering voice, as if he was determined not to be shouted down, though Priscilla had spoken meekly enough in all conscience—“is there any harm in that?” and Horace looked round the room as if appealing to a sympathetic public.

“Now, do pray go out, Horace; for your vio-

lence makes me ill," urged Priscilla, who was not in the habit of complaining.

The husband seized his hat, and brushed it in a fierce manner, and seemed loth to leave off doing so, feeling that when he did there was nothing to do but to go, and he scarcely knew how to retire with a good grace. Some wives would have said a pleasant word at this juncture; but perhaps Priscilla could not think of any thing agreeable, for she certainly did not avail herself of the opportunity to make a conciliatory remark. On the contrary, she said something very disagreeable.

"As I suppose I am not to expect you for the rest of the day, I'll get my dinner soon; so don't bring in Mr. Tindal or any of your friends on the chance of cold meat. I shall have a little broth for my dinner and go to bed early."

This was too much for Horace. He gasped out a "Very well!" and stalked out of the house. There was not a more injured individual than Mr. Horace Bentley in London, thought Mr. Horace Bentley, as he strutted along the streets, his chest heaving with indignation at the uncalled-for con-

duct of his wife—the wife he had done the honour of marrying. He never reflected that he had taken her from a comfortable home, and placed her in dingy lodgings in a back-street, where she had toiled in his service for many months; he had conferred a great favour upon the daughter of an obscure surgeon-apothecary by making her the wife of a man of genius, and this was how she repaid him. Instead of urging him up those heights of fame he fain would travel, instead of cheering him by kindly word and gentle act, had she not thrown every verbal obstacle in his path? Had she ever appreciated him? Did she praise his work; *could* she appreciate it? She was sharp and not destitute of a certain cleverness; but it was not his cleverness, it was not the sort of sharpness he admired. She was good at accounts; genius wasn't. She had no fancy, was utterly devoid of imagination. After all, was this the kind of wife for Horace Bentley? Had he not married in haste; and had it not been more Priscilla's act than his own? He had scarcely known his own mind; but Priscilla had struck the iron whilst it was hot, and had firmly riveted the

heavy chain which bound him hand and foot. Suppose he had not been hampered with a wife, what a capital income for a single man he was making by his pen! What right had Priscilla to feel the slightest jealousy about Miss Mellington, to lose no opportunity of saying something spiteful of that charming young lady—that pattern daughter, who rode to rehearsals in an omnibus, and took her earnings home to her mother like an angel? What did Priscilla earn? What did she do to keep away the wolf? She managed well, and was economical; of course she had been brought up to be so, and had passed her youth in studying the art of skinning a flint; which, after all, was opposed to his generous way of treating matters. Wasn't she a bit of a burden and a clog upon him?

These were some of the thoughts which arose to the mind of Horace Bentley as he walked towards the abode of the Criterion *soubrette*. He was so deep in his reflections that he actually forgot to take a cab, and found himself at his destination before he was aware of it. His heart

beat loudly as he raised the knocker. He tapped very gently; for she might be asleep, he thought, and any noise might awake and alarm her. The door was opened by a slatternly lodging-house servant, who had apparently, in a moment of abstraction, applied the black-lead to her own countenance instead of the grates; and she replied in answer to Horace's trembling inquiry, that Miss Mellington was better; would he walk in? Horace wavered, and finally decided not to walk in, though he would have given worlds to have seen the fair Julia. He was fumbling awkwardly at his card-case, in the vain hope that she might appear, though he knew the accident she had suffered rendered it impossible, when he heard his own name repeated in the thrilling tones of Miss Mellington's voice.

“Is that Mr. Bentley?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, how kind of you to take pity on me! Come in, if you are not going to be very severe and angry at my behaviour.”

Angry! he was a brute, he thought, to have

written the piece at all. He was, in fact, indirectly the cause of the accident. He entered the room from which the voice of the charmer had emanated, and there, upon a couch, reclined Miss Mellington, suffering from a very badly-sprained ankle, and what she termed a "general shock." Neither casualties, however, had prevented her indulging in a recent novel, which was at her side, together with her part in the new piece, two or three cards from callers whom she had not seen, and a bunch of roses left by an eccentric admirer, who had never told his love, but had been content to let concealment feed on his damask cheek in the upper boxes for a year or two, and who was known at the Criterion by the soubriquet of "Wallsend," from a popular belief that he was in some way connected with the coal interest. Miss Mellington's room was not gaudy, neither could it be termed exactly neat. There was a comfortless air about it,—a confusion which was not admired, a negligence which was certainly not studied. There was a showy "ornament" in the fire-place, and this

article had been evidently called upon to do the duty of charity, and covered the many sins of untidiness of which the occupiers of the room were guilty. Part of the week before last's dramatic journal, a spoiled feather, and a bit of a play-bill were only partially hidden by this elaborate paper decoration; and the chimney-piece was covered with letters, bills, receipts, Cumberland's *British Theatre*, newspaper notices (favourable), cheap hair-ornaments, photographs of friends (and enemies), and a pair of little stage-shoes, very distracting, and a good deal worn. Instinctively, and after the first glance round the room, Horace compared it to his own neat and painfully spick-and-span first-floor, where every thing was in its proper place, and nothing was allowed upon the chimney-piece to interfere with the effect of Mrs. Molloy's Swiss boy and girl, who wore a permanent smile of happiness upon their china countenances, and who were apparently in the act of arousing themselves and "awaying" to labour, regardless of severe and extensive loss of limb. The blind, which was very yellow, hung

unevenly, the curtains were as much off the hooks as on them, the rug before the fender was placed in an oblique manner very maddening to the methodical eye, the fire-irons had apparently been swept down by the sudden swaying of petticoats, the red-baize cloth was half off the round table, and the bell was broken. There was something infinitely dispiriting in the general look of the room, and Miss Mellington noticed the visitor observing the universal disorder.

“Don’t be severe on my comfortless apartment, Mr. Bentley. Mamma is terribly put out of the way at my accident, and hasn’t had the heart to tidy the place. She is so anxious about me.”

As Miss Mellington’s exertions meant meat and drink to the old lady, Horace could easily understand that the Criterion favourite’s health was a matter of some moment to Mrs. M. He made a stumbling apology, and said he didn’t see any thing untidy. He said this with his observant eyes fixed steadily on a pair of ragged old carpet-slippers which were peeping at him from under the sofa.

It was very sad that I should have been so foolish as to have been late, and trusted myself in one of those horrid whisking cabs. I was so anxious about the piece,—your first one too,—and I'm sure it would have been such a hit. I don't know what you must think of me. I'm sure you'll never, never forgive me."

Never forgive her! Was he not to blame in casting her for such a part? Could she forgive *him*? that was the more correct way of putting it.

Now when two young people are very earnest in forgiving each other, in insisting upon assuming all the blame of a mishap, and are mutually regretful, it is very pretty and touching and romantic. There was not a thought of evil in the little head of the hard-working, honest-hearted little actress. She was as straightforward as her profession would allow her to be; for the stage is a selfish calling, and men and women who follow it and have to live by it should not be judged by too narrow a standard. A performer is a person who lives by pretending to be somebody else; it is scarcely strange that a little of the odour of the

workshop should hang about the artizan when he has knocked off labour for the day. Julia's manners were a trifle artificial, her smile a little mechanical, her agreeable phrases smacked slightly of the footlights. If it came to a question of real aid, pecuniary or personal; if she was asked to perform for a friend in distress, or to put her hand in her pocket for a sick acquaintance, she was never known to refuse. She was thoroughly unselfish in these matters, though she would stick out for her rights in the theatre, and fight her foes tooth and nail when it came to any thing which affected her position before the public. Warm-hearted, impulsive, weak, vain, and generous, Julia Mellington had very little of the domestic heroine in her disposition; but she had a genuine love of her art, studied hard at every thing she undertook, and amply deserved her popularity and the good word of all who knew her. She had not escaped calumny, as a matter of course. It is the penalty all pretty women on the stage must pay for the overwhelming quantity of compliments they receive, and the large amount

of admiration they excite. Those who knew least about Julia were the loudest in her dispraise of course, and plain people generally were very hard upon her. Conscious of the entire untruthfulness of these malicious reports, Julia Mellington took no trouble to refute them; but she felt them very keenly, and had many a good cry in private, though she would have died rather than exhibit any annoyance about them before people. So far as the world knew, Julia had never been in love. It had often been settled she was engaged, though no one could actually vouch for the fact. There was a tall stockbroker with heavy whiskers, who was at one time spoken of as the most likely man to marry her; but he was shortly cashiered (according to report) for a military adorer, whose whiskers were, if any thing, heavier than the City buck's. Montrose, the walking-gentleman, was supposed at one time to have a chance; but upon being joked on the subject, the chivalrous comedian, who had a real liking and respect for Miss Mellington, fired up so fiercely, and expressed his contempt for gossippers in general, and

the one he addressed in particular, in such strong language, that the subject was dropped from that day forth within the walls of the Criterion.

Julia found Horace's conversation infinitely more amusing than the novel she had been struggling with. The book had been about things she didn't understand; Horace's talk she thoroughly comprehended; and having a keen sense of the ridiculous, she laughed until she cried at his absurd description of the theatre-people the night before. Mr. Bentley gave the reins to that dangerous satirical hobby-horse he was so fond of riding, and he found Julia an admirable audience. There are no people so thoroughly alive to fun as actors—when you are not reading a farce to them. Horace could not refrain from mentally comparing the different effect of his remarks upon Julia Mellington to that which they produced when thrown away upon Priscilla. Julia enjoyed the mischievous Horace's droll and highly overdrawn description greatly. Priscilla was accustomed, when Horace was in his more frolicsome moods, to stare blankly amazed at him; as much as to

say, "Are you mad, or not?" She had no appreciation of humour. A cookery-book for her before all the comicalities that were ever penned. She considered Mrs. Caudle a dull calumny on the sex; and one of the first serious squabbles she had ever had with her husband resulted from her declaring she could never get through twenty pages of *Pickwick*. Humour and fun danced in the laughing eyes of Julia Mellington, and dotted her face into half-a-dozen dimples at every sally of Horace's. He gave an imitation of Slagg which convulsed her, and described Giggley's tearful appearance at the announcement of the farce's withdrawal so absurdly that she had to beg him to desist whilst she recovered her breath.

Horace had never met any one so delightful in his life. He could have stayed there talking all day. He rose once or twice to leave; but on each occasion Julia begged him to stop a little longer, saying she was terribly lonely, and that it was a charity for any one to stay and chat with her. Once she asked him to hand her some

article from the sideboard. How he wished it had been something he could have perilled his life in obtaining! a daisy on a cliff overhanging the sea, or a blue pebble at the bottom of a well. How delightful it would have been to have risked his neck to gratify the slightest whim of hers! Mingled with his intense admiration of her personally was a great respect for and wonder at her talents, at the ability which earned her an income of three times his own. She was very young,—Horace thought about eighteen, but she was much older than that,—and by the time she reached forty, what a large competency she would have made! What would she look like at forty? what would she look like at fifty? would she leave the stage, or take to playing buxom ladies past middle life? Would she marry, and retire? That thought sent an arrow through him. He felt he hated the happy man already. For a second he remembered that it was no business of his, that he was booked for life; but the reflection lasted only for a moment. He wouldn't permit himself to think of Priscilla; he was in another world altogether,

and he had not noticed the sudden apparition of Miss Mellington's mamma. Mrs. Mellington was a little old lady, with a snuff-coloured front rather on one side, whose clothes hung very straight, giving her much the appearance of Mrs. Noah in the Lowther Arcadian arks of childhood. She had a weakness for wearing her bonnet in the house, which invested her with an unsettled and nomadic appearance; and this, combined with a restless manner and a perpetual conviction that "there was something wanted doing, but for the life of her she couldn't remember what," rendered her rather a fidgety and uncomfortable person, and not the best attendant upon a patient recommended quiet. She was generally accompanied in her domestic travels by a faithful duster, with which, even as she sat down to take breath, she would make feeble dabs at imaginary spots or stains, or flick furtively at flies which didn't exist. Her husband had been something connected with a fire-insurance, but no one knew exactly what, but it was generally understood to have been a genteel and responsible post; though there were

certain people with uncomfortable memories, who declared old Flinders (for the family name was no more Mellington than it was Wellington) to have been a drunken reprobate, who beat his wife and broke the furniture every week of his wicked life. He had not lived to see his daughter's triumph, having performed an involuntary act of Juggernautism in Oxford street one day, by placing himself conveniently in front of the wheels of a Bayswater omnibus. As he left his widow nothing but an extensive list of debts, she found herself scarcely any better off by his death. But shortly after, her daughter, who had always possessed a pleasant ringing voice and a dangerous talent for mimicry, insisted upon coming out; and through the assistance of a friend of the late Mr. Flinders, who was connected with a minor theatre, little Julia had her wish gratified; and being intelligent and attentive the manager put her forward. A wandering Westender strolling into the house saw her, and appreciated her fresh unstagy style, and in a week after she was engaged by manager Girdlestone. A good new part in a successful

piece settled her career, which from that time had been one of uninterrupted success. All this the lively Julia had told Horace in a pleasant chatty way, and in answer to his many inquiries as to the cause of her choosing the dramatic profession, first appearance, her powers of study, her feelings on the production of a new piece, and a dozen other subjects. Of course she passed over the parental episode, and did not refer to the change of name. Some people are very fond of telling their small histories and dwelling on their petty ups and downs in life. Julia was always ready to enlighten friends touching her brief but glorious career. She was very proud of it, and had every right to be so. Horace had come to the conclusion that she was a most heroic and exemplary character. He had heard and seen too much for his own peace of mind; the room was slovenly, but it only served the better to show off that perfect embodiment of neatness, amiability, filial devotion, and all the cardinal virtues, who reclined upon the shabby old sofa, driving him to despair with every glance of her hazel eyes.

Suddenly a phaeton pulled up at the door, and Horace saw a tawny moustached person peering over the blind into the room.

“Lor, if it ain’t Sir Charles!” exclaimed the old lady.

Julia seemed pleased at the news. Very much too pleased, thought Mr. Bentley; at whom the old lady threw an uneasy glance, which changed to a look of evident relief when that proud youth rose to go. Miss Mellington shook hands with him—a little hurriedly he fancied; and as he passed out of the house, Sir Charles went in, honouring him with a cold stare of surprise (disdain Horace imagined, of course) as he brushed by him in the narrow doorway. The phaeton of Sir Charles was very dapper and fashionable; Sir Charles’s horse was a splendid animal, and Sir Charles’s groom was a model.

“Who on earth’s *he*, I should like to know; and what business has he there, a yellow-haired puppy?” growled Horace to himself as he turned down the street.

CHAPTER V.

THE ILL-MATCHED COUPLE.

YES; who on earth could "Sir Charles" be? and what right had he to drive up the dull shabby little street in his dashing phaeton, scattering the children, and exciting general observation? People were ready enough as it was to make disparaging remarks upon all folks connected with the drama; ready enough to declare the gifted Miss So-and-so to be flighty in her conduct, and the versatile Mr. Somebody-else to be devoted to the bottle. Mr. Jones the special pleader, and Mr. Smith the wholesale stationer, may commit all sorts of depravities, and beyond the small circle of their immediate acquaintances their foibles are unknown; but those public characters, whose names figure on the playbills, cannot be too particular; for their business is every body's business, and

their reputations are apt to be treated lightly by a charitable and kindly world. It is one of the penalties of success, argued Horace; the great law of compensation settles that it should be so; and to the philosopher it should be a comfort and a soothing reflection at all times. Horace a philosopher! He who was chafing at a scarcely-developed jealousy, which was as irritating as the full-fledged feeling every bit, and which filled his mind with uncomfortable thoughts, and upset him, and took away his appetite, and rendered him worse company in the first-floor of Little Green Street than ever.

The great law of compensation? Yes; the law which permits the Earl of Emptyate to have a pretty wife and thirty thousand a-year, but takes it out of him terribly with the gout and troublesome relations; the law which allows the great Browbeater Q.C. to gain that tremendous case in court, and covers him with present glory, and paves the certain path to the comfortable cushions and the imposing ermine, but sends him home trembling to his termagant spouse, whom he is

ashamed to show to the world, for does she not massacre her majesty's English every time she opens her mouth? The glorious compensating-law, which gives so much and takes away so much; which doles out to men and women much the same amount of happiness, if they could be only brought to see it.

Of all people in the world, Horace was perhaps the last to be brought to see it, or at all events to submit to it with any decent show of patience. "Argue as one will," he thought, "there can be no denying that Sir Charles—whoever he may be, with his horses and carriages, his handle to his name, his landed property, and his social status—gets a much greater amount of enjoyment out of life than I do, with my cheerless lodgings, uncertain income, slender prospects, and"—yes; there is no blinking the matter, he wound up with his wife. He wasn't speaking: he was only thinking; and he thought the last portion of the sentence *sotto voce*, as one might say: he dared scarcely *think* it aloud. There seemed something shameful in it; and he felt himself colouring deeply.

But spite of his blushes and the feeling of self-contempt for the mean thoughts that came across him, his wayward brain would dwell upon the unpleasant subject, and he found himself turning to it again and again; and he began at last, by some specious process of mental reasoning, to look upon himself as an injured man; not that he could exactly say who had injured him. That he had been his own enemy in marrying as he had done, he never admitted; the thought was too absurd; self-conceit would not permit it to dwell upon his mind for a moment. The king can do no wrong; and if ever there was a king in a small way of business, that despotic domestic monarch was most undoubtedly Mr. Bentley. Supposing his marriage to have been an injudicious act,—he didn't admit it was, by any means, because that would have implied rashness upon his part; and if there was one thing he prided himself upon, &c.,—but *supposing* it to have been injudicious, was he to blame in the matter? Had not Priscilla married him, rather than he married her? Wasn't the act one of generosity on his part? Seeing her

snubbed and unhappy, had he not, like a self-denying chivalrous student as he was, boldly come to her rescue, and taken her from a home in which she was miserable? What was there in the histories of heroes more self-sacrificing and unselfish than this?

A young man about to enter life, with talent, he might say genius, beyond most, who might have won for himself fame and honour and position, to willingly clog himself with an incumbrance,—an incumbrance who brought him nothing; an incumbrance who could sew-on shirt-buttons, and battle and chaffer with small tradesmen, and beat down weekly bills, and dispute over items beneath a lady's notice, one would think; an incumbrance, without expensive tastes, it was true, and of a domestic turn generally; but an incumbrance, when all was said and done,—a mile-stone round the neck of genius, and a burden on the back of young ambition. And did not Priscilla know every thought that passed through the busy brain of her young husband, as well as he did himself? Did she not read his reflections

in the anxious worried frown upon his forehead, and trace the current of his thoughts in the thousand trifling evidences of dissatisfaction and discomfort during each day of his nervous unsettled life? O sharp-eyed sex, when we fancy we deceive you, how we deceive ourselves! How you see through us, and run us up, and tabulate us, and docket us, and put us in the little mental pigeon-holes, with titles over them, which tell what we are; and all the while we are wrapped in our "superior intelligence," draped in our cloak of self-conceit; and we imagine that we are grand mysterious creatures, past the comprehension of the squaws whose calm eyes see the very beatings of our craven hearts, and who know the painted warrior, with his pipe and his poisoned arrows, and his solemn silence and his native dignity, to be no more than a trumpery swindle and a shallow sham.

