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# THE GIRL HE MARRIED.

A Novel.

BY

JAMES GRANT,

AUTHOR OF "THE ROMANCE OF WAR," ETC.

"O! good, your worship, tell it of all things; for I mightily delight in hearing love stories."

SANCHO PANZA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1869.

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# THE GIRL HE MARRIED.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE SILENT SHOT.

THIS had been the last entire day that Lennard Blair expected to spend at Oakwoodlee, and he had many arrangements to make with Stephen Hislop concerning the future letting of the house, and with Elsie on other matters, during the tearful pauses in which the poor old woman indulged while packing his portmanteau.

He had to dine with Feverley and then to meet Hesbia; and, that other matters might not be wanting to occupy his thoughts, Maxwell, Mr. Vere's valet, brought him a brief note from that gentleman, and it ran thus:—

“I hope nothing will prevent you starting duly for Liverpool to-morrow. I see by Bradshaw that

the first train is the 7.30 a.m. from Carstairs. A forgery to the extent of £1,400 has been committed in my name—so Envoyse writes me. See him at once about it, and he will give you all the particulars — at least, so far as he knows them.”

“A forgery!” repeated Lennard, pondering; “I shall not go without seeing Hesbia, at all events, and learning my fate from her own lips.”

Having no intention of keeping the reader behind the curtain, we shall simply mention that a cheque for £400 with which, on a very remote chance of repayment, Mr. Vere had favoured Travice Cheatwood, had passed into the hands of others for £1,400—a little additional penmanship having made a difference in the document, of which the bank entirely disapproved.

Matters had not been going on very satisfactorily with the house of Vere and Co. lately; so old Mr. Envoyse had acquainted Lennard. Several ships had been lost, and the insurances effected thereon were about to be toughly disputed in a court of law; two were openly alleged to have been scuttled on the high seas. Other untoward events had occurred; and Mr. Vere seemed to be by no means easy in his mind, to judge by the tenor of his communications.

“Once again in the old alley off Canning Place,

I'll have a general overhaul of these matters," thought Lennard. "Perhaps the old head clerk is unnecessarily anxious; but he has thrice hinted mysteriously of 'untoward events,' and I don't much fancy the phrase."

And a time was to come when Lennard would dislike it still more.

At present he was full only of the pleasure and anticipation with which Hesbia's coquettish letter had inspired him.

He dressed carefully for his rendezvous; yet his toilette was artistic in its apparent carelessness. His browned but handsome hands were gloveless, as he was in the country, and he now wore the only piece of jewellery in which he indulged—his father's large old-fashioned signet ring; he wore a black velvet shooting-coat, with a lilac vest (a colour which he knew Hesbia admired), a spun-silk shirt, and white wide-awake, the contour of which set off his fine face, with its straight features, dark complexion, darker eyes, and smart curve of moustache.

The sorrow and affectionate solicitude of his two old domestics, as they hovered about him during the entire day, had proved somewhat of a "worry" to Lennard; but the earnestness of their kindly wishes and suggestions filled his heart with gratitude and a regret that he could not effect something permanent for their comfort. He arranged, however, that they were to remain at Oakwoodlee till the place was let

or otherwise disposed of. Not that Lennard ever meant to part with this last fragment of his patrimony; he remembered too well his dying father's wishes and the old traditional virtue ascribed to the retention of the Charter Stone; but all that he proposed to do for Elsie and Stephen he did in kindness of heart and a sense of gratitude to the two faithful old creatures, in a land where such faith and love as theirs are daily growing less.

His father would have done so too, though it would have been with something of the stately old feudal, or, better still, the old Scottish patriarchal idea, of ministering to two humble but hereditary claimants on his bounty and protection; but Lennard viewed their future and his own chances of ability through the medium of experience, and as a practical young man of business.

"You will look after my two old friends when I am gone, Feverley," said he.

"I shall, my dear fellow—with a heart and a half!" replied the Doctor, in his earnest and impulsive way.

Amid all the kindness and hospitality displayed by Feverley and the kind old lady, his mother, Lennard was watching the shadows as they deepened on the slopes of the hills, and longing for evening.

The dinner at the Doctor's little cottage was

excellent; for Mrs. Feverley, in honour of her son's friend, had made unusual exertions: the hotch-potch was voted a great success, the lamb had been fed on the Pentland slopes, the green peas and cauliflower were of the Doctor's own culture, and the salmon was fine though curdy, so Lennard and Feverley fed like two heroes of the Waverley novels.

At last the moment came when Blair must bid the Doctor adieu, if he would be at the stile in time, as he had to pass through the hamlet of Blairavon, and traverse the road by the Haughs, a greater distance than he had first reckoned on; and, full of what he would say, in what terms he would describe his nervous dread of being deemed a fortune-hunter, how he should explain his prospects and his hopes for the future; his too probable despair if he was compelled to sail for Vera Cruz without a pledge—a solemn promise from her; how he would seek even to soften the faults of Travice Cheatwood,—all passed through his mind as he proceeded along the old shady roads, where the stately trees—the beech, the lime, and chestnut—entwined their rustling foliage overhead.

He hastened on.

Already the farewell rays of the setting sun were resting redly on the whinstone face of Craigellon, at the base of which the black coots were floating in the loch where his uncle Lennard had been found;

and ere long the stars would be twinkling from the sea of azure, amber, and opal overhead.

The sunlight faded out, the blue deepened, and the shadows in the woods grew darker.

“Oh, which of all these stars shines over the fortunate?” thought Lennard, as he gazed at Hesper twinkling over the summit of Craigellon; “what is the secret that governs, aids, or inspires the great element of human success, or that enables men to fight the great battle of life with a clear brain, a brave heart, and a strong hand?”

Would the golden dream of love, of wealth, and success ever be realised by him?

He increased his pace, for he had now turned into the grassy footway that led directly to the stile, which was only about half a mile distant; but he had not proceeded far when a sudden cry of anguish escaped him—the same cry heard by Hesbia at their trysting-place—while his right leg seemed to break under him, and he fell on his back in a bewilderment of terror and exquisite pain!

Save a crashing of branches, as Travice Cheatwood, clutching his treacherous weapon, tore unseen through an adjacent hedge, there was no sound in the woods or in the air near him.

Panting rather than breathing, Lennard endeavoured to struggle to his feet, only to sink again more helplessly and in greater agony. His first idea



was, that his leg had mysteriously snapped—given way—under him ; and just before being thus stricken down, he had been conscious of one of those unaccountable shivers, called in Scotland a *grue*, which, according to superstition, comes only when a human foot treads on the ground where one's grave is to be made.

“ Oh God ! ” he exclaimed, while the bead-drops were wrung from his temples by pain and perplexity, “ what misery—what strange calamity is this that has come upon me—at such a time too—and Hesbia—Hesbia ! —— ”

Rallying his energies, he examined the now useless limb, and found the blood flowing freely from a wound inflicted some inches above the knee-joint, over which he had no power, for the bullet had fairly smashed through the thigh-bone.

He felt convinced that it was the effect of a shot ; but fired from whence, by whom, and from what species of projectile—a rifle, musket, or pistol ?—for he had been unconscious of hearing a sound ; and full as his mind was with the image of Hesbia Vere, he could not have failed to detect the report.

He was bleeding fast ; again and again he called for help—for succour ; but, as the place was lonely, he heard only the voices of the wood-pigeons, as he scared them from their nests, and he feared he might lie long enough in that unfrequented path, ere a

passer that way discovered him. Did not a year elapse before the remains, said to be those of his uncle Lennard, were discovered by a dog among the sedges by the adjacent loch?

The terror of bleeding, perhaps to death, alone and in the night, came vividly upon him; to stop the hæmorrhage, he tightly bound his handkerchief round the wound, and again shouted with all his strength.

This time he was successful in attracting the attention of a passing horseman, who drew his bridle and paused on the highway.

The Reverend Doctor Kirkford, who had been dining with Ranald Cheyne, at the Haughs, and was jogging along the highway on his barrel-bellied Galloway cob, heard Lennard's cry, and, coming to the spot, was grievously shocked and horrified to find the son of his old friend stretched on the pathway, pale, exhausted, bloody, nearly speechless, and what was still more bewildering, totally unable to explain or assign a cause for his being reduced to such a condition.

The old minister was a sturdy and humane man; he lost not an instant in procuring assistance; and about the same time when Hesbia Vere, with a pouting lip and angry eye, was having her long chestnut tresses manipulated and arranged for the night by Mademoiselle Savonette, Lennard was being placed in bed, helpless and faint with agony and

loss of blood, in the old house at Oakwoodlee, while the worthy minister—leaving Elsie and Stephen Hislop to moan, and marvel, and wring their hands—was lashing up his old cob, and galloping like a madman, to fetch Doctor Feverley.

## CHAPTER II.

## AT BREAKFAST.

“IF you write of this coarse work-a-day world,” remarks an author recently, “you can no more ignore certain repulsive phases of society than you can write a history of London without mention of its courts and purlieus.”

Mr. Travice Cheatwood is certainly one of those repulsive characters; but his introduction to the reader is as necessary to the course of our narrative as that of Lennard Blair himself.

The deep and dreamless sleep which is so soothing and reviving, and which generally follows a severe exertion of the mind or body, came not to him. Sleep he did; but his slumber was a mere succession of frightful nightmares and fitful startings. Pity for Lennard’s death—if he was dead, or for his sufferings if alive—he had none in the slightest degree. His sole, or dominant emotion, was a selfish aching, and craven fear for himself; and that by the recent act

he had put a climax to a long career of secret crime, which was now on the verge of inevitable discovery.

From having been hitherto parti-coloured, his prospects now were involved in utter gloom.

In the morning, the valet who answered his bell was almost scared by the wan, sharp face, that spoke of an inward struggle of no ordinary magnitude, and by the haggard expression of his pale-green bloodshot eyes.

The sound of the breakfast-gong made him leap in bed with a convulsive start, thus showing how thoroughly his nerves were unstrung and his whole system shaken.

“Maxwell,” said Mr. Vere, to the aiguilleted servant who carved and brought him cold beef and game-pie from the sideboard; “where is Mr. Cheatwood this morning?”

“Studying in the billiard-room,” suggested Sir Cullender.

“Ill in bed, sir,” replied Maxwell.

“I don’t wonder at it—the cigar is never out of his mouth,” said the hawk-eyed baronet, decapitating his third egg.

“Yes, papa—I have heard that Travice is very ill,” said Hesbia, who was presiding over the tea and coffee department with a splendid service of Wedgewood-ware before her—the pots and urn of silver, and so chased and massive that they might have

graced a palace, while all the breakfast-table glittered with crystal, plate, and ivory, in the flood of morning light that streamed through the painted oriel behind her chair; but now the matter of Cheatwood's illness was eclipsed in interest, when the butler, with his usual calmness of visage, and imperturbable company-bearing somewhat changed, came forward rather nervously and hurriedly, to announce that "one of the under gamekeepers was just arrove in the servants 'all with the hawful news as how young Mr. Lennard Blair had been shot dead —."

"Dead!" exclaimed Mr. Vere.

"A'most, or very nigh it."

"When—where?"

"Last night, sir, in the fields."

The low, sharp cry that escaped Hesbia, as she let her cup drop from her trembling hand, drew the black, shining eyes of the unmoved baronet somewhat inquiringly on her.

"Shot—shot, do you say?" resumed Mr. Vere, in great excitement.

"Sorely wounded, sir, at all events," replied the butler, who was a large, bald-headed, and remarkably sleek-looking personage, attired in black, with an ample white vest.

"But shot—shot by whom?" demanded Hesbia, who had grown deathly pale.

"Hirish navvies, or some of the pitmen; who

else hereabouts would have done so, for the people a'most hadore the young gentleman: but I wish, Miss Vere, as we were all safe out o' this, and 'ome in Liverpool—I do."

Hesbia now remembered the strange cry that had reached her as she sat by the stile; and there she had loitered and lingered in growing anger, while he was lying bleeding, helplessly, it might be, dying in the open fields!

"He was found quite faint with loss of blood by the clergyman of the parish, Doctor Kirkford, who took him 'ome, and sent for the Doctor at the village; but he can't subtract the bullets, no-how."

"Bullets—how many are there?" exclaimed Mr. Vere.

"One in each leg and three in his head, as they do say," replied the butler with growing animation.

"I must see him at once," said Mr. Vere, proceeding to finish his breakfast in haste; "he was to have started to-day for Liverpool, with some very important documents for Envoyse—for we have some very unpleasant—ugly matters, in fact, to disentagle; how the deuce can the catastrophe have occurred, in a country so quiet as this?"

"He probably became involved in some low quarrel," said Sir Cullender, with an angry gleam in his sloe-black eyes, for Lennard was no favourite

of his, and Hesbia's interest—her too evident excitement and abstraction excited his suspicions; “there are, I hear, both poachers and gipsies in these parts.”

“What was the cause, or whoever was the perpetrator,” said Hesbia, “of one thing I am assured, the fault would not be Lennard's.”

“Lennard's?” queried Sir Cullender, lifting his thick eyebrows.

“Yes—Mr. Lennard Blair,” she added stoutly, her full, firm lips quivering, and her eyes sparkling.

“Like all your sex, you are delightfully and daringly irrational in your arguments as in your sympathies—your likings and dislikings,” said Sir Cullender, with a quiet sneer in his tone and eye, as he played with the large signet-ring which bore his crest so ostentatiously, and the characteristic motto, *Facie tenus*, which has been translated as “up to the mark.”

In her independence and impulsiveness, Hesbia would at that moment have put on her hat and shawl, and hastened on foot to Oakwoodlee, but something in the expression of Sir Cullender's sharp Jewish eyes arrested her, and she felt herself compelled to linger in the room, and hear a few remarks that passed between her father and the baronet, neither of whom felt their naturally fine appetites impaired either by Lennard's accident or Cheatwood's



illness—and some of these remarks brought an angry blush to her cheek.

“If this fellow should die,” the baronet began, while his nose seemed to become more hooked and an avaricious gleam passed over his eyes——

“Blair do you mean?”

“Yes—to whom would his little place at Oakwoodlee go?”

“I cannot say—but, though small, I know the place to be of more value than he deems it,” said Vere.

“Ah! the coal seams lie that way.”

“Exactly—under every foot of it. He has now not a relation in the world that I know of.”

“To whom would it fall, then?” asked Sir Cullender.

“To the Crown as the ultimate heir.”

“The deuce it would!”

“Of course—if he does not leave the place to two old servants who live there.”

“Bah!” said the baronet, “where do people ever do such things, except in novels?”

“But you don’t know these Blairs,” replied Mr. Vere, manipulating his huge pockets full of loose silver; “his father was a strange, proud, and eccentric old fellow, with queer Scotch superstitions. He actually believed in the virtue or charm of possessing an old block of stone on his lands; in there being in each year an unlucky day for his family; and so

forth. But with all his sound practical sense, Leonard Blair is quite capable of bestowing the remnant of his patrimony as I say."

"Unless——" and here the baronet paused, and gave a furtive glance at Hesbia.

"What, Sir Cullender?" she asked—"unless what?"

"He left it to *you*."

"Not unlikely, I gad—they are such good friends," said Mr. Vere, in excellent humour at this idea, and the sudden prospect of obtaining the poor vineyard of Naboth.

While they conferred thus, there passed over Hesbia's fair face that undefinable expression which led so many to doubt her good birth and gentle breeding; it was genuine and honest scorn for the time, but it took the usual phase of defiance, of challenge, and of covert resistance.

"Maxwell, order round the carriage—no, the mail-phaeton will do," said Mr. Vere; "we shall drive down to Oakwoodlee immediately, and see about all this affair, which will certainly be one for official inquiry."

"And I, papa," said Hesbia, coming anxiously forward, "may I go too?"

"You surely are not in earnest?"

"Of course I am—why not? While with you there can be no impropriety in such a visit."

"Well—for the sake of the drive, you may ac-

company Sir Cullender and me," replied Mr. Vere, who thought if there was any prospect of wills being framed or bequests made, it might be advantageous if Lennard saw or knew that Hesbia was under his roof; and with the permission thus cunningly accorded, she hurried away to her own room, to exchange her morning dress for one more suitable to her visit.

Hesbia had much to think of—much that she dared scarcely to admit—even to herself.

Lennard's non-appearance at the appointed place was now, poor fellow, fully accounted for, and the cause filled her with more of sympathy and with more of love for him, than she ever thought to have been inspired.

Until now, she never knew how much she really cared for Lennard Blair; or was 'it that they were both secluded in the country, and that she was without other objects or attractions? Perhaps that had much to do with the present amount of her tenderness and solicitude.

The illness of Travice at this crisis was strange.

Savonette, Buttons the page, and the butler, too, had told her how white—how fearfully white his face was, how incoherent his manner, and how wild his eyes, as he made his way to bed last night; and Hesbia actually thought for a time that all these might be symptoms of a hopeless love for herself (and not the result of late hours, of selfish hate,

and wholesome fear), and that her cousin had become a regular victim to his passion.

Suddenly an alarming idea—a terrible suspicion struck her, a new idea, at which she felt herself grow pale, and which she endeavoured to thrust aside as soon as it occurred. She remembered the fierce threat that Travice had made in the conservatory. Then a cry almost escaped her, as she rushed away to the gun-room, for, as in old Richard Blair's time, there was still an apartment of this kind in Blairavon, though casual guests alone used the weapons now.

All the fowling-pieces, rifles and other firearms—even to some trophied muskets of the Russian war—were in their usual places; not one was missing, and a swift, keen glance at the locks of all showed Hesbia that not one had been used overnight.

So Lennard Blair had been shot down, as she had been told, in a district where he had not an avowed enemy, but many, many friends—shot down and left to die, without further molestation; his watch, purse, and rings were all untouched, so plunder had not been the object; and he had fallen by an unseen hand, just as his favourite dog had perished shortly before.

The whole affair seemed the result of witchcraft—it was so mysterious and unaccountable.

## CHAPTER III.

## VISITORS AT OAKWOODLEE.

DOCTOR FEVERLEY was soon by the bedside of his friend, and after an examination, found that the bone of the thigh had been severely fractured above the knee by a bullet, which was lodged in the wound, and the probing for which, with its subsequent extraction, caused the most exquisite agony, nor was it fairly brought forth until chloroform had been resorted to.

It was then found to be a bullet of exactly the same kind as that by which the dog had been shot; conical in form, with a little wooden plug for expansion, it was marked with two letters, A A; and now the mystery of the affair was greatly increased.

“Truly, as Sterne says, ‘We live in a world beset on all sides by mysteries and riddles,’” was the remark of Feverley, as he surveyed the bullet.

“What the devil do you mean, Doctor?” asked

Lennard, with a sigh of anger; "I have been shot at by some scoundrel——"

"Yes—by whom and for what?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well—is not one a mystery and the other a riddle?"

"But both shall be solved by the police."

And so, while Lennard lay abed, securely fixed with splints and bandages, a prey to pain, weariness, anger, and suspense, and, worse than all, afflicted by a fever, for which the cards left by a score of neighbours (even those of Hesbia) afforded little or no solace, great lumbering rural police, and sharp-witted little detectives, together with Mr. Grabbie, a local legal functionary and practitioner, hunted and scoured all the neighbourhood in vain.

The Reverend Doctor Kirkford, who had first found Lennard; Steinie and Elsie, who had seen him go forth hale, and well, and thereafter borne home faint and bloody; Doctor Feverley, with whom he had dined; and others who could have no possible means of knowing anything about the crime or the perpetrator of it, were precognosed, examined, and worried by the Sheriff-Substitute and Procurator-Fiscal, but in vain. Days passed on; nothing was discovered, and by the time he was able to leave his bed, and be seated in a chair for a few hours, "the mysterious case of shooting at Blairavon," as the local papers called it, was beginning to be forgotten

by all save himself and his little circle. The authorities, of course, pretended to have "a clue" to the perpetrator; but always failed to follow it up.

As a J.P. for the county, old Ranald Cheyne made himself very busy in the matter, and was unsparing in the expenditure of money and horseflesh, but to no purpose.

"By all that is atrocious!" said he one day, as he clutched his hunting-whip in his energy, "such a crime as this never before disgraced the county, and the perpetrator must one day be discovered and brought to strict justice. But you are getting over it famously, Lennard, my boy; the bone and breeding of the Blairs are in you, and they never succumbed to anything. Your misfortune is likely to furnish talk for the fireside, the coverside, and the harvest-field for many a day in West Lothian."

All this, though it soothed, failed to console Lennard; a foul wrong had been done him, by a secret hand, by some one unseen, and as yet unknown; he had thereby endured great suffering; was sorely wasted in body and "worried" in mind by the obscurity in which the outrage was involved.

It was a severe blow to be suddenly stricken down from health and strength to the extremity of helpless weakness, and to become, for a time, a lamed and

bedridden man, with the chances of amputation—of death, perhaps by fever, and to know also, that while all this was being endured he had been without the long wished-for explanation with Hesbia Vere. Then, when remembering her fickleness and coquetry—how many she was alleged to have jilted, even before girlhood was passed, he writhed on his pillow at the thought of her being left now entirely to the attentions of others, for though the mysterious Sir Cullender Crowdy had returned to London, new visitors of both sexes were at Blair-avon.

Among others, some of the Hussar officers from the barracks at Hamilton or Perth; but those men, he was told by Feverley, seemed to be somehow proof against the witcheries of their coquettish hostess. They shot and raced—it was not the hunting season—and while enjoying his wine, secretly voted “old Vere a bore.” To Hesbia it was soon annoyingly evident that they preferred the Cheynes to herself.

“Why was this?” she one day inquired angrily of her cousin Travice, who was pleased to see her mortified, and who had won a small mint of money from the unsuspecting dragoons.

“The plain fact is, Hesbia, that in these girls those fellows find something more akin to themselves.”

“How?”



“To their own order.”

Then the old feeling came over Hesbia, and her eyes gleamed with their most unpleasant expression.

Elsie and Steinie hung over Lennard even as his own father and mother would have done. In their earnest and loving old eyes there was ever an expression which seemed to say, “Oh, if we could only die for you!” so great was their devotion to him, perhaps quite as much because he was the son of Richard Blair and one of the “old stock,” as for any personal merits, though he was a very amiable and loveable young fellow. In the first days of his lassitude, pain, and fever, he seemed to be living over a portion of his past existence.

The smiles and tears of childhood seemed to return with those memories of the spring of life when he had been going step by step along a flowery path towards its summer; but ever and anon, among old familiar sounds, such as the cawing of the rooks without, the creaking of a vane overhead, the patter of rain on the roof, the sough of the wind in the pine-woods, with the voices of Elsie and Steinie, *others* seemed to mingle—others that were stilled for ever; so, in his delirium, he would fancy that the years which had passed were rolled back, and that he was a child again, with Elsie his nurse as of old, singing him to sleep in the same room and the same bed where he had often cowered in the winter

nights, with fears of the spunkies and spectres, and other pre-railway phantoms, who had long made the vicinity of Blairavon their abode.

Elsie Graham was much mollified in her views of Miss Vere, who daily sent Maxwell or Mademoiselle Savonette, with inquiries, cards, and occasionally comfits and cordials, and who frequently came in person to ask for Lennard, but, of course, never alone, as she had always with her Flora Cheyne or Mr. Vere; and on one of those occasions, when the latter spoke of the affairs of the firm at home, and of the forgery which was yet involved in so much mystery, Lennard could perceive that his agitation was visible through even his long-practised and habitual system of self-control, and that the loose silver was jingled in his pockets more vigorously, but more abstractedly, than ever.

During one of the early days of Lennard's convalescence, when he could sit in an arm-chair under the drooping laburnum and fragrant lilac-trees near the door of Oakwoodlee, and enjoy a cigar in the bright sunshine, or the cool breeze that came from the belt of pines around the Charter Stone, he received a visit from Hesbia, who was accompanied on this occasion by the daughters of Ranald Cheyne and by—her cousin Travice Cheatwood!

The postman had just brought a letter, which Lennard perceived was from Mr. Dabchick, but he had not time to glance at its contents (fortunately,

perhaps, though they were, in one instance, very important), for he heard the voice of Hesbia, and a thrill passed through his breast; he thrust the letter into his pocket-book, and grasped the knobs of his arm-chair in a feeble, and, as it proved, vain attempt to rise, when she, with her three companions, crossed the little piece of green sward to the place where he sat under the trees.

So Lennard Blair was fairly out of danger! Travice Cheatwood felt, for the time, out of it too; and so all his old hatred had returned with renewed force.

“Exposed me, did he!” thought he, again and again; “exposed me, and saved those beggarly snobs, Dabchick and Feverley, from the unmerciful ‘milking’ I had in store for them (and himself too). Well, I shot surely, and he’ll never trump that card, confound him!”

Travice had been posted recently as a turf-defaulter on the course at the Derby, Epsom, and Catterick Bridge—posted beyond remedy or avail; for though he had heard of other persons taking high grounds, instructing their solicitors to sue, and so forth, no such method was open to him. He could only grind his teeth—grin and bear it.