What must be the feelings of a wife when she first begins to find her husband look upon her as a burden and a clog; when the love—never very intense, but which the wife hoped might be all the

more enduring from the absence of extravagance in it—begins to fade and disappear, leaving a dull blank colourless ground of indifference, which must, as she well knows, soon assume the more decided hue of actual dislike, what can picture the inward anguish of a loving woman! Now Priscilla really loved her husband. Her way of showing her affection was not as many women's are; for she had been brought up in a harsh school, and had never been encouraged to exhibit any great show of tenderness. She was a woman incapable of coaxing; she never nestled up to her husband when he had been worried at disappointments out-of-doors, never crept softly up to his side, and, taking his hand gently in hers, whispered a cheering word of comfort. Not that she was callous by any means. She felt the deepest sympathy for him in his disappointments and annoyances; but she was not possessed of much judgment, and would frequently make an irritating remark, or ask an unpleasant question, precisely at the most inopportune moment. She would almost drive her easily-excited husband

wild by asking kindly after some acquaintance who had, by the merest accident, been unpleasantly prominent in Horace's thoughts at the moment, in consequence of said acquaintance having snubbed him that very day. She would speak slightly of the productions of his particular friends, failing to distinguish their articles in the periodical to which Horace was attached; whilst she would, from perfect chance, praise the shallow scribbling of some contributor whose name was gall and wormwood to her husband. When he read her his sarcastic contributions, she would fail altogether to see the points, and would listen to his humorous sallies without a ghost of a smile upon her inflexible countenance. Not that she was a fool. She was a shrewd sharp girl enough, and her intellect was bright when brought to bear upon many subjects; but she was not the wife, in any way, for Horace Bentley. She was thrown away upon him, and he upon her. He should have married a sympathetic young creature, with lofty aspirations, poetic yearnings, a soul above seeing after things, a spirit that yearned for the illimitable; a girl

gifted with a great sense of the ridiculous, who would have joined her husband in laughing at the world, but who would have possessed great powers of pathos too; a woman with whom inky fingers were an institution, and who would have passed her days in dreamy rhapsody, and her nights in gazing spellbound on the moon; a wife who would have shrunk from an interview with a mundane butcher-boy, who would have pined to nothing rather than beat-down a fishmonger's charge for a pair of soles; a wife who would have sat and watched her husband at his work, with her white hands crossed upon her knee, and her big thoughtful eyes fixed in admiration and worshipping wonder on the marvellous young genius, who was immortalising himself with a quire of foolscap and a penny ink-bottle, whilst heedless crowds passed by, and creditors (who could not understand him) clamoured at the front-door for their small accounts; a wife who would have gone headlong to ruin with him, but who would have appreciated him at all events, and not dashed at a subject like pickled salmon just as her husband had finished

reading a little poem which he considered to be rather better than Béranger.

There was no denying his clothes were well looked after; his shirts were never without a button, the darning of his hose might have carried away a prize at an exhibition of needlework. They were always folded with a precision that was highly praiseworthy; and he had never to ask a second time for his boots. Then his meals were always ready to a moment, and his weekly bills were a marvel for their minuteness. Spic and span too were the apartments, the windows spotless, and the chintz covers of the chairs always presented a shininess suggestive of a general "calendering" the day before. The bump of order was prominently developed in Priscilla's cranium, and the severe trimness of the drawing-room struck the stranger with a kind of awe, and he would mechanically return the chair he had taken to its place at the conclusion of his visit. Much as the children dreaded Horace, they were ten times more afraid of his wife. When her little sharp rap was heard at the door, the Molloy child who

was deputed to open it would walk tremulously and with bated breath to perform his task, and would cower behind it as Priscilla passed, and descend to the kitchen on tiptoe when the desperate feat was accomplished. Mrs. Molloy, not a nervous woman by any means, would feel "all of a fluster" when Priscilla sent word that she wanted to see her, and would make many excuses, such as the necessity of a slight revision of her toilette generally, and her cap in particular, in order to gain time before facing the first-floor with composure. The surly lout of a husband of hers, too, entertained a wholesome terror of Mrs. Bentley, and would suddenly cease the swagger in which he indulged on his way home at night from "The Dromedaries," and descend the kitchen-stairs in a humble, not to say sneaking, manner, that would have greatly entertained his boon-companions in the street, could they have seen the pothouse blusterer creeping to bed in apparent fear of his life. The boon-companions even knew something about Molloy's lodger; for happening to prolong an argument opposite their brother-member's door-

step one night, they were suddenly alarmed by the white form of an enraged female appearing at the open first-floor window, and were edified by a libellous harangue from Mrs. Bentley, who was not in the best of tempers, and who threatened to give the entire body in charge if they didn't move on that very instant,—a set of idle tipsy brawlers!

It was one of Horace's late evenings, and he was out. He had a good many late evenings, and it must be admitted that Priscilla scarcely set about in the right way to make his home very inviting. She thought she did. She did not err from any desire to be contradictory and disagreeable. She reasoned and argued with herself; but to no purpose. She had always made her papa's home pleasant to him; the pupils, perhaps, had not experienced unalloyed happiness in the house of the Bloomsbury surgeon; but their special comfort had never been considered greatly by Priscilla. She was always at home; she did not gad about—indeed she sighed when she reflected that she had nowhere to gad to; she was always neat, and had never worn a curl-paper since her wedding-day.

she had nice dinners ready to the time; and no acquaintances unpleasant to her husband ever came to see her. No, poor girl, that last reflection was true enough. She was not burdened with an over-quantity of friends. She was lonely enough, in all conscience. Even her mamma came only at long intervals, and made her miserable with her complaints and grievances. The dressmaker opposite had lots of visitors, people who came and drank tea with her, and sat at the window munching water-cresses. She had seen shrimps frequently over the way, and, on occasion, boiled ham from the cookshop. Laughter and singing would be often heard in the first-floor opposite; in Priscilla's apartments never: except, perhaps, when Horace roared over his own writings, or sung a snatch of something he had heard Miss Mellington warble. There was a goldbeater next door, who did not confine his beating to the precious metal, but occasionally extended the exercise of his skill to his precious wife. Fighting was frequent at the next house, but the tears and mutual regrets in which the goldbeater and his better-half in-

dulged, when their contests were over, were said by Mrs. Molloy (who had witnessed the reconciliations) to be “very ’art-rending and pleasant.” There was nothing heart-rending and nothing pleasant in the chilly, sombre, sullen state of things at Priscilla’s. A good row, if it bore with it the certainty of mutual forgiveness and consequent temporary happiness, would have been welcome to the young wife, who felt herself very much like a fish out of water, not understanding exactly what it all meant, or how it had arisen, or what she was to do to put an end to the present cheerless mode of life. For, as we have said, she loved her husband. She had never, until she met him, known what it was to flutter at the approach of any man, had never seen a male creature with whom she could be content to pass her life. But she found Horace different from any one she had ever known, and his faults even rendered him more attractive to her. Now in the long lonely hours a reflection—a humbling and a shaming reflection—would come upon her, and render her very miserable. Had she not lured Horace on to

think he loved her? had she not married *him*? She dared hardly put this question to her conscience, but found herself putting it continually. She remembered the brusque manner of the young student gradually growing kinder, until it merged into a more than ordinary politeness and attention. Then she traced the whole course of the business: how she flattered his boyish conceit, and played-off a thousand little amatory tricks; and how he had blundered into a sort of matrimonial mesh, in an awkward kind of way, and, floundering about, had found himself engaged and vowed to marry, before he well knew what he was about. It had been a bad business on her part, and she regretted it now. Regretted it more for her husband's sake than her own; for she had never hoped for any particular happiness, and had made up her mind to single spinsterhood long ago. But the bright youth who had been entrapped,—for in her more desponding and self-accusatory moments she would use no milder term,—he might have done any thing, have won name and fame, and in time have married—ay, married even Miss Mellington, if he'd pleased.

At the thought of rivalry, there would return all the petty pleasure of a temporary triumph; and she would wipe her eyes with quick sharp dabs, her pocket-handkerchief rolled into a hard lump like a little railway-buffer, in the extremity of her excitement. Then she would indulge in little fierce fits of crying, that relieved her very slightly, but left her more low and miserable than ever.

This was the woman whom Horace thought he could deceive, or at all events conceal the truth from. He thought—as we are all apt to do—that she was not sensitive because she was not sensitive in his way. When he received a sharp letter from the proprietor of the periodical, pulling him up very properly about not sending his contributions at the stipulated time, he was with difficulty persuaded from writing a rejoinder on the spur of the moment, which would have put an immediate finish to his relations with the employer who was paying him the salary which supported him. When Priscilla declared the proprietor to be in the right, Horace considered his wife to be not only devoid of all sensitiveness, but to be lacking in affectionate

sympathy. He would have liked his wife to have got his hat and gloves ready for him, so that he might have started off at once and bearded the lion in his den. He was terribly sulky with her, and hardly spoke a word for the rest of the day; though he found the salary his wife's advice had prevented his flinging away highly convenient, and in fact peculiarly necessary the following week.

“But who on earth could Sir Charles be?”

CHAPTER VI.

COONEY'S LODGER BREAKS BOUNDS.

IT was another hot night in Cooney's quarters, though not so sultry as on the occasion of Felicia's mysterious visit. Cooney was still smoking his pipe, as if he had never stirred from the same spot for a week, and his opposite neighbour was doing the like. Squalor and crime and hunger still lounged about the ends of the hideous courts, as they had done for many a night before, and would again until the creeping chills of the coming winter sent them shivering into their wretched hovels, or out into the foggy streets in search of plunder. Whichever way the wind blew, the dust was pretty certain to settle in the grimy coffers of the insatiable Cooney. The number of pewter-pots that were placed out to dry in the hot sun might diminish; but the net of the marine-store dealer was a capa-

cious one, and he was not particular as to what flowed into it. The trifling weekly sum paid by his mysterious lodger tumbled into his till with the rest of his gains, and went to swell the enormous balance supposed to be gathering to the credit of Cooney by his less fortunate neighbours. The mysterious lodger, who occupied a dingy and somewhat dilapidated room in the shaky tenement of the unscrupulous marine-store dealer, was only a mystery to Cooney so far as his never going out was concerned. From morning till night, and from night till morning, the gentleman in the spare apartment paced his small room or reclined upon his fusty bed, or cooked his unsavoury victuals, or spelled over his greasy weekly paper, or puffed away at his cheap and strong tobacco—tobacco cheaper and stronger even than Cooney's own—and lolled with his bull-head at the window (looking on to a court), but never passed the threshold of his landlord's door. This was a mystery to Cooney, certainly. He had received lodgers before, who had kept their room in the broad glare of day, and had sauntered forth under

the shadow of night. He had sheltered many queer customers in his time. A history of that small back-room and its inhabitants would have been a strange and interesting volume, and would have formed a neat little appendix to the Newgate Calendar; for Cooney's lodgers had seldom been honest folk. Few of them but had felt uncomfortable in the presence of the police; and perilous leaps from the small window into the court beneath had been made by Cooney's tenants on more than one occasion. The landlord, however, had seldom gone without his rent, even with his least-solvent lodgers. He had never shown any great delicacy or consideration in mentioning money-matters, but had invariably gone straight to the point and demanded his week's rent in advance; for "bless your 'art," he would observe, "what's life? you're 'ere to-day and gone to-morrow;" which was too frequently the fact in the lodgers' case; but Cooney seldom lost by them, in consequence of never departing from his settled custom.

Suicide was not altogether a stranger to the room where the mysterious lodger dwelt; and if

report was to be credited, a darker deed had once been committed within the four walls of the foul apartment. In the immediate neighbourhood of Cooney's, dark deeds were common enough; for it was a lawless locality, and when drink had it all its own way—drink on an empty stomach—the place was apt to lose its head and turn rampant in the extreme, flourishing knives and fighting fiercely, sparing neither woman nor child in its brutal violence. Though beds were scarce about there, the usual commercial result attendant upon a brisk demand was not apparent, and lodgings did not run high; the avaricious Cooney even being content with a very modest sum for the accommodation he afforded his strange lodger.

Mr. Jennings—for such was the name he gave, or rather Ledbitter gave for him on his first settling in Cooney's quarters—was not a troublesome lodger, even as lodgers in that neighbourhood went. He never rung the bell, for the simple reason that there was no bell to ring—and nobody to answer it, if there had been; he cooked his own meagre food, of which he ate little; and

Tom Spottle did his marketing. Tom Spottle, an orphan lad who lived in the court beneath, and who would always shuffle up to the mysterious lodger when he heard a peculiar low whistle, in which the queer customer would indulge when he wished to engage the attention of the boy. For if Cooney was reticent and uncommunicative, so was his lodger. In fact, the marine-store dealer shone beside Mr. Jennings as a brilliant conversationalist. He could upon occasion indulge in something approaching dialogue; and when he was wound-up by disappointment in some bargain which had "gone off," or the discovery that he had given too much for some article in the way of business, Cooney had been known to go on a good deal; whilst there were those who had heard him talking by the hour to himself, totting up the trifling gains of the day, and criticising his own conduct as a mercantile man stringently and with much acrimony. "Pretty feller *you* are," he had been heard to say, as he picked at his beard with his long yellow claws; "pretty feller for business! Pity you wasn't brought up to play a instrument

or write ballids. Nice eye for any think in your trade you've got, I *don't* think; and a very pleasant soft 'art when you see the gal a trembling with the sugar-tongs in her 'and and her eye on the door all the while, ready to take any trifle, quite grateful and 'appy. *You* go and give fancy prices for things, *you* do. People gives you a character for being a deep 'un too; that's the best of it! Deep! *You!* Why, bless your innocent 'art, you're just about as shaller as shaller can be; that's what you are. The sooner you gives up a trying your 'and at trade and retires to that 'and-some country seat of yours, with livery servants and every thing gen-teel, the better."

Thus would the contemplative Cooney reflect aloud upon his unpardonable generosity and untradesman-like liberality, said sundry eavesdroppers, who had listened at the cracks of his shutters on calm still evenings and been greatly entertained thereby. But Mr. Jennings was not in the habit of talking to himself, though he would occasionally heave a great heavy sigh that seemed to shake the house. On the whole, Mr. Jennings must have

found it dull ; and he would have found it even duller than it really was, if it had not been for a very bad and troublesome cough, which kept him company almost continually—a cough that seemed to tear his throat as he struggled with it, and after a fierce and triumphant wrestle would leave him weak and exhausted, panting for breath, the tears streaming from his blood-shot eyes, and his thick neck crimson at the back.

There were a good many bad coughs in that neighbourhood, and consumption stalked about those narrow squalid courts without his presence being greatly noticed, and certainly without being often challenged by that watchful but sadly overweighted sentinel, the parish-surgeon. The lungs of little children had a hard struggle of it in those close foul dens in which they slept in crowds ; and the snatches of a purer air they got when playing amidst the garbage in the gutters—air purer by comparison, but bad enough in all conscience—were but snatches, after all. Philanthropists had passed down the street and peeped timidly up the courts, and hurried on shudderingly and with ele-

vated noses. They had wondered indignantly (when they were out of the street and elbowed broadcloth instead of ragged fustian), for their parts, how people could for shame keep their children so dirty, their matted hair uncombed, and their hands and feet a sight; and they gave it as their opinion that the poor would find it much to their advantage if they were cleaner in their habits; for soap-and-water was cheap enough, as every body knew. Yet these very people would say to young friends about to marry, "Never live in an old cheap house, my dear; do what you will with painting and cleaning, you will find your furniture look shabby in it; and what with old-fashioned dingy mantelpieces, ugly grates, rattling shaky windows, ill-fitting doors, and cracked ceilings, you will be always having workmen in to tinker it up, and it will never look well. No, my dear, take a newly-built house: those nice elegant modern villas, with their lofty ceilings and general comfort, elegance, and accommodation, half furnish themselves; though you are not overloaded with furniture at present, and intend adding to it by

degrees as your income increases, you will feel some pride in a house that to a certain extent keeps itself clean, and always does you credit." Model cottages might have cured many of the coughs that were settling fast upon the lungs of Cooney's little neighbours. Clean hands and faces, ay and cleaner consciences too, might have been a little less uncommon, if the sacred word "home" had not been associated with every thing comfortless and filthy in the reeking courts and alleys round about the marine-store dealer's den. Not that Mr. Jennings had been without advice. Mr. Ledbitter had been to a surgeon for him; and a pompous little man—with a shirt-front which shamed the whole street, and a double eye glass which sorely tempted the evil-looking lads on the kerb, as its owner passed with gingerly steps along the pavement—would occasionally sneak into the shop of Cooney, and, bowing blandly, mount the creaking stairs that led to his patient's apartment, turning the handle softly, and coming suddenly upon the lodger, and starting him so, that his pulse would be unreliable for

some minutes; for Jennings was averse to strangers, and trembled whenever there was a knock at his door. This might have been the result of a low state of health, though Cooney assigned it to other causes. But the landlord was apt to suspect every body, and Jennings was not personally a lodger to inspire any particular confidence, possessing many of the physical peculiarities of the class in which Cooney moved. Though bantered gently by the doctor, Jennings never overcame his nervousness, nor could he completely disguise a very evident sense of relief which always came over him on discovering who it was that had entered his room.

“And how is our cough to-day?” would Pinto ask (for Pinto was Ledbitter’s doctor), and he it was who dazzled the neighbours with the display of linen and the double eyeglass; “are we easier, eh?”

“Well, for the matter of that, doctor, much about the same; but I don’t mind the cough; it’s the close-shaving in the matter of a drop of something. I don’t feel myself without it.”

“My dear sir, we must be severe with you on that particular point. You must *not* indulge in any thing of the kind just yet, I assure you. Drink would be only adding fuel to fire; you are a great deal too easily excited as it is.”

The man rolled his eye round the room fiercely, and muttered some dissatisfied sentences to himself, but did not renew his remarks on the subject.

“Now, Mr. Jennings, you will take some of this, according to the directions, whenever the cough is troublesome, and I will see you again some day soon. Good-morning.” And the surgeon ran down the stairs, scuttered through the shop, and was in the street before Jennings could say another word.

Out of the street into another more airy and less crowded would the doctor's legs have carried him very speedily, had not Cooney caught him by the sleeve and stopped him.

“Look'ee here, doctor,” he said, jerking his thumb at the lodger's room, “any thing wrong there?”

“What do you mean, my dear sir?”

Pinto called every body “my dear sir.” He even addressed the new young doctor a couple of doors off, whose smart brougham was gall and wormwood to the shabby little surgeon, as his “dear sir,” the first time he met him, though he could have stuck a dagger into the small of his back with the liveliest satisfaction. He “my dear sir’d” his tradespeople, and the luckless patient whom he put into the County Court in the course of the same afternoon.

Cooney was annoyed at having to explain himself. He shook his head with a vexed look, and continued:

“Wrong, any thing *wrong*? that cough, for instance? Churchyardy, ain’t it?”

“Ha, ha! my dear sir; it *is*, as you say, ‘churchyardy;’ but I apprehend nothing—oh, no, nothing. Your lodger has lived hard; looks as if he could fell a bullock; nothing of the kind, weak as a cat; but cough nothing very serious.”

“No dying on the premises,—nothing of that sort?”

“ Oh, no ; make your mind easy, my dear sir.”

Cooney gave a grunt of relief ; for he didn't like people a-dying about in *his* house. Pinto was soon out of sight ; his short sturdy legs taking him over the uneven pavement at a brisk half trot ; a style of locomotion he had assumed in early life, to give people an idea that he was always in a hurry to get to his numerous patients.

Privacy had begun to pall on Jennings lately ; and his state of close retirement, unrelieved by the visits of friend or foe, and unsweetened by the occasional fillip of a cheering glass, was unpleasantly suggestive of the confinement to which felons are submitted ; and Jennings chafed at it, and had grown daily more morose than ever. He began to look on life without liquor as a bit of a burden, and he didn't see exactly what good was to come of his long incarceration over Cooney's shop. The absence of Ledbitter, however, he considered a great relief, and he felt to breathe more freely as he reflected that the Glenburn family were

out of town; for Ledbitter had got him somehow in his power, and it was very evident that the valet was not the kind of man to give way to a generous impulse without a reason for it. In a blundering bull-headed sort of way, Jennings arrived at the conclusion that he was somehow being made a tool of, and he felt no kind of gratitude to the man who fed, lodged, and provided him with a doctor. He was doing himself good, no doubt, by keeping away from drink, and taking stuff for his cough, and living quiet; but he didn't want to do himself good. He'd rather have been out and about, his own master, and free to take his glass when he liked; he hated the fellow who had got him in his toils, who exercised a mysterious power over him, and made his blood run cold when he looked at him with a sinister smile upon his lip and a meaning look in his pale strange eyes. For Ledbitter did look at him a great deal during their interviews; and Jennings by no means liked it, and winced under it, and felt himself unable to return the other's gaze, and was very dispirited, and sometimes a trifle sulky in the presence of his

patron. But he was powerless to rebel. The serpent-eyes had fixed him, and, burly brute as he was, he sadly feared the serpent's fangs. He was relieved of the oppressive presence of the valet; but the valet's spirit seemed to haunt the place, and the pale eyes to pierce the gloom and watch the solitary lodger as he lay in bed, or sat moodily spelling over his paper, or lolled lazily at the little shaky window over the court where Tom Spottle dwelt.