“When things are at the very worst,” thought he, “they are always sure to mend; and perhaps it may be so with my affairs. I have still my chances with Hesbia; and when all is lost or over, I can at

least levant to the diggings or the land of the Stripes and Stars!"

Such were the thoughts that flitted through the mind of Travice as he approached the invalid—his victim,—who sat almost powerless in his cushioned arm-chair, his slippered feet upon a stool, a stick and crutch by his side; his straight features, in their pallor and thinness, looking straighter than ever; his eyes with the glare and hollowness of suffering apparent in them; his hair uncut, and, like his beard and moustache, looking, as Hesbia thought, unpleasantly ample; while his tasselled *robe-de-chambre* flapped loosely and widely about his attenuated limbs.

Hesbia and the Cheynes approached and greeted him with genuine kindness and commiseration expressed in their charming faces, and their inquiries and congratulations were uttered with such real interest and feeling, that Lennard felt his heart beat happily, and he even held out his hand with forgiveness to Cheatwood, thinking the while, as old Steinie hobbled forth from the house with chairs, how the appearance of the three fashionable-looking girls in their light summer dresses, smart hats and feathers, and perfect toilettes, from their gathered hair to their tiny Balmoral boots, made gay and bright the exterior of his somewhat lonely and old-fashioned place.

On this day Hesbia had almost to compel Travice

Cheatwood to accompany her, nor would she listen to one word of the quarrel which he openly alleged as the reason of his having no desire to meet Blair again ; while his secret one, was his dislike, aversion, and fear to meet face to face one whom he had wronged in a mode so dastardly. But he found there was nothing for him but to trust to Blair's generosity for silence concerning the *écarté*, and to escort Hesbia, who, more by chance than motive, had reminded him of the threat he uttered in the conservatory on a certain night ; and Travice, when she did so, changed colour, or rather lost it, most visibly.

“I bear you no malice for our shindy, Blair,” said he, presenting his hand ; “*écarté* is an ugly game, and no born Briton is ever really master of it as it is essentially French. Sorry to hear of all you have suffered in this devilish affair ; hope you'll soon be quite well.”

“Thanks. Hand chairs to the ladies, please—nearer me. Steinie has placed them half-a-mile distant.”

While Travice with nervous haste was placing the chairs, Hesbia's eyes beamed kindly into Lennard's, as she said in a rapid whisper,—

“I was not far from you on that fatal night.”

“Indeed——”

“I was at the stile on the road to the craig—*you know the place*—and actually heard your cry.”

“Thanks for telling me so, Hesbia,” said he with a sigh; and a quick, but unseen, pressure of their hands closed the secret intelligence, which brought a flush to Lennard’s cheek and a lustre to his eye.

Travice Cheatwood, bent on making a good impression, was “got up” even more carefully than usual, in a suit of lilac-coloured tweed, a white vest, a slender blue silk tie drawn through a ruby ring; a wide-awake hat, with an eyeglass screwed into the rim thereof; lavender-coloured gloves, with elaborate black seams; glazed boots, and a tooth-pick umbrella. His goatee-beard was carefully trimmed, and while doing his best to preserve a nonchalant bearing, there was a restlessness apparent in his eyes and manner.

Flora Cheyne and her younger sister were gentle and lady-like girls. To a close observer, even to Lennard’s lover-eyes, it was evident that, while infinitely less beautiful than Hesbia, there was about them less of that bearing of perpetual self-assertion which distinguished the heiress of Blair-avon.

## CHAPTER IV.

## LENNARD OBTAINS A CLUE.

AFTER a few common-places were uttered, kind enquiries made, and messages given, by the three ladies, Mr. Cheatwood feeling all the awkwardness of his position, notwithstanding his profound assurance, found an absolute necessity for saying something, more especially as Lennard's eye had twice regarded him with an expression of calm, cold scrutiny; he therefore observed,—

“Singularly enough, I happened to be in the fields when this unhappy affair occurred, Mr. Blair; and, like Miss Vere, I was not far from the spot.”

“Indeed,” replied Lennard; “this is the first time I have heard of the circumstance. Your name did not appear among the precognitions of the Procurator.”

“Oh yes, but he *was* in the fields on that evening,” said Flora Cheyne, with a readiness that won her the gratitude of Mr. Cheatwood, “for about

the very time you were attacked, he was at the Haughs with some music for me."

This was not strictly true according to time; but her reply greatly encouraged Cheatwood, who resumed,—

"It has been a serious business this of yours, Blair."

"Serious, indeed—Feverley, it seems, at one time was sorely afraid of gangrene setting in, and then nothing could have saved me but immediate amputation."

"Poor Mr. Blair!" said Hesbia; "all your round-dancing would have been at an end then."

"But you are getting rapidly better, Mr. Blair—and we are so delighted to see it," lisped Flora Cheyne.

"Yes—thanks to Frank Feverley; among all the thousands of practitioners on the human race, I do not think I could have found a more careful fellow. I can absolutely move my leg a little to-day!"

And, making a most horrible grimace while he did so, Lennard lifted his foot about two inches from the soft stool on which it rested.

"All right, old fellow—never say die!" exclaimed Cheatwood, patting him on the back,—a patronizing process which Lennard never relished, save from intimate friends, and under which he winced now, as he detested Cheatwood's slangy and free-and-easy style; "You'll be up and about in a week or two;



but you are in comfortable diggings—this queer old bunk of your father's—and so should take your own time of turning up at Vere and Co.'s, in the old alley at Liverpool."

"Can this really be the rascal I suspect him?" thought Lennard.

"As soon as you are able to move a little, remember that the carriage is quite at your disposal—papa told me to say so," said Hesbia.

"And *my* papa desired me to place my bay pad at your service, as a first mount," said Flora Cheyne, with a little blush; "it is quiet as a lamb, Mr. Blair, and rides on a snaffle."

"Have a weed," said Travice, opening his cigar case and proffering it, ere Lennard could thank the ladies; "Hesbia and Miss Cheyne will, of course, excuse us here in the open air—you are forbidden to smoke —"

"More than one—thanks—and I have already done so."

"But, Mr. Blair," said Flora, looking into Lennard's face with her dark eyes full of interest; "is it quite the case that, as papa says, you did not hear a report when shot down?"

"I heard nothing—saw nothing!"

"You are quite certain?"

"Quite; I heard no sound, but the cry of pain that escaped me," added Lennard, glancing at Hesbia.

“How doocid odd!” commented Travice, as he carefully bit off the end of a cigar, and proceeded to light it. Turning again to Lennard, with the fixed eye-glass shining in his eye, imparting thereby a grotesquely sinister glare to his expression, he asked, “have you no suspicions of any one?”

“There are times when I have.”

“Times only?”

“It is awkward, without solid proof, to bring forward an accusation of guilt, Mr. Cheatwood.”

“Of course—of course,” replied Travice, composedly puffing his cigar; “the pitmen hereabout are, I have heard, a rough lot; but every man must be held innocent till he is found guilty.”

“And, in doubtful cases,” continued Lennard, with a peculiar smile, “we have in Scotland, as in France, an ugly but necessary verdict—‘not proven.’”

Travice Cheatwood thought of Dabchick, and in his heart anathematized all law in general, and Scotch law in particular.

“Beyond acceptances too often protested. I have had little to do with the law,” said Travice, with a tone of retort; “because, like your worthy father — ”

“My father?” interrupted Lennard sharply, with a reddening of his pale cheek, and an emphasis on the words.

“Yes—I have been, like him, animated by a

gentlemanly love of spending much and making little.”

The remark, though smilingly made, simply originated in Travice's desire to be impertinent. He saw the feverish hectic of suppressed irritation in the now usually pale cheek of Blair; but pity he had none, and all fear for himself had, in this instance, completely passed away.

“Listen,” said Hesbia, during an unpleasant pause, while the cooing of the cushat-doves came softly out of the Blairavon woods; “listen to the sweet notes of the wood pigeons.”

“How romantic—bah!” was the blunt reply; “I like them best when their toes are peeping up through a covering of good puff-paste.”

“Just as those white lambs which dot the green sward in the foreground would please you better with the accompaniments of green peas and mint sauce.”

“Precisely, my dear cousin; and you might add, with a glass of good dry sherry.”

“You have charming tastes, Travice!” said Hesbia, opening and shutting her parasol with an air of annoyance, and fearful that he might commit himself unpleasantly, as a sullen expression was beginning to gather in his eye; so with the kindest manner she could assume, she now rose to retire, giving a promise of coming soon again—a promise which kindled a glow of love and gratitude in Lennard's heart.

“Travice,” said she, angrily, as they quitted Oakwoodlee by the wicket which opened into the highway, “you are remarkably cool over all this painful affair of Mr. Blair’s.”

“Cool!—yes, as a dog’s nose at Christmas—why should I be otherwise?” he asked, tipping the ashes from his cigar by the ivory handle of his “toothpick” umbrella; “my own affairs are quite worry enough for me, and it happens that just at present my betting-book is not the most pleasant reading in the world, and is likely to continue to be so, unless I can get a lady with a jolly pot of money to take pity upon me for better or worse.”

“Oh, fie; how mercenary!” said Flora Cheyne, holding up a tiny finger in mock rebuke. “Is not money the root of all evil?”

“So says the nursery rhyme—and so say the parsons, too—but how the deuce is one to get along without it?”

“True,” sighed Hesbia, as she thought of all the luxuries by which she was surrounded, which were now the necessities of her existence, and which she knew Lennard Blair could never yield her, unaided by her father, and from him there had been dropping many unpleasant hints of losses and money disasters of late!

After his three visitors had left him, Lennard sat long in a pleasant reverie, thinking over all that

Hesbia had said, for though she had uttered but commonplaces, she had a modulation of voice and a varying power of eye, that lent point to her most trivial remarks; her smiles had been winning and tender—too winning and too tender to suit the taste of one who detected them, Travice—her kind manner, and the honest warmth of her parting hope that he would soon be able to visit them at Blair-avon, as the carriage was at his disposal, more than ever won poor Lennard's heart, and feeling that for her sake he could quite forgive even the uncourteous and dishonourable conduct of her cousin, he forgot all about the letter of the fussy little barrister, and sat in a long and happy reverie, listening to the rustle of the green leaves overhead, the soft cooing of the cushat-doves, and the murmur of the adjacent stream as it chafed over its bed of brown pebbles.

To have excited so much interest in Hesbia's breast, and won so much of her sympathy, made Lennard think that all he had suffered had not been endured in vain, or without a pleasing reward.

At last he proceeded with half vacant interest to unfold and read the dapper lawyer's epistle, and while doing so the piping falsetto voice, the general meekness of visage, and great pomposity of bearing, which were characteristic of the writer, came to memory. Like many of the great obscure, even in

these practical days, Dabchick affected heraldry; thus his note-paper was adorned with no less than three crests, one for each of his names, in chief being a chicken *proper*, for the noble line of Dabchick. Lennard could have laughed at this display, but a pallor settled gradually over his face as he read the letter, one part of which closely affected himself.

“Everything is dull here, and as usual the streets of Edinburgh look about as crowded at noon as those of London do at four o’clock in the morning; and nothing is doing in our courts, for yearly our legal profession is going more and more to the dogs, and the ‘honorable position of the Scottish Bar becomes more and more traditional—a thing of the past!’ *Oremus pro paupertate Edinensi!*”

Dabchick was evidently discontented; he had *not* been retained in the only case of which he had a chance of figuring in since his “call to the Bar,” the right of way to the mains of Kaims.

“How fares it with la belle Hesbia? Some cavalry men from Perth barracks, or from those at John’s Lodge (near Edinburgh) are at Blairavon, I hear; so the old game of furious flirting will, no doubt, be a-foot, and we civilians nowhere.”

“John’s Lodge—pitiful snob!” muttered Lennard, who knew the Scotch, or local name, of the barrack referred to; “but what the deuce is this?”

“I heard of your accident through the papers, and have since learned from Feverley when he was in town for a day, that you were fast progressing to convalescence. Pray accept alike my condolence and congratulation. I always feared that a certain party, from whose extreme sharpness at cards you saved both the Doctor and me, would work you a mischief. In fact, on that night, I saw it in his eyes, and we lawyers can read a man as a book. Are you aware that once when getting a fishing-rod out of *his* room at Blairavon, I found among his other appurtenances an—air-gun!”

“*An air-gun!*” exclaimed Lennard, starting so convulsively, that for some minutes his wounded limb gave him exquisite torture.

Here there was a clue to the whole affair, and though the lawyer had been too cautious to commit the name to paper, Lennard knew that Travice Cheatwood had been the villain who wounded him—who had contemplated alike the gratification of a revenge and the removal of a rival by deliberate assassination; and yet, not an hour since, he had stood smiling and talking by his side, offering him a

cheroot, patting him on the shoulder, and warmly shaking his hand prior to departure.

And now Lennard remembered the bitter threat Travice had made to Hesbia in the conservatory. It seemed but empty sound then, though it had a terrible significance *now*.

At the the hand of Travice, then, had he endured all this peril, all this suffering, and misery of mind and body, this deprivation of light, and air, and sunshine—a bed-ridden patient—for so many days! An access of his fever almost came upon him—so keen was his sense of wrong, so fiery his resentment, so determined was he on a terrible retribution!

He must go to Blairavon, reach unseen the rooms of Travice Cheatwood in his absence, secure the silent proofs against him, and try if the two bullets he possessed fitted the muzzle of that murderous and illegal weapon, beneath which he had so nearly perished.

Then came a dread lest Cheatwood might have destroyed or concealed it beyond all chance of discovery.

However, that he should not mar his own purposes, he felt the imperative necessity of being patient, calm and wary, and of keeping for a time his own counsel; and he did so, concealing his suspicions from Feverley, from Hesbia, and even veiling his emotions to Travice himself, though never



again would he permit the hand of that personage to touch his, when they met or parted.

“Till the fitting time comes, I shall speak of this to no one—for a secret ceases to be such when shared by another.”

And he folded and docketed the letter of Mr. Dabchick, ere he locked it in his desk, with all the precision he had acquired in the house of Vere and Co.

## CHAPTER V.

## CONVALESCENT.

NOTWITHSTANDING that his offers and attentions had been declined, at first jocularly and then very angrily and decidedly by his cousin Hesbia, Travice Cheatwood—that man of dark purposes and desperate fortune—still continued to reside at Blairavon, where his presence was tolerated by Mr. Vere out of mercy to a dead sister's memory, though he was by no means an over-indulgent uncle, and certainly had no suspicion of the matrimonial schemes which the plotting brain of his nephew might conceive, while he knew, moreover, that Hesbia was quite able to take care of herself.

Travice had no fine feelings to blunt; after being so decidedly, almost contemptuously refused by Hesbia, a real lover would have quitted her presence for ever; but Travice, was little more than a desperate money-hunter, and willing enough to accept a fortune of his uncle's making, and to take it encum-

bered with such a charming appendage as Hesbia; so he lingered on at Blairavon—in fact he had, at present, nowhere else to go. The atmosphere of Liverpool and of London also being alike too hot for him, he had the pretence of a country visit to remain where he was, and resolved to protract it to the last day.

Perhaps the first ramble in which Lennard indulged—when, after nearly two months of convalescence in an arm-chair, and in hobbling about the grounds of Oakwoodlee on crutches, he was able to walk abroad with the aid of a staff—was to the spot where he had been shot down, in the little pathway that led through the fields to Craigellon.

It was now nearly the end of July, and, through various contingencies, he had never found a proper opportunity for recurring pointedly with Hesbia to the object of that assignation which she, apparently, had kept, while he had been compelled to fail; and latterly a fear had haunted him that the Vere household would return to Liverpool, leaving him with his secret untold—his story unsaid to Hesbia; for already their periodical visit to Blairavon was protracted long beyond the usual time, for Mr. Vere's mind seemed much occupied by developing to their utmost, the resources of the coal mines at the Mains of Kaims.

As Lennard stood in the solitary path, vividly the memory of the shock he had undergone, with all

its pain and bewilderment came upon him. He surveyed the place and saw the exact spot where he fell, recognizing the chestnut trees, the branches of which had interposed between him and the sky as he lay prostrate among the long grass; and again, as on that eventful evening, the last red rays of the sun were fading from the flinty brow of Craigellon, and at a distance he could perceive the sequestered stile where Hesbia had awaited him, and heard, without understanding it, his cry of dismay.

But for that atrocious act of Travice Cheatwood, the meeting had taken place, and Lennard had been now the accepted lover of Hesbia Vere,—or have known the worst, and left her sphere for ever.

By the wayside the thistles were in full flower, the summer grasses in the fields were deep and dewy, and the fledgling partridges whirred up from them in brown coveys; but the mavis and merle had ceased to sing now, for the dog-days were setting in and the golden butterflies and dragon-moths fluttered about lazily in the last light of the sun.

As Lennard, with an eye rendered keen and sharp by long suffering, surveyed the spot where he had lain till found by Doctor Kirkford, something glittering among the grass that grew thick about the roots of the hedge close by caught his attention.

It proved to be a gold sleeve link, to which was attached the fragment of a cuff, frittered and frayed by two months' exposure to the wind and rain. To

the link were two small Indian gold coins, and from what remained of the cuff, which was of fine linen, it appeared to have been neatly edged, or bordered with dark needlework.

How carelessly detectives and others had examined the scene of his suffering the discovery of this relic evinced.

Lennard had a vague recollection of having seen such cuffs and sleeve links worn by Travice Cheatwood; and, after a longer and more careful scrutiny of the place, he placed what he had found in his pocket-book, as another link in the necessary chain of evidence, and turned homeward.

“How rarely do our instincts mislead us!” thought Lennard; “and I always hated that fellow!”

He was frequently tempted to make a confidant of Feverley, and ask his advice; but as further proofs were still wanting whereby to criminate Cheatwood (and could he do so without disgracing Hesbia?) he resolved to wait a little; yet on the very night of this fresh discovery near the scene of his attempted assassination, he was nearly tempted into additional confidence by the friendly and trusting manner of the young Doctor, who dropped into Oakwoodlee, as he frequently did, on his way home to the village.

“You are somewhat moody and silent, Frank,” said Lennard, who perceived that the Doctor sat

with an air of abstraction, smoking and sipping his wine.

“Moody, am I? perhaps I am a little weary,” replied Feverley; “I have had many patients to visit to-day—and the days of July are long and hot.”

He tipped the ashes from his cigar, sighed, and relapsed into silence.

“There is something else than medical visiting in your mind,” said Lennard; “did you observe anything that interested you in yesterday’s paper?”

Feverley changed colour visibly.

“I observed,” said he, “that old Sir Philip Wharton Foster had been struck with paralysis at Monkwood in the Merse——”

“And was so dangerously ill that he was not expected to survive.”

“He died the same night,” said Feverley in a faint voice; “I read his name in the obituary this morning. Poor old man—don’t talk about it.”

“Why?” asked Lennard somewhat vacantly.

“Because—it must be a severe blow to—to—his wife.”

“Your cousin—your cousin Milly Montgomerie of the Moat. Ah, Frank! I have not forgotten your sad little love story, and that untoward meeting at Blairavon.”

Feverley, who had grown very pale, started a

little, as Lennard could perceive by the light of the candles, and he strove to dismiss from his mind the subject on which he had no intention of talking; but the poor Doctor was only human, and he could not resist the current of the thoughts that came unbidden to his mind.

After a pause, during which he had pushed aside the wine decanter, and mixed for himself a rummer of whiskey and water, he said in a voice that was broken in tone—

“I certainly have no reason to mourn the demise of Sir Philip Foster. That marriage of my cousin Milly to him, when I was far away in the Greenland seas, off Spitzbergen Peaks and Davis’s Straits, was an act of atrocious cruelty on the part of her father, and may God forgive him (I never can) for all he made us endure; but Sir Philip was rich and I was poor—yea, poor as Job,—and what right have the poor to possess either hearts or feelings, wants or wishes?”

Lennard sighed, for after his late sufferings he was easily depressed; he thought of his own chances and hopes in relation to Hesbia Vere; and, somehow, on hearing the tone of Feverley’s voice, and the hollow bitterness it possessed, his heart sank within him for a time.

“I thought I had got over all the bitterness of our first great sorrow when separated by the Indian seas, and, as I supposed, for ever; I had learned to

be content—always cheerful—even happy at times, as you have seen, for a gloomy doctor had better try some other art than that of healing; but still, in my lonely moments, the past was ever before me, vividly and sorrowfully.”

“And now that obituary in the newspapers has brought back all the memories—all the past—in full tide like a summer’s flood.”

“Exactly.”

There was another pause, till Lennard said,

“Lady Foster will be a free woman—a wealthy widow now. Her stern and courtly old husband she may—nay, must—have respected, but never loved.”

“Respected?” said Feverley, bitterly; “I have my doubts if, in her darker hours—and dark hours she must have had—poor Milly could have respected him; for he took her at her father’s bidding and from his merciless and avaricious hands, after a long course of domestic tyranny and systematic oppression; and only the stern consciousness that she had perhaps anticipated her revenge, made her go through the mockery of a holy rite at the altar with him, Philip Wharton Foster; but peace be with him now!  
 . . . . . If I have suffered much, Milly has suffered more! I have had the world of active life, such as it is with me here, to engage me—a world where I can at least be useful and merciful to my fellow-men; and in seeking to relieve, so far as I



may, the ills that flesh is heir to, forget the keener pangs that have wrung my own heart. I had this resource left me; but she—she—had only the consciousness that her young life had been utterly cast away!”

The Doctor's pale face flushed as thoughts came fast upon him; and he seemed, as he paused from time to time, with his cold and forgotten cigar between his fingers, to be speaking to himself as much as to Blair.

“Never shall I forget, Lennard, if I were to live for a century, the memories of those nightly meetings, stolen in secrecy, in sorrow and rapture, in the bower at Monkwood Moat—her despairing appeals to God, and to me—poor helpless wretch that I was!—not to leave her—her lips pressed to my cheek—her imploring voice—her clinging gestures—her declarations that she was mine and mine only; the fire of her spirit and her energy, as contrasted with her *petite* figure and delicate beauty,—yes, the memories of all those hours of passion are ever with me, in one of those secret places of the soul, which we can open and shut at pleasure, and keep unknown to all the world, Blair!”

“‘All's well that ends well,’” said Lennard; “and we have yet to see the end of all this. The old man has gone to his last account, and we may freely say, ‘God rest him, now;’ but there can be selfishness in——”

“Hush! say no more, if you love me, Blair,” said the Doctor, starting up; “I have dread enough of my own new thoughts, and shrink from having them fashioned into words by another.”

“You may yet be very happy, Feverley.”

“Perhaps; but worldly happiness, I fear,—

“‘It is the gay *to-morrow* of the mind,  
That never comes.’”

Soon after this, Feverley made a hurried departure; and though his manner, his story, and his confidences might have lured Lennard Blair to speak again of his own aspirations towards Miss Vere and of his grave suspicions concerning her reckless cousin, he still delayed. Hence, in the matter he lost the valuable advice of Feverley, through whose calmer judgment means might have been taken for the suitable exposure and punishment of Travice Cheatwood—most certainly for his final expulsion, at least; and thus the great catastrophe which afterwards ensued might happily have been avoided.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE VINEYARD OF NABOTH.

THE happiest period, perhaps, of Lennard Blair's life, as yet, was now to come; and if ever lover had the field entirely to himself it was he; for much about the time that he became well enough to stir abroad, though still too feeble and ailing to return to Liverpool, a telegram from Mr. Envoyse summoned Mr. Vere to that place for an indefinite term; and Travice Cheatwood, to recruit his resources, had followed to Perth or Piershill Barracks some of his recently-made cavalry acquaintances, whose I O U's he held for more than a thousand pounds, and who had not, as yet, discovered his peculiar proclivities, or that his name had figured so unpleasantly on the course at Epsom and elsewhere.

Prior, however, to Mr. Vere's departure, a little speculation in a piece of land which he had long coveted was agreeably achieved.

Mr. Vere had not been so blind as to fail in per-

ceiving that Lennard Blair had a great *tendresse* for Hesbia ; but, as he had certain views regarding her, and other intentions concerning him, he tolerated their intimacy because, as Hesbia was somewhat self-willed, it might have been difficult of prevention ; and having long wished to obtain possession of Oakwoodlee, of which he had no hope during the life of Richard Blair, he now resolved to lose no time in setting about it, especially as he had ascertained secretly and satisfactorily the dip of the coal-seams in that direction.

It had been said of Vere that, through life, “ he was ever great in traffic, had a keen eye to business, knew his Bible by rote, and never failed in getting a slice off every cut loaf for himself.”

Yet ready money had mysteriously become scarce in his hands of late ; all his private resources had been turned to the development of the coal-pits, and Lennard had seen with regret that nearly all the grand old oaks—the woods of Blairavon, once his father’s pride—had become timber for sale under axe and saw.

As Hislop said, with a groan and with unintentional wit, “ nothing would be left but the genealogical tree, and even the last branch of that was not a flourishing one.”

“ Yes, Steinie, and the dule-tree yet remains,” replied Lennard, with a grim smile as he referred to the old gallows-yew on which the lairds of Blairavon

had executed justice on their vassals in the times of old.

On the first day he dined at the manor-house after his partial recovery—though he had to walk there and back with the assistance of Steinie's arm—when the cloth was removed, Mr. Vere resolved to speak to Lennard of the affair that occupied his mind.

The fat, solemn, and would-be dignified, but nevertheless servile butler, in his accurate suit of black and amplitude of white waistcoat, thinking himself in all—save purse—quite the equal of those he condescended to attend, dispensed the wine, and duly arranged the decanters before his master. He was a white-haired, bald-headed, sleek and selfish specimen of his class, looking “farrard to keeping his own 'otel some fine day with Mamselle Savonette as its missus,” for her savings, perquisites, and peculations, when added to his own, would make a tolerable sum; and now he hovered at Mr. Vere's back, till told that he might withdraw, a hint on which Mr. Maxwell acted to; and as Hesbia and Flora Cheyne were already in the drawing-room, Lennard found himself alone with Mr. Vere, who hospitably pressed him to take wine again and again.

Playing with the grape-scissors or a wine-glass in one hand, while the other was plunged among the loose silver in his pocket, Mr. Vere said—

“Now that we are quite alone, I wish to speak with you on a subject which may prove greatly to your future advantage; but which, with your local prejudices, and family sympathies, you may consider one of delicacy.”

Mr. Vere paused and Lennard bowed, and assisted himself to grapes.

“I have some advice to offer.”

“Say on, sir,” said Lennard, half suspecting and dreading the nature of it.

“In fact, Blair, I hope you won’t think—even as a father, and many years your senior—that I take a premature or unjustifiable liberty in talking of it at all.”

“Can it be my regard for Hesbia to which he refers?” thought Lennard, whose heart had begun to beat wildly during all this preamble, but who was somewhat relieved when he found the subject was Oakwoodlee, one he had already mentioned once before.

“The estate of Blairavon is incomplete without those few acres of the old Jointure House, which it surrounds on every side. Hand these over to me, Blair, and I shall assign you their full value—as made up by a surveyor, or other competent person—in further shares or interest in our firm, which must yield you a much greater return than such a patch of land can ever do. At present I am able to indicate, if you would prefer it, a splendid investment in a

monetary point of view. You know how successful the line of steamers from Panama to Australia has proved, creating the necessity for a connecting link between the Isthmus of Panama and New York, the Cunard line having decided upon running a branch line in conjunction with the mail steamers from the United States to London. You understand me?"

"I think I do, sir."

"Take your wine; the port stands with you. Well, my friend, Sir Cullender Crowdy, has a new and original scheme for a line of screw-propeller packets, from the Mersey direct to Carthagina, and on through the Carribean Sea, touching at Cuba, San Domingo, and so forth, through the Straits of Bahama and so on to Boston, and thence back to England. Packets, the engines of which will be worked without steam or coal, or fuel of any kind, by an entirely new motive principle—a system of condensed air, known to a very few—and so cheap in its operation that we cannot fail to destroy the enterprize of the great British and North-American Royal Mail Steam Company, unless they are pleased to amalgamate and cast their lot with us; and then we shall have in our own hands the entire steam-navigation round the habitable globe!"

Listening to all this like one in a dream, to Lennard the vaunted speculation sounded unpleasantly like the enterprizing Captain Hawksley's famous galvanic scheme; but though his faith in

Mr. Vere was great, he eminently disliked the baronet's name or share in any plan or enterprize whatever. He sat silent, and knew not how to reply.

“By bold speculation large fortunes alone are made now,” said Mr. Vere; “but if shares in this proposed new South and North-Atlantic Packet Company are not to your taste, you may place the money you receive for Oakwoodlee into the old firm—”

“That I should prefer infinitely,” replied Leonard; “for with the schemes of Sir Cullender I shall have nothing whatever to do!” Mr. Vere winced at this remark, and knit his brows. “And now when I remember the last words of my father, poor old man, I have sore compunction in assenting to part with the last fragment of Blairavon.”

“Blairavon is gone,” said Mr. Vere, tartly; “it is no use crying over spilt milk.”

“But it is hard that poor little Oakwoodlee should follow.”

“Think of the result—the return for your money; it may be sufficient in time to enable you to buy two such places as Blairavon, and certainly twenty times such as Oakwoodlee. Besides, you are young, and cannot see your future. When you have cleared up some of those cloudy matters which shall be put in your hands for elucidation at



Vera Cruz, and established a branch of our house there—if all turns out as well as I expect, you will find the result of the confidence we have placed in you pleasant, I am assured, in more ways than one.”

Lennard's heart beat lightly and happily as he immediately applied this vague promise to the position of himself and Hesbia; but there was one remark of his father's concerning her, which came like water on the rising flame, and repressed by pride the avowal that was trembling on his tongue, so he filled and drank his glass of wine in silence.

“I should like your decision soon,” said Mr. Vere, after a pause.

“Give me one day to think over it—to take counsel with myself?”

“Then one only, as I leave for Liverpool by an early train to-morrow, and hope you will not be long after me—three weeks more should see your health quite restored.”

“I hope so, sir.”

“Well, then, we shall have the land valued; the sum agreed upon assigned to you, or placed by Envoyse to your credit in the funds of Vere and Co. I shall assume that you only want time to make up your mind—not that you will change it.”

Mr. Vere went to a side table, opened a magnificent walnut davenport-desk—and while the voice

of Hesbia, as she sang at the piano, came floating from time to time through the folding-doors of the drawing-room, he made a jotting of the proposed transaction which Lennard Blair initialled.

So now, perhaps, even the Charter Stone was about to go—that palladium and old Druidical monolith, the legends and memories concerning which went beyond even the days of our Saviour.

But Lennard was in love, and “all books—even novels—will tell you that a man in love is not a good judge of what he is doing.”

Perhaps, but for the voice that thrilled in his ears and in his heart, Lennard might have declined the whole transaction.

In the little oak-pannelled parlour at Oakwoodlee, Lennard sat long that night, pondering over all Mr. Vere had said, the promises he had made, the hopes he had held out, and others vaguely hinted; and weighed all against his father's dying injunctions never to part with Oakwoodlee. But was he actually parting with it in spirit, if the value thereof was invested in a firm of which he, himself, would one day be an active, a prominent, and perhaps ultimately surviving partner? More than all, if he succeeded in gaining the love and hand of Hesbia Vere, Oakwoodlee and more would be her portion; and if he lost her, of what value would life be?

He thought long and regretfully over the matter, and finally resolved that he would fully accede to

Mr. Vere's wish ; yet that in memory of his father's wish and the old family tradition, he would reserve the Charter Stone !

Lennard actually blushed when he spoke of the proposed transaction to old Steinie Hislop, for whose startled look he was quite prepared, and to whom he felt himself compelled to frame a specious story to the effect that out of the return the investment would bring him, he should be enabled to purchase an estate six times larger than the patch of grass and coppice called Oakwoodlee.

“ Better a wee bush than nae bield,” responded Steinie, in doubt, as he shook his white head thoughtfully.

“ With Oakwoodlee, Steinie, I should be but a bonnet laird after all, with—as the proverb of family pride has it—‘ a wee pickle land, a gude pickle debt and a doocot.’ ”

“ But hold ye by the Charter Stone, Mr. Lennard, for if other saws say true, gude will ever come o' that.”

“ Whether or not Oakwoodlee goes from me, you and Elsie shall never want while I live,” said Lennard ; “ and I must tell you, Steinie, that though feeling compunction for so soon violating—if it can be deemed so—my father's last wish in parting with this poor fragment of all that once was ours—I will realize quadruple its value in another fashion, and with that, his dreams of wealth and station ; and

I feel grateful to Mr. Vere for affording me such an opportunity.”

But again the old man shook his head doubtfully, for his instincts made him cautious, and his years of hopefulness were passed away.

When next they met, and Lennard hesitatingly—for he had a sensitive dread of ridicule—spoke of his wish to retain a right of proprietary over the Charter Stone, Mr. Vere first smiled, and then laughed outright. It seemed to him a queer affair altogether, as he was too much a man of the day-book and ledger to understand anything about a sentimental investment such as this, unless Lennard conceived, as he laughingly hinted, that “there was a good pot of money hid under the old block.” However, he agreed to let him retain it as his own, and shook his hand with a warmth and cordiality that made him feel quite happy. Mr. Vere then sprang into the carriage which was to take him to the train for Carlisle and the south, and they separated.

Vere had lost no time in leaving ample instructions; so through the medium of Mr. Gideon—or, as he was locally named, Juden—Grabbie, a species of lawyer in the village of Blairavon, the deeds of transfer or sale were drafted, or partially drawn out, to be further executed and completed by a more experienced conveyancer, and duly recorded in form of law, as Mr. Grabbie could not act legally as a

writer or procurator; and then Oakwoodlee passed like Blairavon out of the line of Blair for ever—Blairavon that for centuries had been the home of a race that, until the days of poor, simple, and unthrifty Richard Blair, had never known reverse, save such as were common enough in the old cut-and-thrust days of English invasion and domestic raid.

It passed away, all save the Charter Stone, and a saturnine smile spread over the coarse visage of Mr. Juden Grabbie, as he penned the clause, wherein “the said Lennard Blair, reserved to himself, his heirs, executors, and assigns, the upright pillar or block, known as the Charter Stone, with a space of six feet ‘around the same, in perpetuity;” for Grabbie, whose father had been a rat-catcher and earth-stopper on the estate, knew the tradition well; but he valued as lightly as Mr. Vere the sentiment or superstition which led Blair to retain it. Yet it was in something of the same spirit which has inspired many old Highland families, whose estates have passed from them, to retain a rock, an islet, or a burial-place; as the family of Borthwick still retain the mere rock and ruin of that name near Edinburgh, when all else—even their title—has passed away.

So Lennard soon found himself a species of visitor, or tenant under the roof that had once been his own; and a time came—but he then was far away—when the old family portraits, after being touched up by

Sanders M'Gilp, R.S.A., were removed again to Blairavon, to form the nucleus of an ancestral gallery for the new proprietor, and when the pictures of Richard Blair's favourite hunters and racers, with many similar sporting relics, were sold to adorn the walls of the village inn, and those of its less pretentious rival, the alehouse, where many a time, when the Atlantic lay between Lennard and the house that had been his home, old Stephen Hislop would sit regarding them wistfully, and sigh for the days that were gone, as he lingered over his gill-stoup of Glenlivet, or his mug of Preston beer at the Blair Arms, or the humbler tap.

## CHAPTER VII.

## AN EXCHANGE OF HEARTS.

IN the happiness that awaited him after Mr. Vere's departure, Lennard's compunctions for the sudden sale of his old place were soothed, or almost forgotten.

Mr. Vere had gone for a doubtful time; Travice Cheatwood was absent, none knew precisely where; visitors who had been expected at Blairavon were sending apologies, and thus Lennard Blair and Hesbia were left entirely to themselves.

Hesbia, who felt bored in the great old house, had proposed to have several guests for a few weeks before returning to Liverpool. "Poor, widowed Lady Foster and her little boy Frank," of course, and some of the married officers from the nearest barrack, and their wives, whom Flora Cheyne would help her to entertain; but the issue of these invitations, even for the short period proposed, Mr. Vere had, for the first time, forbidden, hinting at

the necessity of retrenchment, much to the astonishment of Hesbia, and it would have been to her intense disgust, had she not had Lennard Blair with whom to fill up her spare time.

“ But retrenchment,” she would repeat ; “ why—what on earth can papa mean ? ”

“ He has, perhaps, a husband in view for you,” said Flora Cheyne, laughing.

“ A husband for me ! Well, I suppose something of the kind is necessary in the end—to marry and to pay one’s debts ; but I can always get one without papa’s aid, I hope.”

Hesbia was past girlhood in experience certainly, but would a time ever come when the vague but bright dreams of that happy period—if the flirt ever had them—with all the secret thoughts and emotions inspired by love would be absorbed and interwoven with her maturer state of existence ?

Some of the county ladies — “ awfully county ladies,” as Hesbia called them, shrugged their shoulders and lifted up their eyes in protest and astonishment at her being left alone in the great house without a matron. Hesbia had somewhere an aunt whom she might have invited ; but she was at variance with the spinster in question, and would brook no control ; so she was thus, and from the other contingencies alone, and for a brief period, her own mistress. The censorious resented this, and remarked—



“ Her only companions were the Cheynes—and they are motherless girls,” added the less good-natured.

The evening of the second day after Mr. Vere had gone, saw Hesbia and Lennard seated in the beautiful little boudoir which opened off the great drawing-room at Blairavon. He had arrived to escort her to the Haughs, as she preferred walking, the evening was so fine, and the carriage would come for her after supper; and now she was attired in one of her most accurate toilettes, for with Hesbia her gloves, cuffs, skirts, and anything, even to her brass-heeled Balmorals, were each and all a careful study, that made a charming but certainly showy whole; and, as she felt assured that the frustrated meeting at the stile would be recurred to, and that the conversation might certainly take a very remarkable turn, there was something almost of nervousness imparted to her usually very nonchalant bearing.

Lennard thought he had never seen her looking so brilliant and handsome, for there was a flush on her cheek, and a coquettish smile in her bright hazel eyes; but he felt a secret emotion of intense annoyance, for, while hat-in-hand, awaiting her appearance in the drawing-room, he found no less than two envelopes addressed to her in the hand-writing of Sir Cullender Crowdy. They had been posted from London within a week, and lay tossed carelessly

among stray cartes de visite, invitation notes, and other litter in the card-basket.

What had been the contents or purport of those two letters, written within a week of each other, as the post-marks showed? and what had been her answers?

Lennard had observed that whenever he spoke warningly or slightly—which he always did with reluctance—of this dubious personage, that she invariably evaded to reply to, or skilfully changed the subject. Well—this might be natural enough, as he was involved in several private schemes and speculations with her father.

He shrunk from speaking of him now. They were setting forth considerably before the hour in which they were due by invitation at the Haughs, and Lennard had promised himself a delightful and critical interview, the memory of which might never be forgotten.

“How silent and empty the old house seems now,” said he, as they issued from the conservatory door into the sunny lawn.

“But while you are at Oakwoodlee, I shall not weary so much as I should have done had you gone with papa.”

“You flatter me,” said he, as he lightly touched her arm, for her reply was encouraging.

“I never do so, Mr. Blair; but ennui I may feel nevertheless—one can’t read novels for ever, and even

Mudie's box ere long becomes a profound bore. A girl at school, I used to count the days till vacation-time; so here, I have been wont to count the days as if they were those of exile."

"Exile—Miss Vere?"

"Yes—you know I always hate the country."

"Why?"

"It bores me by its intense monotony. I am never so happy here as when I have friends with me from home—I mean, of course, from Liverpool, for then we have so many topics in common to talk of—faces and places we know; houses we mutually visit; our partners at the last ball; the last concert; who are engaged and who jilted. But when summer is past, to be left as I am just now in an evening by my dressing-room fire, with my back hair loose, listening to the broken English of Savonette, staring at the embers while the wind sighs round that great, gloomy old house, is dreary indeed. But I crave your pardon, I quite forgot that the gloomy old house was once yours."

While she had been running on thus, Lennard had drawn her arm through his, retaining her hand for a time with a tender and lingering pressure, as he looked into her eyes, while their footsteps were bent, involuntarily as it seemed, towards a secluded part of the lawn, where a narrow pathway threaded the copsewood.

“ You were at the stile, Hesbia, on that fatal evening when—when—” Lennard began.

“ You suffered so fearfully?—yes; I kept our—our appointment,” she replied in faint voice. “ You had something particular to tell me?”

“ What I had to tell you then, I search my heart in vain for fitting words to tell you now.”

Lennard paused, for his emotion was deep, and never before had been a more fitting opportunity to bring matters to a crisis with Hesbia, who fully expected what she was to hear, for she leaned heavily on his arm, over which her tightly-gloved hands were clasped, while she looked up into his eyes with a half-timid but wholly loving expression, and then, blushing, drooped her eyelids.

Then as doubt gave way to certainty that she loved him—loved him at last—there came a rush of rapture over every nerve and fibre of Lennard’s frame—a wild careering of the blood through all his pulses, and he grew giddy with joy as he pressed her to his breast, and showered unresisted kisses on her brow, and eyes, and lips—on her hair and on her hands, while he poured into her ears the old, old story that was first whispered among the roses that bloomed in Eden.

For a time they lingered in the shady wood, hand in hand, with eyes bent lovingly on eyes. In those of Hesbia there could be read a kind of expression, which seemed to announce that she was overcome,

conquered at last, but did not quite like to own it ; after a time even that idea appeared to pass away, and love only lit them up—those beautiful, arch, and winning eyes.

Hesbia Vere had been a flirt all her life, and when flirts are really stricken with the tender passion, they are said to suffer more than quieter girls. Be that as it may, Hesbia reclined with her face on Lennard's breast, completely overcome for a time, while he, between intervals of silence—mute eloquence indeed,—uttered broken sentences expressive of the love he had ever treasured for her in his heart, and told of the comparative poverty that had fettered his tongue ; that he knew her father's alleged colossal wealth, and suspected his ambitious desires and views regarding her future ; but that to withstand the passion that preyed upon him was impossible ; and alike was it impossible for him to leave home for a vague period, perhaps for ever, without the avowal which he now made ; and much more to the same purpose said Lennard, with pauses between—pauses that were filled up very pleasantly however.

Compared with his deep, full, passionate earnestness now, how strange and heartless seemed the half-bantering style he had used in times past at Liverpool, and which we can only describe as a dangler's fashion of making game when he dared not make love to Hesbia !

All that was over and gone; they seemed to know and understand each other fully now; and as they progressed through the coppice, solemn and tender vows were interchanged under the grand old trees which had heard the same love whispers from buried generations of men and women—for the summers of many centuries had seen the foliage bloom on the slopes of Blairavon—the same Blairavon that might once again be Lennard's home; for did not its mistress love him, had she not accepted his love? So he might yet die under the same roof where he had first seen the light.

It was a great triumph, slowly, but successfully, and most unselfishly brought to pass! In the delight of the time, he forgot all about lands or wealth; he remembered only that he was with Hesbia, and that she loved him—loved him at last.

It was a soft evening in autumn, among the earliest of August; the rich harvest fields of West Lothian were laden with bearded grain that waved beneath the wind like the billows of a golden sea. No sound was near the loitering lovers but the voices of the birds and the rustle of the leaves, while the amber sunset poured aslant between the branches of a long forest vista, which was terminated in the distance by the picturesque little village of Blairavon, its red-tiled cottages with white-washed walls peeping through masses of brilliant

greenery, and clustering round the steep knoll that was crowned by the parish church.

Was it any wonder that hours passed on while the shadows of mountain and wood deepened and lengthened, that the last rays of sunlight faded from the highest hill-top, and darkness crept upward from the low places of the landscape, and that the invitation to the Haughs was forgotten, or remembered suddenly, only to be considered a dreadful bore?

But the tumult of their thoughts had to be stilled, their glances to be studied, and faces modelled to an air of well-bred indifference, and all their nerves to be calmed down and attuned to spend a quiet evening—after making shallow apologies of mistaking the way, or the time—in a quiet family circle, to endure the dawdling by the piano, a stupid and silent rubber at whist, or Mr. Cheyne discussing the points of his hunters, and the prospects of the grouse and blackcock shooting—while their minds were full of all that had passed in yonder greenwood shade, where the dew and darkness now lay deep on flower and tree.

Slowly passed the evening; but the butler announced “Miss Vere’s carriage” in due time, and again the lovers were alone.

The harvest moon was shedding a flood of yellow light over all the scenery now; the spreading oaks that bordered the way seemed in the dew as if

gemmed with crystals ; the great green hills towered into the blue sky in silence and distance far away ; but Lennard and Hesbia took heed neither of the scenery nor of the time.

Hand in hand, and cheek to cheek, they sat whispering a renewal of their vows again and again, while the softly cushioned and well-hung carriage rolled on ; and they were only roused from their delicious trance by the valet banging down the steps, and opening the door--most startling and unwelcome sounds to them.

Hesbia set down Lennard at the wicket in the hedge, that led to Oakwoodlee, and then he lingered in the moonlight till the last sound of her carriage-wheels had died away ; and she was driven home to ponder over all he had said, over all she had promised, and to convince herself that she was irrevocably in love, and engaged faithfully at last !

How intolerably lonely, dark, silent, and ghostly the old house seemed to-night ; but that period would soon pass, and she knew where and when she was to meet Lennard again on the morrow.



## CHAPTER VIII.

## THE WEEK OF JOY.

“SOME one has written that ‘every existence is prosaic;’ but surely ours here is not so, Hesbia,” said Lennard, “here in this lovely country, among those green woods, where we may wander at will, and build our airy castles fashioned out of daydreams, and made radiant within by love—the old fabrics that cost so little—and yet, at times, so much.”

“Yes; if never realized!” replied Hesbia, sighing.

They were again in the autumn woods, rambling hand in hand, and talking in soft whispers of themselves and their future.

It was impossible to shut their eyes to the fact that no small amount of tact and diplomacy would be requisite to undermine the influence of the baronet and others perhaps. Though such fears came as an alloy to their happiness, neither as yet

gave them utterance ; and they strove to dream on, and suffer themselves to glide on the current to which they had committed their fate.

Yet it was strange and sad, and terrible to think that they were communing there under the old oak trees, their faces flushed in the evening sunshine—alone in that beautiful solitude—Hesbia's tears of joy falling on Lennard's cheek as they reclined against each other lovingly, their lips meeting ever and anon, his hand pressing hers to his breast, or straying with fatuous fondness among the soft tresses of her rich brown hair, and still, for all that, they might be governed by influences beyond themselves, and a day might come when they would be nought unto each other, when they would separate and pass through life, perhaps, as strangers !

This secret dread made Lennard cling more to Hesbia, and feel more anxious about the sequel of their new position.

They were engaged now ; it was the joyous period of looking forward to greater and more lasting joy, yet it had that alloy already mentioned, and Lennard at times felt conscious that he might as easily make the river Avon run up a hill as win the consent of Mr. Vere ; and yet with Hesbia he was as successful as the most enthusiastic lover could desire. Was it possible that there was a hidden virtue in the proprietary of the Charter Stone, after all ? Laughing in his joy as he asked himself the

question, it almost seemed as if its retention was a pledge from Destiny, that with Hesbia he might yet regain all his family had lost !

Though somewhat artificial by nature and education, it was difficult for Hesbia Vere to wander with Lennard Blair over the grounds that had once belonged to his family and now to hers, and without interest to listen to his voice, which was a very winning one, as he told her {of the legends and superstitious memories that haunted each local feature, such as usually hover about every rock and wood, monolith and tumulus in Scotland.

There were the old green mounds of the Roman camp at Kaims, where three beautiful women attired in green, with golden hair, and glittering girdles, met some hunters, who, after a long day's sport in Strathbroc, the adjacent valley of Badgers, had slain a buck and were merrily preparing a supper in the woods. The fair visitors shared their wine and venison, and spent what seemed a night in gaiety and dancing in the moonbeams ; but when morning came and they suddenly disappeared, a year and a day were found to have elapsed—a year and a day in Fairyland ; the bones of the buck, bleached white and bare, lay deep among the rich grass and the leaves of last autumn. The doublets of the bewildered huntsmen were tattered and rotten ; their boots mouldy, and their knives and arquebusses were each a mass of rust ; and like he of the

“Sleepy Hollow,” they had each a long beard, while more than one stately tree that had spread its branches over their rustic fête, lay prostrate with age and rotting in the mountain burn.

And weird and strange were other stories that Elsie could tell of the old silver-mine in the Bathgate Hills, where ancient miners—squat little men with conical red caps and beards that hung below their knees—worked o’ nights in the ancient levels, and minted uncounted coin; of kelpies who lured belated travellers, and witches whose spells wrought evil to their enemies; of Ringy Rattles, the chain-fiend; of ghost-haunted houses; of voices that came from the old Dule Tree of Blairavon, and little people in green that were wont to dance in the ring that was traceable round the Charter Stone.

On yonder hill was the ruin of a hut wherein Steinie’s father had found an old woman—a reputed witch—labouring in vain to extract from her leg a bullet he had fired at what he conceived to be a mountain hare flitting past him. Nor was the house of Blairavon without a ghostly tenant, for it had been said at times that the figure of a tall young man, wearing the costume of George II.’s reign—the little triangular cocked hat and powdered bob-wig, the heavily-cuffed coat and small sword—was seen, in the evening generally of the 1st of May, to linger among the trees of the avenue; but his form, which was always distinct at a distance, gradually

faded out or melted away on the approach of the bewildered spectator.