He could never get away from those eyes, those searching eyes of Ledbitter's, that had so little expression, yet said so much; eyes that told the poor outcast, hiding from the world in his miserable retreat, that disobedience would be his doom, the slightest show of insolence would seal his fate, and that a prison would be his portion if he so much as raised his little finger in rebellion. Not that Ledbitter had ever threatened. He was gentle and low voiced, and moved about with panther-like softness, and sat down gradually on the broken chair, so that that dilapidated article of furniture showed fewer signs than usual of dis-

tress ; and he never said a cross word to the fellow who feared him so. The very stairs creaked less with Ledbitter than with any one else. He seemed to go through life making less noise than other people, and appeared to glide through existence as it were oleagiously and without a hitch. It was strange that the big lodger at Cooney's should consider him fearful-looking, as he undoubtedly did, and that he should see any thing peculiarly unpleasant in the mouth of Ledbitter, any thing coldly cruel in the eyes of Ledbitter, any thing suggestive of cunning and remorselessness in Ledbitter's general air and manner. Jennings had seen many bad faces in his time—faces that had grinned hate and rage upon him, with gleaming eyes and great, fierce tusks of teeth set together firmly—faces rendered almost fiendish by drink and starvation, degrading punishment, or the rampant sway of evil passions, for he had mixed among a desperate crew ; but he had never seen a countenance that chilled his blood when he looked upon it until he saw the white full face of Ledbitter, the cold crafty features of the man who

had him in his iron grip. Often as the valet sat by him in the wretched room, Jennings's fingers would itch to be at his visitor's throat, and the placid manner of his patron would madden him by its quiet air of complete self-possession; but he was powerless when Ledbitter was present; and when he had gone, the lodger would clench his fists and growl a deep curse between his closed teeth, and inveigh most bitterly against the cruel fate that had thrown the valet in his path. Low, tremulous, and nervous,—for the poor wretch had been reduced by physic and fear to a miserable state of melancholy and perpetual trepidation,—Jennings would perhaps have put himself out of the reach of his tormentor and his enemies in general, had it not been for the promise of a reward some day. The date had not been, and would not be, fixed at present; but Ledbitter would reward him in due season for the service he was doing the valet, and in a distant land, where drink was plentiful, he might rest beneath the roof of his own dwelling and snap his fingers at fortune. Ledbitter was very fond of picturing this future of perfect hap-

piness to the lodger at Cooney's; but could never be induced to fix a date for the realisation of the golden dream.

“There was time enough, time enough,” he would say, gravely shaking his head; “time enough when that troublesome cough was cured, and the shattered constitution a little restored, to talk about the future.” Though the visitor *did* talk about the future a good deal and very tantalisingly, giving a fanciful description of a serene and peaceful existence in a foreign land that set the lodger's mouth watering, and showed up the dirt and discomfort of Mr. Cooney's “furnished apartment” very effectively. Whether, however, this pleasant but uncertain prospect was worth waiting for through an indefinite period—a period during which freedom of action and a drop of drink were denied a poor man—was a question.

On the particular night of which we are speaking, Jennings felt the heat and the loneliness, and the desire for something better than barley-water and slops more strongly than usual, and he sat and

sighed at the open window, and leered horribly at Tom Spottle, whom he spied passing up the court with a can of beer.

It was many a long day—many a long year it seemed to the thirsty Jennings—since he had tasted beer. As to brandy, he had forgotten what its flavour was like. Tom Spottle carried the beer-can very carefully; but he could not prevent an occasional drop falling, like the first big blobs of a thunder-shower, on the hot flagstones of Carmichael Court. Jennings turned his head from the window; for flesh is weak, and he felt himself failing in the matter of firmness. He went to the other side of the room, and tried to become absorbed in the print of the parting between Jack Sheppard and Edgworth Bess, which a former lodger had cut from a newspaper; but he failed to get up any interest in the highly-sensational woodcut; and despite the presence of the Led-bitter eyes, which he felt were looking hard at him all the while, his own visionary orbs again settled upon the figure of the youthful Spottle, who from certain indications about the mouth,

appeared to have slaked his own thirst in a furtive and rapid manner for fear of observation.

Tom Spottle was a London boy of the lowest grade, sharp, saucy, and strong of limb; not a sentimental consumptive little hero with a latent love of his catechism and a pious horror of naughty words. He was the sort of child who would have thriven on a cinder-heap, and grown sturdy on the banks of a sewer. He had never known an ache or pain, though his toes peeped out of his big broken boots, and his clothing was as scanty in December as in the dog-days. He scarcely ever gave a civil reply to any one; he was no respecter of persons; he would have been quite at his ease with the parson of the parish, and would have chatted familiarly with her majesty's state-coachman. His mother, Mrs. Spottle, was a laundress of intemperate habits; a small spare white-faced woman, who was in the habit of declaring it was "little as sufficed her, goodness know'd;" and might have added, that less would have been prudent, for she was generally

unaccountable for her own actions after dusk; and how it was she had never set fire to her shaky lodgings was a mystery to her neighbours. Tom's father had fallen off a ladder in a fit, and died in hospital, when his son was an infant; but spite of meagre food and inattention, Tom grew to be a sturdy lad, and learnt his letters from the names on the spirit-casks at the gin-palace patronised by his mamma. Had he consulted his own inclinations, he would have gone to sea long ago, but he could never make up his mind to leave his mother; and she, poor muddled miserable creature, adored her son, and would sob over him in her maudlin moments, and say how like he was to his dead father, and what a fine strapping fellow he was growing, and how good he was to his poor old mother with her rheumatics, and nobody to say a good word for her in the world. Nobody *did* say a good word for her, certainly; but he would have been a bold boy who would have dared to utter any thing against Mrs. Spottle in her son's hearing. Once a strong lad of the court so far forgot himself as to call out "Old Tom!" to the

laundress, who was pursuing her unsteady way along the court to her lodging, muttering in thick accents to herself; whereupon "young" Tom, having seen his mother safe in-doors, set upon the satirical youth in question, and sent him back to his friends with a pair of black eyes, and a cut down the cheek that disfigured him for life. Nobody had ever done any thing towards improving Tom's mind, and he was steeped in ignorance; but half-fed, half-clothed, and wholly dirty little street Arab as he was, there was something in the bright eye and brisk manner of the neglected boy that was very remarkable—a gay unvicious spirit that no surrounding misery and gloom could crush and destroy. He had soon attracted the eye of Jennings, for he was nearly always about the court under Cooney's window; and a sort of acquaintanceship sprung up between the rough man with the bad cough and the sharp boy in the ragged clothes. The lodger indulged in clean linen to an extent never known previously in the annals of the back-room he lived in; for Ledbitter insisted upon it, and as he paid for the washing,

Jennings did not object. Young Tom carried the clothes backward and forward from his mother, who got the job through the recommendation of Cooney; and thus the friendship commenced. Ledbitter saw the boy too, and liked him, occasionally giving him coppers and good advice, though he discouraged his visits, and told him to fetch what Mr. Jennings required and then be off, and not hang about; particularly though was he to remember one thing—he was never to bring Mr. Jennings any thing to drink, on pain of Ledbitter's displeasure and the loss of the lodger's washing to Tom's mother.

But young Tom Spottle, sharp impudent boy as he was, had a feeling heart, and when he saw the wistful glances which fell from the eyes of Mr. Jennings upon the can of beer he held in his hand, he mechanically paused and nodded at his neighbour, and asked him if he wanted any thing. Wanted any thing? He wanted beer; pined for a draught of the delicious beverage, but dared not demand it.

“Who's that for?” growled Jennings.

“Mrs. Milliken, washin’ along of mother.”

“Hah!” sighed the lodger heavily.

“Like a drop?” asked the lad, with an insolent twinkle in his eyes; for well he knew that Jennings was not permitted it.

“You young warmint, don’t grin at me,” replied the lodger, on whom the sight of the beer was acting with much the same effect as red cloth upon a bull; “don’t grin at me; but take and fetch me a drop, on the quiet, mind; it won’t hurt me. Put it in a bottle, so as Cooney don’t see it when you come through the shop. Here’s a tanner, if you’ll do it;” and Jennings, who had spoken in a loud hoarse whisper, and with his hand to his mouth, fished up a sixpence from his pocket, and exhibited it to the hungry boy in the court.

Sixpence! What did not such a sum command? Pudding for a week. A slice a day of that lovely steaming luxury that lay upon tin trays in Duffy’s window, brown, luscious, and inviting, scenting the surrounding air, and maddening the impecunious children who flattened

their noses against the greasy window-panes, and hated the smug-faced female who served-out the delicious dainties, indifferent amidst a forest of fruit-pies, and undaunted in the presence of a downright Giant's Causeway of currant-pudding. Or suppose he spent it in meat; thin juicy slices of the rich hot boiled-beef, that stood weltering in Duffy's window, a bovine castle surrounded by a moat of gravy; a castle that looked as if it would last for ever, notwithstanding the repeated onslaughts of the relentless carver; a castle that was firm to its very foundation, and when almost razed to the ground maintained its perpendicular marrow-bone, which still stood like a triumphant tower, marking the scene of the fierce encounter. Or roast-beef, brown and rich, with its attendant dab of Yorkshire pudding, and thick soup-like gravy that was almost too good to think about; or the plump boiled-pork and savoury pease-pudding; or—but when imagination got into Duffy's shop, it was apt to lose itself amidst an *embarras des richesses*, and to run wild in a region of good things. Sixpence all at once seemed a small for-

tune, and the eyes of the boy were dazzled as he watched the fingers of his tempter twiddling the precious coin. Jennings was dreadfully thirsty. Tom Spottle was hungry, almost to starvation. He was always hungry, was that growing lad, who thrived on so little, and shot up strong and limber spite of scant and sorry food. Stronger folks have fallen ere Tom's time; and the sight of the sixpence, with its accompanying vision of a raid upon Duffy's counter, was too much for the hungry lad. He left the can with Mrs. Milliken; and before Jennings was aware that his wish was about to be gratified, Tom stood panting before him with a pot of beer.

Reader of the male sex, you have slaked your thirst on a hot day, after a long dusty walk, at a roadside inn, drained a deep draught out of the plebeian pewter, disdaining the glass goblet you can get at home; and have mentally settled, after drawing a long sigh, and putting down the empty measure, that the last half-minute of your life has been one of almost unprecedented enjoyment. You have said the same to yourself, no doubt, many

times when, after sitting in a hot crowded assembly, you have hurried into some neighbouring hostelry, defying public opinion, and have drained the welcome draught which Combe and Delafield or Whitbread brew.

Madam,—you do not drink beer, of course; a little pale ale in a long glass with the stilton at dinner perhaps, but nothing more,—you have felt a thrill though, you will confess, when the pleasant pop of the champagne-cork has fallen on your ear after a lengthy waltz; or the favourite has won or lost the cup, and you get the dozen of six-and-a-quarter gloves, either way. Perhaps you can appreciate the joy with which the lodger at Cooney's seized the precious liquor from which he had been cut off for so long, and raised it to his trembling lips, and drained two-thirds of it before he drew his breath.

Tom Spottle was rather alarmed for himself; and expected Cooney or Ledbitter to enter every minute. But he admired what the elder Weller called the "powers of suction" in his employer, and threw a comical glance into the almost emp-

ted measure, indicative of satisfaction at the lodger's absorbent abilities.

“There, you young vagabond, you've been and done for me, according to the doctor's notions,” exclaimed Jennings, with a great coarse laugh. Then he took the rest of the liquor, and looked round with an air of satisfaction. Tom seized the money and the measure, and was soon on his way to the savoury establishment of Mr. Duffy. But as he neared the shop, he paused. A thought of his mother's empty larder came across him; and though the steaming pudding was in sight, and he could sniff the odour of the hot joint fresh from the oven, he turned deliberately round and retraced his steps to Carmichael Court. The beer had reinvigorated the limbs of Mesdames Milliken and Spottle, and the two women were washing away to their heart's content.

He crept up softly to the side of his mother and placed the sixpence in her moist hand.

“You'll want some supper, mother, after all this 'ard work; here's a trifle as I've earnt.” And

then he whispered in her ear, pulling down her head gently, "Don't let it go in drink; have some victuals; you're a-wasting away like."

The washerwoman gave him a hug, and said she would do as he wished. Not until she had eaten of the cookshop viands would young Tom Spottle touch a morsel. When he did, he ate sparingly, and put by some for the morrow in a basin, though he could have devoured that and more, and still felt hungry. Tom Spottle had broken his word; but there were worse boys in St. Giles's, ay and St. James's too, that night.

Cooney's lodger had passed the proverbial Rubicon and defied the doctor's orders. He had drunk the forbidden fluid, and he felt thoroughly ashamed of himself, though his thirst was but half slaked. For it was the peculiar nature of the beer at the Blue Dragon to increase the thirst it seemed to satisfy. Artful and designing was the landlord of the Blue Dragon; cunning and deeply versed in the many tricks of his pernicious trade. In the art and mystery of sophisticating spirituous liquors, in the science of tampering with

the brewer's barrels, and increasing the quantity of his beer whilst apparently not detracting from its quality, Mr. Sopwith stood alone. Licensed victuallers of loose principles looked up to him as a marvel amongst men. Envy upset the system and aroused the bile of the Hope and Anchor opposite; whilst hatred gnawed at the vitals of the Duke of York down the street. Sopwith's liquors had the par: no gin so fiery and potent as the gin of the Blue Dragon; no beer so thick and stupefying as the heavy, heady stuff that Sopwith served to his ragged customers. They were ragged mostly. The coppers that flowed into the Blue-Dragon till came generally from the pockets of the very poor; the showy chaise and big bony black horse with which Sopwith would drive his better-half down to Richmond on a Sunday was started on the strength of the money paid him by the starveling crew who dwelt round about Carmichael Court.

There was scarcely a hollow-eyed wretch he passed on his way out into pleasanter regions that Sopwith didn't count as a customer. He

nodded familiarly to a heavy-jowled fellow leaning against a lamp-post, with the recollection fresh upon him that he had told his barman to thrust him out into the street two nights back, when the party in question had been noisy and was spending nothing. A pale little woman passed rapidly under the Roman nose of the bony black horse, and slouched quickly down a side-alley; but not too quickly for the eye of Sopwith, who threw a savage glance after his quondam customer, for she had grown squeamish all of a sudden, and taken the pledge like an idiot. Bits of boys with short pipes in their mouths, lads with the limbs of children and the faces of old men—faces which were very familiar to him, for he saw them almost daily across his counter, lounging on the long form he had placed there for his weary patrons,—met his glance at every corner as he danced his high-stepping but funereal knacker past the little petty shops and dwellings of his neighbours and supporters. How many crimes have been committed in the name of poor Sir John Barleycorn! His reputation

suffered sadly at the hands of Sopwith, and the wholesome beverage left the bar of the retailer a very different drink from that which the sturdy draymen had lowered into the cellars of the Blue Dragon. Certainly the particular specimen of Sopwith's beer in question had only rendered the recipient more parched than ever. It had sent a thrill through his frame though, and warmed him and emboldened him to do a deed he would have shrunk from thinking of ten minutes previously. Why should he be mewed-up in the room at Cooney's? why shouldn't he be a free man for a few minutes, and take a stroll and stretch his limbs? By taking a stroll, Mr. Jennings meant in reality a turn as far as Sopwith's tavern, and no farther. By stretching his limbs he meant more beer; possibly a taste of something stronger. He seized his hat without more a-do, and went down the rickety stairs, feeling a little light-headed as he did so, and chuckling to himself at the thoughts of his own boldness.

Cooney was not a nervous man; but he started

back when he found his lodger in the shop. It was altogether so unexpected that he was unable to speak. He even left off in the middle of an elaborate piece of music which he was performing with his nails on the counter. He had finished his pipe outside, and was reading a bit of torn newspaper which had been wrapped round some article he had purchased. He had looked up, and beheld his mysterious lodger, and now sat staring at him speechless, and with his big oblivious eyes distended to their fullest width.

“Coming back ag’in soon,” said Jennings, as he passed out into the street, leaving his landlord staring helplessly about him. Jennings had mistrusted his own strength; and when he found himself in the crowded noisy street, he staggered and almost fell up against the post of Cooney’s shop-door. He had fancied himself as strong as a lion, and had paced his room like a tiger panting to be out in the broad jungle; but now that he found himself free, he felt weak and tremulous, and his big knees gave under him, and he walked on slowly and with difficulty, his right hand held

out in a somewhat helpless manner, and his brain all in a whirl. But he found his way to Sopwith's very soon. The bar of the Blue Dragon was crowded with customers, and the noise was confusing, whilst very little air came in through the swing-door to cool the close and reeking atmosphere. Sopwith, in his shirt-sleeves and not a bit proud, was chatting with the ragged crew around him. Landlord, customers, beer-barrels, bright glasses, gas-chandeliers, green-and-gold decorations, oleaginous-haired barmaid, and every thing, suddenly melted into one heterogeneous heap, and floated for a moment before the eyes of Jennings a confused chaotic mass of distorted dirty faces and glitter, and then all was dark. Cooney's lodger had swooned.

Fits were not so very uncommon at that season of the year or in that neighbourhood, and Sopwith objected to them on principle. If he had followed the dictates of his hospitable feelings, he would have ordered his barman to put Jennings out on to the pavement, and there have left him to come round at his own convenience ;

but there were hearts more charitable than Sopwith's beating on the other side of the Blue-
Dragon bar; and the ragged women crowded
round the unconscious Jennings, and opened his
shirt-front and poured vinegar and water over
his forehead, and spoke in gentle pitying voices
that belied their repulsive looks; and presently
the burly fellow came to himself. The heat, the
noise, and his own weakness had overcome him;
but he aroused himself, and took a long pull at
something hot and strong, which made a man of
him once more. Then of course he felt bound to
treat the folks who had been so kind to him, and
he surprised Sopwith by a display of silver, then
he became more and more himself; and the nearer
he approached the normal Jennings, the more
liquor he imbibed, and an hour or so passed plea-
santly enough at the bar of the gin-palace; and
the women who had spoken to the prostrate Jen-
nings in a low voice addressed the perpendicular
Jennings in a very high one; whilst the talk, the
laughter, and the badinage were exceedingly loud
and rather unrefined. In the midst of the revelry,

however, Tom Spottle pushed his way in, and, looking hard at Jennings, shook his small head deprecatingly, and beckoned Cooney's lodger towards the door.

“You're wanted immediate,” said the lad.

“'Tain't, 'tain't *him*, is it?” asked the lodger, with a look of alarm.

“No, no, 'tain't the gent; but come along of me; you ain't no right to be here, you know.”

The strange customer paid his reckoning, and, pushing through the other customers, staggered out into the street. Tom Spottle held him up; for Jennings was tipsy, and a trifle scared at being fetched home suddenly. He entertained a dim notion of running away; but he felt dazed and stupid; and the boy held on to him, clutching him tightly in his tiny grip. The big burly fellow looked down once at the child who held him so firmly and piloted him so carefully through the swarms of people in the street, and burst into a great hoarse laugh. The little lad led him into Cooney's, and up the shaky stairs, and opening the door, left him; then sliding down the rickety

balusters, was soon out again and into Carmichael Court.

Cooney's lodger looked round the room with a drunken leer; but he gave a great wild shout of horror when his eyes met those of Mrs. Gaunt.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST FALSEHOOD.

HORACE BENTLEY was of a restless disposition, and "Sir Charles" settled upon him very heavily, kept him awake, and worried him. He was very short and sharp in his manner to Priscilla; and she generally felt it a relief when he went out. He scowled so at a Miss Molloy who met him on the stairs, and curtsayed and grinned, that she stood glued to the spot like a lamp-figure; and chancing to come upon a select party of children who were playing school on the steps, he indulged in such unseemly and violent language, that the academy broke up suddenly and dispersed in much confusion. He tore the button off his shirt because his collar was a little uncomfortable, and flung his boots down stairs in a rage at their not presenting as shiny an appearance as

he wished. He ate his meals hurriedly and in silence, snapping up his mouthfuls with savage rapidity, and doing dreadful things with his knife, that in calmer moments would have made him shudder. Altogether he was about as unpleasant and untractable a young man as could be seen in a day's walk; and a little wholesome physical correction would have done him a world of good. He was behaving like a big bad boy; and really we don't know how such people should be punished, unless it be by an application of that ferule which tender-hearted parents refuse to let their children tremble at nowadays. Though there is no schoolmaster abroad to apply a wholesome chastisement to grown-up scapegraces, Dame Fortune often fills the post of corrector to these troublesome children in the world's school, where they make themselves so unpleasant, and raps them over the knuckles with a little illness, a pecuniary loss, a disappointment to their selfish views, or a good sound public wiggling, with as excellent an effect as does the retributive tutor with the wax-ended tickler. But Horace received no punishment be-

yond the tears and black looks of Priscilla ; he had no mother-in-law to keep him in his place ; no indignant big brother of his wife to tell him he should be ashamed of himself ; no obtrusive friend to make him uncomfortable by kindly hints. Conscience pricked him, and that was all ; and the wounds it left were mere scratches compared to the deep gashes from the piercing glances of the graceful Julia.

There was but one person in the world whose advice would have stood the least chance of doing him any real service. His mother might have done much, had she been in London ; but she was far away ; and Horace would blush when he remembered how seldom he had written to her, how seldom he had thought of her. He was always going to write in a day or two, whenever Priscilla suggested he should drop her a line—only a line, to say he was well and happy. Happy ! could he tell her that with truth ? Was he happy ? or was he a mistaken youth, who had committed one great error, and marred all his hopes by his rash stupidity ? If his mother had been with him, would

he have married Priscilla? Would she ever have consented to his allying himself to such an uninteresting person, one so totally opposed to him in every way? Then her family,—her common little pretentious ignorant father, her silly dowdy mother; would not the slightest knowledge of these people have served to prevent Mrs. Bentley ever consenting to her son's marriage with Priscilla? Mrs. Bentley, it was true, was only a poor little music-mistress, and that sort of thing. But how different from Priscilla; how intellectual and bright, how thoroughly alive to fun and humour; yet how keenly sensitive to the slightest pathos; what an ear for music; what a clear sweet ringing voice; what a cheery, gentle, loving, tender little woman; and how pretty still! When Horace compared his wife with his mother, it was considerably, very considerably to the disadvantage of Priscilla. He never compared Julia Mellington with Mrs. Bentley, of course; for it is the peculiarity of such natures as Horace's that they only use arguments in certain cases, and seldom quote examples that don't serve their own particular views. The end of his reflec-

tions on the subject was, that he sat down and wrote a long letter to his mother, which he did not show to Priscilla. A very grumbling and unsettling letter, calculated to make poor little Mrs. Bentley uncomfortable and unhappy, and uneasy for the future of her boy. He said life was a bore and an uphill journey, and that thorns were plentiful in his path of roses (for in the full flush of his first success he had written to his mother that he was in a fair way to fortune, &c., sending her the paper containing his contributions, with an inky line round them, as if she wouldn't have known them); that it had been a great mistake his going to Pinto's, and that the pretentious Phineas Stone had not done him such a favour by sending him there. He walked round about Priscilla, as it were, not saying any thing disparaging of her, but dimly shadowing forth his feelings, and writing a vague and disagreeable letter, which made his mother wretched. Even as he posted it, he felt that he had done something silly in sending it, and paused irresolute as to whether he should go into the shop and ask for it back, under pretence of the direction

being wrong. But the shopman was Priscilla's grocer, and knew him, and Horace always passed his tradesmen haughtily; for they were more familiar than he liked, and seemed to be quite unaware that he was a great man. So the letter went; and Horace sulked and snarled, and Priscilla pouted and said very little; and the first-floor in Little Green Street had a dismal time of it.

A few days afterwards, when Priscilla sat working away at a tiny cap, the sight of which might have roused tender feelings in the breast of any man less wrapped up in himself and less preoccupied with something else than Horace, he bounced somewhat suddenly into the room, looking more like his former self than he had done for months. He was almost radiant; the ferocity had left his eyes, and the chronic sneer departed from his lips. He went up to his wife and said something pleasant; he kissed her too, and whistled about the room quite cheerily. Priscilla was not taken-in by the sudden change. She knew better than to attribute it to a natural alteration in her husband's feelings,—a proper awakening to the

fact that he had been conducting himself reprehensibly for some time, and had at length made up his mind to turn over a new leaf and be pleasant and companionable. Indeed, it was unfortunate for Priscilla that she was a little *too* suspicious. She had been brought up amidst deception and chicanery; for her father was a quack at heart, and his life was one long pretence. Horace had given her very little trouble; for his acting was extremely bad, and she could read his inmost thoughts without any difficulty. But she had carried her disbelief of what she saw, and her habit of looking for other motives than those which were evident, to such a pitch, that she assisted towards making her own life miserable to a much greater extent than she imagined. Some people would have taken Horace's changed manner as an agreeable alteration for the better, and welcomed it accordingly. They might perhaps not have been so worldly wise as Priscilla; but they would have rendered themselves much more comfortable, and have pleased their husbands. This Priscilla did not attempt to do. She gently loosened the arm

he had placed around her, and went on with her sewing. Horace, however, was not to be put out, and he rattled away in the liveliest manner, and bantered Mrs. Molloy about her numerous progeny when he met her in the passage in the course of the evening.

“ Well, sir,” replied the landlady, with a pleasant smile, “ I only ’ope, sir, that when you haves a fam’ly, they’ll be’ave better than my plagues, which Molloy never corrects ’em; no, nor so much as ’ears ’em their spellin’, though he was brought up as a writer hisself; but was forced to give it up becos of the paint a disagreeing with his ’ealth, and is a reg’ler dickshunary as regards his letters. And talking of a fam’ly, how is your good lady this evenin’? she have been in low sperrits of late; and not to be wondered at neither.”

There was something horribly suggestive in Mrs. Molloy’s speech,—suggestive of coming cares and trials, of future expenses and responsibilities. Horace winced at her words, and coloured, and felt uncomfortable; for he felt that he was not in a proper frame of mind for a father; and the

prospect of soon becoming a parent seemed to carry with it a world of trouble and anxiety. But even now he felt more for himself than for Priscilla. His income was small and uncertain enough for two; but what would it be when additional expenses came upon them, and there were more mouths to fill, more limbs to clothe? This was a subject he was in no mood to pursue; it was too unpleasant to think about; so he threw it aside, leaving the morrow to take care of itself, which was the frequent custom of this unstable youth.

Of course there was a reason for Horace's high spirits; and of course that reason was something he did not communicate to his wife. These were the facts: he had not heard of the fair Julia for some time; he was ignorant whether she was almost well again or at death's door. He had heard nothing, for he hadn't the courage to go to the Criterion to inquire after her; and the phantom with the phaeton, the whiskers, and the title of "Sir Charles," had frightened him from calling at Miss Mellington's house. He was afraid of hearing more, of seeing more. He felt that if

he heard "Sir Charles" address Miss Mellington too familiarly, he should brain him on the spot.

But he found himself insensibly drawn in the direction of the actress's dwelling whenever he went out. At length his ignorance as to the state of her health became insupportable. He had passed the end of her street several times; but *this* time he turned down it, and found himself on her doorstep, with the knocker in his hand before he was well aware of it. Julia opened the door herself. There she was, firm as ever on her feet, radiant with apparent health, frizzy as to hair, fascinating as to manner, and wholly charming as before. She appeared delighted to see Horace, and shook him warmly by the hand. She thought he had forgotten her. How was it he had never come since? Had the unceremonious way in which that horrid "Sir Charles" had burst in offended him? Had her mother been rude? she was so odd sometimes in her manner to strangers. Had the dinginess of her apartments frightened him? What was the reason? She had been looking out for him to call and

make her laugh; but in his absence she had been constrained to get well without his assistance. Oh, yes, her foot was as well as ever; see how she could stand upon it. She wasn't going to appear till Monday week though, for Girdlestone had a new piece coming out, which was expected to do great things, and the part she was to have played was given to Miss Clarence, which was a great chance for the poor thing. Clarence was a dear creature; but what she could do with a part of fourteen lengths, when she had never done much more than utility-business, was more than Julia could prophesy. And had Mr. Bentley something else ready for her to appear in? she was so anxious to play in a piece of his; she was sure he could write just exactly to suit her;—and so on. This and much more did the fascinating damsel rattle off very glibly, before Horace could say a dozen words. But he could have sat there (for he had entered the untidy little parlour) and listened to her silvery accents for ever. Probably he *would* have sat for a considerable time, had not “Sir Charles” driven up to the door in the smart pha-

ton with the dashing horse. Julia was not in the least confused; she only shook her head with a gesture of annoyance—annoyance at the interruption, Horace thought—and beckoned through the window for the visitor to come in.

“Mr. Bentley, the author of the unfortunate farce the other night,—Sir Charles Soper, Bart., one of our great Criterion patrons.”

Julia, who introduced the two gentlemen in these words, described Sir Charles in rather a comically-bombastic manner, and she laid a ludicrous stress upon the ‘Bart.’ Horace bowed a little superciliously; the baronet nodded and said, “How do?” with a good-natured smile.

Sir Charles Soper was an amiable youth enough, without any vice, and not overloaded with brains. He drawled his words out slowly, and hadn’t the least objection to being joked. He had plenty of money, and was very fond of the society of “theatricals,” as he termed people connected with the stage. He took a great interest in the fair Julia, and it was whispered that he wanted to marry her; but he was so general in his attentions, so

liberal in the matter of boxes on benefit-nights, subscriptions in cases of illness, and so cosmopolitan in his patronage, that people were divided in their opinions; and when Julia's friends settled that she would assuredly be Lady Soper some day, her detractors laughed the assertion to scorn. But no one said a word against her fair fame; her bitterest professional enemies stopped short when it came to a question of character.

"How's foot?" asked the baronet languidly.

"Gracious me, Charley, do speak English," replied Julia. "Do you mean how's *the* foot? What on earth do you leave out the 'the' for?"

Sir Charles threw an amused glance at Horace. He delighted in being blown up by Julia.

"Don't she bully a fellow? Did she bully you over your farce?" asked the baronet.

"No," cut in Julia. "Mr. Bentley speaks so that one can understand him. If you're inquiring after my game leg, it's all right again."

Sir Charles Soper was not a brilliant talker. He often said he would back himself to break down against any man. Having inquired after

the fair Julia's foot, the yellow-haired baronet found himself at the end of his conversational tether, and could do nothing for some time but stare. Finding eventually that this became monotonous, he took temporary refuge in whistling. Meanwhile Julia and Horace were rattling away about theatrical and general subjects. Horace felt on his mettle before Sir Charles, and brought all his weapons of talk into tremendous play, keeping Miss Mellington in an almost uninterrupted state of laughter, and producing upon the aristocratic visitor much the same effect as if he had brought out a pocketful of fireworks, a musical-box, and a steam-engine, and set them all going at once.

The baronet had a big mouth and big eyes,—he came of a lumpish family,—and ran large generally. But Julia had never seen his eyes or his mouth distended to such an extent as they were during Horace's visit. At first he stared with a look of blank amazement, which, however, became gradually one of intense wonderment and admiration. He was dazzled, but delighted. He had never heard any thing like it. He had read

things in books, you know ; Sidney Smith, and Theodore Hook, and those fellows, you know ; but always fancied 'em inventions ; but here was a fellow, confound it ! talking like a fellow in a play, you know. Soper's friends were, for the most part, apt to consider talking a bore, and expressed their opinions in as few words as possible. With them the new *prima donna* who was driving musical amateurs crazy was "not bad ;" the crack Academy picture of the season was "rather jolly ;" the last horrific romance of that popular frightener, Mr. O'Ghoul, which stirred the hair of the whole novel-reading world, was "clever, and all that ;" they were addicted to lounging about with their heels higher than their heads, indulging in the strongest cigars and the mildest "chaff ;" they dressed faultlessly ; and did nothing all day, with a steady application that was highly praiseworthy.

"I say, Judy," said Sir Charles, during a pause in the conversation,—he always called Julia 'Judy,'—"I say, Judy, I've got an idea."

"Have you, Charley ?" replied Julia. "Welcome, little stranger."

“Come, I say, I’ve heard that in some piece, I know.” And Sir Charles waggled his head knowingly, and winked at Horace, and chuckled a good deal for some time.

“What is it, when you’ve done giving that highly lifelike imitation of an insane cockatoo?” asked Julia.

“Well, a dinner, you know—Richmond—Star and Garter—in honour of your recovery. I’ll get Batts and Codrington, and we’ll have a jolly time.”

“Now you know my weakness, Sir Charles Soper, Bart., and it’s not fair to tempt me. I have a passion for dinners at the Star and Garter, and the very waiters know me by sight there. Then Ma always will eat mayonnaise, and I’ve such a time of it with her for a week after. Besides, if I go before I act again, people will say I’ve been shamming, and I don’t know what. No, thankee, Charley; it’s very good of you, and I’m very much obliged to you; but it can’t be done, as Giggley always says of a new piece.”

Sir Charles looked really cut up. He was one of the best-natured fellows living, and he had quite looked forward to giving Julia a treat after her illness. He looked round the room, unable to find an appropriate reply to Julia's objections; but he could think of nothing to say. He had some thousands a-year, good health, and many mundane blessings; but he would have given up a great deal if he could only have talked like Horace. She wouldn't have refused *him*, thought the baronet; or if she had, the agreeable young Rattle would soon have dispersed her objections to the winds. "Well, 'pon my life now, don't see it. Won't have any mayonnaise; so your mother can't get ill: bother what people say—that's my opinion; isn't it yours, Mr. Bentley? isn't 'bother what people say' your opinion?"

"Most decidedly," replied Horace, smiling.

"There," renewed Sir Charles, quite fortified by Horace's agreeing with him; "there, Judy, Mr. Bentley says 'bother what people say.' I hope you'll give me pleasure of your company, Mr. Bentley, 'm sure."

Horace looked a little confused at this.

“Nice fellows, and you’ll be more than welcome ; any friend of Judy’s—”

“I’m much obliged to you,” replied Horace, colouring a good deal ; “but really I don’t—”

“Come now,” exclaimed Miss Mellington, suddenly, “if you’ll go, I’ll go,—there !”

“That’s bargain, bravo !” exclaimed Sir Charles, with a positive approach to excitement. Horace coloured more than ever, and he felt his heart thumping. What could he say but that he should be charmed ? and Julia seemed glad of the prospect ; and as for Sir Charles, he insisted upon shaking Horace by the hand, and offered to drive him home. Horace would as soon have thought of being driven up the Duke of York’s column as to Little Green Street ; so he stammered out an excuse about business in the City. And after settling as to when the dinner should be, how they were to meet, and other relevant matters, he bade the baronet and Miss Mellington adieu. All this was the cause of his cheerfulness and good temper when he reached his home, where his wife was

waiting for him, sewing away at the little white cap.

Horace had never been to a dinner of the kind to which Sir Charles had asked him. During the *Catch-'em-alive-oh* days the proprietor had given his staff a banquet; but it was of a plebeian character, consisting of pork-chops as the *pièce de resistance*, and settled speedily into pipes and gin-and-water. He had heard of the Star and Garter, but had never been inside it; and he was pleased beyond measure at the prospect of the whole affair. On the morning of the day he rose early and scanned the weather. There are people who can enjoy themselves in any weather, and who feel as charitable on a chilly day, when the east-wind whistles and the dust rises to one's eyes in spiral columns, as they do when the air is balmy, the heavens serene, and the country birds pipe up merrily as they hop under the hedgerows, and the town sparrows twitter along the housetops quite happy. Horace was not one of these; he was peculiarly subject to those "skyey influences" which act so strongly on the English tempera-

ment. When he saw that the day promised to be a glorious one, he gave vent to his delight in a loud "By Jove, what a morning!" and drew a long breath, as smoke-dried Londoners do when they catch the first glimpse of the welcome sea.

"I'm so glad it's a fine day ;" said Priscilla.

Horace looked round sharply at her. Lately she had caught up a little of her husband's satirical style, and could out-sneer him when it came to a question as to which should be most disagreeable. But there was nothing suggestive of a double meaning in her tone or her look.

"And why are you glad, my dear?" asked Horace, who was tying a new neckerchief with extreme care.

"Because I've a fancy for a drive-out to-day. You've often said you would treat me to one ; and as I feel languid and weak, and am rather tired of staring continually across the street, I don't think it would be a great extravagance if you gave your wife a drive 'round the Park.'"

Horace felt very uncomfortable. He was not good at excuses on the spur of the moment. His

wife seldom had a treat; but then, as he argued to himself, neither had he, and he was the "bread-winner," the one who required it the most.

"To-morrow I'll take you out, my dear; but to-day I—a—"

"Never mind," replied Priscilla, tightening her thin lips, "I can do without it, I daresay."

A very awkward pause after this. Horace soon set to his work, and made believe to be writing very hard, though he was thinking of the coming treat all the time, and walking to the window every ten minutes to look at the weather. It was arranged that the party were to meet at Richmond, and have a good long evening; so Horace brushed his natty new hat, and drew on his tightly-fitting gloves, and made ready to start out upon his day of stolen enjoyment. Priscilla showed no curiosity as to his movements, she sat placidly sewing in a calm way, exhibiting no interest in her husband's occasional remarks, which were of a disjointed character and upon trivial subjects. A very close observer might have noticed a very slight tremulousness in her lip and a

jerky sharpness in her manner of sewing; but Horace was a good deal occupied with himself, anathematising his tailor for cutting his sleeves awkwardly, and declaring he would go to his bootmaker and kick him with his own productions, and blustering about a good deal. He felt awkward at going out, and wanted, if possible, to get up a dispute, and retire hastily under cover of a sharp quarrel. Priscilla wouldn't be aroused to any outward show of irritation, though she was smouldering within like a small volcano. Just before Horace left the room he turned to his wife and said :

“ Oh, Priscilla, I don't suppose I shall be in to dinner to-day. I think of going down to see Tatlow at Tottenham; Sperling and myself have a notion for a new periodical we want him to take up. Good-by, my dear;” and he pressed his lips to his wife's cold cheek, the lips that had so clumsily fashioned the first lie of his married life.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN COONEY'S FIRST-FLOOR.

MRS. GAUNT stared hard at Mr. Jennings for some moments without uttering a word. The burly lodger was scared and trembling, and for a few minutes seemed scarcely to know where he was. Mrs. Gaunt kept her sharp eyes fixed upon him with a cold stern gaze, her bushy iron-gray eyebrows contracted, and her hands crossed upon her lap. She sat bolt upright on the rickety chair, and looked as solemn and inscrutable as the sphynx. Jennings was shaking in evident alarm, and seemed to be meditating a retreat, for he occasionally threw an anxious glance at the half-open door. Presently the visitor strode up to it and closed it, turning the key in the lock, and then returned to her seat and her former position. The lodger watched her silently. At length he

gave a big sigh, which seemed to come from the deepest recesses of his overcharged bosom, and drawing his hand across his eyes, as if to collect himself, grunted something which was almost inaudible, but sounded very like a malediction. Perhaps a more unpleasant-looking couple than the pair who were sitting at that moment in Cooney's first-floor had seldom been seen in the "furnished apartments" of the marine-store dealer. Over the coarse repulsive features of the man there had gradually spread a deep angry flush, that made his face look very fearful; and there was a bulldog determination about his mouth that would have even awed Tom Spottle,—a look that Jennings's recent acquaintances had never seen, but that Mrs. Gaunt was familiar with and didn't mind. She too had assumed a more defiant appearance; and nursing one leg and folding her arms like a man, sat back and peered beneath her heavy brows at her companion with just the faintest indication of a smile upon her lip. It was a question for some time which should speak first. The housekeeper eventually broke the silence, and said in a cold harsh

grating half-whisper, "So, Michael, I have found out your hiding-place, you see."

The man started as he heard the familiar tones of his visitor's voice, and cleared his throat before he answered her.

"Who's hiding?"

Mrs. Gaunt gave a short scornful laugh. "You can't keep a secret from me, Michael; and never could. Your term's not up, and *you're* not the kind of man to get a ticket-of-leave. Catch you cringing and throwing up your eyes and talking piously to the chaplain, and doing the civil by the authorities. More like to get up disturbances and fly at your warder, or whatever he's called; and get your term lengthened. You're like those savage brutes that get all the fiercer with being chained up. Prison-discipline and poor living wouldn't soften *you*, Michael."

The man looked more repulsive than ever as an evil grin broke over his face, and he put his hand to his mouth and whispered hoarsely:

"You're right, Jane Lyon; I'm no ticket-of-leaver. I waited for years afore I got my chance;

but I got it at last; ha! ha! I got it at last, and I gave the whole lot of 'em the slip. Two of us concocted it together; but my mate he broke his neck, *he* did, a-trying to follow me, and I got clean away."

The fellow chuckled to himself at the recollection of his companion's failure; and the bad cough, taking him rather suddenly and severely in the midst of his laughter, left him panting and out of breath, with his hand pressed to his fastly-beating heart, and the tears pouring from his eyes. As he looked up, temporarily exhausted, the eye of his companion seemed to sparkle with a look of triumph,—seemed to taunt him with her superior strength, with her secure position compared to his, the poor skulking varlet, with his fearful cough, that seemed to rend his brawny chest, and leave him prostrate.

"What do you want here?" he suddenly exclaimed, jerking up his bull head fiercely.

"It's not so strange a woman should wish to see her husband after so long a separation, Michael."

“See her husband!” laughed the lodger; “a pleasant visit, ain’t it? A pleasant place to come to, eh? and nice agreeable recollections we’ve got to talk over, eh? eh, woman, *eh?*” and he half rose with a fierce scowl and his fist clenched.