Even the railway whistle had failed to scare away this unpleasant personage, who was averred to be a Cheyne of the Houghs, who, on the occasion when Admiral Vernon took Portobello, had greatly distinguished himself there, and led a body of seamen and marines in the attack on the Iron Castle. There he slew, sword in hand, a Spanish cavalier of prodigious stature, whom previously he had thrice encountered on the high seas, and thrice fought without avail till the muzzles of their lower deck guns were in the water. On his return, laden with Spanish doubloons, Captain Cheyne was married "to Mrs. Betty Blair, spinster, with a fortune of £10,000," as the *Caledonian Mercury* records, according to the fashion of the time.

"Married; but there the alliance ended, ere it was well begun," said Lennard, when he told his story to Hesbia; "for on their wedding-day, when dinner was served up in the great dining-room, and all were making merry in the presence of the bride and bridegroom (for it was not the custom then for the newly-wedded to run off per rail to hide their blushes and their whereabouts), a servant entered and whispered to Captain Cheyne that a gentleman was awaiting him below, one who craved an audience.

"'A gentleman—at this time!' exclaimed the captain.

“ ‘A foreigner—a seaman apparently,’ the servant said; ‘very tall and very dark-complexioned, wearing a peculiar dress, and having a half-healed wound in his face.’

“ ‘Show him in, and set a chair and cover for him at the table.’

“ But the servant said that the stranger declined to enter the house, and was waiting in the entrance-hall. On hearing all this, the captain changed colour visibly; and though a jovial, ranting, roaring British seaman, who took his grog always double-shotted, with two glasses instead of one, appeared sorely disconcerted; but he kissed his bride’s hand, excused himself to the company, and descended to the front door, through which he was seen to pass, and thence slowly down the avenue in close and earnest some said angry—conversation with the dark stranger, who wore a Spanish doublet and toledo of enormous length.

“ An hour elapsed and he did not return; two hours succeeded, and his friends began to look blankly and inquiringly into each other’s faces, for fears of a duel or other outrage began to suggest themselves. The bride became terrified, and her apprehensions soon developed those of the wedding guests; for evening was now at hand!

“ With lighted torches, armed with swords and pistols and accompanied by dogs, they sallied forth to beat the woods and search the grounds, for at the

gate-lodge the keeper affirmed that no one had passed forth from the avenue that day; but the woods were beaten and the fields were searched in vain, for of Captain Cheyne not a trace was ever found. Years rolled on, and though the bride lived to see the days of Waterloo, she never heard tidings of the handsome young husband who was so mysteriously borne away, as it was thought, by the unquiet spirit of the Spaniard whom he had slain at the storming of Portobello.

“Is it not strange, Hesbia (and you will smile when I say so), that Beltane day, as we call it, has often been an unlucky epoch for our family, and so we have never been without our fears or superstitions concerning it. On that day my grandfather sank under the wounds he had received long before at Villiers-en-Couche; on that day, as you know, my father died; and on that day my uncle Lennard was drowned in yonder loch.”

“Good heavens, you are most unlucky and mysterious people,” said Hesbia, laughing; “and one must be courageous, indeed, to marry among you!”

Even while suffering from his lameness, which was gradually passing away (after his “accident,” as he named it), and though the future was involved in clouds, how rosy seemed the life of sweet intimacy he was leading now with Hesbia Vere!

“Papa has yet to be told,” she would say, thought-

fully, from time to time; and who was to take courage and do it? Lennard or herself. Oh, it must be Lennard, of course. How she wished it all over, and that she knew the best or the worst. There would be a storm, and assuredly she dreaded it, for Hesbia, to do her justice, both loved and feared her only parent, though she knew that he was grasping and selfish to the last degree.

They had arranged all their programme for the future; that, on returning to Liverpool, Lennard was to trust in Heaven and his own eloquence for moving her father's heart and gaining his consent; and that, perhaps, ere winter they should be married—even the day was vaguely hinted at,—on his return from South America.

Travice was still absent, and now was the favourable opportunity for searching his rooms, and obtaining, if possible, distinct traces of the crime he had committed; and, moreover, in their moments of tender confidence, occasions were not wanting to Lennard for mentioning his strong suspicions to Hesbia; but she looked so bright and beautiful, and they were so happy, that he was loth to cast a blight over her by wounding her self-esteem and making her blush yet more for so near a kinsman, and Feverley approved of his silence; so the days passed on, and Lennard never told her how nearly he had died by the hand of Travice Cheatwood.

He had written to Mr. Dabchick, thanking him



for the information, or hint, so warily conveyed in his letter, adding that he meant to act upon it when a fitting period came; at the same time he begged the lawyer, for the sake of the Veres, to say nothing of what he suspected—a useless request perhaps, so far as the instinctively and professionally wary little man was concerned.

And so, before other events began to transpire, a whole week had slipped away—a week which we can only describe as being one of joy!

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PROOFS OF GUILT.

FROM their pleasant dreams they were roused to the necessity for action, when letters came from Mr. Vere.

“Dearest Lennard, our week of joy—as you name it—is fairly over now, and we must return to the realities of our former existence,” said Hesbia, one evening, as he met her at the accustomed trysting place, the stile on the path to Craigellon. “By a letter I have just received from papa, it appears that my cousin Travice will arrive here to-night or to-morrow, to take me with him to Liverpool. Blair-avon is to be immediately shut up, and the plate counted; the drawing-room to be given over to brown holland and lavender, to solitude and the spiders! ‘Tell Mr. Blair, if you see him,’ adds papa, ‘that as soon as he can travel we expect to see him in the alley. Change of air, even to this place, will completely restore him.’”

Lennard was grieved, but not much startled, as he had daily expected some such summons; to Liverpool he knew they must inevitably return ere their ultimate fate was decided. It would be but the beginning of an end, and better commence it to-morrow than at a later period. He was nearly well and strong enough to accompany her; but in the society of Travice Cheatwood—even for the brief period of a railway journey—that was not to be tolerated, or even thought of.

“Cheatwood *here* again!” he muttered, while his brows became knit and his eyes sparkled, for there was no time to be lost in getting into his rooms at the manor-house, and making a search there for anything that might corroborate the suspicions caused by the hint from Mr. Dabchick.

“Again?” repeated Hesbia, looking up at him archly from under her hat and feather; “and why not again, Lennard? You are surely not jealous of poor Travice?”

“I am jealous of no one now, Hesbia,” he replied, caressingly.

“You had a quarrel about cards or something, I know; but all that was made up, was it not?”

“It was pardoned, Hesbia—not forgotten; but he, to be here once more!”

“Do not be angry with my cousin,” urged Hesbia, passing a hand caressingly round Lennard’s arm;

“the poor fellow is only his own enemy—a species of rolling stone that gathers no moss.”

“And so he seems to make your father’s house his home now?”

“Never when we are in Liverpool, but temporarily while we are in the country. At present, he has no other home.”

“And seems incapable of making himself one, or of gaining reputable friends either.”

“You are very severe, Lennard,” said Hesbia, demurely; “and did I not love you very much, I should quarrel with you now——”

“Quarrel about him?”

“Yes, about anything, that I might have the pleasure of making it up again with you.”

“Listen to me, Hesbia,” said Lennard, taking both her hands in his—tightly and softly gloved little hands they were—and gazing into her face with a tenderness and an earnestness that were not unmixed with anger concerning the secret he had kept so long: and then, briefly and rapidly, he told her of all he had suspected; of the two silent shots; of the peculiar bullets that had been found in the body of his dog and in his own limb; of the cuff and sleeve-link he had found; together with the important information he had received by a letter—he did not immediately say from whom, nor did she inquire—that Travice Cheatwood possessed an air-gun (an illegal weapon); and that jealousy, ani-

mosity, and dread of a final exposure concerning his foul play at cards had doubtless driven him to use it.

They were, as yet, both in ignorance of how Hesbia's somewhat *outré* but enigmatical letter had been tampered with, taken from the hands of its custodian, Buttons, read, and so fully understood that it led Travice, on the night in question, to lie in secret like an assassin, waiting for Lennard; but as the latter unfolded all this web, Hesbia could only weep, amid all her indignation and shame (for the conduct of Travice inspired both), on finding that her worst suspicions—she had not been without them—were now confirmed and realized!

“And this weapon—this air-gun—is, you say, in his room?”

“Is or was. Certainly, Mr. Dabchick saw it there,” replied Lennard, a little doggedly.

“Oh,” said Hesbia, with something of disdain, “*he* was your informant?”

“Why should I conceal it?—yes.”

“Come home with me; we shall summon the housekeeper and make a search.”

“Thanks, Hesbia—you speak my very wishes; but I fear our scrutiny may be in vain; your cousin would surely not be such a simple blockhead as to leave openly, or lying about, the means of committing a crime, which filled all the county with wonder, and excited such a spirit of inquiry.”

“Come with me at all events—come with me this instant, and we shall see!” she exclaimed passionately, as she passed her handkerchief over her eyes, which sparkled through their tears, while her cheek flushed with excitement; “what will papa say, or think, or do, when he learns that you have suffered all this at our hands—at the hands of one of our family, and suffered it in silence too!”

“It was for your sake, dearest Hesbia.”

“My darling Lennard—my dear, good, amiable pet—I shall love you more than ever!”

“But do not distress yourself—all is over now, and I am well again, though I could not exactly vault over a five-barred gate yet; but the good time, even for that, is coming.”

“And now to examine Travice’s rooms,” resumed Hesbia, who in her eagerness almost ran till they reached the door of Blairavon House, where the servants, under the direction of the solemn and pompous butler and the bustling housekeeper, were carefully closing and securing windows and shutters, taking up carpets and down curtains and hangings, reversing pictures and shrouding statues, glass shades, and so forth, in linen covers, so that already the great drawing-room, when doubly reflected in its opposite mirrors, seemed a long and silent perspective of ghostly grotesqueries.

Summoning the housekeeper, Hesbia desired her to “conduct Mr. Blair to Mr. Cheatwood’s rooms,

as there was a gun—no, a pipe—a book, or something there which he wished to obtain before they were finally shut up;” and while the domestic curtseyed and withdrew with Lennard, Hesbia threw aside her hat and gloves, and resolving to make a most accurate search the moment he was gone, seated herself on a sofa in the dismantled drawing-room, and threw open a window, that the evening breeze might cool her flushed cheek, for the aroma of the lavender branches strewn about so plentifully by the housekeeper, was somewhat oppressive.

Her mind was full of exciting thoughts—of grief, of shame, and bitter indignation against Tralice, who had so nearly brought scandal upon her and her father; and these sentiments were not unmixed with a hope that this outrage, if privately proved and brought home to the perpetrator, might be successfully used as a lever power, when Lennard urged their suit, and sought a consent to their marriage.

All was still in the great mansion; she could hear only the beating of her heart and the buzz of the flies in the vast space of the stately room; and without, in the calm evening, all was intensely quiet. No sound broke the stillness but the cawing of the sable rooks in the autumn woods, and the distant clatter of a long train of carts, passing from the mains of Kaims, heavily laden with what she was wont to call her “papa’s black diamonds.”

She was restless; she looked at her watch; ten

minutes had elapsed, and Lennard had not rejoined her; what had he found—what was he about—and why had she not gone too? Her curiosity became too great for endurance, so she hastened towards the rooms which she knew had been assigned to her cousin, traversing a long and antique corridor, through the deeply-embayed windows of which the sunlight fell in flakes of golden light, while on the lozenged panes the leaves of the clustering ivy, and those of the loftier trees, were rustling with a sound that was dreary enough when heard in the nights of winter.

Lennard had not yet left the quarters of his late rival, for now that he was in them he felt all the awkwardness of his position as a stranger, and the impossibility of fulfilling the object of his visit, as he dared not break open lockfast places, and yet where else would that probably be for which he was seeking? So he followed the housekeeper with vague but restless eyes, as she showed him through Mr. Cheatwood's bed-chamber, dressing-room, and bath-closet.

How well Lennard remembered the first, for when in infancy it had been his nursery, and there had he often nestled and cowered in his little crib at night, when the winter blasts rumbled in the great hollow chimneys, and when the hail and ivy leaves clattered on the corridor windows, while he feared the spectres that filled the stories of the



servants and the peasantry. Captain Cheyne, perhaps, returning from Elfland in his red coat and bob-wig, or Ringy Rattles, the Chain-fiend, whose red-hot links swooping through the air could overtake and enfold even the swiftest horseman; or the kelpie who lured Uncle Lennard into the loch, and many other desperate hobgoblins unknown to those who live in an atmosphere of gas. Though altered and modernized, it was the same room in many respects, and the massive stone fire-place, with its Scoto-Italian mouldings, was quite unchanged.

Its adjuncts and appurtenances were more luxurious and splendid than tasteful or elegant; but pipes of all sorts and sizes, *cartes-de-visite* of opera-dancers, old cards, racing calendars, odd numbers of *Punch*, *Bell's Life*, and so forth, littered the mantelpiece and console, while brilliant French crayon heads of somewhat languid and dishevelled beauties were hung on the walls in slender maplewood frames.

“Now, sir, do you see what you want, please—a book or pipe I think Miss Vere said?” urged the housekeeper, who grew somewhat perplexed by the dreamy air of Lennard: he had entirely forgot her presence, and now that he was actually in the apartments of Travice Cheatwood, continued to survey with a bewildered and irresolute eye the suite of Elizabethan furniture, the elaborate bed with its stately canopy and hangings of coral-coloured damask, the handsome dwarf and French

wardrobes with mirror panels, the cheval glasses which had so often reflected the accurate and fashionable toilettes of the absent desperado, the writing-table—a miracle of carving—and his luxurious easy-chair ; but where the deuce was he to look for the air-gun ?

Not in the chest of drawers or wardrobes, most of which were locked, and which he had no right (though the best of excuses) for opening ; and no such implement or weapon was to be seen among the rods, sticks, billiard - cues, umbrellas, and hunting-whips which littered a corner of the bath-closet.

“ I see nothing like that which Dabchick has mentioned in his letter,” said he to Hesbia, who now joined them.

“ I hope to Heaven he may have been mistaken,” said she. “ He had his own reasons for disliking Travice, apart from the card squabble.”

And in her anxiety, quite forgetting how much her speech conveyed to Lennard, and that the “ reasons ” referred to must have been jealousy of Travice when he first came to Blairavon, she proceeded with great energy to pull out and push in several of the drawers which were left unlocked. Some were empty, others contained some articles of clothing only ; but she was nervous, excited ; and after tossing them vaguely about, began to survey the apartments with a sharper scrutiny than Lennard.

“When or how was this injury done; and so clumsily repaired, too?” she asked, pointing to a portion of the wainscot skirting of the dressing-closet, which had evidently been roughly removed and replaced, and to conceal which the window-hangings had been disposed so awkwardly that her foot caught them.

The housekeeper shook her head; she had never observed the damage before; but a moulded piece of the wainscot, some four feet in length, had evidently been forced off and restored in a very unworkman-like manner; and now, all unused to excitement, very much was that portly dame astonished (and such a story it would be to relate in the servants' hall!) when she saw Mr. Lennard Blair make a dash at the wood with the poker, and, after wrenching it off, utter a cry of fierce satisfaction!

For there, concealed by the floor-skirting of the room, he found the identical object of his search—a double-barrelled iron tube, the air-gun, with a package of its bullets marked AA on the back of each, conical in form, plugged with wood and precisely like the two in his pocket-book, which we may add exactly suited the bore of the inner barrel. And that more complete evidence might not be wanting, there too lay the cuff of fine linen edged with dark needle-work, and having two Indian gold coins as a link, exactly corresponding with those found by

Lennard with the frayed fragment in the hedge. In fact Travice, on discovering that he had lost one on that eventful night, had been wary enough to conceal the other with the instrument of his crime, in the very place where—thanks to the sharpness of Hesbia's eye—Lennard found them now!

Being ignorant of all this cause for excitement, the housekeeper's usually stolid visage seemed to expand and grow round with wonder.

"Most fatal proofs! most fatal proofs!" exclaimed Hesbia, clasping her hands.

"So, so—you see now that 'the trail of the serpent' is complete!"

"Oh, how you have suffered at his hands, my poor, dear Lennard!" said Hesbia, forgetting the housekeeper, whose eyes opened very wide indeed; "how shall we ever convince my poor deluded papa of the extreme guilt of which his nephew is capable?"

"Were the scoundrel here, face to face with me,"—Lennard was beginning furiously, when—

"Hollo; what's up!—by Jove!" exclaimed a voice close by, and they found themselves confronted by Travice Cheatwood, whom an imprecation escaped, sworn bitterly and huskily through his clenched teeth.

At his back stood Mademoiselle Savonette, whom a laudable curiosity had drawn hither, her dark

French eyes glittering with gratified malice, for she especially disliked him, and seemed to take in the whole situation.

He was looking very pale, and his attire was in disorder; he was minus hat and gloves; his cravat and collar were torn and awry, and his whole appearance bore the strongest traces of his having been engaged in a recent scuffle. Yet though a strange expression of spite and rage mingled with that of terror in his sallow face rendering his green eyes almost white, he mustered courage to say, "What is the meaning of all this, Hesbia; and why the devil do I find this fellow in my room, and knocking my traps about—eh?"

Hesbia surveyed him with a very mingled expression of face; but shame was more predominant there than pity.

He was again about to bluster, but the moment his eye fell upon the weapon which was in the hand of Lennard, who had kept it partly concealed, lest there might be an attempt to wrest it from him, a deadlier paleness spread over his face, and he reeled against the wall like a drunken man.

Notwithstanding all his constitutional insolence, there was not, perhaps, within the three seas of Britain, a more complete moral coward than Travice Cheatwood! On this occasion his aspect was pitiable, and it so happened that he had greater

and more immediate cause for terror than even the present discovery and probable vengeance of Lennard Blair.

“Treacherous and malevolent scoundrel!” exclaimed the latter in a low voice of concentrated passion, while his eyes, dark, honest, and indignant, seemed to glare into those of Cheatwood—literally flashing death and terror into his soul: “thank your cousin that her presence alone prevents me from beating you to the earth with this, your own infamous weapon; and thank her further, that for her sake alone, I do not send you to pick oakum for life, by handing you over, as you deserve, to the nearest police magistrate!”

Then he added, in a hurried whisper, to Hesbia—

“After this complete discovery, I cannot trust myself in his presence longer, lest some terrible scene ensue,—thus you must permit me to withdraw. I shall leave my card here to-morrow,” said he to the housekeeper—in short he scarcely knew what to say—“and if I can be of any service in this hurry and confusion, command me. If you, my good woman, are ever called upon to state on oath the discovery of this evening, it is to be hoped that you will remember all the details!”

“Lor, sir; yes, sir,” replied the poor woman, looking utterly and miserably mystified.

Then, gently touching the hand of Hesbia and

whispering "To-morrow at the stile," he left the house, carrying with him all the proofs of the guilt of Cheatwood, who never made the least attempt to recover his property.

But there was no meeting at the stile on the morrow.

## CHAPTER X.

## JUDEN GRABBIE'S VISITOR.

**B**EFORE explaining the reason of Mr. Cheatwood's remarkable appearance on this occasion, we must change the scene to the office of a certain local official already mentioned incidentally in a preceding chapter, Mr. Juden Grabbie.

It stood in the pretty village of Blairavon, the white-walled cottages of which, with fluted or overlapping red tiles, and crow-stepped gables tufted with green moss, and having brilliant trailers round their windows, clustered about the grassy knoll on which the church is situated.

Diverging from this, the older portion of the hamlet, there had sprung up in the direction of the coal-pits a new street of plain little cottages, built of hewn stone, blue slated, and having square windows with iron frames (all lozenge-fashioned and of dreary uniformity). This little street had a bleak, hard, bare, and somewhat grimy aspect by day; and the dark figures of the colliers, like pan-



tomimic gnomes with lamps flickering in their caps, when passing to and from the pits, lent a gloomy air to the place, even when the sun was shining, and there groups of noisy children contended in the gutters with dogs and ducks and hens. But on the night preceding the *dénouement* which closes the last chapter, flakes of warm light from the gas-lit windows streaming athwart the thoroughfare made the collier dwellings look bright and cheery.

These cottages bordered the path to the Kaims, where at intervals ruddy gleams shot upon the sky of night with a strange and weird effect, bringing out of the darkness fantastic-like erections, revolving wheels, ropes, chains, and the figures of grimy men. That path had been in former days the paved Roman way to the camp of Agricola, and in more recent times the old mail-coach road. It had long ceased to be used, all traffic being transferred to the railway; so it became more rugged, more encroached upon by hedges, wild brambles, and trees, and by borders of grass that grew rank and deep, than it had ever been, even in the days of old, when Mary fled from the field of Langside, or when her father, the fifth James, rode to the Jousting Haugh of Linlithgow, in time to see the battle between the Hamiltons and Douglasses, when culverins boomed in the hollow glen, and axes flashed on casques of steel, and when Lennox, "the best and bravest man in Scotland," perished beneath the sword of the High Inquisitor;

for it is an old, old road-way, and has seen generations of strange wayfarers in its time.

At the junction of the old village with the new, as a species of connecting-link, stood the office and dwelling of Mr. Grabbie, a small but snug cottage, with a little garden-plot before it.

Mr. Juden Grabbie was a personage who exercised, but in the matter of advice only, the distinguished functions of a country-writer (*Anglicè* attorney) and messenger-at-arms, and who not unfrequently stooped to do the humble work usually assigned to criminal officers. He was a cunning, servile, greedy (and outwardly most religious) wretch, who, under the pretence of local agency, had contrived to get a great many of the title-deeds and other documents of the district into his dingy hands. He occasionally "did" little accommodations, too, at "a mild forty per cent.;" he was a source of intense dread to the poor and needy, and to all who were in his power, and who had no desire to contemplate the charms of Scottish scenery through the iron grilles of the nearest Tolbooth.

In his office, the walls of which were somewhat ostentatiously hung with insurance advertisements and prospectuses, rouns of turnips, and green, white, and live stock, all yellow and flyblown, intrenched deep among bundles and dôquets of papers and letters, surrounded by well-thumbed ledgers and green tin boxes, piled on an iron frame, Mr. Grabbie, in a well-

worn suit, on this evening was seated at his writing-table, working intently by the light of a green-shaded gas jet, when his slipshod servant-girl came timidly in and placed before him a square glazed card, whereon was the superscription of "*Mr. Nab, Liverpool.*"

"Nab—Nab—is it no MacNab? Never heard of such a name—what is he like, lassie?" he asked, glaring sharply at her through his spectacles, while pausing with one finger on a column of figures, and his pen held over the ink-horn.

The girl hesitated and seemed doubtful, so, after rubbing his grey grisly chin, Mr. Grabbie desired her to show the visitor in. Then he made a marginal mark in pencil, so that no time might be lost in resuming his summation again, wiped his spectacles with a dingy brown handkerchief, and readjusted himself in his chair, so that he could sit in perfect shadow, while the visitor would be exposed to the glare of the gas jet; and all this he did rapidly by system as well as habit.

The stranger, a pleasant-looking little man, about forty years of age, with an intensely keen eye, and an appearance that was almost gentlemanly, was carefully dressed in black; he entered quietly, bowing and smiling, and placed his umbrella, hat, and grey cotton gloves upon a chair.

"Good morning, Mr. Grabbie," said he.

"Morning—good evening would be nearer the

time o' day, I think," growled Grabbie, suspiciously; "be seated, sir."

"Thank you; I am a stranger in these here parts—just come by the Carlisle train, and have been specially recommended to you, sir."

Mr. Grabbie now gave one of his brief nods; the stranger had certainly come about a money matter—perhaps a summons against some one.

"You know this county well, of course, sir?"

"The county!" said Grabbie; "I should think so; I was born and bred in this village—was never out of it, except for a few years' drudgery in the office of Snap & Grinder, the writers in Glasgow. Well?"

"You know Blairavon House?"

"Perfectly—Mr. Vere's place now."

"Perhaps you may have seen a Mr. Travice Cheatwood there or hereabout?"

Mr. Grabbie, from being blunt and almost indifferent in manner, now became suddenly interested.

"I have never seen him there, but I have seen him once too often *here*."

"In this office?"

"Seated in the very chair you occupy; but," added Grabbie, closing his teeth with a snap, "he is not in this neighbourhood just now."

"He soon will be."

"Ah—you know that, and wish to see him?"

“Very particular,” replied the little man, winking and smiling pleasantly.

“May I inquire *what* you are?” asked Grabbie, sharply, after a pause.

“You may, sir; I’m Mr. Nathan Nab, of the Liverpool detective police.”

“Whew!” whistled Mr. Grabbie, lying back in his chair, and raising his spectacles to his brow, while a smile of malicious satisfaction spread over his face, puckering up his cunning and sunken eyes, and then these two men surveyed each other for a moment in silence.

No person would for a moment have supposed that Mr. Juden Grabbie was or ever had been a gentleman. In his sixtieth year now, his appearance was vulgar, yet tolerably respectable. Mean in visage, he had a cruel mouth, shaggy brows, and keen eyes, with a kind of red malevolent spark in them. Cunning, as we have said, he was deep, cautious, heartless, and brutal at times, especially to the helpless and poor; yet he was always scared, restless, and nervous in the presence of his superiors, and being quite aware of this defect in his temperament, he strove to conceal it by an assumed frankness and cordiality of manner, that made such men as Ranald Cheyne and Richard Blair draw themselves up to their full height, and silence him by a steady stare, which excited his secret hate; but over the last-named unfortunate Grabbie had revelled in

triumph and revenge, when he had him seated in that same office, perspiring with vexation at the ruinous renewal of bills, granted at nearly fifty per cent., by *him*—Juden Grabbie—the earth-stopper's son!

Now Mr. Grabbie, among his other characteristics, was a good hater; and most cordially did he hate Travice Cheatwood, whom he had “accommodated,” and by whom he had been more than once insulted. “The man who has a purpose to achieve, or a secret to hide, should never make an enemy;” but Travice had a purpose to achieve, and more than one ugly secret to hide; and yet he had made an enemy of Mr. Grabbie, for that personage, when venturing to Blairavon on one occasion, sent up his card by Mademoiselle Savonette, Maxwell and Buttons having both eschewed his request, and while waiting in the hall, had heard Travice say, impatiently,—

“A person wanting to see me, you say?”

“Oui, m'sieur — M'sieur Grabbie from the village.”

“Then give *this* to M'sieur Grabbie from the village, and tell him to go to the devil, Savonette, translating it into French or Scotch as you please!”

And the soubrette brought back to Grabbie his card—torn in two! Grabbie could barely pocket the affront; but his fury knew no bounds when he discovered that Mr. Cheatwood had that night, with-

out leaving any address behind him, taken the train for Carstairs Junction, where all trace of him was lost.

“You belong to the Liverpool detective force?” said Mr. Grabbie, with a wicked but gratified smile.

“Yes,” replied the other, proceeding to light a cheroot. “No objection to this sort of thing, I hope?”

“None. And your business is with Mr. Vere’s nephew?”

“Yes; it’s a queer bit of work, but common enough with our profession. It is simply concerning a bill for £1,400—a forgery.”

“On whom?”

“Mr. Vere.”

“To that amount!”

“£1,000 over the original sum.”

“And by Mr. Cheatwood? Odds, man! I think that a wealthy gentleman like Mr. Vere might have taken it up and said nothing about it for the sake of his sister’s son.”

“So perhaps he would had he known; but naturally enough he denied all knowledge of it, and telegraphed to Mr. Envoyse that it was a forgery. By this time it had been duly honoured by a bank, and the affair was before the police ere the number and date remaining in his cheque-book showed Mr. Vere that it was one originally for four hundred given to his

hopeful nephew. It has been paid away to other folks, and now I am here with a warrant for his arrest and conveyance to England.”

Mr. Grabbie rubbed his rough chin and coarse hands with intense satisfaction.

“I have never been in Scotland before, sir; and the way of doing dooty here is strange to me. Your name was mentioned to me by the head of our force in Liverpool, as having been already in correspondence with him concerning the whereabouts of Mr. Cheatwood.”

“Anent a protested two hundred pound bill of my own—yes.”

“And so having a direct personal interest in his capture.”

“Troth have I! But I don’t see how his capture for forgery will bring me much nearer payment.”

One hundred and twenty was the sum given to Travice on his own acceptance for *two* hundred, and it proved to be almost the only rash transaction of Mr. Grabbie’s long professional career. In the end he had trusted to Mr. Vere taking it up to prevent exposure; but that gentleman had found other affairs of greater magnitude to occupy him, and never replied to his letters.

“So the bill has been paid away?”

“Yes; from ’and to ’and till it’s reached them as won’t be trifled with. Mr. Vere has been driven rather wild by the pranks of that same nephew, and



he is—if all folks *do* say now in Liverpool—perhaps not quite so rich as he seems.”

“Do you really say so?” exclaimed Grabbie, as his eyes sparkled with a pleasure he could not perhaps have explained. “Why, he bought a bit more land here lately—Oakwoodlee; and these pits of his are one of the best-paying specs in the West country.”

“Well, he has had many losses of late. I have walked over all his place since I came by the afternoon train; and I learned by inquiry at the house, that Mr. Travice Cheatwood is absent, but expected to-morrow, or the next day at latest; and so I shall be on the watch to grab him!”

Grabbie ground his teeth with evident satisfaction at this new prospect of vengeance for his loss, adding,—

“You will not require the aid of the Rurals unless necessary?”

“Oh, no; gents never resist. I’ll just slip the bracelets on and have him off to Liverpool, second class, by the night train. I wish the thing done quietly. Mr. Vere is a gent that will come down ’andsome if I does it ’andsome and avoids exposure.”

“You have the warrant all right, I suppose?” said Grabbie, with a keen glance at the dapper little detective.

“That is what I especially wished to ask you about,

for I was dispatched in a precious hurry, I can tell you ; but here it is, all regular.”

“ And isn’t worth so much waste [paper,” exclaimed Grabbie, the moment he cast his keen fierce eyes over it.

Mr. Nab looked aghast, but incredulous.

“ An English warrant in Scotland is as useless as a Rcosian one, and, even if signed by the Lord Chancellor, must be *indorsed* by the sheriff of the county or stewartry in which the person who is to be arrested resides. Why, Mr.—Mr.—”

“ Nab,” suggested the little man mildly.

“ Mr. Nab, you must be very new in your business not to know this. A warrant signed by the Lord Advocate empowers the arrest of any one in any part of the kingdom of Scotland ; but that is never asked for in such petty cases as this. The sheriff’s signature is necessary, and if resistance is apprehended——”

“ Lor, what do you do in *that* case ? ” asked Mr. Nab, who had vague ideas of Scottish mountain passes bristling with swords and pistols ; for he had seen “ Rob Roy ” at the Alexandra Theatre, and the total rout of the British troops amid much blank cartridge and blue fire.

“ Well, in *that* case, the presence of a Scottish criminal officer is necessary, and I can act in that capacity.”

“ But what the dooce is the meaning of all this

fuss about a Scotch sheriff's signature?" asked Mr. Nab, with some irritation of manner.

"Do you no ken, sir," asked Grabbie, with a small burst of patriotism that was perhaps professional—he was not so degraded as to be without that—for though a legal shark, he was not a legal snob like Mr. Dabchick—"Do you no ken, sir, that by the Act of Union passed in the reign of Queen Anne, no Scottish subject, or person resident in Scotland, can be taken forth the kingdom by a warrant from any authority hailing from the region of Westminster; for Clause 19th saith, that 'no causes in Scotland shall be cognisable by the Courts of Chancery, Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, or any other court in Westminster Hall;' and to further ensure such protection, the sheriff's signature is now necessary for legality."

Mr. Nab listened to all this with some bewilderment, as he now heard, perhaps for the first time, of a Treaty of Union and a queen called Anne. He had, however, been recommended to the right quarter by the head of his department in this instance; for in the promptings of his rage against Travice Cheatwood, Mr. Grabbie gladly promised to make all sure and certain.

Before the afternoon of the next day he had the English warrant completed, and watch set at the two railway stations eastward and westward of Blairavon; and the first shadows of sunset saw him

and his English compatriot, after a comfortable dinner at the Blair Arms, loitering near the front lodge-gate of the mansion-house, and smoking a couple of exceedingly bad cigars with great apparent satisfaction.

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE OLD QUARRY.

AS the time of Mr. Cheatwood's arrival at the manor-house on this occasion was unknown, no smart tiger, topbooted with cockade and belt, no handsome Tilbury and high-stepping horse with splendid harness, awaited him at the solitary little railway station ; and all unaware of the plans laid for his capture, and of the discovery and complete disgrace that so surely awaited him, he had sped along the Edinburgh and Glasgow line by the afternoon express train, till he reached the branch of single rails for Blairavon.

He was not in the sweetest mood of mind with fortune.

He had hung about his new cavalry friends until they had become perplexed by the run of luck at cards and billiards being perpetually in *his* favour ; so his mode of play was watched, and being found unsatisfactory, he was one wet night collared by

a file of the main-guard, and trundled without much ceremony outside the barrack gate, where he found himself in evening dress and glazed boots under a torrent of rain.

Following at some distance the porter who was carrying his portmanteau and rugs, Travice walked leisurely along with a cigar in his mouth, and no more formidable weapon in his hand than the most slender of umbrellas. The beauty of the evening, the great green hills, towering into the blue sky, their peaks yet reddened by the last farewell light of the sun that had set; the soft russet and brown that were stealing over the autumn woods, the golden grain that stretched far away till lost in evening haze; the silvery smoke ascending from cottage roofs into the dewy air, and the voices of the cattle, as "the lowing herd wound slowly o'er the lea," had all no charm for Travice, though he paused at times in reverie, with his cigar between his daintily-gloved fingers, and then muttering an imprecation, would tread slowly and sulkily on, immersed in his own troublesome thoughts.

But at a part of the path he was pursuing—between two cornfields, and not far from an old quarry, he suddenly found himself confronted by two men, in one of whom he recognized Mr. Grabbie, and in the other he felt instinctively the presence of a foe, though he was a well-dressed, smiling, and dapper little man.

“Beg pardon, Mr. Cheatwood,” said he; “but we have a small piece of business with you.”

“With me, fellows!” said Travice, instantly on his guard.

“Yes,” replied Grabbie, with a growl of rage, while his companion fumbled in his coat-pocket for a pair of handcuffs; “I hold a protested bill of yours.”

“Oh, bother your bill just now, Grabbie—I’ll make it all square in a day or two. I give you my honour——”

“Sorry, sir, to deprive you of so valuable a commodity,” said Mr. Nab (not one of whose motions escaped the eyes of Travice), smiling more pleasantly than ever, as he dropped his umbrella, and suddenly producing a pair of handcuffs (bright and well worn, evidently), he added, “I have a warrant for your arrest,” and made a clutch at the wrists of Travice, who, ever on his guard, had warily sprung back two or three paces, and stood prepared to show fight.

“My dear sir,” said Mr. Nab, with a pleasant and even friendly air of expostulation, though he felt that he was managing matters with less professional skill than usual; “it is a mere waste of time to resist!”

But Travice did not see it in that light. Knowing something of the science of self-defence, and being pretty strong and active, notwithstanding his dissi-

pated habits, he was resolved not to be taken without a desperate struggle; but his cheek grew pale, his eyes glared with a strange and fishy expression, and his fair moustache and upper lip quivered with the agitation he could not control.

Those who are living in a tangle of falsehoods never know when or where the danger of discovery lies; so it was with Cheatwood! His network of treachery and deceit had been gradually growing tighter around him, and he knew that a crisis, a climax, must come at last; yet there glowed within him a spirit of defiant desperation, not unmixed with terror. Could his secret shot at Lennard Blair have come to light? was it the "doctored bill?" thought he, or what the devil was it? Any way he was resolved not to be arrested as a felon without a struggle for liberty.

"At whose instance is your warrant?" he asked.

"The police magistrates of Liverpool."

"On what charge?" he asked, in a husky voice; "but stand back, I say, on your peril!"

"Forgery!"

The word fell horribly on his ear! Often had he named it to himself; but now when uttered to his face in open daylight, it filled him with dismay. For a moment he presented a pitiable spectacle; that of a human being degraded by his own acts, hunted, detected, and brought to bay at last; pale,



shrinking, fierce, and desperate, without friends, or hope of refuge. But the next instant saw his constitutional assurance come to his aid, and on Mr. Nab preparing, cat-like, to make a spring, he exclaimed, furiously—

“Be off, you mangy scoundrels, if you would reach your kennel with a skinful of whole bones!”

“You cannot be so mad as to attempt resistance!” said Mr. Nab, who seemed more amused than surprised, while the bullying Grabbie grew savage, and proceeded to turn up the cuffs of his coat.

“You can’t arrest me here on an English warrant. I know *that* much of law.”

“But it is duly signed by the sheriff, and its legality shall be enforced, sir—enforced!” cried Grabbie; “surrender peaceably in the name of the Queen, you dyvour loon, for if you dare but to strike one blow——”

What the threat of Grabbie was to have been Travice never knew, for observing that the speaker in his wrath and excitement had drawn unusually close to the edge of the quarry, he made a sudden rush, and dealing him a blow (a regular facer) fairly between the eyes, and well planted in too, he shot the legal bully of the village clean over the brink, and with a half-stifled yell Grabbie fell headlong crashing among prickly whin-bushes, gorse, and

loose stones to the bottom, some thirty feet or more below.

Despair gave Travice pluck, and closing instantly and recklessly upon Mr. Nathan Nab, he strove to lift him off his feet and send him after his companion. Nab fought desperately, and with all the more energy that he felt himself armed with all the majesty and authority of the law; but in a second he found Travice too much for him, and felt his ribs compressed, himself half lifted bodily from the ground and hurried toward the brink of the rocks, over which he was deliberately flung on the top of Grabbie; and then with the hot perspiration pouring in bead-drops over his temples, the old wild clamorous anxiety and terror in his heart—the same revulsion of spirit—which he felt on that night when he shot at Lennard Blair, Cheatwood rushed back through the fields towards the railway, in the hope of being soon able to put as great a distance as possible between himself and the scene of this new and most unexpected catastrophe.

He knew the depth of the quarry. It was old, long unused, and water generally lay there. So his hope was that if they were not suffocated in the slimy puddle, these legal wolves might escape with a few broken bones; any way they must not look upon his face again, for he had committed a fresh—and he knew not how serious—violation of the law. Onward he ran through the fields and under the

shadow of the hedgerows. He was but two miles from the station, and could he but reach Glasgow, there all trace of him would be lost, and there were ships in plenty for America and everywhere else.

But a cry, a malediction escaped him on discovering that he had not a farthing in his purse; his last shilling he had given to the porter who was carrying his portmanteau! Hesbia would replenish his exchequer, he had no doubt; then to her he would apply. There was yet time to reach the house, to restore his attire to order, to explain the desperation of his affairs, obtain money from her or the butler, and get away by the first night train, before Messrs. Nab and Grabbie had scrambled out of the quarry-hole, if they were able to do so, and could rouse the rural police and others on his track.

“If,” thought he, “they have but one broken bone each, I am safe!”

He lost no time in putting his plan in execution, and, seeking the nearest and most unfrequented paths to the house, reached it, as we have seen, just in time to be confronted by Hesbia and Lennard, with the proofs of another crime in their hands.

To seek his friend Feverley's cottage and relate what had taken place, had been Lennard's sole idea on leaving the manor-house. He had no intention of appealing to authorities or of demanding publicly the exposure and punishment of Cheatwood, even

for all he had made him suffer, for much of the shame and obloquy of a criminal prosecution would recoil on the Veres, and from such an event he shrunk. Confirmation of his suspicions, and a true key to the cousin's secret character, were all that he required. If love for Hesbia did not make him magnanimous in his secret thoughts towards Travice, it at least made him politic; but there was a storm of fiery indignation rankling in his heart as he walked slowly down the avenue in the twilight, and crossing the highway sought the shortest by-path that led through the fields to the village.

A few drops of rain plashing on the still leaves gave warning of a coming shower; it came in time, and fell so heavily that he was compelled, for more than half an hour, to seek the shelter of a thicket. While there he heard in his vicinity strange sounds, which after a time he became certain werethemoans and cries of some one in pain; and these, on examination, he found to proceed from a man lying at the bottom of the old quarry near the pathway.

Lennard knew well every nook, crevice, and shelf of the quarry; on many a day in boyhood he had birdnested among the gorse that fringed its mouth, or fished for minnows and "pow-wowets" with a luggie and string in the slimy pool at the bottom; so now safely but carefully he made his way downward in the gloom, to find the sufferer, who lay helplessly on his back, so severely shaken and bruised

as to be almost unable either to walk or stand. He proved to be Mr. Nab, whose companion, having suffered less injury, had clambered out and gone to the village intent alike on succour and pursuit.

“’Elp me, for Godsake, whoever you are, out of this ’orrible ’ole!” cried poor Mr. Nab in a piteous voice.

“How the deuce came you here—any bones broken?” asked Lennard, stooping over him, kindly.

“I can’t tell—I fear so—I feel smashed a’most, from ’eel to ’ead—oh dearie me!” groaned the other.

“Get up, if you can, please—try to stand, and I shall help you out. I know every part of this place, as well as if I had dug it.”

He had almost said “owned it,” but failed, for such had once been the case.

Half supporting and half dragging the little man, who every second implored him to stop (and who, between the combined effects of the slimy puddle, the recent rain, the blood which had flowed from some cuts and scratches, with his bruises and fears, was in a deplorable condition), Lennard had nearly reached the mouth or summit of the quarry, when he heard voices, and saw the flickering light of a couple of stable lanterns, as Mr. Grabbie arrived in all haste, with the efficient aid of two rural policemen, big burly fellows with gilt St. Andrew crosses on

their felt helmets, a brace of grooms from the inn, and several colliers from the village, all of whom immediately recognized "young Mr. Blair," and uttered his name in various cadences of astonishment.

"Glad to see you able to exert yourself so well, sir, after your strange accident," said Juden Grabbie, whose head was bound up by a handkerchief. "This is a dangerous hole for one to venture into in the dark."

"I never thought of the danger when some one required help or pity, Mr. Grabbie."

"And it was like ane o' the gude auld stock to fear neither deil nor darkness!" said one of the policemen, touching his cap to Lennard; "mony a day lang syne, when bairns, hae you and I shot rabbits and fuimarts here in this auld quarry-hole."

"How came all this about, Mr. Grabbie?" asked Lennard. "Did your friend—he looks very pale—fall into the quarry?"

"No, Mr. Blair," replied Grabbie, grinding his teeth with pain and rage; "but both he and I were knocked into it like a pair of ninepins, when in the lawful execution of our duty! What think you of that, sir?"

"Knocked into it! by whom?"

"I am ashamed to say by *one* man—that un-hanged villain, Travice Cheatwood."

“ You use strong language, Mr. Grabbie.”

“ Not stronger than the occasion deserves.”

“ Do you forget that he is the nephew of Mr. Vere? ”

“ That matters little; and no action at law for speaking unadvisedly of him will ever follow, we may be sure of that! ” continued Grabbie, with a dogged insolence of tone.

“ You had a scuffle; so that accounts for the disorder of his attire when he reached his uncle’s house.”

“ *He is there, then!* ” cried Grabbie in a hoarse voice, with a start of anger and satisfaction.

Lennard hesitated.

“ Speak, sir—evasion is quite useless.”

“ I certainly left him there half an hour ago; there is little reason why I should cloak or conceal his movements.”

“ Give me your warrant, Mr. Nab, and the bracelets too! Lads,” exclaimed Grabbie with angry triumph to the police and other men from the village, “ you’ll follow me. Mr. Blair will attend to Mr. Nab—he is too kind-hearted and brave to leave him.”

“ I beg that you fellows will not make a row in the mansion, and alarm Miss Vere. She is alone, or with servants only,” urged Lennard, angrily.

“We shall do nothing unseemly, be assured, sir,” replied Grabbie; but we must surround the house and capture Mr. Cheatwood, or Cheat-the-wuddie; by my soul he is well named!”

And Grabbie grinned in savage glee at his own pun.

“On what charge do you arrest him—assault?”

“Yes, and worse—fraud and forgery.”

“Good heavens! the amount?”

“He received a bill of exchange or cheque for £400 and paid it away for £1,400—clever dodge; but soon detected.”

Lennard felt his breath taken away; this must be the very document about which there had been so much correspondence and telegraphing between Mr. Vere and old Mr. Envoyse.

But ere he could ask another question Grabbie and his followers, all full of natural excitement and vulgar curiosity, had departed to surround the manor-house, while Lennard felt his arm clutched nervously by Mr. Nab, who groaned heavily.

“Don’t leave me, please sir, till I’m in a safe place. I’ve a wife and little ’uns in Liverpool—my poor missus, bless her ’art; she knows nothing of my most miserable plight to-night.” He seemed on the point of weeping; but changing his tone to anger, he added with something of Bailie Jarvie’s



emotion, "It was in the hexecution of the lawr; but I wishes as my old boots 'ad been red 'ot, when I came on such a herrand into this cussed houtlandish country. However, dooty, you know, sir, is dooty."

## CHAPTER XII.

## HUNTED.

TRAVICE CHEATWOOD felt that the worst was known now.

Cowering for a moment under the bright and scornful eyes of his cousin, whose slender nostrils and upper lip seemed to quiver with mingled shame and passion, he was convinced that this was an extremely awkward time to ask her for money; so he delayed for a little, being unluckily ignorant how closely the reinforced beagles of the law were on his track.

Lennard Blair was gone—that was one relief; and the wondering servants, whom the too evident disorder of his bearing and attire had filled with all the curiosity of their class, had retired with lingering steps and listening ears, and at last the cousins were left together face to face in the dining-room, where the gas had just been lighted, and where, by Travice's order—for his tongue was cleaving to the

roof of his mouth with thirst and excitement—the startled butler had uncorked and left him a bottle of champagne.

“You’re badly hill, sir?” said he, pausing, as he cut the cork with his scissors.

“Yes; I’ve had a spill as I came along the road—ass that I was not to order down the wagonette to meet me at the station; there—there—that will do; you may go.”

And the solemn butler bowed himself out, and hastened to join the conference in the servants’ hall.

Travice leaned against the massive walnut-wood sideboard, quaffing the sparkling wine, and more than once deepening its pink by a dash of brandy from a liqueur-frame.

He felt how miserably “small” he seemed under the proud flashing glance of Hesbia, whose silence was becoming somewhat oppressive, and whose brown hair glittered like a shower of gold, as she stood under the lights of the gaselier, erect and tall, the broad pink stripes of her white piqué adding to her stature, and a pearl-grey jacket, trimmed with swansdown, thrown partly back from her handsome white neck.

“So—so, you’re getting the whole place into holland pinafores and paper bags—eh?” said Travice, making an effort to speak, while his tongue seemed to have become larger in his mouth, and his

voice more guttural. "Here's a jolly row about a beastly kite of Uncle Vere's!"

"Or yours, rather."

"Well, Hesbia, can you lend me a few pounds?"

"For what purpose, sir!" she asked sharply.

"To help me out of this place; I am in a regular hole, upon my honour—a devil of a scrape; bailiffs are after me; I knocked two over, and am in danger of arrest—nothing less!"

"Arrest—for what? debt, or for courting, as you have done, the fate of a felon? So, sir, in flying from capture as a swindler, you find yourself convicted of an attempt to murder. Forging on papa and seeking to kill one of his friends! oh, Travice! Travice!"

"For Heaven's sake, if not for your own, speak lower, Hesbia—consider the servants. I only meant to wing Blair, *not* to kill him; by Jove I did, and that was all! But you are so deuced sharp with a fellow. It is my love for you, Hesbia, that has brought all this to pass," he added, seeking, but in vain, to soften her.

"Say, rather that idleness and wickedness have done it," replied Hesbia, giving way to tears and mortification.

"I have not ime to put off, cousin," said he, in a low and agitated voice, "and if you would not see me arrested here on a warrant from Liverpool concerning that blundered bill of exchange—you under-

stand—give me your loose cash, for I have not a sixpence, and a sojourn in foreign parts will be of vast benefit to me. I thought at one time to have taken up the bill myself in time to prevent discovery, but, being ignorant of business transactions, failed. I expected to have made a good book on the Derby, and that would have scored off everything, Hesbia; but all failed me. Flying Scud—d——d brute—only ran a good second, and I got but £150—a beggarly £150, by judicious hedging. Then I was a horrid defaulter at Catterick Bridge and elsewhere. I was in a desperate fix, and neither lansquenet or unlimited loo could help me. Among those dragoon fellows—regular heavy swells, half ennuied and wholly self-satisfied idiots, who seem to have lost the use of their limbs and their brains too (if they ever had any)—I won a thousand pounds here, but all went again elsewhere—where, don't matter now; so money I must have from you, my dear cousin, that I may decamp, hook it, be off——”

“To where?”

“What does it matter? America or Boulogne; plenty of scamps bolt to both places, and why not I?”

The brow and lip of Cheatwood grew supercilious, as he thought he had very efficiently defended himself. His eyes, we have said, were pale in colour; keen when excited, languid when otherwise; his cool insolence of deportment was returning, and

became effrontery as the wine invigorated him. He took another draught of the foaming Cliquot, and listened intently for a sound that might indicate pursuit or alarm.

“Have you no remorse for the shame you are bringing on my good papa?” asked Hesbia, with streaming eyes.

“None, by Jove! Your governor has always had an eye to the main chance, and to every minor chance, too; but he’ll be checkmated, choused, cheated by that precious ‘baronet’ of his in the end, or I am a Dutchman.”

“Slangy as ever. Well, Travice, have you no remorse for the shame and disgrace your conduct may bring on *me*?”

“Oh, my sweet cousin! you can take jolly good care of yourself.”

“On me,” she continued, “whom you have even pretended to love?”