“Pho, Michael Lyon! you don’t cow me with your big words. Sit down and don’t be a fool, unless you wish to nurse that cough of yours between four stone walls. You’ve good cause to recollect that I can give back as good as I get. I’ve done it before, and I’ll do it now, if I’m put to it.”

Mrs. Gaunt brought down her strong fist upon the rickety table as she said this, and the physic-bottles rattled again.

“You got me lagged, Jane Lyon, like a wild cat, as you always was,” said the man fiercely, but in a low voice. It was very evident that he feared his wife, for he had shrunk and looked behind him with a shudder as she threatened him.

“I gave you up to justice because you were a brute, and I went in fear of my life of you; not for what you actually did. The crime that convicted you was your own affair. I could have

stood your treatment of me ; but when you raised your heavy fist and struck down your child,—your handsome child, that was the only thing I cared a bit about, the only creature I had a tender thought for, or an atom of love,—when you struck her down in cold blood, and marked her for life, I made up my mind you should pay for it,—pay for it in bitter hard work, which you always hated in your idle heart, in chained limbs and scanty food ; and you *have* paid for it, with broken health and strength, and fear and trembling lest they should come and drag you back,—drag you back from your drink and the idle loafing life you love, Michael Lyon.”

The woman had pushed back her bonnet while she had said, and some of her grizzled hair came tumbling about her neck, and she rocked herself backwards and forwards as she spoke with a wild rapidity of utterance, and a voice thick with rage at the recollection of the past.

“Marked her for life !” exclaimed the lodger.
“Much harm it did her ! Ain’t she married to a live lord ; ain’t she a member of the aristocracy,

a-moving about in the drawing-rooms of the great folks, every body talking of her beauty and envying her? Don't she dress in silks and satins, and gold and jew'elry, and have powdered-headed servants standing behind her chair, handing of her dainties on gold and silver dishes? don't she ride about the street in a great splashing carriage with a coronet on it, with blood-horses and glittering harness? Don't tell *me*; I know all about it, woman; and here's her father a hiding and skulking in a miserable garret as one of her kitchen wenches wouldn't let a parent live in; here's her father, her own flesh and blood, not allowed enough to keep body and soul together,—dying, mayhap, in a den like this,—all because he was led into crime, and had bad associates, and ill-luck, whilst his child's a-flaunting it with dukes and marquises within a stone's-throw of him."

The lodger's voice had become broken, and his eyes had filled with tears long before the finish of his speech. Now he leant his head upon his arm and sobbed and groaned, whilst his big frame shook with hysterical emotion.

Mrs. Gaunt's heart was not touched at the sight of her broken-down husband, and she sat patiently enough until he came to himself again.

"You seem to know a good deal about your daughter," she said, when the fellow's fit was over, and he was wiping his eyes with a coarse red handkerchief.

"Know it! Who could help knowing it? Ain't the fashionable papers full of her? don't every one talk of her grand doings?"

"A deal of fashionable gossip goes on about this neighbourhood, I should think," sneered the housekeeper.

"Well, that may be, or it mayn't, for the matter of that," replied Lyon, with a sulky shake of the head. "Anyways, I know what I know; and a clever woman you always was, Jane Lyon, and no mistake neither."

The muscles about the housekeeper's mouth relaxed slightly. She was vain of her own tact, and the compliment pleased her.

"How did you do it, eh?" asked the convict in a whisper, with a smile and a general lighting

up of his repulsive face, as he edged the chair nearer to his wife, in pleased expectancy of the coming revelation.

“I did nothing. Lord Glenburn fell in love with the beautiful face you did your best to destroy. The proud nobleman bent his knee to her, and she accepted him by my advice.”

“By your advice, eh? ha, ha! good, good, Jane Lyon! A clever woman always, always!” How the burly fellow chuckled, to be sure, over the mental picture of the great nobleman suing for the hand of the convict’s daughter!

“I always said I’d live to see her a grand lady,” said the housekeeper; “and I have.”

“Ah, and a rich lady too, I warrant,” said Lyon, with an eager glance.

“Well enough, well enough,” was the reply.

“Then I’ll go and see her, I’ll go and see her,” said the man, rising with a wild look, and buttoning his coat.

“I would,” calmly observed the housekeeper. “It will give Mr. Ledbitter much pleasure to see you at his master’s house.”

The fellow sank on to his seat in a second. The magic name of the valet had acted like a charm, and there was not an atom of the bully now visible in the craven countenance of the escaped felon.

“A nice man Ledbitter, eh?” said the house-keeper, rocking her chair back, and looking at her husband with half-closed eyes he dared not meet; “a re-markably nice pleasant person.”

The convict looked round the room to make sure the ubiquitous valet wasn't present, and grinding his heel upon the floor muttered an angry curse, coupling it with his patron's name.

“How did he come to find you out?” asked the visitor.

“Mere chance. I wasn't myself when he came across me at a public-house close by where he lived. I was half muddled when I heard some one speak of a lady just for all the world like my daughter, with a three-cornered scar on her left cheek and all. I lost my senses and talked at random, and Ledbitter—leastways he calls himself Johnson when he comes here—he stuck to me and

give money, took me a lodging, and got me a doctor, and came and see me when I had the fever, and let out every thing. He's never threatened me straightforward; but he's dropped hints as have well nigh drove me mad; told me in a roundabout way as a word from him would send me to the hulks for life; and smiled at me when he said as he'd never split, so long as I acted square, and held my tongue and kep' quiet. Smiled he has when he's said this, mind you; smiled like some grinning beast as one dreams about. Ugh! his very name sets me a-shivering, like as if I was palsied."

He shook himself violently as he said this, as if he were trying to throw off the oppressive influence of the man he dreaded so. Mrs. Gaunt—for such we will continue to call her—was evidently pleased to find her husband in this frame of mind, and she nodded her head gravely, and drew her hand over her cruel mouth, and was plainly gratified at what she had heard.

"Yes, Michael Lyon, there's no doubt but he *could* send you to the hulks for life; not the least;"

and Mrs. Gaunt seemed quite to relish the misery and dread her remarks caused her husband.

“But he won't, mind you!” suddenly exclaimed the convict, after a pause; “he won't! He'll act square and honest, he says; and when he's done with me, he'll see me safe away to foreign parts with plenty to live on,—plenty; that's the bargain, mind.”

“Suppose he doesn't stick to his bargain; suppose he gets into a scrape himself; for you don't know what his object is in thus keeping you here under his thumb. Perhaps he's playing some dangerous underhand game himself, and is only using you as a tool; and suppose he leaves you to your fate if things go wrong. Suppose he's lured you on only to let you down, after all, eh? Suppose he left you to your fate at last, clever Michael Lyon?”

The woman leaned her elbows on the table as she said this, and peered closely into her husband's pale face.

“Suppose he did that, woman! If he did,” muttered the man through his clenched teeth,

“weak as I am, I’d hold on to his throat like a dog until he dropped dead at my feet.”

The housekeeper was not in the habit of flinching, but she shrank back a little scared at the convict’s expression as he breathed this threat. There was a strange expression in his eye that awed her more than his fierce looks, which, indeed, she cared little about. She placed her hand over her face, and was silent for some seconds.

“That man’s a mystery,” she said presently; “a mystery. There’s more in the whole business than meets the eye,” she continued musingly to herself. “Perhaps he has some claim on Glenburn, and means to make a market of his silence some day. My lord may fall out with his wife ten times a-day; but when it comes to a question of pride; when the secret of his wife’s low birth is known; when he finds she is the daughter of a—no, no; I won’t bear thinking of.”

The housekeeper rose and paced up and down the room, regardless of her husband, who sat watching her with a dogged frown, but with a

curious look upon his face ; for he was beginning now to wonder how his wife had found him out ; and mingled with his anxiety to learn this was the uncomfortable reflection that his hiding-place was not as secure as he had fondly imagined, and that other and less welcome visitors even than his wife might drop in upon him unannounced some afternoon. What guarantee had he that Ledbitter would stick to his word ? If the valet chose to throw him over, what could he do but submit ? As the possibility of such behaviour rose to his mind, he felt the perspiration start in big beads to his forehead ; and he began to wonder how it was he had stayed so long in so uncomfortable a position. But where could he have gone, where could he go now ? for his wife's remarks had sadly shaken his belief in the good faith of the disinterested Ledbitter. He could not move ; and if his wife were to assist him (which he strongly doubted), the man who had considered him so valuable a link in the chain being forged for somebody would not let him slip away if it could be helped ; and though he knew his wife to be a

clever woman, she was nothing compared to Led-bitter. They lived in the same house, and Lyon felt certain the valet would worm the convict's whereabouts out of his master's mother-in-law in no time. His master's mother-in-law! It was the first time the fact had struck him that he was father-in-law to a peer.

"Does he come here often?" asked the housekeeper.

"Oh, he comes often enough, for that matter," was the reply.

"Late?"

"Generally of an evening."

"Always alone?"

"Yes; once or twice at first he brought a doctor with him."

"Humph!" and Mrs. Gaunt became absorbed in her own reflections.

It was a lucky thing for the housekeeper that her husband's term of penal servitude had not expired, and that he was in mortal fear of reincarceration, else she would scarcely have sat within reach of his revengeful grasp as safely

as she did that evening. But the fellow who would most certainly have wreaked his vengeance on the woman who had betrayed him, had he been free, though he had known the almost certain result of the deed, was overawed by the unfinished term of imprisonment which hung over him, and it seemed to damp the deadly determination which had burnt in his fierce breast through the long hours of his confinement; the determination to visit a fearful vengeance on his wife so soon as he was again free. He hated her bitterly in his heart; but it was a craven heart; and it beat doubly quick when he thought of the single hair which held the weapon that hung above him. Besides, in his clumsy dunder-headed way, he stumbled upon the reflection that in his present helpless state, his wife might be something more tangible to depend upon than his patron Ledbitter. She came like a second string to his bow, as it were; and he remembered how, once on a time, she had shown a kind of rough liking for him. It was something like the affection of a polar-bear, perhaps; but when he had

first married her, she wasn't quite the stern repellent creature she looked now. He remembered her when she was a buxom person in her way; always unbending and bushy-eyebrowed, but not a bad-looking woman, although a strapper. He fancied, notwithstanding all that had happened, that there might be somewhere in the corner of her heart a lingering spark of the old liking for him, which pity for his present broken-down condition and past ill-fortune might set once more a-glow. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye as these thoughts suggested themselves; but he only saw the back of her big hand, for her face was partially hidden in it; and as the hand was a larger one than falls to the lot of most ladies, a very considerable quantity of Mrs. Gaunt's countenance *was* hidden in consequence. It was strange; he had longed for the day when he should meet his wife, should have her in his power—a power he had meant to use, too, please good fortune should give him the opportunity. In the long sleepless hours of the night, during the monotonous toilsome days,

alone or amongst his crime-stained brother workmen, he had cherished this one hope. Yet here he was with the woman beside him, close to his hand, and he felt more afraid of her than he had when he heard her telling the police where he lay, trembling and skulking, with a white face, and no nerve to use the knife he held clutched in his clammy grasp. He had yearned for this hour; but nature had stamped him coward at his birth, and the brawny villain sat beside his wife with a palpitation of the heart, and trembling legs that wouldn't have carried him a dozen yards.

Meanwhile, what strange wild thoughts were chasing each other through the busy brain of the bold unscrupulous woman who sat close by him! What a whirl of doubt, and dread, and plotting, and confusion worse confounded—what a chaos was there behind the broad forehead of Mrs. Gaunt! But through all the medley mass her mental eye was firmly fixed on one object. She never lost sight of it for a second. Ledbitter's destruction—that must be compassed at all risks. Whilst he lived to work out his mysterious plan

of vengeance, or whatever it might be, there would be no peace for Mrs. Gaunt; no certainty in the proud position she had won for her daughter; nothing but a hideous threatening black cloud, which might burst at any time, and blast the prospects of the handsome girl, who was the only thing the housekeeper had one touch of affection for, and whom she loved with the love some wild creature feels for its young, and who will battle to its last breath in defence of its offspring. She was a rash headstrong woman, as we have before said, and she felt herself no match for Ledbitter in cunning. He had long ago beaten her at that. He knew every thing,—her name, her relationship to his mistress, her husband's past crime and present condition. The selfish admiration which Glenburn had imagined to be love, and which had been a nearer approach to that sublime passion than any previous sentiment which had warmed the breast of the nobleman, had somehow flickered away into a feeble remnant of the former flame, and the fretful peer seemed ill at ease with his handsome

wife ; and the shortsighted girl wouldn't play her cards dextrously, but seemed to take a silly pleasure in thwarting her techy partner. There was much of the mother's obstinacy in Lady Glenburn ; and some of the bull-necked stupidity of the father too was evident in the escaped convict's daughter, who drove her carriage, and ordered those about her, who would have turned from her in utter scorn had they known her antecedents. Mrs. Gaunt's blood seemed to freeze within her veins as she thought of this. She could have wept and screamed in very rage as she remembered how helpless she was, how utterly she was at the mercy of her arch-enemy. She felt like a fierce and vicious horse that, with its strong knee strapped up, lies panting but powerless at the feet of its smiling conqueror. Oh, how she yearned for a glimpse of some means to silence the hateful Ledbitter for ever ! She could think of nothing. There all the while sat her heavy-jowled husband, saying not a word, but staring blankly at the wall with his large dull eyes ; and he the cause of all the mischief, the

poor fool who entertained a dim notion that his wife was thinking tenderly of days gone by, touched by the sight of his hollow cheeks and the sound of the cough that shook him so. Presently she spoke, spoke in an undertone, and without looking at her husband; spoke half-musically, scarcely listening it seemed to the other's replies.

“A low lot live about here, I suppose?”

“Well, yes; they ain't the most respectable class, as a rule.”

“Wouldn't think much of murder, for instance.”

The man looked up sharply, but his wife's eyes were fixed on space, and her arms were folded.

“Mayhap not, if the swag was certain, and no partickler risk.”

“That's a pleasant-looking court you look into. Nice honest folks live there, I should say.”

“As honest as their neighbours, for the matter of that. The police don't trouble that court much, though. They go down two together when they *do* go.”

“ Ah, desperate characters, eh ? ”

“ Apt to fight when the drink's in 'em, like a many more. ”

“ You were a desperate one, once on a time, Michael Lyon. ” The woman turned and faced her husband.

“ I'm much the same as ever I was, ” replied the lodger with a short laugh, for he felt uncomfortable at the turn his visitor's remarks had taken. He couldn't bear that continual reference to the past.

“ Much the same as ever, eh ? ” said the house-keeper, drawing her head back to take a comprehensive scrutiny of her husband's figure, and looking at him critically with her eyes half closed. “ No, not quite that, I think, Michael Lyon. You've lost your bold look ; you may frown, but the old look's gone, gone ; you've got a stoop too, though you're straightening yourself for the moment,—a decided stoop. You look worn and ill ; and your hands are white and delicate compared to what they were. That cough troubles you dreadfully too,—leaves you weak, I daresay. No,

you're not much the same as ever, by any manner of means, Michael Lyon,—by a-ny man-ner of means." And she shook her head slowly as she dwelt upon the last words.

Perhaps the housekeeper had selected her expressions with a view to irritating her husband; if so, she had succeeded; for her slow manner of speaking and the subject-matter alike galled him; a fierce grin broke over his face, and he drummed with his fingers on the table in evident vexation; for your burly invalid hates to be told that his illness has permanently damaged his iron frame. Lyon was aware he had no brains, but he had always felt proud of his muscles. Mrs. Gaunt knew his weak point, and she fired away at the heel of the burly Achilles remorselessly.

"Let me see, you must be a good age too now. You're some years older than I am, and I'm no chicken."

"Never mind how old I am. I'm a bit down now, for I've had an illness that would have settled many a strong man; but wait, a bit, wait a bit; I'm a match for most of 'em now; they'd better

bring a posse when they want to lay a hand on me, for I'd mark a few afore I gave in, down as I am." He looked round with a savage and defiant laugh, and half rose from his seat. The cough took him however, and he had to give-in to it. It was a most annoying cough that, and came upon him at the most awkward times. He wrestled and fought with it, but it generally got the better of him.

"That's on the lungs, Michael Lyon," said the visitor quietly, as her husband sat with his hand at his side trying to recover his breath. In an instant down went his hand, whilst he shook his other fist angrily at her.

"What's the odds, if it is? Keep your opinions to yourself. It's little you'd do towards relieving it, if it was killing me by inches. What do you want here at all, I should like to know? You've done me enough mischief to satisfy the most malicious, I should think; you might let me alone now."

The fellow looked round with an expression almost piteous, and his voice was broken.

"I've come here to make you an offer, Michael

Lyon; to propose terms. I've no wish to hand you back to your friends; and if you do what I want you, you may nurse that cough in a warm climate with a competency."

The convict began to stare at his wife with a more intelligent and less ferocious look than his face had hitherto worn throughout the interview. He could not even now refrain though from looking behind, to see that Ledbitter wasn't lurking at the back of his chair. Mrs. Gaunt edged her chair nearer to her husband, and clutched his arm.

"He's got you hard and fast, Michael Lyon, this smug-faced fellow with a hollow smile and a soft voice; he's got me hard and fast as well, and our child—all of us! He's burrowing beneath the earth, and laying his plans as a sapper lays his powder under the enemy's works; and some day, when it's the proper moment, the grand blow-up will come. It will be too late for us to act then. The world will know who we are. Lady Glenburn will be spoken of as the adventuress, the daughter of her housekeeper and a convicted felon."

Cooney's lodger turned white with rage, and

his wife felt his arm shake with passion beneath her firm grasp.

“If he raised a finger to hurt that girl, I’d tear him limb from limb!” he hissed through his closed teeth.

“Does he look like a man who would ever have a fit?” said the housekeeper in a colloquial tone, letting go the arm of her husband. He stared at her, for these sudden transitions were confusing, and he began to suspect that his wife’s mind was affected.

“Don’t you think that his short neck and full habit of body are a little suggestive of apoplexy?” She asked this with a less flippant air, and her husband was more puzzled than ever.

“Mayhap it is; I never thought about it. I’m thick-necked and heavy-built myself; but I’ve never had nothing of the sort.”

“No,” continued Mrs. Gaunt, with her eye fixed on the ceiling; “but people of that kind *do* have fits, and generally at very awkward times, and without previous warning.” She turned her gaze quickly from the ceiling to her husband’s

countenance; and as she did so, his face lighted up with a sudden flush, and he was about to blurt forth an eager avowal that he read her meaning, when she stopped him by a gesture with her big hand, and he sat and stared at her with a kind of awe.

The talk from this time until the woman's departure was low and earnest, the housekeeper speaking rapidly in an undertone, and the man occasionally chiming-in with a hoarse whisper. Presently she rose and left quietly, and without shaking her husband's hand; but placing her finger on his arm with a cautioning gesture, which he evidently understood. She passed out into the street with a grim "good-night" to Cooney, who grunted, as was his custom. When the marine-store dealer peeped into the lodger's room an hour later, he found him with his head resting on his hand, wrapped in thought. Little Tom Spottle looking round later still, found him in the same position, thinking—thinking of the best and safest way to do a certain dark and dreadful thing.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DINNER AT RICHMOND.