“Pretended—yes, that’s about the mark,” replied Travice, into whose brain the fumes of the mixed champagne and brandy were mounting fast; “but give me some money, I tell you, and let me be off while the night lasts, and ere it be too late.”

“Off to where, I ask you?”

“Why, what need is there for you to care?—anywhere—‘anywhere out of the world,’ as the song says. By the way, talking about winging Blair,” said he, resuming something of his old

bullying and insolent bearing, "what right has that fellow to be prowling about this house, when you are in it—alone, too? And why were you left in it alone?"

"Papa started in such haste for Liverpool," urged Hesbia, reddening with anger.

"But for that old muff—pardon me, but he is my uncle as well as your papa—writing for me to come here, and escort you to Liverpool, I might have escaped this diabolical scrape and row to-night."

"What scrape!—what row!—And how dare you speak to me thus?"

"I repeat to you," said Travice, nodding his head with tipsy solemnity, "that sheriff officers, both Scotch and English, are after me concerning that blundered bill, and if I am arrested here, many *other* things will come to light, and then what will your fine friends—your swell county acquaintances say, eh?"

This probable contingency had the deepest sting, even vulgarly as Travice worded it.

Hesbia dried her tears, which were bitter indeed, for they were those of the keenest rage and shame mingling with a nervous pride that prevailed over all. She thought of the county ladies who had—she knew not why—treated her coldly; who had even mocked her attempts and show, and reprehended her "fast ways," as they termed them; and, hastily turning aside, she was in the act of unlocking her escritoire,

while Travice, who had taken a pair of scissors from her work-table, was sedulously snipping off his entire goatee-beard and long fair mustachios—a task which he had barely achieved when the bell at the entrance-door was rung furiously thrice in quick succession, and the stout fussy butler, with a face as white as his vest, entered hurriedly to announce that the “Rooral perlice were hollering at the door, and the hentire ’ouse was surrounded on hall sides !”

“Keep fast the door, and don’t open it on your peril !” thundered Travice.

“But they says, sir, as they’ve a warrant, and will force it.”

“Let them do so, if they dare ; an Englishman’s house is his castle.”

“But we ain’t in England, sir,” urged the butler, who, though usually stolid and solemn, was simply petrified now. Among all the families he had ever served, “and werry ’igh class families they wos,” as he assured Mademoiselle Savonette, he had never witnessed such an *esclandre* as this !

Pale and terrified, Hesbia, who knew that a criminal warrant could not be resisted, placed some gold in the hand of Travice. Then looking from the windows, she could see several men loitering in the lawn before the house, while the unmistakable burly figures of the county police in their long blue coats and black felt helmets, were visible at the front door, where they rung and knocked with all the vigour



and assurance of vulgar authority; and then was heard the voice of Mr. Juden Grabbie, loudly demanding entrance "in the Queen's name."

"He at least is out of the quarry-hole!" thought Travice; "But how about Mr. Nab?"

The *last* time that old house had been assailed it was in a very different fashion, when Crichton's Grey troopers on their march to the wild and lone Aird Moss, surrounded and searched it for certain recusant divines whom the laird was supposed to shelter; but they failed to force an entrance till trumpets were blown, and many a musket and carbine had flashed redly from the greenwood shade on one side, and the old loop-holes and turrets of the house on the other.

In addition to the precaution of having several auxiliaries, Travice knew well that Grabbie would take other measures, and have the more remote avenues of escape, the roads and lines of railway watched, and that descriptions of his person would be telegraphed along the wires to Glasgow, Carlisle, and elsewhere!

"Good-bye, Hesbia; God bless you, girl, if you care for such words from such a fellow as I," said Travice, with something between a sob and an imprecation in his throat, as he prepared for instant flight; "I shall get out of one of the corridor windows and drop down by one of the trees."

"You will be seen, Travice; you will be seen!"

“By whom?”

“Those wretches on the lawn.”

“Well, I must make a bolt of it to the coal-pits; there I may find concealment somehow or somewhere for the night, and to-morrow is a new day.”

He rushed away, and from the corridor Hesbia saw him pass safely through a window and reach the branches of a tall old chestnut-tree, down which he dropped just as the house-door was forced with a crash, and Grabbie entered in triumph with the warrant in his hand and a *posse* at his back.

Hesbia took no heed of the distant noise; her whole anxiety was that Travice should finally escape; for better, she thought, was any sequel—alas! but she could little foresee what that sequel would be—than the protracted disgrace of an arrest, imprisonment of so near a kinsman, and his trial, with all its consequent exposures.

The moon was up now, and clear and brightly streamed her flood of lustre across the smoothly mown lawn; thus, the moment Travice reached the ground, there was a shout from different points, and she could see several scouts rushing towards him.

“Away, Travice!—Away!” cried Hesbia; but he never heard her voice again.

Turning like a hunted hare, he fled in the direction of the coal-pits, throwing aside hat and coat as he ran, wildly, blindly on with despair and bitterness in his heart. Once or twice in the red gleams that

shot occasionally from the workings she could detect his white figure as he glided along between the hedgerows, and once or twice she heard a distant shout from the pursuers, who were pretty numerous now, all those who had been at the forcing of the front door having drawn off and left the huge old mansion to perfect silence.

Among those who joined in the pursuit of the fugitive towards the pits was Lennard Blair, who, having conveyed the querulous Mr. Nab to a place of safety, now hurried towards the mains of Kames as fast as his stiffened limb would permit, and ignorant of how the whole affair would terminate—whether in the arrest of Travice, in his concealment among the miners, or in his ultimate escape from the vicinity, a result for which she devoutly prayed—Hesbia in tears and extreme agitation, with her heart oppressed by shame and anger, sat by the open window of her dressing-room, with her eyes fixed on the moon-lighted landscape (while the now silent Savonette dressed her long flowing hair) anxious to catch any distant sound from which she might gather information, and longing for the morrow when she was to meet Lennard Blair at their trysting place, the stile, and for the coming night which would see her *en route* for home again, and far away from the scene of all this mortification.

But there was to be no tender meeting on the morrow!

Save the bay of an occasional watch-dog at the yellow harvest moon, all sounds had died away, and the far-stretching landscape seemed to sleep in the calm and liquid sheen. Up soared the moon, her disc seeming to grow smaller but clearer, as she climbed into the wide blue vault, and then the angularities, the slated turrets, and quaint masses of the old castellated house came forth alternately in vivid light, while portions between were sunk in deepest shadow. Over the dark bronze or russet-coloured woods the hills towered up to heaven, and Hesbia sat with her hands clasped, her cheek pale and wet with recent tears, praying for the escape of Travice, that all might be saved from further shame on his account.

Then, amid these aspirations, she wondered in her heart whether all that she and Lennard hoped for would ever come to pass, and felt with something like awe that when again she looked upon these moonlit hills and woods their fate would be decided, and that all would be over for better or for worse—that they should have one path in life, or be parted for ever! For ever? and he loved her so much!

Anon the pale face of the miserable fugitive came vividly before her, with all its alternate insolence or craven cowardice, as passion moved him; his bitter hate and utter absence of all shame for his degraded position and dishonour of his friends.

“Oh, is such a creature’s earthly future worth

praying for?" she exclaimed, with more of exasperation than pity, as she thrust aside even Fussy, her silky-haired Skye terrier; for so pre-occupied was Hesbia, that the little animal, wont to be so petted, quite failed to obtain the smallest caress.

Hark! what was that?

Suddenly the placid stillness of the night and of the air was broken by a strange, a terrible, and most unwonted sound!

A tremendous roar—an explosion—as of thunder shook the ground, making the affrighted birds fly hither and thither in wood and field; it was dull, muffled, and altogether peculiar, for it seemed to be under the surface of the earth; then all the lights at the Mains of Kames disappeared, and in their place a vast black column of smoke and dusky vapour, earth, and stones shot high into the calm and clear blue moonlit sky; and Hesbia, as she gazed with strained and starting eyes at a scene and circumstances so unexpected and bewildering, felt her heart grow still with terror and apprehension—she knew not of what!

The obscurity about the Kames continued to increase till the dark vapour seemed to shroud the whole place, and the waning of the moon behind the hills added to the sudden gloom that involved all the once bright and busy scene.

Then flickering lights, like those of torches, began to glimmer out of the darkness; excited voices and

shrill cries, even painful shrieks, rang forth upon the night; and she could hear the footsteps of many persons running along the nearest road, as they seemed to make with all speed to the point of alarm,—the Mains of Kames.

“What catastrophe is this? what horror can have happened?” asked Hesbia, starting from her seat, as the butler, with Savonette, rushed in, exclaiming,—

“Oh, Miss 'Esbia! oh, Miss Vere! the most 'orrible, the most hawful noos! The coalpits have blowed hup and are a-fire, with the men in the workings, and not one will come alive to hupper hair again!”

“Speak, Savonette!” said Hesbia, pressing her hands on her breast; “is this actually the case?”

“Oui, miladi, and worser—much worser!”

“What *can* be worse than such a horror?” exclaimed Hesbia.

“Ah, Sacré Dieu! ah, Mère de Dieu!” cried the excitable Frenchwoman, throwing up her hands and eyes; “how can I tell you—tell you all?”

“Of what—what?”

“M'sieur Travice hid himself in ze pits, and Messieurs Blair and Grabbie went down after him, and are all there with the poor workmans now, in one great conflagration!”

“In the pits?” said Hesbia, in a faint voice, as

she turned with terror to the black column that towered into the sky.

“Vraiment—oui, in ze pits, which is all as one huge morgue—one grave of death and fire!”

Though her heart was chilled by a deadly and devouring terror Hesbia neither screamed nor swooned, nor made a scene of any kind; but a desperate calmness seemed to possess her; and, moreover, she could not believe that Lennard had actually gone where her soubrette asserted. She felt assured that he was the last person to make himself unnecessarily active in the arrest or prosecution of her erring kinsman.

“Savonette, get me a hat and warm cloak; I shall go to the pits in person, and you shall both accompany me; and, to prevent mistakes,” she added, “send a servant at once to Oakwoodlee, to inquire for Mr. Blair, and say that I require his assistance instantly.”

Hesbia set forth with her excited attendants; and Buttons, who had been despatched with her message to Oakwoodlee, soon overtook her, with the assurances of the startled Stephen Hislop that “Mr. Blair had not been at home since noon, and that no one knew where he was!”

## CHAPTER XIII.

## CHEATWOOD'S LAST CIGAR.

IN the hunted fugitive who flew past him on the highway near the village, Lennard Blair had barely time to recognize Cheatwood, so he stood irresolute, till Juden Grabbie and his legal *posse* came up in full cry, and then he joined apparently in the pursuit, but solely in the hope of aiding in the ultimate escape of the offender, for the sake of Hesbia and her father.

After they had lost sight of Travice, traces of his route were found ; in one place his hat, in another his overcoat—a smart reefing jacket, which he had thrown away that he might run with the greater ease. A shout escaped the pursuers when they came in sight of him for the last time, as he sped through the street of the collier village. He was seen to turn up a lane towards the nearest coal-pit, and then all trace of him was lost, and Grabbie, Lennard, and



those who accompanied them were completely at fault.

They searched the engine-house, the piles of coal, the waggons, and all the various sheds and out-buildings, in vain; Travice Cheatwood had vanished!

While his followers were examining the premises, Grabbie had been peering into the pit-mouth, down which the long chain was still descending; he was listening to every sound, but none came upward on the cold rush of air, save the occasional jarring of the circular basket, as it slid swiftly into the profundity below.

Two men who were superintending the winch or steam-engine would accord him no information, and surlily warned him to "be off about his own business;" but, heedless of this order, and intent only on the purpose which brought him there, Grabbie drew the attention of Lennard to certain footmarks which, in the united glare of the gas-lights and furnace of the engine, were distinctly visible in the soft black mud about the mouth of the pit.

They were evidently made by a pair of fashionably-shaped boots, with high and small round heels; and they could be traced distinctly up to the wooden platform round the verge of the pit, from whence the wearer did not seem to have returned.

"Should you know this Travice Cheatwood, Mr. Blair, if you saw him?" asked Grabbie, with a grin, as he rubbed his grisly chin.

“Yes—perfectly.”

“Even if dressed as a collier?”

“I think so—in any disguise; but I don’t believe it at all probable that he would adopt one so grimy and unpleasant,” urged Lennard, anxiously, and about to turn away.

“We are on the right scent, I’ll take my affidavit that we are!” said Grabbie, emphatically; “the basket or tub has just gone down, and I am certain our man is in it, though these two rascallions won’t admit that such is the case!”

Grabbie, though inexorable in his spite and wrath, was strictly legal, however, in all his measures. Leaving certain men to watch the mouth of the pit, and sending others to the escape or air-shaft, he proceeded in quest of the manager, showed his warrant, and insisted on admission to all the mines, if necessary. Permission was at once accorded, for well did the manager know that the legal bully of the village would brook no trifling.

Still anxious to save Travice, Lennard left nothing unsaid to dissuade all from seeking him underground, till in the end he resolved to go down also, as he was not without a hope—a feeble one, certainly—of concealing or getting him away by some other outlet, for this pit communicated with others; and in the six years during which Mr. Vere had possessed the property and done so much for these coal-mines, Lennard had frequently been through them, and

was familiar with most of the seams, cuttings, and workings of the place.

When Travice was tearing at his utmost speed along the road, he almost wished that his way lay near some steep precipice, over which he might fling himself; or near some deep water, in the silent depths of which he might plunge headlong, and never rise to light or life again. Mortification, despair, and rage were his prevailing emotions—mortification for his baffled schemes and loss of position; despair at the prospect of being taken, tried, and sentenced to a penalty, the seclusion and degradation of which would be maddening to one of his temperament; and, finally, he felt a bitter rage at all who were now in league against him. With all these was the exasperating sense of being helplessly and pitilessly hunted like a wild animal, and in his heart, though it was a craven one, there rose at times a fierce longing to face about, to close with, and to strangle or otherwise destroy, the nearest of his pursuers!

But onward he ran, past trees and hedges, cottages and farmyards, where children shouted and dogs barked after him, the tramp of feet on the hard roadway behind adding speed to his flight, while the openness of the country and the brilliance of the moon rendered futile any hope of escape through the fields on either side.

The suggestion of one peasant to another as

Travice flew past the cottage door at which they were smoking, that "he was surely ane o' the folk frae the madhouse, where twa were tint (missed) yesterday," led him to infer the danger of seeking refuge in any dwelling.

Could he but reach the Kaims! There he knew were many outhouses, sheds, stables, and other buildings, wherein he might lie concealed for a time.

Inspired by this idea, he hurried through the village in full view of his pursuers, and turned up a little alley, as already related, towards the nearest pit. Some miners were just getting into the basket as he drew near, and very like melo-dramatic fiends the poor fellows looked, they were so black and grimy, with their teeth and eyeballs glistening white, in the lambent flames of the safety-lamps, which each carried on his head, as if to complete the illusion.

"I shall trust these men," thought Travice, and, ere giving the word to descend, they paused and swung in the basket over the vast profundity of the pit, as he approached them in hot haste.

Travice feared that if he asked permission to descend on the plea of curiosity at that unusual hour, with his attire in such disorder after his flight, and being minus a hat, the miners would for a certainty deem him one of the missing lunatics; and to attempt to join them without some proper explanation would ensure his rough expulsion from the basket.

“ My good men,” said he, “ I am an unfortunate fellow who is about to be arrested for debt. That sordid wretch, Juden Grabbie, is after me with the police, and ever so many of his people ; you will save me, won't you ? ”

“ If we can, we shall ! ” said emphatically one of the miners, who all knew Grabbie personally or by evil report.

“ Then take me down with you for to-night—for this night only—by Jove I'm lost—I hear these scoundrels coming ! ”

“ A' richt, sir—jump in ; come alang wi' us,” said the miners, cheerily ; “ we'll be aucht hours in the pit.”

“ That will do—eight hours ? ”

“ Aye, sir—one shift o' aucht hours, and then a longer spell in the slack or off shift.”

This was about as intelligible as Sanscrit or Oordoo to Travice ; but he knew that eight hours of successful concealment might enable him to escape.

“ Gie me your hand, sir—jump, sir—steady, so—and we'll tak' gude care o' ye ; ” and the moment he was in, a signal was given, and they vanished from the surface.

Travice had never been in a pit before, and he seemed to lose his breath in the rapidity of the descent, as it seemed, into the bowels of the earth. Fixed in the basket, he stood erect, like his four

companions, and all grasped the chain. Down, down they glided, with a steady and scarcely perceptible motion, through a cylinder of some six feet in diameter, solidly built all round.

He could not and dared not look below ; he cast his eyes upward to where the surface of the earth was receding, and to where the sky was reduced to a small round patch of deep cold blue, out of which some stars twinkled with a brilliance that seemed unnatural. Noises and voices overhead became indistinct, and anon passed away ; then nothing was heard but the rush of cold air upward, and the jarring of the basket as it swept down its cylinder of stone.

The lamps in the miners' hats gave a grotesque horror to the deepening gloom, and when at a vast depth Trayice felt his head grow giddy, compelling him to look down, he struck his brow against the side of the pit, and might have fallen from the basket, had not the strong arm of a miner (who growled an angry oath in his ear) been cast around him.

His face, which had been all a-glow with exercise, and seemed so red in the glare of the lights near the pit-mouth, looked so cold, white, and stern in the gleams of their safety-lamps, that the miners regarded him and each other with an instinctive uneasiness that might have been the foreboding of what was to ensue.

Down, down yet, through strata of limestone, trap, and friable slate; and now icy drops of water and tiny pieces of coal struck him at times on the face.

Dreary was the silence, and dreary the darkness, and now voices and sounds began to ascend as from a world *below*; then lights and moving figures appeared, as the space suddenly widened on all sides.

“Steady the basket!” cried a hoarse voice; then the motion ceased, and Travice Cheatwood found himself more than two hundred feet below the upper earth and air; while the novelty of his situation, and the suddenness with which it came to pass, though it brought a certain sense of security after his recent flight, made his heart beat almost painfully. Yet he strove to carry a brave air to those about him.

“My good fellows, you have been very kind to me,” said he, as he opened his purse and put into the hard palms of the men almost a handful of Hesbia’s money.

“By my faith, sir!” exclaimed one, “had I been like you——”

“In what respect?”

“Sae rich, I mean.”

“Rich, indeed! well?”

“I’d hae seen this black hole at the deil, before venturing into it.”

“At the devil—eh?”

“Yes, sir.”

“My dear fellow, I fear I was going *that* way after all, and only took this *en route*, you see.”

“It’s hard to hae to flee for honest debt,” said the miner; “but tak ye tent noo, and learn for the future to put your hand twice to your bonnet for once to your pouch.”

For a time the fugitive could distinguish nothing; all seemed dark or vague, and shadowy uncertainties; ghostlike outlines of human figures were passing to and fro; then columns of coal, caverns of coal, seams of coal, blackness, damp, grime, horror, and discomfort everywhere began gradually to make themselves visible by the light of the covered lamps.

The columns were generally composed of that slaty kind of stone which usually accompanies coal, and exhibits the impression of fossil fish, of ferns and other plants which had grown and passed away ere the seas and volcanic fires of unknown ages hurled rocks and mountains upon mighty forests till land and water changed their places.

In no disposition to moralize, Travice Cheatwood looked shudderingly around him. Some thirty men or more were at work in the pit, and three several Shetland ponies were employed to draw the coal from the more remote parts of the workings to the main shaft; and all these sturdy little animals by the darkness were rendered blind



now, and were more shaggy and uncombed than when they had roamed in wild herds over the green grassy holms and surf-beaten voes of their breezy native isles.

“Eight hours!” thought Travice, as he looked at his watch; “if I reach the surface again by two or three to-morrow morning, I may get clear off to a distance before daybreak; but to be eight hours here—perhaps more—ugh! how shall I ever endure them?”

After a time he began to see objects with more clearness, and could move about between the pillars of coal or slate that were left at regular intervals to support the roof of the mine (about a foot or so above his head), and he could not avoid shuddering, when he saw in some places men nearly nude, lying at full length, and working sideways, or, like rats in a drain, crawling into the narrower seams that sloped upward or downward as the strata lay at various angles, and picking out the coal with an axe from between the successive layers of lime and ironstone.

“Work, my man,” said a collier who had been eyeing him with some curiosity, for his story had been noised about in the mine; “it will be gude for you, and help to spend the eerie time; there’s a baggie—a wee slype for three hundred-weight; drag that to the nearest seam, and fill it wi’ coal if you can fyle your dainty hands wi’ sic work.”

The half scornful laugh of the man sounded harshly, as it was reverberated among the echoes of the mine; but Travice looked with wonder and horror at human beings dragging those "slypes," some of them on hands and knees, through narrow seams in the stratum of coal, in literal suits of harness composed of straps and chains; and by such miserable means as these are brought to upper air the garnered stores of past and unknown ages, to meet the requirements of our time, and to aid with iron and electricity in bringing together the ends of the earth, and achieving a new destiny for man!

"Od' man, when I was a halfling bairn," resumed the miner, "I've dragged four and forty rakes a day, in a fifty-six pound timmer basket, and keepit my auld mother in ease and comfort by her ingle cheek! What think ye o' that?"

But the wretched Travice, who scarcely understood a word the Scotsman said, only shivered, and made no response.

Though not of a very imaginative turn, when he looked around him and contemplated the dreary vault from which the moisture (distilled, perhaps, from drains and rivulets far above their heads), plashed in the unseen pools below, the blackness everywhere, save when the Davy lamps of the workers gave out uncertain gleams; the strange noises; the clank of unseen chains; the singular

and unnatural echoes; the noxious vapours; the exhalation of gases and the intense heat of the atmosphere, suggestive of fire-damp (of which there had been many unpleasant rumours of late), all might have conduced to make him believe that he had passed away from mortal life, and was now in the infernal regions!

Juden Grabbie he knew was on his track; but what of Mr. Nathan Nab, of the Liverpool detective force? How had he fared after his rough tumble into the old quarry? What if he was dead! What would the coroner's inquest say? There was no such tribunal in Scotland; but there was a local Procurator Fiscal whose name was suggestive he knew not of what; and Travice remembered how he once saw an inquest in England, with all the genteel idlers of a petty cathedral city, the curious tradesfolks, the grimy mob, and the street urchins hovering about an inn where a dead body lay on a table, in all its rigidity and horrid angularity, covered by a white sheet.

Was he the same Travice Cheatwood, who, notwithstanding all his monetary trouble, gambling shifts, and recklessness, had led a life of tolerable luxury, ease, idleness, and fashionable dissipation; who at times when he had made up a successful book on a few races had kept his hunters and drag, with a box at the opera, and a cottage at St. John's Wood; who could prove himself a judge of the best wine

and a good horse ; who occasionally associated with men of rank and money, tuft-hunters, turfites, and gamblers however ; and who, from being a member of his uncle's luxurious household, the companion—even the would-be lover of the beautiful Hesbia—*l'intime du maison*, ever since Sir Cullender Crowdy (“that peculiarly fishy party,” as he always called him) had left—could he, he asked of himself—be the same man who was now sunk to an ebb so low that he was a fugitive, glad to lurk in a hideous coal mine, fleeing from charges of felony, the associate and the protected of those he deemed but poor degraded slaves, yet each of whom was fearless and free, and when compared with him, to be envied !

Travice could almost have wept in his rage ; and with intense bitterness of heart he sighed heavily.

He looked at his watch again. Another hour had actually elapsed—but only one hour ; how long and dreary it had seemed !

Six, perhaps seven more hours must be passed in that horrible place, for such it seemed to Travice, though the industrious bread-winners of half the adjacent village toiled there in sturdy cheerfulness. Hastily he put up his watch, for it was a handsome gold one, and he trembled lest it might excite the cupidity of some of those grimy men, who worked like pantomimic fiends or the gnomes of a German story in those dark seams and fissures, where a blow from a

pickaxe might find him a sure and secret grave for ever.

In searching his pockets he found a last cigar in his case, and with a muttered exclamation of intense satisfaction, he drew it forth, leisurely bit off the end, and, ignorant of the atmospheric dangers by which he was surrounded, looked about him for a—light!

Near him was a Davy lamp, which one of the miners had placed on a pillar of coal. It was one of those very lamps which the philanthropic Sir Humphrey invented, with a lid of tissue wire so constructed that it might be used with safety even in the most explosive mines. In his ignorance, the unfortunate Travice unlocked and removed the tissue cover, and was proceeding very deliberately to light his cigar, when a heavy hand was laid on his arm, and his eyes were met by the malignant smile that glittered in those of Juden Grabbie.

Ere either could speak, there came a wild cry—a shriek of alarm from various parts of the mine—

“The lamp, the lamp! Fly to the shaft, fly for your lives! Fire, fire!”

Then followed a terrific—a blinding explosion, and all the pit was involved in darkness, smoke, and chaos—agony and death.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE BURNING MINE.

ACCOMPANIED by Mademoiselle Savonette, and one or two other servants, Hesbia was soon at the scene of the disastrous calamity, where a soul-stirring, bewildering, and terrible spectacle awaited her. The engine-house, the offices, and sheds around the mouth of the yawning shaft were crowded by pale and terrified people who, on the first note of alarm, had rushed there from the adjacent village. Many of these were the wives, mothers, children, and friends of those who were in the mine, and their wailings and lamentations were heard at intervals amid the fierce roaring of the red flames that rushed skyward from the pit, and the excited voices of the gathering workmen, who were bravely ready to do any task that might be assigned them by any one in authority.

Two hundred feet and more below where they stood, it was known that from thirty to forty men,

living or dead, were immured in that subterranean tomb of fire, the sides and roof, floor and entire substance of which, all served to feed the great element of destruction.

The flames from the shaft lit up the whole locality, dispelling the gloom of night after the moon waned, and casting strange weird gleams and shadows on the faces of the excited and agonised watchers, and on the mysterious-looking machinery, the clumsy beams, the grimy wheels and chains of the engine-house.

And now, to add to the grief and consternation of many who might already be widowed and childless, yet knew it not, a bellowing roar at a little distance announced the explosion of *another* mine, with which the workings of the first one communicated, and a dense pall of black smoke filled all the air, overhanging the startled and now almost deserted village, where every door was left wide open, and every fireside abandoned; and in fatuous grief and terror, the names of those who were too surely supposed to be perishing were lovingly called in varying tones, amid sobs and shrieks that seemed to load the air.

In the first shaft the flames soon began to subside, or to shoot up their black mouth at intervals only; so fires of coal were speedily set ablaze, and the wavering light of these, as they flared upon the night wind, tipped every neighbouring object with

fire. On the brown, crisp woods of the old manor house, and far away by Oakwoodlee ; on the beetling brow of Craigellon, and the slopes of the more distant hills ; even on the gilded weathercock of the secluded church, making it shine like a red star, fell the ruddy light ; and on the green mounds of the Kaims (or old Roman camp), which were verdant and grassy, and had been old, by more than a thousand years, in the days when Hector Boethius (who knew neither of coal nor of coal-pits) recorded that the men of Fife and the Lothians were wont to dig a black stone which, when kindled, gave forth a heat that would melt iron.

Till the flames completely subsided below nothing could be done in the way of exploration or descent, and the gathered people, the wailing, the weeping, and the hopeless, could but watch and wait, and wring their hands and pray.

Clutching Savonette (who had completely exhausted the entire and somewhat ample vocabulary of French interjections expressive of wonder and horror), Hesbia Vere, seated or standing, lingered among the heaps of *débris*, coals, shale, and rubbish, while continuing to gaze in a species of stupor at the mouth of the pit, which for a time seemed but as the vent of a mighty furnace.

Of the vast monetary loss this calamity would inevitably prove to her father, and how it might



yet affect *herself*, she had not then a single thought.

From the men in charge of the engine-house, both of whom she questioned closely, she learned, beyond a doubt, that Lennard Blair, with whose appearance they were quite familiar, one whom she knew must be her cousin Tralice, and a third, Mr. Juden Grabbie, were all in the pit, and too probably would never leave it, for already the engineer, the manager, and others in charge were speaking of having it deluged with water, "lest," as they phrased it, "the seams might fire again."

Could it be possible, she thought, that he who loved her so well, the handsome Lennard Blair—he whose dark eyes had so lately been gazing with tenderness into her own; whose kiss had been so recently on her cheek, whose voice and loving smile were vividly in her mind, was down—down that dark, flaming, and mysterious gulph!

It seemed all a phantasmagoria—a nightmare—a horrible unreality.

He was absent from home, of that there could be no doubt, and the rapidly spread rumour that "the young laird" (so was he fondly named still by many) was in the pits, speedily brought to the spot his two dependants—the tottering Stephen Hislop, propped on his staff, and the active yet querulous Elsie Graham; and there too gathered fast to give advice or aid, Dr. Feverley, the Rev. Dr. Kirkford,

mounted on his cob; Ranald Cheyne on a foam-flecked roadster; the Ground Bailie; the Sheriff, a solemn and priggish personage; the Procurator-Fiscal, a fussy little country solicitor with keen ferret-eyes, a white shirt frill, and a huge Laurence-kirk box, from which ever and anon he took pinches of snuff; the chief constable in his uniform, and hundreds of others to gratify their curiosity, till a dense throng on foot or horseback filled up all the excited neighbourhood.

Community of sentiment and grief drew Elsie near to where, with a warm cloak and rich velvet hood drawn over her, Hesbia Vere was seated on a pile of stones.

“Oh, Elsie,” said Miss Vere, weeping freely when she saw how bitterly the old woman wept, “this has come upon me as if it had been a thunderbolt from heaven!”

“Aye, madam, and from heaven came the stroke, though why or wherefore, we canna say and canna see!” moaned Elsie, rocking her person to and fro in all the abandonment of grief.

“It is a great, a most unaccountable accident.”

“Hech, aye, aye!” replied the old woman shaking her head; “and when sic accidents come, they bode mair ill-fortune than folk may at first decern.”

“Evil-fortune, Elsie, woman!” expostulated Steinie, whose silver hairs were glistening in the light of the watch-fires. “The ill-luck and danger,

the suffering and death are a' here in plenty without boding mair."

"Aye, but mair must and *will* happen!" croaked Elsie.

"Do you think so?" asked Hesbia, anxiously.

"She says truth, Miss Vere," said the minister, Dr. Kirkford, who had now dismounted and held his Galloway by its bridle; "from what the engineers are saying, I fear that your father's pits are ruined for ever."

"I heed not the pits, sir," said Hesbia, amid a torrent of tears; "I think only of those who are in them. Oh, Dr. Kirkford, how long may the fire continue to burn there below?"

"Who can say? There are mines in Fife that have continued to smoulder on for ages."

"Ages! and what is the first cause?"

"Fulminating damp, which in general can only be kindled by flame, through gross carelessness or deliberate malice."

"Malice, Doctor?" echoed Hesbia, connecting the idea with her cousin Travice.

"Yes," replied the portly old man, as he patted her shoulder; "such things have been."

"But wilfully or maliciously to set fire to a coal-mine is felony, without benefit of clergy, by the tenth parliament of George II.," said the Procurator-Fiscal, who stood by, tapping his snuff-box complacently.

“Tell me, Doctor, do—do—do you think that all in the pit must be——”

“Be what, Miss Vere?”

“Dead by this time?” asked Hesbia, in a broken voice.

“I cannot say; I would earnestly and prayerfully hope not!”

“Oh, why should such horrors be? It is surely not the will of God.”

“Why have we war and pestilence, shipwrecks, earthquakes, and sudden death? Man is a free agent, my dear Miss Vere; but strange it is, that such wholesale calamities as this should come of our enterprise, and our development of science and skill! So what avails the promise that was given of old: ‘I will bring thee to a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass: where thou shalt lay up gold as dust, and the gold of Ophir as the stones of the brooks.’ Science draws together the ends of the earth, yet in its pursuit and development men must die as those poor fellows are too probably dying now.”

And politely lifting his broad-brimmed hat, the stout and kindly old clergyman moved away to those whom he thought required his ministrations and comforting assurances more than the fashionable young lady—the wives and children of the men who were in the pit.

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Miss Hesbia drew a little way aside with Elsie and Savonette.

In the horror of a conviction that Lennard had perished, impressed by the active terrors of the scene, and by the noisy but natural grief of the people around her, she forgot all her (occasional) selfish fears of how a life of comparative poverty could be spent with him, in case her father cast them off, or commercial disaster overtook them all; for such fears she had not been without of late.

But Lennard was gone—too probably gone for ever—by a dreadful death, scorched perhaps out of the semblance of humanity, and entombed in that subterranean catacomb—so she could weep for him freely now, and, for a time, cared not even if her cold father knew that she had loved him.

Her absorbing question was, what purpose had taken him into such a strange place as the pit, and with such a pitiful creature as Juden Grabbie?

That secret object, alas! she might never know, and she might never look upon his face again. The pit was on fire and he *within it!* So there was nothing to be done but wait in agony—nothing, nothing—but to wait for the end.

“Oh, Miss Vere,” said Elsie in a low voice, as she crouched at Hesbia’s feet and still rocked herself to and fro; “the puir lad that’s gane loved you—loved you weel!”

“Hush, Elsie! hush!”

“And wherefore should I hush?” asked the old woman almost sternly, as she lifted her head. “My brave lamb was proud of it, and surely *you* dinna feel ashamed?”

“Ah no, Elsie, you mistake me; but you see how sorrow and trouble come upon us all in turns, rich as well as poor.”

“True, true, Miss Vere, to every one in the world; but this stroke is a heavy one to me. I was his nurse in the auld house up the brae yonder, and he became to me even as my ain bairn when his puir mother died. You are young and rich and winsome, and may soon find others to love you; but I am a lonely, forsaken auld body, and shall never have another to love *me* as he did! And oh, Miss Vere, it seems but as yesterday when I had him on my knee a smiling wean, round as an egg and straight as a lance; but never mair can these auld hands of mine smooth his shining curls o’ gold; for they were golden as the bells o’ the bonnie broom bush, when he was a bairn!” said Elsie, her native accent deepening with her grief, which at times became uncontrollable.

“Blairavon is gane—wood, hill, and muirland; and now the last o’ the auld stock that hae hunted and hosted, feasted—aye, and fought wi’ kings—hath gane too,” said Hislop, as he struck his staff into the turf. “So you and I, Elsie, have been ower

lang here; we have outlived our kith, our kindred, and our time!"

"His name, I fear me, was an unlucky one. Why did the auld laird name his first-born after his drowned brother Lennard?"

"Because he did so love that brother," said Steinie.

So the exciting hours of the night wore on, and Hesbia lingered there listening, as one in a dream, to those about her, speaking of fire-damp, of gaseous exhalations through fissures in the rocks, of Davy lamps, and the recklessness of miners in leaving them open or unlocked; of their smoking, and having lucifers in their pockets; of turning water into the mine; and to the vague and often wild suggestions made by the excited, the ignorant, or unthinking; till murmurs of hope began to mingle with the sobs of women and children, as the flames from the pit became less and less, and after a time died completely away, leaving its round black mouth of calcined brick and stone, yawning in the light of the flaming cressets and coal-heaps.

Anxiously and intently many an ear and many a yearning face were bent over the fatal pit; but no sound came upward from the horrid depth below.

Had all then perished?

Hesbia was liberal and open-handed, and from the great house she had brought and distributed, by the butler's hands, spirits, wines, food, and money too,

among the workers, and the anxious, pale, and affrighted women who lingered in sorrow around that disastrous grave, which certain brave fellows were now making vigorous preparations to descend and explore.

By this time Mr. Vere had been telegraphed for by his ground bailie, and was speeding north by the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway; and now when his handsome young daughter, whose soft dishevelled hair seemed turned to ruddy gold by the lights that flamed around the pit, rose at last to retire, the eyes and the blessings of many followed her.

Hesbia was becoming exhausted, so Mr. Cheyne resolutely took her home, urged by Feverley, whose professional duty kept him at the scene of the accident. And now the long and miserable night, which had seemed like an age to many there, was passing away, for in the east the faint grey of dawn was stealing in; the peaks of the highest hills began to brighten, as the light stole down their grassy slopes, and the shadows gave place to it even in the valleys.

The cold stars paled and faded out one by one, and the light of the watch-fires began to sink and die, as the brilliant sun of a glorious autumn morning, through bars of crimson and amber, shed his warmth over the beautiful scenery; the birds twittered in the hedgerows, and the hawk hung aloft in mid-air; the corn-fields rolled their golden billows, and the dewy woodlands rustled their crisp



foliage in the soft wind that came from the western hills.

But many an eye was red with weeping and watching; many a heart was sick and sore with grief; and many a hardy bread-winner's place and chair were empty in the once busy and happy little village of Blairavon.

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE NEXT MORNING.

THE early morning train brought Mr. Vere to the place of the calamity, where he could do nothing but hear clamours, griefs, complaints, and applications, with threats of legal proceedings for underground mismanagement,—from all of which he turned away wearied, worried, and profoundly disgusted, to the now half-dismantled and partially shut up manor-house.

There Hesbia, pale, unslept, and exhausted, was awaiting him. She had never been to bed, but for a time had reposed on a sofa in her room, in momentary expectation of hearing some tidings from the fatal mine. After sunrise she rang for her attendant.

“Papa has been telegraphed for, Savonette; he will be here this morning, beyond a doubt, to breakfast; and he must not perceive or detect the great grief this accident has cost me.”

“ Why, Miladi ? ”

“ I have my own reasons. ”

A few hours had served to make Hesbia again politic, and partially to restore Vere's influence over her.

“ Oui, mademoiselle ; I comprehend now, ” said the soubrette, with a sad but knowing smile.

“ Good ; then make my toilette one that may deceive him, at least by removing, so far as possible, traces of all I have undergone since last night. ”

The soubrette applied herself diligently to her mistress's beautiful hair, and produced from the magnificent silver inlaid dressing-case the Bohemian crystal and Dresden bottles of perfumes, pomade, Rimmel's *Vinaigre de Toilette*, *Blanc de Perles*, and many other mysterious compounds, wherewith to cool Hesbia's skin, to brighten her eyes, and remove all appearance of languor, tears, and the sorrow of the past night.

Her dress, a morning robe of bright blue, trimmed with white braid and with much white lace, especially about the bosom, neck, and loose wide sleeves, suited well the fulness of her figure and the usually brilliant character of her beauty ; but now her colour was gone, her lips unnaturally red, and the lids of her handsome eyes were heavy and drooping.

Hesbia was doubtless somewhat of a sensationalist,

and for a time had fully indulged in all "the luxury of woe;" but now her chief task was to conceal from her own father the misery of her heart; that one whose step and voice could send the life-blood careering through it, and through every pulse, was gone too probably to the world of shadows, and that the touch of his "vanished hand" would thrill on hers no more!

She repented now of many times when she had wounded and piqued him, parried his attentions or ignored them; received them coldly, and even flirted furiously with others for her own amusement. All that was long since over now.

This was the day when she was to have bade farewell to him and returned to Liverpool, escorted by Travice—farewell but only for a short time, as he was so soon to follow her, and then a crisis would come for sorrow or joy! There she had many gay friends and gossips to meet and gaieties to plunge into—gaieties such as were unknown to rural Blairavon; but where were now the joys of future years? where the bright visions she had begun so recently to picture?

Her Eden was blasted—blighted even as the fabled Rose Garden of Irem was blighted to punish the pride of the Son of Ad.

Morning stole on; the train was long since in, but her father did not appear. Maxwell, his valet, however, arrived with a message "that, though

wearily with travelling all night, he had gone to the Kaims, and should soon be home to breakfast," and so in the desperate hope that he would bring her some sure—she could scarcely hope for happy—tidings, she sat at an open window of the dining-room, listlessly waiting and watching.

Through it the soft breath of the cool autumnal morning came stealing in, and wafting the fragrance of the monthly roses and the borders of mignonne; but now the gardeners had left their task of tending the cuttings of pansies and pinks, the planting of polyanthus, the propping of gorgeous dahlias and towering hollyhocks, and other flowers and work of the season, to use their spades for a better purpose in digging at the pits in the cause of mercy and the hope of rescue.

The fragrance of the last few flowers of autumn came unpleasantly and without charm to Hesbia; there would be no meeting to-day at the lonely stile on the grassy path to Craigellon; and as such occasional tender excitements were necessary to her existence, after her past coquetries, the world seemed an emptiness—a horrid blank, indeed!

When Mr. Vere entered, she rushed into his arms.

"What news, papa, from that dreadful place of sorrow?"

"Sorrow and loss, too—very considerable loss, let me tell you, my dear girl," said he, sourly.

“Of course, papa—well?”

“Not a sound can be detected in the pit, Hesbia. At the edge of the shaft, two of the miners lay down with their faces over the edge, and together raised a shout that was both loud and long, and it rung with a wondrous sound in dark profundity. Again and again they shouted, and there came back——”

“Oh, papa—what?”

“Only the long-drawn echoes of their cry, and when these died away all remained silent as the grave below. But workers and diggers are going down in regular gangs and spells to clear away the rubbish, which has accumulated or fallen in the cuttings of the pit, and ere long they hope to get at the bodies——”

“Oh, Heavens!”

“And send them up in slings. The carpenters of the village have already prepared several coffins—plain deal things (however plain I shall have them all to pay for!) to the pit-head. And now let me to breakfast,” he added, seating himself at the table. “I’ve been travelling all night—came off the moment I got the telegram, though it was useless to send for me. But can there be any truth in the story of Travice Cheatwood and Lennard Blair, too, being *both* in the pit?” he asked, suddenly, while observing her keenly; but Hesbia kept her face in shadow.

“Yes, papa,” she replied, while the tears rushed to her eyes; “they are there too surely, I fear.”

“Why, what business,—coffee, not tea if you please, Hesbia,—what business had either of them down there; at night, too? It seems incredible—unaccountable; yet I have heard it on all hands, from that old blubbering Scotsman Hislop, too, with some story of a previous struggle and attempted arrest—arrest of whom?”

“Travice, papa; you could not think it was Mr. Blair.”

“Of course not—but hush at present; I know too much of Master Travice and his precious affairs. You have begun to pack I see, and to have the house nearly ready for shutting up. Maxwell! the marmalade—Thanks.”

He was her father, yet Hesbia gazed with wonder at the placidity with which he sat before her, looking so calm, so sleek and young in air and bearing, and with his perpetual smile while making his morning repast; yet a keener eye than hers might have detected under that commercial mask a secret expression of worry and harassment, while he took ham and egg, game and fish from the butler and Maxwell, who were both in attendance, and ventured from time to time to join a little—a very little, as Mr. Vere was not condescending—in the conversation when it turned on the recent catas-

trophe, for in that locality of course every one's mind was full of it.

Though she endeavoured to conceal her emotions, Vere saw his daughter's grief, and knew that it was not all for her cousin Travice; but he ignored it.

“By Jove,” thought he, when they were left to themselves by the withdrawal of the servants, whose presence on this occasion was boredom to them both, “I never imagined that she cared so much for that fellow! So you don't know what object took Blair down the pit?” he asked, heedless of how he might sting her heart by the abrupt question.

“No, papa, I do not; I cannot even suppose.”

“I have been told that he was not unfrequently there—a strange taste!”

“Yes, he used to go when little more than a boy, while you were first having these pits made; and sometimes he pressed me to accompany him.”

“Indeed!—What business—but you never went?”

“Never, papa; I was too terrified. Then he was such a favourite with the miners, and all the work-people hereabout.”

“Yes,” said Vere, with a grimace, “more, perhaps, than I, who have spent so much wealth among them, and have literally created that collier village where only green fields lay before. Such a row they make about a few wretched lives lost in a coal



mine! I'll warrant these folks here took the news of the battle of the Alma, the Indian Mutiny, or the great earthquakes in South America quietly enough!"

"The death and the suffering incident to these events were far from their own hearths, papa."

"And they even threaten me with legal proceedings—the ungrateful wretches!"

"Prosecution, papa—you—how?"

"Oh, under the 'Mines Inspection Act,' concerning working with unlocked safety-lamps, as if I could know whether or not such were the case. Yet that fussy little beast of a Procurator Fiscal and that legal snob of a sheriff, both hinted as much. And then there is Travice——"

"Oh, papa, do not talk of poor Travice now—I implore you—with anger at least."

"But others will, and handle his name pretty roughly, for there are a thousand scandals attached to it. If he has perished there, whatever be the errand that took him—it is the best fate that could befall him. Yes, Hesbia, and he I speak of is my only sister's son!"

"Do be merciful, papa," she urged, with clasped hands and eyes full of tears.

"Misfortunes, especially commercial ones, never come singly, Hesbia," said Vere, resuming his old habit of jingling his loose silver, which he did now with angry energy. "I have had some awkward

affairs to settle in Liverpool, and if these coal mines are totally destroyed—I—I know not what may be the result.”

“How, dear papa?”

“I have sunk so much money in them, and trusted to their resources, perhaps too much,” he added, lowering his voice.

The sleek expression of his face changed for a moment, a glare came into his light-coloured eyes, then they seemed to pale out almost to extinction, and he looked old and unpleasant.

“Dearest papa,” said Hesbia, caressing him; “I am truly grieved to see you look so worried. Tell me, how long do you propose to stay here?”

“Not long; I can promise you that, Hesbia,” he replied, snappishly.

“Then you—you—”

“Return to Liverpool to-night, and you go with me.”

“To-night—so soon? And—and—and poor men in the mine!”

“I can do nothing. Dead or alive, the fellows, I suppose, can be found without *my* assistance. Bother the men!—Some drunken wretch among them has unlocked his lamp and done all this ruinous mischief; and then come the clamours of their families to madden me, quite as much as the threatened actions for damages. I’ll hear all about the affair at home, through the papers or otherwise,

soon enough. I have enough—and more than enough—to attend to at the counting-house, and home we shall go,” he added, emphatically, locking at his watch, “by the 4 p.m. train this evening. So please to have the whole place shut up at once, and left as before to the care of the gardener and his wife.”

Though an only daughter, Hesbia knew that her father was not one who brooked either trifling or delay; so with a sigh, for she would fain have lingered a few days longer to learn the last and worst, she was preparing to obey him, when Mr. Cheyne was announced, and he came in, hat and whip in hand, and with his spurs and spatter-dashes on.

Bluff, jolly, weather-beaten Ranald Cheyne, looked pale and weary now; all night long he had been hovering about the scene of the recent catastrophe; his smiles were gone, and the wrinkles in his face were deeper. He was a kind-hearted, plain and honest old country gentleman, and the sight of so many poor women and children in grief and terror had quite unmanned him. He shook hands with Miss Vere and her father in silence, seated himself ere he could be invited to do so, and drew a long sigh.

“I heard of your arrival, Vere, and just rode over to see if I could be of any assistance.”

“Thank you, ’tis very kind, I’m sure.”

“An awful business this,” said Cheyne, after a pause.

“Shocking!” exclaimed Vere.

“The loss—”

“Of money to me will be serious, I must tell you.”

“Sorry to hear it, sir; sorry to hear it. But it was the loss of *human life* I was about to refer to.”

“Ah!”

“I have just come from your pits, Vere. The workers have already reached the bodies, and are rapidly bringing them ‘to bank,’ as they technically term it. The first pair I saw slung up, all grimy and scorched, and hanging limp and lank in the slings, were a father and a son—poor fellows! poor fellows! God rest them!—old Davie Burt and young Colin. I knew them well, and my heart felt ready to burst when the women of the village closed shrieking round them, and Frank Feverley—who, like a brave good fellow, is working there in his shirt-sleeves—declared that both were dead, and must have been so for some hours.”

“What followed?” asked Vere, coldly.

“What *could* follow? They were confined at the pit-mouth, carried home, and laid side by side in their little cottage at the Kaims.”

Hesbia wept freely, and Mr. Cheyne sat eyeing Mr. Vere with a curious expression, while tapping

his strong white teeth with the loaded handle of his hunting-whip.

“My girls, Flora and her sister,” he resumed, “with many other ladies, are among the people in the village, to be of service, if they can. Miss Vere remained at the pit last night till I literally forced her home; and now *we* must do something, Vere. The people about the place are marvelling much why you are not there. I think you should come with me, and put a few pounds in your pocket. I am not rich, but I’ll give a hundred or so towards the matter, to begin with. Remember, these widows and orphans will all be cast on the highways for food, or the tender mercies of the parochial authorities——”

“If the works are destroyed,” hissed Vere through his teeth, closing the sentence, with a covert gleam of rage in his pale eyes.

“Then come with me for an hour or so, my good friend.”

“Well, for an hour; but I must leave for Liverpool to-night,” said Vere, tossing *Bradshaw* angrily on the table, “and have not much time to spare.”

“Papa, should you hear any news of—of——”

“Your precious cousin Travice—eh?” interrupted Vere, with a smile on his lip and much suppressed fury in his eye.

“Ye-yes, papa——”

“Or of Lennard Blair,” said Ranald Cheyne

kindly, in a low voice, "instant word shall be sent you. Poor young Blair! what would his jolly fox-hunting father—old hard-riding Dick—have thought of this? I'll leave my horse here, and we shall walk over to the pits together."

"I cannot be of the slightest service," grumbled Mr. Vere, as Maxwell brought him his hat and gloves; "I hate all scenes, especially those of sorrow. Have luncheon—game-pie and devilled turkey—an early dinner prepared, for I hope Mr. Cheyne will join us. Then we'll be off by the 4 p.m. train, remember."

And as they retired, Hesbia buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly, not the less so that her father seemed so heartless as to excite quietly the very decided contempt of Ranald Cheyne of the Haughs.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## HOPELESS.

ON arriving at the Kaims, they found that the underground manager, the oversman, and some fifteen or twenty miners—all more or less suffering from asphyxia, from scorching, broken bones, bruises, or shocks of the nervous system, but none in imminent danger—had been dug out, slung up, and conveyed to their homes, each of which formed a centre of attraction to the morbid and the curious; so the crowd had greatly lessened, much to Mr. Vere's satisfaction.