THERE are few better things in life than a dinner at Richmond, Greenwich, or Blackwall, provided of course that the party be well selected, and the day fine. A dull day will destroy the charms of either place. The “finest view in Europe,” as the Russian Emperor termed it, looks murky and miserable through a driving rain, and the Isle of Dogs is not the most picturesque prospect in itself; whilst Blackwall is—well, it’s *not* a lively place, let people say what they will; and after a good dinner there, people have been known to say very startling things. But in the light of a summer’s day we subscribe most willingly to the somewhat autocratical dictum of the imperial critic; we also smile blandly upon the canine island opposite the Ship, and are ready to go any

lengths in praise of that celebrated river-side suburb, whose wall is black, and whose bait is white, and the titles of whose hotels remind one of many pleasant hours. The meteorological Mrs. Glasse has laid it down as the first principle of "outing" in England, that you must "first catch your sunshine." The rays of the cheering luminary are indispensable to any thing like *al-fresco* pleasuring in our variable clime. It warms and cheers and brightens, and is altogether half the battle. Most decidedly, to carry out the recipe of the respected lady we have alluded to, when we dine at Richmond, at Greenwich, or at Blackwall, the day as well as the dinner should be "served hot." In the first place, people are better-tempered in warm weather. When it is agreeably mild, they partake of the geniality of the atmosphere; and when the heat becomes oppressive, they are too languid to say ill-natured things, or take up unpleasant remarks sharply. The jolly round sun is a constant reproach to the fretful, and presides in the sky like a genial host smiling down a welcome upon the world. The very beg-

gar beneath the hedge makes a banquet of his bread and cheese with an approach to something like enjoyment, when the clear blue ceiling of a summer sky meets his wearied gaze as he shades his eyes with his brown hand to take a long look at the singing, soaring group of skylarks carolling away in a tiny crowd,—little specks of song on the rich blue roof above him. In the foulest lanes and back slums of the black metropolis, where the sun's rays show up the dirt and squalor cruelly, they also season the poor scant meal with a dash of cheerfulness unknown in the nipping chilly days of dismal winter. Old snuffy querulous clerks, who devour their dull solitary dinners at the nearest cookshop—lonely in the midst of so many, isolated in a crowd of chattering, knife-and-fork-rattling, beer-imbibing, lip-smacking brethren—prop their penny paper against the cruet-stand, and eye their plate of steaming stuff with a pleasant pucker of their shrivelled lips, as a gleam of the glorious sun comes flashing in upon the tin cover of the potatoes and spreads a halo round the battered pewter. Besides, doesn't

the dinner keep hot longer in warm weather than in cold; and isn't that alone an overwhelming argument for the summer? There are injudicious managers of big fish dinners who place every thing on the table at once, and dazzle the eye of the diner by a sudden display of two-dozen different dishes. It is in vain to suggest the possibility of speedy ruination to at least half the things on the table; the water-souchet may become lukewarm, the turbot may turn tepid, the salmon settle into a semi-soddened mass of half-cold fish, and the only article decently hot may prove to be the devilled bait; but threats and arguments are alike unavailing, and the head-waiter leaves you to your fate and your fish with lofty and irritating indifference. In such a case, who can overvalue the advantage of a "broiler"? Eat a mutton-chop with the thermometer below zero, and tremble as, despite the hot plate and your own haste, you watch the rapidly-congealing fat of that succulent dainty so few can cook. There are persons who declare they cannot eat in hot weather. Poor creatures! There are others

who prefer closed curtains and the lamps lighted, who like to shiver over their soup; and who, as they hear their champagne-glass rattling against their teeth, and wonder whether their nose is as blue as their opposite neighbour's, are wilfully blind to the fact that the dinner is a dismal duty, and the company as cold as the *entrées*. How different is a dinner in the summer, with the windows open and every one pleasant! Why the very "pop" of a champagne-cork has a different sound in summer. Moselle cup is not so bad a beverage in the hot months, and the light wines are luxuries when they sparkle in the sunlight; but poor stuff when the lamps are lighted, and the dark curtains and solemn dulness suggest port-wine and prosiness, when the dessert is all dry fruits, and a draught fit to cut one in pieces whistles round the nape of your neck every time John opens the door. In short, people dine in the summer; in winter they meet together and feed.

It was specially one of these "dining" days when Horace started from Little Green Street, Soho, on his pleasant journey to Richmond. The

sun shone, the sky was cloudless, and there was just enough air stirring to detract from the sultriness which would have been otherwise oppressive. The shabby little houses in the dull street where Horace dwelt seemed to him to look even shabbier than of yore; the children whom the sun had brought out like flies appeared grimier than ever; the little miserable shops looked mean and abject in the extreme, as he passed superciliously along the pavement, his gorgeous attire attracting general notice, and not a little comment of a ribald nature, from the small fry in the street. To the neighbours Horace was a splendid mystery, and Mrs. Molloy rather increased than allayed the general anxiety touching his pursuits, income, and prospects, by hints of an indefinite nature, and much head-shaking and eye-blinking when his name was mentioned. For conceited, stuck-up, supercilious, and haughty as she was accustomed to designate Horace a dozen times a-day, the good simple creature was in her heart greatly proud of her lodger, and not a little afraid of him. He was altogether different from any one she had

ever seen. As to comparing him with the young men who lodged opposite, or next door, it was ridiculous. The young man at Mrs. Pellett's was polite to her when he met her, and would ask after her children seriatim with solicitude, and promise to take Dolphus to the pantomime next Christmas; the young man at Mrs. Gooley's was a Chesterfield in manners compared to Horace; whilst the pattern young man over at Sadgrove's shop, who was a Sunday-school teacher, and secretary to the Mechanics' Institute, and was supposed to be going into a consumption with "overstudy,"—*he* was in "the littery way hisself, but was that 'umble that nobody would have guessed as he was more than other folks." But they were all very different from her first-floor, and very inferior, she must confess, notwithstanding his grand airs and general hauteur.

The young men round about Mrs. Molloy's bit their nails a good deal, and were given to sitting at the window on Sundays in their shirt-sleeves, and to indulging in lengthened conversations from second-floors with friends in the street. The young men

round about Mrs. Molloy's kept birds, which they placed outside their windows, and played the flute dismally on a summer evening, selecting such depressing ballads as "Love not," which is a slow and consequently easy composition for beginners, but which, repeated nightly for many weeks, becomes somewhat monotonous, and is apt to bring tears into the eyes of listeners in low circumstances.

The young men round about Mrs. Molloy's were in the habit of wearing their hair long, and, having pomatumed it to a distracting pitch of glossiness, would turn it under all round in a fashion now discarded, but which was very general in certain circles a few years back, and was undescribably "gentish" and annoying in its oleaginous rotundity. They were in the habit of dropping their aspirates very freely about Little Green Street, and they were altogether of a different stamp from Horace. Even the master of the house, who was of democratic tendencies, and very strong upon the equality of man, over his Sunday paper, acknowledged the superiority of

his first-floor lodger; and used to brag about the intimate relations he held with Horace at the meetings of the "Dromedaries," until the hearts of his companions were filled with envy; and the more satirical among the members made Molloy's aristocratic acquaintance a subject of ridicule, and would ask him if that "article on Chaney in the *Times*" was his friend's, and whether "it was true as Molloy and his littery swell-friend was assisting of Macaulay in his 'ist'ry, as was the general report." That unpopular Dromedary would sneer at such "underbred chaff," and loftily turn the conversation into other channels, laying down the law upon home and foreign politics with the air of one who was behind the scenes, but whose honour forbade him telling too much. Amongst the tradespeople Horace was considered a highly solvent and responsible person; for, thanks to his regular salary and his methodical wife, his bills were discharged weekly to the farthing; not without a good deal of haggling on Priscilla's part, of course. She liked to bargain and argue and beat-down across a counter. The least deficiency in the

weight, a suspicious egg, a piece of bacon that was less "streaky" when cut into than it had seemed from a superficial observation on the shop-counter, a watery potato, a hard-roed herring when a soft one had been ordered, too much fat with the chops, too little with the steak; each of these discrepancies formed at times a subject for mutual recrimination in the surrounding tradesmen's establishments. But Priscilla invariably came off conqueror. She was freezingly civil, and never lost her temper; but there was a frigid air of formal determination about her that carried all before it, and, after a weak attempt at excuse or justification, the shopman would yield miserably to the prim Priscilla, and metaphorically lay his entire stock at her feet. It was no wonder that with these folks the grand Horace, who, if he ever in passing condescended to purchase any thing, never inquired the price or looked at his change, should be considered a "real gentleman," though they generally remarked that a generous burst of this kind upon Horace's part would be sure to be followed by a long course of more than ordinarily

sharp practice on Priscilla's. Even amongst the small children who perilled their lives daily about the pavement of Little Green Street, who ran under the wheels of the passing cabs, and stood waving their arms at the horse in the Parcel-Delivery Company's cart until it seemed an impossibility that they should escape with a whole limb,—even these urchins paused in their play to stare at “the gentleman at Dolphus Molloy's,” as he strode past them superciliously. Dolphus Molloy had told wondrous stories of the magnificence which reigned in the first-floor of his mother's house; of the revelry which went on when Horace's friends came, of the cigar-smoking, the singing, the wines (generally fetched by Dolphus from the nearest public-house, and occasionally discovered by the visitors, being smuggled-in in a paper under Dolphus's pinafore), and the general air of affluence which surrounded the founder of these gorgeous banquets. Not unfrequently had Horace tossed a silver sixpence with an air of patronage to this particular Molloy, much to the annoyance of Priscilla, and greatly to the delight of the pa-

rent-bird, who would pounce upon the coin on the arrival of the child in the kitchen, and, reading his offspring a lesson on the evils of a love for lucre, pocket it with much solemnity. In short, in the immediate neighbourhood of his lodgings Horace Bentley was a mysterious but much-admired person; and if a carriage-and-pair, with powdered footmen, had pulled-up at Mrs. Molloy's one day, and the flunkeys had saluted him with much respectful fervour as the long-lost but now happily-discovered "rightful heir," the Little-Green-Street gossips would have hurrahed with genuine delight, and declared "it was no more than they'd expected all along."

Of course he took a cab. He was in more than time; but he was not in a walking humour, and leant back like a young lord, after telling the driver to take him to the station. Richmond was soon reached, and he strolled along towards the hotel. A round-faced fat little man, with a bald head and tremendous whiskers which met under his chin, was standing with his hands in his pockets by the door, and round him hung several waiters, who

were evidently showing him the attention due to a person of distinction.

“Sir Charles Soper dines here to-day?” said Horace to a pompous-looking waiter who was standing a little aloof from the others.

Horace was rather abashed by the big place and the very little effect his gorgeous get-up had produced upon the persons around.

Suddenly the bald-headed gentleman turned upon him, and, bowing politely, said,

“Sir Charles Soper *does* dine here, my dear sir. And you are, if I mistake not—a—”

Here the little gentleman with the bald head paused; for it was his peculiarity that he was excessively fluent up to a certain point, which point generally contained the pith of the matter, and would then break down in a most irritating way, leaving his listeners to supply the blank if they could, and if not, to feel excessively annoyed with the unsatisfactory little gentleman with the bald head in question.

“I dine with him,” replied Horace, with a smile.

“De-lighted, my dear sir. I shall have the pleasure of meeting you. Let me see! Charley told me your name was—” Here the little gentleman looked askance at Horace, with his head on one side like a knowing bird.

“Bentley,” said Horace, bowing.

“Of course—of course. Allow me;” and the funny little fat man shook Horace by the hand very cordially.

“Charley hasn’t come yet. Charley brings the ladies. Ha, ha! devoted to the sex is Charley, and popular. Oh, yes; decidedly popular. No notion of giving a dinner, though; not the least. So, like a sensible man, leaves that sort of thing to me.”

The little stout gentleman said this, walking up and down in front of the hotel, his arm linked in Horace’s.

“Do you always come to his rescue on these occasions?” asked Horace, amused at the self-important air of his companion.

“In-variably,” replied the other. “I’ve devoted myself to the art, because it *is* an art. You

have not arrived at an age to consider it one, I am aware. You are in that stage of life when you don't care what you eat. Now I've not the least doubt that you consider a leg of mutton and trimmings a grand dish. No offence, my dear sir; but don't you?"

The bald-headed little gentleman pushed back his hat, and, placing his thumbs in his waistcoat, leant back to see what Horace would say.

"I don't think a leg of mutton a bad thing, I must confess," was his reply.

"Ha-ah!" exclaimed the other, with a prolonged sigh of resignation.

They walked up and down in silence for some moments. Suddenly the stout man turned abruptly upon Horace, and remarked with an air of almost sharpness:

"Salad-dressing, now: I shouldn't be surprised if you were in the habit of pouring that yellow stuff they sell in bottles over a lettuce, giving it a whisk round with a wooden spoon, and devouring it with a kind of relish, eh?" Come,

now, you've done that?" Then he muttered to himself, "And these are the sort of people Charley expects will appreciate *my* salads."

Horace bit his lip to avoid laughing outright, and assured the little gourmand that he objected on principle to the compound in question. "Besides," he continued, with a solemn air that was superb, "you shouldn't regret the fact of my being a new-hand at these culinary triumphs. You've seen a boy at his first pantomime. Watch how the lad enjoys the novelty; very different from the *blasé* old fogies, who yawn over the last excitement. I'm like the boy at the pantomime. I assure you I can appreciate a curry far more than some old Oriental fire-eater, whose palate has been stung and peppered into a state of permanent unimpressionable parchementism."

This was one of Horace's flashy bits of alliterative nonsense, the kind of thing that always irritated Priscilla beyond endurance. It had an opposite effect upon the stout gentleman, who stood still, and took an enormous pinch of snuff out of a big round wooden box with a portrait of the Prince

Regent on the lid, before he could make an adequate reply.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, after his snuff,—
“by Jove, young gentleman, you talk like a book, sir; not that I ever read books—they distract one’s mind so; but really I never saw the matter in the light you put it. It’s a very plausible theory; but, a—I’m not quite sure that it’s true, after all.”

Most of Horace’s theories, like the daw in peacock’s-feathers, showed an imposing plumage, but would scarcely stand plucking.

“I wish I could remember what you said, though; it would amuse Charley; he’s a great liking for that sort of thing. Never says any thing good himself; don’t pretend to it; but appreciates others;” and the stout gentleman tried to repeat Horace’s rubbish to himself; but failed.

“I’m sure,” said Horace, mentally resolving to do a paper upon dimmers in *Snelling’s Miscellany*, and introduce his new acquaintance under the name of Mr. Percy Jackall: the ‘Percy’ being in punning allusion to the stout gentleman’s obesity; and the ‘Jackall’ to his being the provider

to the tawny 'lion' Sir Charles,—“I'm sure our host must appreciate others, when he leaves the ordering of his dinner to a gentleman so evidently up to his work as yourself.”

Horace bowed, and the fat little gentleman bowed and smiled; and they were bowing and smiling at each other when Sir Charles Soper and his party dashed up to the door of the hotel. Sir Charles drove a splendid pair of horses, and looked very jovial, and shook Horace heartily by the hand, and patted the 'jackall' on his bald head, and handed out Julia Mellington with a beaming countenance. Julia looked the least bit delicate; and the slight pallor on her cheeks lent her a more interesting appearance than ever. She was dressed in a mass of floating fabric that seemed to surround her like a cloud; and she had the most maddening little bonnet, trimmed with all sorts of artificial trifles, that nodded and danced as she shook her head at Horace, and kissed her hand to the stout gentleman. As she stepped from the carriage to the ground, she exhibited a tiny boot that fitted her little foot to a nicety; and her hands might have

been made to her gloves, so creaseless and shapely were they.

“They’re the only things I’m extravagant in,” she was accustomed to say,—“the only things; boots and gloves I will have of the best.”

She was perfectly right; for there is an indescribable charm about a woman who is always seen with good boots and gloves. Bonnets and dresses are of minor importance; for fashion renders the robe of to-day ridiculous to-morrow; whilst bonnets are as eccentric and as variable in their shapes as are the sentiments of their capricious wearers. But through all the tricks and changes of taste the neat boot and the well-fitting glove are always popular, always pleasant to behold. Supposing such a state of things as that described in Tennyson’s *Princess* were to exist, and refractory and rollicking “girl-graduates” to require the warning presence of a lady-police, that feminine force would never obtain “active and intelligent” officeresses if the ponderous “bluchers” and unsightly “berlins” of our own constabulary were the compulsory wear of those charming creatures. The

boots and gloves of the fair Julia's mamma were not so faultless. There was a bulginess about the former that was not satisfactory to the critical eye, and they were of a drab colour that is not pleasant to look upon. Mrs. Mellington always had a severe half-hour with her gloves before going out with her daughter; and would at length appear with a very red face from her recent efforts, and with a pair (generally puce) as much off as on her hands, suffering agony with her thumbs, and with long ends of uninhabited kid pointing from each finger. They had been pretty hands in their day, when the departed Flinders, then a spruce young fellow enough, but with an unpromisingly moist eye and maudlin manner even at that early period, would squeeze them under the table at supper; but hard work has a tendency to develop the female knuckle to an abnormal extent; and the poor little old lady had had her share of hard work, ay and hard knocks too, in her time. She worried her daughter a good deal upon festive occasions; for her notions of dress were eccentric, and greatly opposed to Julia's. She had gone through life with the firm

impression that a black-satin gown was the acmé of gentility, not to say splendour; and it would have rendered her miserable to have destroyed the illusion. Her daughter would remonstrate mildly, and bring home tempting patterns of less sombre materials; but Mrs. Mellington was inexorable, and stuck to her opinions and her dress, observing, as a climax to her arguments, "It's not flaunting, dear; it suits me; and it's gen-teel." Personally the old lady did not much enjoy herself when she went to grand dinners; for she liked her dinner in the middle of the day, with her nap after it, and a late meal was not in her way; "though your poor dear pa was very partial to 'em," she would observe when talking of a coming banquet; for Julia enjoyed an innocent "out" of this kind, and her chaperone's black satin was in as constant request at certain seasons as the dress-suit of a "dancing" man or an opera-critic. This wonderful garment shone with resplendent lustre on the present occasion; and as she toddled towards the hotel on the arm of the stout gentleman, she struck the satirical Horace as looking immensely like a big black-beetle.

As the giver of the entertainment, of course Sir Charles had the honour of escorting Julia; and Horace lounged after them with Crofton Batts—to whom he had been introduced by Sir Charles.

Crofton Batts was a government clerk, who passed at least two-thirds of the day with his hands in his pockets and his glass in his eye. He had been looking at life through this little eyeglass for some years, and he didn't think much of it. He was one of those people whose friends are always telling them they want rousing, though in Crofton's case it was by no means evident that he would do any thing astounding when he *was* roused. People used to come behind him, and striking him playfully on the back, tell him to "wake up!" others would shout in his ear, "Now then, Batts!" loudly; and his more intimate associates would dig him in the ribs, and tell him not to sink into a state of coma. He was a good-natured stupid sort of pleasant-looking man, who seemed to be born to be pushed about, and bantered, and receive nicknames continually. He had a sleepy smile, and a peculiarly slow and sig-

nificant wink, which he made do the duty of a verbal reply when he was hard up for a fitting answer, as he generally was; for his ideas flowed tardily, and he very properly mistrusted his powers of retort. He had only been known to lose temper once during the years that he had been at his office; and that was when a very youthful clerk, who had only been in the room a couple of days, called him "Blinkers," which, bearing a double application to Batts' name and his eyeglass, struck the generally slow sense of the senior, and produced most unpleasant results for the rash novice. Crofton stared for a few seconds at the offender; then walking slowly up to him, grasped him by the collar, and punched his head in a measured methodical manner some half-dozen times. Those present described the process as somewhat resembling the slow but determined action of a gigantic pile-driver, so steady, heavy, and regular were the blows. Pegwell, the young clerk in question, spoke of it as the worst licking he had had since school; but admitted the justice of the punishment, and begged Crofton's pardon like a gentle-

man the day after. Batts smiled heavily at Pegwell's apology, and drawled out, "All right; only if a chap that's only known a fellow for a couple of days is to call a fellow 'Blinkers,' hang it! what are those to do who have known a fellow ever so long?"

The fussy little fat gentleman, whose name, it appeared, was Coddington, now got into mysterious confabs with the head-waiter; and Mrs. Mellington and her daughter retired: the former to put on a marvellous cap which she had brought with her; and the latter to arrange that wonderful hair which looked so wayward and wild, but which in reality was managed with the greatest care and dexterity imaginable. Meanwhile Sir Charles strolled into the room, and looking round at the arrangements for dinner, expressed his opinion that "By Jove, you know, after all, Richmond was a fine institution, and all that; and Judy deserved a treat now and then, for she worked like a slave, and was as good as gold, you know."

This was addressed to Horace, who was not

backward in praising Miss Mellington; and as even the placid Batts woke up into something like liveliness on the theme, and as Codrington came in flushed from his interview with the proprietor of the hotel, and capped the general praise by the most extravagant eulogium, Miss Mellington's ears must have burnt considerably in that solitary apartment where she was shaking her mamma into shape, and arranging her cap and giving her serious advice about behaviour.

“Now, ma dear, I don't mind what on earth you say or do before the gentlemen; but it's the waiters I'm afraid of. If Miss Pimlico's name's mentioned, don't say any thing, because you always put your foot in it, you know; and remember particularly that ice-pudding invariably makes you ill.”

The old lady, who was greatly pleased with her cap and the prospect of a pleasant evening, promised to pass over the objectionable Pimlico, and to look another way when the voice of the tempter suggested “Hice-puddin', mum?” and to be very circumspect and genteel. The effect of

Julia's floating cloudy dress and general appearance was overwhelming. She entered the room looking really radiant; and Horace could not refrain from wondering if it were possible that such a creature should ever become elderly and treble-chinned, and addicted to black satin and wearing her bonnet in the house.

“Jove! Judy, you look tremendous!” exclaimed Sir Charles in rapture; “tremendous! don't she, Crofton?”

Crofton Batts screwed his glass a little tighter into his eye and his hands a little deeper into his pockets, and grunted acquiescence.

“You will permit me to say, Mrs. Mellington,” observed the stout gentleman, “that your gifted daughter looks every inch a seraph,—every inch. She reminds me strongly of a—a—” Here Codlington put his finger to his brow, but failed to recollect the magnificent creature Julia reminded him of; and so Mrs. Mellington could do nothing but nod and chuckle and look pleased, at which she was an adept; and the fair object of general appreciation made an extravagant curtsey,

and said she was really overwhelmed, &c. Horace had said nothing; but Julia was not going to let him off.

“Now, author,” she observed banteringly, “what do *you* say? Do we come out to Richmond looking passable; eh? Do we contrive, with our knowledge of ‘making-up,’ and all that sort of thing, to slightly astonish the Browns; eh?”

What would Horace have thought if he had heard Priscilla indulge in such unseemly language? But somehow it lost all its vulgarity when uttered by Julia’s lips. She had a bright joyous genuine manner with her that carried every thing with it. He blushed strongly at being singled out in this way, more especially as he saw the baronet’s big eyes fixed on him, and his mouth half-open, as if prepared for something good; for Sir Charles had looked forward to Horace enlivening the party tremendously.

“Upon my word,” he replied, “you must receive such an amount of high-flown compliments, that it must be a treat to come across one who doesn’t know how to pay them.”

“ Oh, go along with you,” said Julia, half piqued. “ You authors never pay any thing.”

The others screamed at this, especially Sir Charles, down whose cheeks the tears rolled in a small torrent, whilst the old lady nearly chuckled herself into a fit. Horace admitted he was rightly answered, and broke down in an elaborate attempt to mend matters by an allegorical tribute to Julia’s charms, which she declared “ was too clever for *her*,” and in the midst of the merriment dinner was announced.

Such a dinner ! It even satisfied Codrington, and Sir Charles declared that to be a marvellous triumph on the part of the lucky *chef*. The stout gentleman tasted of innumerable dishes, and made the dinner of a starving emperor. He had marked out at the commencement what dishes he intended to partake of, and he left very few on the list unmarked and untasted. Julia had a keen eye for the ridiculous, and she felt that the only congenial one of the party was Horace. Their eyes continually met ; for there is a marvellous freemasonry in fun, and by many little side-looks and wicked

glances Julia indicated to Horace her appreciation of Codlington's prandial powers, which indeed were something beyond all precedent within the recollection of the oldest waiter in the room, and gave rise to painful conjectures as to when he had eaten last, and how long he would continue without a fit or something terrible. But Codlington not only possessed the appetite of a charity-school, but the digestion of a dozen ostriches, and he attacked dishes that would have made the dyspeptic shudder to look upon, and the bilious shrink in horror to hear named. He was the kind of man who had "never had enough green fat in his life," and whose mouth watered at the mere mention of marrow-bones. To see him testing each dish at Sir Charles's dinner was something that could never be forgotten; and at length the host, waking up to the fact that Julia was enjoying the exhibition, tempted the capacious Codlington still further, rallying him on his declining powers, and accusing him of fearing the gout, and of having lunched heavily. Crofton Batts made a capital dinner too, doing a good deal of execution in a

solemn manner, and saying something to the point every now and then with a drowsily droll air that proved a pleasant foil to the smart style of the vivacious Horace. Mr. Bentley began at the wines early, and mixed them with a recklessness that soon produced very brilliant effects in the shape of social sarcasm, quizzical comments on political celebrities, slashing condemnation of certain pompous big-wigs, contemptuous showing-up of popular people generally, and, in fact, a universal onslaught upon every thing. He was in great glee at his own powers and his success; for his sallies produced roars from Sir Charles, little screams of malicious pleasure from Julia, roused Batts into something like a show of interest, and nearly finished the earthly career of Codlington, who would try to enjoy the good things of Horace and his host simultaneously, and nearly choked himself half-a-dozen times in the endeavour. Mrs. Mellington looked very much as if she was in a firework factory, and all the explosive articles in the place were being tried around her; and indeed the popping of the corks, the clatter of the

knives and forks, the shuffling about of the attendants, and the chatter and laughter of the host and guests, would have confused most people. Such a merry rackety little party had seldom gathered beneath the roof of the Star and Garter. The infection spread to the waiters, and even a solemn person of imposing mien, who condescended to look in occasionally and frown at the company,—a person who looked every inch a landed proprietor,—was distinctly heard to splutter at one of Horace's jokes, and to retire speedily behind the door, where he was seen to crack his sides in a furtive manner for some minutes. Julia didn't like the presence of the waiters. She had a dim notion that one or two of them had seen her at the Criterion, and were watching her to see if she ate like other folks, and she almost found herself addressing the principal one as "sir." Horace saw this, and in the height of his hilarity addressed one of them,—a red-headed and ferocious-looking waiter, who was new to his business, and who made up for incompetency by scowling and obtrusively handing bread at inju-

dicious moments,—as “Slagg,” which sent the young lady into fits of laughter, and irritated the attendant, who became more incompetent if possible, and was finally shunted-off into the passage by his chief. At length these necessary evils retired, and Codlington looked appealingly at the host, as much as to say, “Have you nothing to observe? did I betray my trust? was the dinner good?”

“Tell you what, Codlington; it was doosid good, if that’s what you mean,” observed Sir Charles.

“Now that the waiters are gone,” said the lively Julia, “and I can give expression to my sentiments, I must say you have surpassed yourself. In fact, the banquet was what our enthusiastic friend on the left, with the rapidity of utterance, Mr. Crofton Batts—”

“The Charles Mathews of private life,” put in Horace.

“Just so,” continued Julia. “The banquet was—let’s see, where was I?—oh, ah, it was what our dear friend would call in his extravagant way ‘not ba-a-d.’”

“ Oh !” said Codlington, bowing and grinning, “ really now, praise from—a—Sir Rupert Stanhope, you know—”

“ Sir Hubert Stanley next time would be an improvement,” said Julia.

“ Oh ! it’s all the same a hundred years hence,” remarked the old lady, who, enlivened by the champagne, thought she might as well make an observation.

“ Quite true, ma’am,” replied Sir Charles seriously ; and in his secret soul he considered Mrs. Mellington a highly sensible woman, who, when she did speak, always spoke to the point.

Then Horace rose—he was considerably flushed, and his curly hair was not as neat as it might have been—and made a speech, which for incoherency, epigrammatic impudence (mostly personal, and levelled at Codlington, who, fancying he was to reply, sat pale and trembling, trying hard to frame some sentences together, and failing), extravagant laudation (of Julia), general flippancy, and Latin quotations (supposed by Mrs. M. to refer to her), surpassed any thing that had ever been

uttered within the memory of Sir Charles. The oration concluded with the health of the baronet, who insisted upon Julia returning thanks. She commenced in the most comical manner, by saying that she was, of course, unaccustomed to public speaking, at which Codrington slapped the table and shook his head, and was generally imbecile for some moments; she declared it to be the proudest moment of her life, and with a mock air of pathos that was delightful, pretended to be overcome by emotion. It was altogether a delicious little bit of unrehearsed comic acting, and every one laughed and applauded vociferously; Mrs. Mellington continuing long after the others, and declaring several times that "that girl would be the death of her some day, she was sure." Batts was now called upon for a song; and after much reflection, he favoured the company with a very extraordinary effusion, which was supposed to be sentimental in the highest degree, but which was received with uproarious merriment, and abruptly cut short at the end of the eleventh verse by Sir Charles, who expressed his opinion that it was

“sort song to have in instalments, by Jove, it was!” Julia following up the remark by suggesting a “judicious application of the pruning-knife,” or, as she expressed it, the P. K. Batts, really relieved, stopped his long-winded ballad, and devoted himself to the claret, sipping it in a slow solemn way, very unlike Horace’s style of tossing-off bumper after bumper. But Horace didn’t get tipsy; he became elevated in its most ethereal sense, and felt himself in a seventh heaven of supreme happiness. He tingled to the tips of his fingers with a vague pleasure; and he stared with a certain awe at the man whose means permitted him to indulge in such blissful banquets as often as he liked. Once or twice he saw his shabby home looming dimly through the vapour-clouds of a vinous mist; and the reflection that the bright vision must shortly fade, whilst the substantial reality of cold mutton and steel forks would remain, came upon him with a creeping chill, that he could only throw off by more wine, more wild merriment, more basking in the bright glances from the laughing eyes of the enchanting Julia.

She *was* enchanting, and she threw many a kindly smile at the self-conceited Horace, who began to fancy she was not altogether blind to his manifold attractions. Nor was she. She was very much struck with Horace, and had not the least objection to a little flirtation with him; and when the party strolled out upon the terrace, she leant upon his arm, and listened to his nonsense apparently not ill-pleased. Sir Charles was not a bit jealous; he mounted a tremendous cigar, and stared at the handsome young couple as they strolled along the paths, and expressed his opinion to Codlington that they were "uncommon well matched;" and Codlington, who was in a condition to agree with any thing and any body, said he loved 'em both, and was with difficulty restrained from at once joining their hands in the presence of several strangers, and hiccupping forth, "Bless you, my children!" with parental feeling.

It is a very hard task to have to describe men and women, and not ladies and gentlemen cut out of fashion-books, or picked off pretty Valentines. There are not many perfect working human mo-

dels walking about the world ; social Bayards are highly exceptional ; human nature is perhaps not altogether so black as it has been painted ; but those who seek to invest it with a marble purity, only succeed in making it resemble a whitened sepulchre. There are those who think that vice should be veneered,—that a thin deceptive layer of mahogany morality should be spread over the coarse deal of common erring humanity ; they would enamel evil, and make it “ beautiful for ever ;” but they find in time that the top-dressing of pretence peels off, and the hard lines about the vicious mouth are plainly visible through the sham white skin. We are none of us as good as we might be : and the perfect youth against whom a word has never yet been uttered, who has never said a syllable against a soul ; who is utterly unselfish, truthful, generous, forgiving, incapable of a mean thought or an injudicious act,—will some day, depend upon it, turn out as arrant a rascal as ever stepped into the felon’s dock. Those who admire the slim and gentlemanlike youth, who walks through the world of fiction, with a glossy new

hat in his hand, and virtuous phrases on his lip,—the noble young person who always speaks to the point, acts for the best, suffers without shrinking, and foils the villain in the end,—will scarcely look upon Horace Bentley as a hero. Neither was he one in any way. He was a selfish, rash, impulsive, and somewhat shallow-principled young man; and he was over head and ears in love with a lady who was not his wife; all very reprehensible and shocking: but such things have happened, do happen, will happen, despite the improved “moral tone” of society one hears talked about, and the public teachings of that beautiful institution, the Divorce-Court. Horace was no hero of romance; he was a human being, and a very ill-conditioned one into the bargain.

The shadows of evening crept over the hill of Richmond; and Horace, with his heart full of rebellious thoughts, and his head full of the baronet’s wine, looked into Julia’s eyes and said all sorts of silly things in a soft voice and with an earnest air. Julia had had a good deal of nonsense talked to her in her time, and after-dinner

compliments were no novelty to her. But Horace's nonsense was somehow different from the ordinary nonsense; his compliments had a different ring from ordinary compliments, and there was a tone of wildness in his words inexplicable and puzzling. He talked of his clouded life, of his fetters, of the wrong road he had taken at the outset; and was altogether too metaphorical to be pleasant. His language was Greek to Julia; but there was no mistaking the impression she had made. It had been unintentional—at least she fancied so. She was rather uncomfortable, and not altogether displeased; but she affected to laugh him out of his gloom, which was now settling very heavily, and left him to look after mamma. The drive home was delightful. Codrington and Batts had gone by train, and Horace took Crofton's place in the carriage. As he parted from them, and Julia gave him her little hand, and was lost to his sight a minute afterwards amidst the vehicles of the crowded street, he felt that the world was a blank to him, and walked towards his shabby home sick and weary at heart. Who should

come to the door of all people in the world but old Anne Maggs, his mother's servant? Her face was grave, and her manner constrained. Before Horace could recover his surprise, she said in a loud whisper :

“Come in quietly ; your wife, poor dear, is very ill ; the doctor's with her now ; she's got a little boy ; and we hardly know if she'll live.”

Horace grasped his old nurse by the arm ; a faint sickly feeling came over him, and he remembered, whilst a flood of shame and sorrow seemed to engulf his whole being, that the last words he had uttered to his wife were false and lying ones.

CHAPTER X.

PRISCILLA IN PERIL.

HORACE BENTLEY, being one of the most sensitive fellows that ever lived, felt as if he had done something very dreadful, and had received a severe but fitting punishment. He had always from his earliest childhood entertained a peculiar horror of a lie. He scorned the man who could tell one; and it must be confessed that he despised himself under the present circumstances thoroughly.

There had been actually no reason for veiling his visit to Richmond in mystery. There was nothing wrong about it. People were in the habit of leaving their wives at home in dingy lodgings whilst they themselves flaunted it in fine rooms and revelled in rich dishes, every day; the world, as a rule, was not hard upon those who so selfishly enjoyed themselves. He could not have taken

Priscilla with him for several reasons. She had no dress fit to go in, for one. She would not dress as he wished, however he might din his desires on the point into her ears daily. As she was never in the habit of going any where, perhaps a dress of the kind would have been superfluous too. But if she had gone to Richmond with him, she would have felt out of her element entirely, and would have made every body uncomfortable by her prim manner and stiff proper ways. Besides, she hadn't been asked; there was no getting over that; it seemed a sort of saving clause in the settlement Horace was coming to with his conscience. But why had he told her an untruth? why had he not boldly blurted forth, "I'm going to dine at Richmond with Sir Charles Soper;" and have done with it? Then again, would he have done with it by so saying? Would not Priscilla have put all sorts of awkward questions to him, and have driven him into all kinds of uncomfortable corners, and have made him mad with cross-examination, and the curl of her thin lip at his frequent failures at equivocation?

He dared not tackle the really vulnerable part of the business. He beat about the bush, and walked round the one weak spot with the knowledge that he was trying to delude himself, and failing. He was well aware that he was up to his eyes in love with Julia Mellington, and that was the reason he could not be straightforward and above board. Of course there would have been no harm in going to dine at Richmond with the pleasant company he had lately left; but going to dine at Richmond with the sole object of enjoying a good dinner, and going there with the ulterior view of making himself as captivating as possible in the eyes of a lady, were two entirely different things. There was no doubt of it; and when Anne Maggs came down upon him like a night-capped Nemesis with the news of his wife's condition, no wonder the gay youth turned pale as death, and felt a bitter pang at his thumping heart.

Readers rich in the possession of compassionate feelings may experience some small pity for the lad too. He had been endowed at his birth with

a turbulent nature, and he had never known a father's correcting influence. No schoolmaster had ever crossed his shoulders with a rod; for Mrs. Bontley was as tender-hearted a little woman as ever breathed, and had petted and coddled her small tyrant, controlling him, though with her soft voice, perhaps more successfully than a browbeating Busby would have done. Still, the boy had grown up, as the so-called tame tigers do, gentle to one creature, but with his fangs ready for strangers. There had always been a lordly air about the lad, strangely at variance with his social surroundings, which were humble and commonplace. He had carried his head high from the cradle. His old nurse, Anne Maggs, had fostered his many little proud ways, and would sit and wag her head with a great grin, distending her mouth and exhibiting an exuberance of gum very astounding to behold. How that old woman loved that boy, and how deep a void she felt in her heart when he was sent away to school, no pen could adequately describe. She cried like an old silly, as she was, as she put together the boy's books;

and as for cording his box, it was apparently a matter of gigantic and most overwhelmingly complicated difficulty, so often did she break down in the attempt; and, sitting upon it, would sob away into her apron as if he was going to execution instead of Mr. Pellet's establishment for young gentlemen. It was only when Mrs. Bentley appeared likely to join with her that Anne Maggs could summon up sufficient fortitude to battle with her feelings, which she did very fiercely, frowning hard to stop the tears, and screwing up the mouth, which would quiver at the corners spite of all her efforts. But when the mother broke down, too, completely, and cried upon the breast of her old servant and friend, Anne Maggs came out triumphantly in the strong-minded way, and spoke with a tone of mock severity to her mistress, and told her it was downright wicked, so it was, to fly in the face of Providence; and when the boy had a plum-cake as big as a wheel-barrow, and pocket-money, and a new knife, and every thing pleasant. So at last the mother settled down, and tried to persuade herself it was all for the best, and re-

membered with satisfaction that Mrs. Pellet was a good soul, and had said she would keep her eye upon the little boy, and see to his comfort. And then Anne Maggs made tea (her invariable custom when any thing ruffling had happened; for, as she always declared, "tea was the most soothing thing in the world when a body'd been worried"); and so the first evening without Horace passed away; and after Anne had seen her mistress to bed, and made her promise not to "go on" any more, she went into her own garret, double-locked the door, and howled away until the small hours, with her head buried in the bedclothes.

Mrs. Pellet had undertaken no small task when she had promised to keep her eye upon the youthful Bentley. It was not that he was a bad boy, or was deficient in intelligence. Indeed he was, Mr. Pellet declared, too sharp for his years, and had a knack of interrupting his master in a manner highly unbecoming and excessively irritating. Mr. Pellet was a pursy little man, with a pompous manner, a rich thick voice, which he considered highly effective, and a big

bunch of seals, which he dangled as he addressed the boys, and which were popularly supposed in the school to be of overwhelming value and to possess cabalistic powers of a secret and most mysterious nature. When Mr. Pellet stood with his left-hand under his coat-tails, and held the ribbon which supported this awful bunch of seals in his right, and fixed his eye upon one particular pane of glass in the school-room window, the boys knew that he was about to air his oratorical powers, and hold forth for the benefit of the scholars and Mr. Pym the usher. Mr. Pym the usher,—a weak-eyed lymphatic person, in rusty black, who knew a great deal, but had met with misfortunes, and whose appetite was considered by Mr. Pellet to be his only drawback,—would shake a long forefinger at the boys in front, and pull a more than ordinarily serious face, whenever he saw his superior settling himself into the speechifying position; and woe betide the boy who should interrupt the flow of the Pellet eloquence by an untimely sneeze or the least display of inattention. Pellet was of a lenient nature generally, and not

given to corporal punishment; but if ever he was induced to forego his principles and produce the seldom-seen cane, it would be upon the occasion of an interruption to any speech with which he might be favouring his pupils. Unfortunately, Horace was not impressed by these oratorical displays. He was an irreverent boy, and was seen to occasionally grin at the grandiloquent nonsense talked by the head-master; and an uncontrollable splutter brought down the eye of the outraged Pellet from the particular window-pane he had been favouring to the luckless boy who was vainly trying to stifle his laughter in his pocket-handkerchief. Horace was too honest to tell an untruth, and admitted that something the master had said had made him laugh. A heavy frown came over the features of Pellet, and poor Pym looked actually paralysed; his hands outstretched in an attitude of the greatest horror, and his pink-rimmed eyes distended to an alarming width. Eloquent as Pellet generally was, he was at a loss for words upon the present occasion. It seemed so utterly inexplicable, that a boy—a

new boy—should presume to laugh at him, and dared to admit it, that the schoolmaster felt uncomfortable and small. He did not strike Horace; he was too sensible for that; but ever after he felt a dread of meeting the audacious youngster's glance when indulging in bursts of eloquence, and would fix his eyes more firmly than ever upon the window-pane, and occasionally devise trifling errands on which to send Horace previously to assuming the elegant and imposing attitude, the dignified effect of which little Bentley had done his best to destroy. So, even when a mere child, at his first school, this strong sense of the ridiculous, which amounted almost to a vice, made for the boy enemies; for Pellet hated him from that moment; and whomsoever Pellet disliked, the faithful Pym felt it his bounden duty to loathe. He was not much of a favourite with the boys either; for he gave them stinging nicknames, which were always appropriate, and stuck to them; and when he was involved in a hand-to-hand encounter, he would fight with such ferocity and lasting pluck, that

boys twice his size were afraid of him; so that the smart little Horace strutted about amongst his companions a small bully, who was a good deal avoided and generally unpopular. He had grown more sensible by the time Phineas Stone's liberal assistance had allowed him to go to the Rev. Mr. Brandle's; and the superior air of the young men he met there, and the improved tone of the place generally, were not without a certain effect upon the impressionable Horace, though his nature remained unchanged; for such natures seldom alter much; and Horace with incipient whiskers and a broken voice was much the same Horace who had burst into a laugh at that terror in the eyes of most children—the first school-master.

But we have wandered away from the first-floor in Little Green Street, in which the young husband now sat with a white face, staring at the anxious worn countenance of his old nurse, who was looking down upon him with an expression of mingled affection and reproach.

Anne Maggs possessed one of those deeply-

lined leaden-coloured countenances, which defy those who would fix its age. She had looked old when she first entered her mistress's service, and with the exception of a slight deepening of the wrinkles, and a more decided stoop, she was the same Anne Maggs as of yore: and Horace felt ashamed of himself as he looked into her honest face.

There were traces of tears upon it, and her eyes were swollen; for she had broken down a little at the sight of the old house where she had spent so much of her life.

Mrs. Molloy too had wept copiously upon seeing her; and the children had clambered about her, and put puzzling questions to her, and "flustered" her a good deal.

"Dear, dear, Master Horace, the poor thing's had a narrow escape; and you away too."

Horace could not reply; but he felt like a villain, and his face was white as a sheet.

"She's—she's out of danger, Anne?" he asked, after some moment's pause.

"No, that she isn't; nor won't be yet awhile."

“Can’t I see her?”

“Not at present. The doctor says she’s to be kept as quiet as possible.”

“By Jove!” said Horace, half rising, “if any of those children make the least noise, I’ll break every bone in their skins.” And he looked as ferocious as the Grand Turk.

“Oh, the children’ll be good enough,” replied Anne, with a slight toss of the head.

There was an awkward pause. Anne Maggs, with her mouth drawn down, and with an ominous frown upon her brow, was seated on the little sofa, tapping her foot upon the floor with a certain irritability which was uncommon with her, and which she in vain struggled to suppress.

“Has she every thing requisite, Anne?” at length asked Horace, who had been pacing up and down the room uneasily, and who eyed the old nurse askance as he spoke.

“Oh yes, Master Horace; let me alone for seeing to all that. A letter as your dear mother received assured us both as certain things wanted attending to; so your mother said, in her kind

way, 'Anne, it's no use your talking any further about it; you must just pop some things into a trunk and go up to London immediate.' 'But,' I said, 'dear heart, what's to become of you?' And she answered with one of her merry little laughs one so seldom hears now from her, 'Oh, never mind me; I'm old enough and ugly enough too, Anne, to take good care of myself.' Which she isn't; for if ever there was a baby, that baby is your dear mother. Ugly, too! she! Ha! ha! that's good, as we well know." Then Anne Maggs's face grew suddenly very serious, and she continued, "Master Horace, your ma's a angel, and you never write to her. She'd give it me now, this blessed minute, well, I know, if she thought I was taking upon myself to say a word to you; but, oh, Horace, my dear boy,"—here the nurse's eyes filled with tears—"Horace dear, as I nursed from the cradle and loved like my own child, why don't you treat us better? You've forgotten us, with your fine friends and your parties and sets-out."

The old nurse shook her head sadly as she

said this, and Horace bit his lip in evident vexation.

“I’m sure my mother never sent you to London to upbraid me. If I have been neglectful, you might make an excuse for me. I’ve a great deal to do; and then Priscilla writes, and—and”—here he broke down.

Contact with the world had not improved Horace. He had learnt to sneer a great deal at sentimentality, and he was not much affected by the overflowing eyes of his old nurse. He was annoyed, too, beyond measure that she should have come up to town so abruptly and found him away—away on his pleasure, when his wife was in so precarious a state. But he was not going to be talked to by an ignorant old woman like Anne Maggs. Anne was steady and respectable and faithful, perhaps; then she was not the sort of servant whom any body else would have. Self-interest had a good deal to do with her great attachment to his mother. He had grown dreadfully narrow-minded, and he was in a tremendous rage; an inward rage which

smouldered sulkily, and only waited the opportunity to burst forth. He was in the humour to kick some one furiously; but there was no one handy, and he had been told not to make a noise. So he frowned with extreme ferocity upon Anne Maggs, and twisted and pulled at his moustache violently.

Anne was not to be frowned down. A soft word would always go a great way with that honest creature; but angry speeches were thrown away upon her. She saw the threatening outburst preparing for her, and, like an old war-horse, snorted defiance at the smell of the powder; elevating her nose, and sniffing loudly, a pink spot of anger visible upon each of her otherwise sallow cheeks.

“At all events—and you’ll excuse an old woman, who’s nursed your mother when a child on her knee, for speaking her mind—you might, I think, have come in a little earlier, considering every thing,” said Anne sharply.

“That may be your opinion, Anne; but you’ll permit me to tell you that you know nothing about

it. People who have business"—here the old nurse swept her hand sharply along her knee, as if whisking off an imaginary crumb, but in reality exhibiting her contempt for Horace's remarks. "You needn't sneer, Anne," observed the husband, with a mingled air of haughtiness and injured innocence: "I *have* business very often to see about. I have to work pretty hard for my living, I can tell you."

Again the contemptuous sweep of the bony hand along the stuff dress, and again a most significant sniff.

Horace paused, and with his hands in his pockets, turned sharply round upon his heels and faced his visitor, an indignant frown upon his face.

But Anne Maggs could frown as well as he, and she looked him hard and straight in the eye. He quailed beneath her honest gaze, and turned again to pacing the room.

"Funny business, Horace, to keep you out so many hours, to require such fine clothes, to flavour you with tobacco-smoke too! I should

be ashamed of myself." Here Anne Maggs rose from the sofa and turned to leave the room.

"I told Priscilla before I went out that I was going to Mr. Tatlow's, and—"

"*And you told her a lie, Master Horace,*" replied the nurse in a hurried undertone, and with her hand on the door.

Horace caught his breath sharply, and turned scarlet.

It is an unpleasant thing to be told at any time and by any body,—it is wonderfully unpleasant when told one by a woman, and *when it's true*.

"We wanted you; for at one time we thought the poor dear up-stairs would die; and we sent for you where you said you had gone. Mr. Tatlow declared you had not been near him; and also that, from certain matters as had happened, you were pretty sure not to go to him."

Anne Maggs was a woman after all, and she left the room with a smile of enjoyment at her triumph.

Horace felt utterly confounded. It would be doing him an injustice not to add that he also felt

very deep shame. For the first time in his life he felt a strong contempt for himself. He had committed a selfish silly act, and had bungled it sadly. It must be confessed that he was more occupied with reflecting on his own stupidity and rashness than upon the wife who lay 'twixt life and death a half-a-dozen yards from where he stood. When at last he thought of her, it was with a frightened feeling, rather than a sensation of grief. Of course he was very sorry and a little shocked; but he didn't "take it to heart," as Mrs. Molloy expressed it; and though he crept up and listened at the door anxiously, there was a lack of genuine feeling about him, which did not surprise the landlady; for Mrs. Molloy had her own notions of her lodger's nature, though she never so much as whispered them even to her husband. Horace listened at the door of the sick room; but all was silent; and he stepped down again, and throwing himself at full length upon the sofa, pressed his hand to his throbbing brow, and proceeded to "think over things."

He determined to argue away the idea that he

had been doing any thing wrong, and tried hard to soothe himself with the reflection that he had done no more than any one else would have done. Suppose Charley Tindal had been married, and had had the chance of a pleasant dinner unknown to his wife, how that mercurial youth would have jumped at it! Any body would have jumped at it: Pulling even. No, scarcely Pulling. He pictured Pulling as matrimonially a model; the good sort of husband, who never missed church, and would as soon have thought of standing on his head before his clerks, as he out after twelve o'clock on Saturday night. Pulling—had he accepted such an invitation, which was doubtful—would have forced his better-half upon the company, and bored them with a display of solemn respectability highly objectionable. Pulling was a muff, there was no denying. It had been a very unlucky business that his wife should have fallen so severely ill in his absence; and he should have felt more comfortable (there was no denying that) if he had been straightforward, and told her where he was going. In fact, the strongest word he could use

against himself was 'imprudence.' He had been a little imprudent, because wives are so ridiculously sensitive; and when once they discover that their husband has deceived them in ever so slight a trifle, they are suspicious for ever afterwards; and he should have remembered that, and been straightforward even at the risk of being thought unkind. He might—had he not been so absurdly blind—have given her the desired drive, and have gone to Richmond afterwards. Ah, but then if he *had*, how ill she would have been; for had she not been at death's-door when stopping quietly at home? Why, a drive round the Park might have killed her!

So, from his very selfishness he extracted some consolation; and, all things considered, he questioned whether *he* was not the injured party, after all.

He burst into a defiant scornful laugh, as his meditations reached this satisfactory climax; and had Anne Maggs come upon him at that moment, she would have found him more than a match for her. But in the midst of this self-satisfaction, a

sound pierced the silence, and smote him like an accusing spirit. The shrill querulous cry of a newly-born infant reached his ear, and a strange wild thrill of joy came over him, whilst the tears rose to his eyes with a sudden rush.

CHAPTER XI.

GATHERING CLOUDS.

HERNSHAW HOUSE did not improve upon acquaintance. Day by day it grew duller and more dreary, and weariness and depression settled upon its owner's spirits.

Glenburn, all things considered, was to be pitied; but his obstinacy held him to his determination; added to which, the gout came upon him again with increased severity, and Ledbitter had a hard time of it, and was run off his respectable legs. Nothing satisfied Glenburn; every thing was wrong. Even his valet's fingers he pronounced thumbs; he was fretful under the manipulation of his excellent body-servant, and declared he was getting old and lazy. Ledbitter took it all very resignedly; and his imperturbability would have enraged a far less irritable

person than his lordship. The more Glenburn growled, the blander was the smile of the servant; and if the master's gouty leg had been raised to kick the valet, there is no reason to believe that Ledbitter would have resented the insult; so placid, so meek, and so unselfishly considerate was that amiable attendant.

Glenburn never suspected his man for a moment. He had never done so; and still less did he suspect him now. The old bygone days had well-nigh faded from his memory, and his villainies had been too numerous to be easily recollected. This very indifference to the wrongs he had committed served to increase the desire for vengeance which at times burnt with an almost uncontrollable fierceness in the valet's breast. Not that the peer ever boasted of his evil deeds, but he never gave a thought to repentance; he never alluded in a tone of regret to the many wrongs he had inflicted, even in his weakest moments—moments when he was, as he imagined, hovering over the grave. He treated his past life as a dull and uninteresting topic, scarcely worth referring

to; and he never, by word or deed, gave the man who knew his inmost secrets the least cause to imagine that he regretted in the least his misspent vicious career.

So he sat up in his room at Hernshaw House, as he had sat up in his room at Portman Square, cursing his illness and every thing else beside; and the smooth-tongued Ledbitter waited on him assiduously, and only coloured ever so slightly when the man round whom he was gradually winding the coils of his revenge spoke to him as he would have spoken to a mongrel cur in the streets. The debt of hate and vengeance was slowly but surely approaching payment. Link by link the valet was forging the chain that was to bind the haughty Glenburn to bitter shame and misery. The stings he had from time to time lately inflicted upon his master had delighted Ledbitter; and when he saw the proud bad spirit writhe beneath the artful taunts and carefully-worded revelations, the valet felt the sweets of vengeance, and dared scarcely think of the great joy of the crushing climax, when

that cruel nobleman should hang his head in bitterest agony and bow his stiff neck beneath the overwhelming accumulation of disgrace.

The announcement to the world that the beautiful lady who ruled the Glenburn mansion so regally was the daughter of a transported felon, would be glorious, glorious! But even that was only half a vengeance, after all. If, before this, his wife were to bring shame upon him, that would add to the delight he waited for, certainly. "More unlikely things than that," mutters the valet, as he sits upon his bed, after a long and trying evening with his master. Then, before putting out his light, a long, long gaze at the little face in the gold frame, and then so hard and relentless a look towards the room where *he* sleeps. Oh, so cold and cruel a look upon that white face, and so wild a light in those generally lack-lustre eyes! Oh, so strong a quiver, too, passing over the firm-set limbs as the beads of perspiration start to the tall forehead; and he hides away the picture from his sight, and presses his hand to his heart with a look of pain!

“But even then it would be only partly paid; it must be paid in full—paid in full!” And he turns upon his side and falls into a fitful slumber.

“A better night, my lord, I think,” said the valet, as he handed his master a cup of tea with a cheery look.

“Nothing of the sort—didn’t close my eyes till daybreak,” was the surly reply.

“Can’t make it out why your lordship should have such bad nights, I’m sure,” half mused Led-bitter, as he set about his ordinary duties and preparations for his master’s breakfast.

Glenburn did not condescend to reply, but looked through the two or three letters his valet had brought him, muttering denunciations upon the heads of the writers, and then tossing the letters aside impatiently.

“No bad news, I hope, my lord,” said Led-bitter, with a well-assumed anxiety of expression.

“No good news, you may be sure,” growled the peer. “Colchester’s in the hole himself, and all sorts of complications will arise in consequence.

Confound him, why did he undertake to unravel my tangled skein when he has evidently enough to do to look after his own !”

“ Dear, dear ! that’s very awkward,” replied the valet, with his finger at his lip in a reflective attitude ; “ dear, dear ! now only to think of Mr. Colchester being in difficulties ; such a placid sort of a gentleman ; who’d have imagined there was any thing underneath such a comfortable calm sort of surface ? Bless me, to think of the strange things one sees daily !”

“ A regular case of ‘ still waters,’ the scoundrel ! Look at his letter ;” and the peer pointed to the large business-looking epistle of his attorney.

Ledbitter took up the letter with a deferential air, and read it very carefully, occasionally giving vent to an exclamation of surprise as he perused its contents. Having finished it, he laid it down on the chair where his lordship had previously placed it, and sighed heavily.

Glenburn had watched the face of his servant whilst reading the letter—watched it through half-

closed eyes, but very carefully too. The letter spoke of dreadful possibilities, and was balm to the valet, who looked serious—even distressed—but in whose inmost soul there was delight unutterable.

“Pleasant letter, that,” said Glenburn.

“A dreadful letter, my lord—dreadful!” sighed the valet.

“Dreadful!” exclaimed his lordship, sitting up; “I don’t see that it’s dreadful, man. Annoying—cursedly annoying, of course—as every thing is with me; but I can’t see why it’s dreadful.”

“Well, I hope it may not prove so, my lord,” replied the valet, with a shrug of his shoulders.

“It’s not so uncommon for men to be in difficulties, I suppose,” said the peer.

“No, my lord; but when a man who is intrusted with deeds and securities, and I don’t know what, by his clients, gets into difficulties himself, he is apt to do strange things; and I must be pardoned for repeating that, to me, the letter is little less than dreadful. I had hoped

that Mr. Colchester had arranged every thing ; but if he has been only artfully staving-off matters,—if he should make a bolt of it, or any thing of that sort,—and any thing more suggestive of some such catastrophe I never read, my lord,—why where are we ?”

Lord Glenburn turned pale, and looked actually alarmed. After a pause, however, he burst into a loud unpleasant laugh, and calling his valet a nervous fool, commenced dressing himself in a hurried fidgety way, which assured Led-bitter that the criticism on the lawyer's letter had not been without its effect. A few years ago, and Glenburn would have lighted his cigar with Colchester's letter ; but it is marvellous how a little prosperity and ease unfit us for the slightest repetition of bygone trials and discomfort. The reckless peer, who had laughed all his life at what most men would have considered misfortune and disgrace, trembled now as he thought of a return of poverty and its attendant shifts, straits, and anxieties. He had also begun gradually to discover that the one link which bound his wife to

him was his wealth. Not that he was rich for a peer; but he was rich for the husband of his housekeeper's daughter. He knew, too, that misfortunes seldom come singly; that a pecuniary smash would entail other annoyances; and he pictured to himself a future of gout, banishment, and domestic misery, which was dreadful to contemplate.

It was no wonder that he should growl more than ever at the valet, who was always with him, and who stung him so often with a smile upon his placid face that was almost seraphic.

His lordship's manner towards his wife had now assumed more the air of the severe guardian than the tolerant husband. If he was miserable himself, he could, at all events, enjoy the negative pleasure of inflicting misery upon her ladyship. He hated Hernshaw House; but he would stop there until he had completely crushed the proud soul of his handsome wife. How she must pant, he thought, to be away, in the world—the world she had adorned, and which had been so new and intoxicating a sphere for the low-born woman he

had raised to high rank! How she must beat her heart out against the strong bars of her cage, as, bruised and bleeding, she falls faint and fluttering upon the floor of her dull prison! How weak and helpless she must feel in her captivity; how wretched in her loneliness, with the dull sea stretching out before her weary eyes like her own blank monotonous future! He would stay there till his dying day, if he lived to be a hundred.

Did Lady Glenburn care for his cruel resolve? did she hang her head like a Lady of Shallott? Not a bit of it. So long as that gallant Sir Launcelot, Captain Atherton, "floated down" to that particularly comfortless Camelot, Hernshaw House, the handsome captive cared very little for her incarceration. The gallant captain floated down pretty frequently. He generally made a point of going up to see Glenburn when his lordship was confined to his room; and as he was the only person who ever came to see the invalid, and, moreover, as he invariably came laden with gossip of the kind he knew Glenburn cared to hear, he was always welcome.

“ Her ladyship quite well, I hope ?” he would sometimes say airily, as he was leaving. “ Haven’t seen her to-day ; s’pose she’s busy. Make my regards ;” and then he would take his departure.

Possibly Atherton had *not* seen Lady Glenburn on the day mentioned ; but he had seen her the day before, be certain, and the day before that as well. He saw Lady Glenburn far too frequently for his own peace of mind. After all, with the coldest natures, playing with the tender passion is a good deal like playing with fire ; it’s a dangerous game with the most careful players, and there’s no knowing when you may get singed. Just as the best and boldest rider eventually breaks his neck at a jump a child might clear with ease, the hardened male flirt finds himself fluttering, some luckless day, years after he had imagined his heart had become passion-proof, and discovers that, tough as the organ was, Cupid had spied out the one weak spot, and fired his arrow at it with the inevitable result.

Atherton had commenced hanging after Lady Glenburn from no particular motive beyond the

desire most dandies possess of cutting out all other dandies. He was pleased to find his presence agreeable, and it flattered his self-conceit to observe the sparkle in Lady Glenburn's big eyes when he approached her. He was not the only one who observed it, of course. Lady Glenburn, as we have said, did not care to disguise her feelings, and was far too straightforward in the expression of her likes and dislikes. She liked Atherton, and she seemed not to care who knew it. The consequence was, every body very soon knew it; and people shook their heads, and pitied Glenburn from the bottom of their hearts; though what could he ever have expected at his time of life? The old bucks were very hard upon him for looking so well, and took a great delight in summing up his years and sticking on one or two; whilst the young bucks shrugged their shoulders, and mentally hoped they should look half as well when they came to Glenburn's age.

In the midst of the turmoil and glitter of the season in town, a man like Atherton was comparatively safe; but in the dull, dreary locality

where Hernshaw House was fixed, it was a very different matter. There were very few places where the proud Atherton cared to carry his stylish person. He was a nobody by birth, and consequently twice as haughty as those of his companions who were well-born. His father had been a gentleman by education, but had inherited his money from a parent who had gained it in trade. He was in his heart a worshipper of "blood;" and man of the world as he was, accustomed to excellent society, in which he shone, he was really a little dazzled by the title and aristocratic surroundings of the woman whose languishing black eyes told him her sentiments as plainly as words. The retired tradespeople and second-rate squires, whose houses dotted the neighbourhood and who formed the cream of the local society, Captain Atherton treated in the most cavalier manner; and when he accepted their invitations, he contrived with great skill to let them see that he considered his visit a condescension. Popular opinion was divided in the neighbourhood, one party considering him a creature of superior mould; the

other set looking on him as a puppy. Perhaps, on the whole, the puppy party had it.

It was a matter of the intensest surprise to the gallant captain when he made the discovery that he was falling in love with her ladyship. He couldn't make it out. He summed up her attractions, and came to the conclusion that she was simply a rather striking-looking woman. Handsome? Well, yes, handsome. Oh, yes, decidedly handsome. But what of that? He had met very many handsome women without falling in love with them. Besides, the idea was preposterous; it was youthful and spooney. Boys fell in love; men knew better. At the same time he must confess he had never seen any one so charming in his life. And then—ah!—such a sigh, that old Major Tannett looks up in alarm, thinking there is something wrong; but Atherton laughs it off, and says he suffers fearfully from dyspepsia.

But a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse, as the Major knowingly remarks; and if Atherton thinks his supposed secret isn't public property, he is greatly mistaken. Meanwhile

Lady Glenburn learns to hate her husband more and more every day; and Ledbitter smiles and has his suspicions, which of course he keeps to himself.

But the clouds are gathering, he feels, slowly but surely round the head of his noble lordship.

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