Several other men were in the mine, and yet unaccounted for; but expressions of thankfulness that the loss of life had not been so great now took the place of those wild ravings of grief heard before.

Feverley had his hands full; but many medical men from other villages were humanely and charitably arriving in haste, and Vere thought with rage,

almost consternation, of all the bills he might have to pay.

“All that have been brought to bank are miners, I presume, Doctor?” said he.

“All,” replied Feverley, sorrowfully.

“Have not the explorers seen any trace of Blair or of Cheatwood?”

“None—none,” replied the Doctor, with growing emotion. “More than eighteen hours have elapsed, Mr. Vere, since the event, and some parts of the mine are still on fire; elsewhere the choke-damp, which always follows an explosion, proves death to all who inhale it. Poor Blair! I have no hope!”

“I leave by the afternoon train for Liverpool——”

“So soon!”

“Business, Doctor.”

“But there will be so much to be looked after here.”

“Imperative business requires me elsewhere; but you’ll telegraph to me the result of the final exploration.”

“There comes a signal from below; some one else has been found!” exclaimed Feverley, as a bell was heard to ring in the engine-house. Then the wheels began to revolve, and the great rope in the centre of the shaft to glide steadily upward, while all who were about the verge drew nearer; every voice was hushed in expectation, every eye bent more eagerly and wistfully on the round yawning mouth, the dark



and deep uncertainty of which made the heart recoil; and a long-drawn "Ah!" or a sound like a sigh of expectation rather than relief, escaped from all, as the rusty iron roof of the cage or basket rose into the sunny air, with four miners standing erect therein, and grasping its sides to steady themselves. The grime that coated them hid the pallor of their faces, but their eyes were wild and bewildered in expression, for they had been half-poisoned by the polluted air below.

"Twa mair corpses to streek!" they exclaimed, huskily, and two human figures, one clutching the other tightly as with a death-grasp, were removed from the cage and laid on the bank in the sunshine.

"Juden Grabbie!" exclaimed several voices, but none of them very sympathizingly.

And who was the other? None recognized his dress, which was nearly burned to rags, or his figure, or his face; the latter was black as that of a negro, and all his once fair hair had been scorched off. It was Travice Cheatwood, from whose collar Grabbie's hand had never relaxed even in his last extremity, for that unflinching legal functionary had been partly asphyxiated and partly crushed to death by falling *débris*.

"Keep back the crowd," said Feverley, with an air of authority, to the police. "Grabbie is dead—hopelessly gone; but the other is only senseless, and

may recover ; his pulses are beginning to beat, and already respiration is returning ! ”

“ Who is he ? who is he ? ” asked several eager voices.

“ A total stranger ; let him be conveyed at once to my house,” said the Doctor, “ and I shall attend him there. Mr. Vere,” he added, in a whisper, after a rapid examination of the prostrate figure ; “ this person so blackened and disfigured is—your nephew ! ”

“ Hush—gracious Heaven—in such a state ! ”

“ He is only suffering from the effect of partial suffocation—there is not a bone broken, nor even an external injury traceable ; turpentine and the cold douche will soon restore him. By Jove, I begin to have hopes of my poor friend Blair ! ”

A miner by means of his pocket-knife had to cut away the piece of Cheatwood’s collar that was sternly clutched by the dead hand of Grabbie, as if in a vice of steel, ere they could be separated. The body of the dead man was then conveyed to his cottage, at the junction of the two villages, while Travice, still insensible and breathing, only in spasmodic gasps, was placed on a door tenderly and gently, and borne by rough and toilworn hands to the little dwelling of Feverley, who by applying electricity to the spinal column and other external stimulants, soon brought him back completely to consciousness.

Among those who saw him borne away and yet

failed to recognize him, was his chief source of terror, little Mr. Nathaniel Nab; but that personage had not his warrant now, and even if, armed with it, he had attempted anything like an arrest, or the enforcement of his office, at that particular juncture, the excited people might have sent him down the shaft without the use of the cage.

Aware of the unscrupulous and clouded character of Cheatwood, and of the legal dangers that hung over him, the Doctor would allow none to have access to the room where he lay, in his medical capacity debarring even the fussy Procurator Fiscal, and other officials. When sufficiently recovered to bear questioning, he was still unable to explain how the explosion took place, as, in fact, he knew not the full extent of the danger he had inadvertently drawn upon himself and others.

“Mr. Cheatwood,” said the Doctor, earnestly, when he thought the proper time had come; “collect yourself, please, and tell me, did you see Lennard Blair in the pit?”

“I saw him but for an instant—at the very time of the explosion—and then—then all became darkness.”

“And was that all—anything more?”

“After a time I heard his voice—praying I think—and I spoke to him; but what he said, or what I replied, it is impossible for me to remember. He was blown away by the second explosion; then the earth

seemed to fall upon me, and I became senseless. Blair must be dead—oh yes he must be dead—dead,” continued the patient, with an air of dreamy bewilderment. “I might have made my way to the foot of the shaft,” he added, after a time, “but for the horrible clutch of that wretch Grabbie; I could in no way work myself free of his corpse!”

“He is gone to his last account, and the secret of his errand will be buried with him.”

“For a time only, Doctor—for a time only,” replied Travice, weeping in very weakness and prostration of spirit, after all he had undergone.

“None have recognized you,” said the young Doctor, soothingly; “remain here in quietness and safety, until I can get you away. In acting thus, I am only doing what your uncle would wish, and poor Blair would have done, for Miss Vere’s sake.”

Weak though he was, a grimace distorted the face of Travice at the name of Hesbia, for their last interview, and the discovery of the air-gun, rushed upon his memory. Till that moment he had forgotten it utterly.

On rejoining Mr. Vere, who was lingering in the parlour with old Mrs. Feverley, and feeling intensely bored by her grief for all the suffering around her, the unwearied Doctor proceeded again to the scene of the event.

Eight more men had been brought up dead, either suffocated or grievously scorched and mangled, and

were borne away in sheets or blankets, followed by wailing and shrieking women and children (whose bread-winners the poor fellows had been) to their now sorrowing, and from thenceforward, desolate homes.

“Eight more men!” muttered Vere, looking at a list of names which was handed him by the oversman, who had suffered severely in the explosion, and could scarcely stand.

“And all these poor fellows have large families,” said Mr. Cheyne, with kind commiseration in his tone and glistening eyes.

“With Grabbie, they make thirteen dead in all. Their friends will make fine capital out of this, if mismanagement can be proved underground,” he added sternly, to the faint and shrinking oversman.

“Poor fellows,” said Ranald Cheyne; “after long years of toil, it seems hard to perish thus in the battle of life.”

“Toil was their inheritance,” added Feverley.

“Dead or alive, sir,” said the oversman, in a weak voice, “all are now, blessed be God, out of the pit except one——”

“Who had no business there—Mr. Blair!”

“Yes, sir; and I have no hope, for fire is still raging in some of the remote seams, and the adjoining pit is yet in flames.”

The cries of those who had been bereaved were now

confined to their own humble homes; the last dead body had been slowly, reverently, and affectionately borne away, and now a solemn silence seemed to pervade all the place where there had been so much excitement, bustle, sorrow, and consternation—a silence broken only at times by the ascent and descent of the cage with a fresh party of explorers, searching for the still missing man; and with hearty good will the brave fellows worked, for Lennard Blair was a favourite with all the little community.

Like a solid mountain or landslip by the destruction of the intermediate pillars, the earth had fallen down in many places; torrents of gas issued through fissures of the rocks in others. Ever and anon the foul air drove the baffled diggers in consternation and exhaustion from their task to the bottom of the shaft; then the bell would be rung furiously in the engine-house, and the cage ascended swiftly with its load of gasping miners, their lips baked, and eyes bloodshot; another gang would cheerfully descend, still resolved to push on and explore; but with no better success.

Mr. Vere grew weary of waiting, and frequently consulted his massive gold watch.

“Only two hours to dine and catch the 4 p.m. train!” he muttered; and making his excuses of urgent business, and leaving instructions with Mr. Cheyne and Dr. Feverley to let him have instant

news if Blair was found, he hastened away, leaving them both under the very decided conviction that he would not become a prey to grief if that circumstance never took place.

And at present Lennard's recovery seemed hopeless—perfectly hopeless!

## CHAPTER XVII.

## SIR CULLENDER ON THE TAPIS.

TO Hesbia the departure from Blairavon station seemed somewhat of a dream; and to one less sensational—perhaps less artificial—leaving at such a juncture would have been a more acute and protracted agony. The active Maxwell had “seen” to all their luggage, rugs, &c., and got the tickets for herself and Mr. Vere, with second-class ditto for their entire staff, the third-class of the Scotch lines being so proverbially wretched that the butler and his companions “couldn’t abear ’em.”

In the same carriage with the domestics went little Mr. Nathaniel Nab, who had strange stories to tell to his brethren of the Liverpool force, concerning his brief sojourn north of Tweed.

Aware that Hesbia would rather be without the annoyance of strangers at present, Mr. Vere had desired Maxwell to secure the coupé of a first-class



carriage for them, and she felt very grateful for this little piece of forethought and attention.

Swiftly went the train, shrieking, whistling, thundering, and smoking along the line; now through echoing tunnels, or along green bankings; and anon past cuttings, where the summer grass had withered or been scorched away by sparks from the engine; and Hesbia's face grew sadder, her eyes more full of tears, and her heart more yearning after the place and the lover she had left behind.

But the scene changed fast as the express train swept over the moorlands that border on Glengonar's "ore-stained stream;" by the Moffat hills, that tower above the Scottish Cheltenham; past Lockerbie, and on through lovely and fertile Annandale, on the green braes of which the last rays of the setting sun were falling.

Ere leaving, fain would Hesbia have visited the cottage of Dr. Feverley, and questioned Travice Cheatwood as to what had passed between him and Lennard Blair in the coal-mine, and what he had said—his last words, too, probably—perhaps a message to herself; but her father had not permitted her to go near her cousin, so the inquiry was never made.

Though silent on the subject, she felt all the heartlessness implied by Mr. Vere leaving while the tragic fate of their friend was undecided. She could but hope that the journey southward—flight,

it almost seemed—was really caused by press of business; but still she had her *doubts*.

Yesterday she had been picturing her return per rail with Travice; her tender adieux to Lennard, and she had been endeavouring to frame the probable speeches in which he was so soon to break the subject of their engagement to her father; she had been thinking even of the fashion and the trimmings of her wedding dress; of who should be her bridesmaids—the Cheynes, certainly, for two—of who should be invited “if papa consented;” and so forth. But now——!

Behind the thick screen of her tied Shetland veil her tears could fall unseen; and so the pair travelled far in silence, her papa immersed apparently in the *Times* city article, while she affected to be busy with her crochet work.

Lennard was dead, she could scarcely doubt now, and she who loved him so, dared not put on even a black ribbon in honour of his memory, for their engagement had been a secret one; and ere long she was to learn that his death would be the only small feature in the whole calamity taken from her father’s point of view.

She was so full of her own thoughts that, amid the monotonous hum and other noises of the train, she had not been aware of Mr. Vere addressing her, till he suddenly raised his voice, and said angrily—

“Can you not put that stupid crochet aside for a moment, and listen to me?”

“Yes, papa; but wait till I am at the end of my row, please.”

“Why?”

“Because if I lose my place——”

“What matter if you do?” he asked sharply.

“It is so difficult to find it again.”

“I was talking to you of young Blair, but you are not attending to me.”

“Pardon me, papa; but I did not hear you,” said she, becoming all attention; “poor, poor Lennard Blair! You were saying——”

“That though he was about as well born as ourselves, Hesbia, the lad was poor.”

Hesbia shuddered, for she knew that her father was indulging in a sneer.

“Poor? perhaps so, but he was strictly honourable—a gentleman in every sense, papa.”

“True; there is a play which says that ‘honest men are the gentlemen of nature;’ he *was* open, generous, and, as you say, strictly honourable, otherwise we never should have employed him.”

Hesbia shivered again. It seemed so strange, so terrible, to be speaking of him already in the past tense.

“But though poor and my dependent, he considered himself more than my equal in some respects—quite a patrician, in fact, for he inherited all his

stupid old father's nonsensical ideas," continued Mr. Vere, who seemed to be talking or working himself into a fit of ill-humour; "and I *hate* your patri- cians or aristocrats—they are all so precious cold-blooded."

"But they are usually courteous, papa," urged Hesbia, "while plebeians may be equally cold-blooded, and are often coarse and brutal. But, talking of patricians, do you consider your friend Sir Cullender one?"

"Yes—by birth unquestionably; but then he has been a man of business, of utility, and common sense; a successful speculator, and the architect of his own fortune. By the way, he has written to you since he left for London, I believe?"

"Yes, papa."

"How often?"

"Twice, I think."

"Twice only?"

"Yes," replied Hesbia, curtly, with annoyance, for she was in no mood to brook much about Sir Cullender just then.

"And what did his last letter contain?"

"Merely an absurd photograph."

"Why absurd?"

"It was of himself, and his hooked nose, black, gleaming eyes, and pale, unhealthy-looking complexion were all most severely reproduced."

"And was this portrait all?"

“I think so,” replied Hesbia, colouring behind her veil with pure annoyance and vexation, for an offer of marriage was pretty pointedly made in the letter referred to, and it was evident that Mr. Vere knew and approved of it.

Following up his own ideas, his suspicions, or actual knowledge, after a few minutes' unpleasant silence, he said, somewhat markedly and bluntly,—

“Do not let us misunderstand each other, Hesbia, or even pretend to do so. It is as well for all concerned that this lad Blair is gone.”

“Dearest papa do not say so !”

“I have other, better, and brighter views for you, and so let there be no more, now and for ever, of this Lennard Blair,” said he gravely, almost sternly. “I have permitted too much intimacy, and ought to have seen it as others have done—one especially.”

“One—who?” asked Hesbia, looking up.

“Sir Cullender Crowdy.”

“Oh, papa! a man as absurd in appearance as in name,” said Hesbia, with something of asperity in her tone.

“If our firm become insecure—in the mercantile world we can never see very far before us now-a-days—if our firm were to fail, I say, how would it fare with Lennard Blair?”

“I do not comprehend you, papa.”

“Have you no dread of poverty?”

“Oh yes!—a horror of it; that is—but I never thought—cannot anticipate such a thing.”

Mr. Vere looked gloomy, for he had his own ideas and secret fears.

“If poor Mr. Blair is really dead,” began Hesbia, with a soft chord in her voice and a sob in her throat, “if he has indeed passed away——”

“Then his share in the business, such as it is, falls to the firm entirely.”

This was not what Hesbia was about to refer to; but now something of mocking duplicity in her father’s tone and eye were so apparent that she felt shocked. She had a fear that Lennard had been duped, and yet she knew not why or how.

“Papa must have injured him in some manner—else whence this coldness about his fate—a coldness amounting almost to dislike?” she asked herself.

“But, papa,” she resumed, “surely *you* can never become poor, whatever happens. Even if your business failed, you have the estate of Blairavon, with all those mines of coal——”

“You know not what you talk of, Hesbia; and as for these pits, I have for the present utterly lost them, with all the plant and rolling-stock underground, by that horrible catastrophe, which may render them unworkable for years, if ever again, for the fire is still unconquered.”

After this, he fussily reopened the *Times*, and relapsed into silence, leaving his daughter a prey to thoughts more than ever gloomy and depressing.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## ENTOMBED ALIVE.

MORE than an hour perhaps had elapsed after the explosion, before Lennard Blair became conscious that he was still living, and so far as he knew, alone in the mine—or alone with the dead; and then rushed upon his mind the awful sense of being buried and abandoned; alone, without even the sad communion of others in suffering!

There rose in his heart a terrible emotion, with a wild beating; life seemed to be only a spirit of agony, and a cold perspiration trickled over him! He heard not a sound, and all was darkness—a great and opaque darkness, which seemed as if it would be for ever between him and the sunshine.

He had been blown into some portion of the workings in the mine unknown to him, and though he had not suffered any serious injury, the poisonous after-damp had cast him into a state of insensibility which, with some less tenacious of life, had already



ended in the last fatal sleep. How long he had lain on the damp floor of the mine he knew not, for day and night were alike where time seemed to stand still.

Was it midnight now, with the diamond stars and the yellow harvest moon looking down on the quiet woods and the great solemn hills? Or was it the next morning, with the bright sun shining cheerily on the waving corn-fields, the tossing foliage, and the green meadows, which were more than two hundred feet above him?

He had his watch, but amid that density of gloom it was useless as a pebble or stone.

His first idea was to seek the bottom of the shaft, but he knew not which way to turn, and in groping about seemed to find himself obstructed on every side by fallen masses of soft earth, or piles of coal, stones, and slag, and more than once he stumbled over a dead pony, or that which with a shudder he knew to be the corpse of a miner. He tried to pray; but at that moment the extremity of horror had put even prayer to flight!

He could consider nothing with coherence, yet seemed to think of everything past, present, and to come, in a chaos of reflection.

The last human faces he had seen, ere they vanished amid a whirlwind of flame, smoke, and sable dust—seen in that moment of terror when the uncovered lamp set the air on fire—were filled with

grief, care, and dismay. Grief and care for wives and little ones they never more might see, and dismay at their own sudden proximity to a terrible death.

In his half fatuous wanderings, he trod upon a body which had still some life left in it ; for he heard a piteous exclamation in a voice that was familiar.

“ Travice Cheatwood ! ” he called aloud, for the sufferer was certainly Travice. To speak to him of his past imprudence then, would have been worse than useless, so he asked, “ Are you injured in any way ? ”

“ Who speaks ? ” inquired the other, groaning heavily.

“ I—Lennard Blair.”

“ God help us ! can it be that you and I are the only survivors here ? ”

“ It would seem so. Let us help each other.”

“ Speak again, Blair ; I am half stupified.”

“ Can you stand up ? ”

“ Impossible ! ”

“ Why so ? ”

“ My lower limbs are buried under a mass of earth, and stones also, I believe ; and the hand of that reptile, Grabbie, is still grasping me with the clutch of a tiger, so my situation is anything but rosy.”

“ Bid him let you go.”

“ I have done so repeatedly, but receive no reply ;

so whether he is dead or alive I cannot say, for the earth is partly over him too."

Cheatwood again moaned heavily, and then said,—

"You know, Blair, that my poor mother was John Vere's only sister."

"Well, what of that now?"

"I lost her when I was an infant. Had she lived, I might not have become the pitiless and pitiful scamp I am!"

"We generally make ourselves, Cheatwood, by our own actions and deeds," replied Lennard, a little touched by the new tone of compunction or repentance adopted by the other in his desperate extremity.

"I am certain that had my poor mother lived," he resumed, "I had been differently guided in youth and advised in manhood, and might not have been dying here to-night amid this horror and misery!"

"Let us put our trust in God, Travice. He is ever kinder to us than we are to ourselves or to each other."

Then Lennard heard him sobbing heavily in the dark. Groping about, he was attempting to yield him some assistance, and endeavour to drag him him from under the superincumbent load of earth that weighed him down, when lo! there came another roar that shook the most remote galleries of the mine, and a momentary flash that illumined

them with a lurid glare; then a rush of poisonous air came past, and, while instinctively covering his mouth and nostrils, Lennard felt himself swept away before it for some thirty or forty yards. There again he sank down overcome by the dreadful and suffocating odours of the atmosphere, and then for some time he slept heavily.

After that slumber passed away, he continued to lie where he had fallen, half asphyxiated and in a state of semi-stupor. Sounds there were none, and while he felt himself, as it were, *listening* to the silence, a dull sense of consciousness mingling with a strange idea of still life came over him.

Already it seemed as if the world of mortal life—the upper world wherein men lived and moved—was gliding away from him, and that the angel of Death was pointing to that which was to come; to judgment and eternity—*eternity*, the “pleasing dreadful thought” of Cato. He was now entombed, he thought, until the resurrection—buried deep among the fossils of ages long since passed away.

When he did attempt to rouse his energies, it was only to become a prey to vivid and horrid thoughts. There was a dull and seemingly distant roaring in his ears which he could not understand, but it proceeded from a more remote portion of the pit than in flames; and though he knew it not, it was a fortunate circumstance that he was so far from the principal shaft, up which at that moment a volume of

fire was ascending like a crimson column into the midnight sky.

Staggering and groping about he seemed to spend hours of hopeless and futile wandering among the tortuous galleries, cuttings, and seams of the pit. Twice or thrice he raised his voice and uttered a loud hallo; but the sound, as the reverberating echoes alone returned it, appalled him.

It was lucky, too, that while wandering thus, he was not far from the air-road, and hence the greater purity of the atmosphere enabled him to think and act with coherence.

He had been asleep and long overpowered, he believed, by the gaseous exhalations elsewhere; but how long? In his confusion of ideas, he knew not whether days and nights, or a week, had elapsed since the first explosion.

How long, long ago it seemed since the discovery of the air-gun and all the other episodes in connection with Tralice. It had been yesterday—only yesterday since then—and yet a lifetime seemed to have passed away. Would Hesbia ever know of his fate? Had the time come and gone when he was to have met her at the stile, or had days intervened, and she taken her departure for Liverpool?

He was very ingenious in tormenting himself.

How long would she mourn for him, and when her period of sorrow was past, whom would she marry? The pale face, the black gleaming eyes and

cadaverous, unhealthy, and almost diabolical visage of Sir Cullender seemed to come out of the solid darkness, and to mock, leer, and jabber at him in answer to the question!

Seated there on a heap of earth and slag amid the intense gloom, with his aching head resting between his tremulous hands, and his elbows placed on his knees, he would have doubted his own identity and almost his existence at times, but for the pangs of stinging thirst, and the thoughts that well nigh drove him mad; yet strange it was, that as he sat there in his state of sudden and most unlooked for misery, absurd scraps of street songs and melodies, with the roar of Liverpool, seemed to hover in his ears.

Light, air, and sunshine—balmy spring, with its hopes of rosy summer and brown autumn; jolly winter, with its hopes of spring again—what were they now to him, when Hesbia, life and all were lost for ever?

There time, as we have said, stood still, and, with him, existence was reduced to a mere system of loud pulsations; for his overcharged heart beat painfully. Wild ideas of quaint hobgoblins, of devouring rats, and of cold, creeping things occurred to him, and he fancied himself in his grave—a grave two hundred feet below the upper soil, so deep that the sound of the last trumpet alone could pierce to where his ashes lay.

Among other horrid thoughts, he feared he might die mad, or that water might be turned into the mine; and though he was perishing of thirst, the idea of being drowned in the dark made him shudder and start convulsively.

Would he be the last to perish, or had others been rescued and he left? He had heard of persons shut up in a mine, contriving to live for months by eating their horses and shoes, while striving to dig their way *upward*—living long after those above had abandoned them as lost, working and toiling upward with spade and mattock—but in vain, to perish at last, one by one, when the last morsel was consumed, and the last brave man's heart failed him; and all this was gathered by the position of their remains, when their memory had become a tradition of the Black country, and a future generation re-opened the place.

But he was without companionship, save the dead, and he strove to remember the prayers that Elsie had taught him in childhood, and amid the loud beating of his pulses to trust in a belief that “whoso dwelleth under the defence of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”

A Great Hand was over him there as well as elsewhere; yet he felt it hard to perish thus, unseen, unknown, unaided, and so young too!

“We are an unfortunate race!” he muttered;

“but how little could my poor father or my dear mother have foreseen such a fearful fate as this for me! Was it for such, to die *under* and not on the lands of Blairavon, I so superstitiously retained the Charter-stone? Even Hesbia—to save whom from further affronts I ventured here—can never know my actual doom—my sufferings; and how long will *they* last till the end—the awful end—arrives! Oh, how much worse than death is life while lingering thus!”

As from a long dreamy sleep, he appeared to waken with a start, on seeing at a distance—afar off it seemed—a ray of light shining, and he rose to make his way towards it. Men were there, too, evidently working, for he could hear their excited voices and the ring of their shovels.

But now the throbbing of his temples amounted almost to agony; the light and the darkness swam around him; sense seemed finally departing; a great feebleness came over his recently wounded limb; all his strength appeared to pass out of him, and in his despair of being left to perish unseen, a wild cry escaped him, as he staggered forward and fell again insensible on the floor of the mine.



## CHAPTER XIX.

## SUNSHINE AND CLOUD.

AFTER all he had undergone for fully thirty-six hours in the mine—prior to his rescue by Feverley in person with a party of volunteers, and being revived by a timely jorum of brandy from a flask with which they were provided—Lennard's body seemed to come to life, if such a phrase may be permitted, before his mind.

The actual consciousness of all he had undergone, with a sensibility of real deliverance therefrom and of safety, only came fully over him when he found himself once more in his own room at Oakwoodlee, and surrounded by faces and objects with which he was familiar.

Next forenoon, lounging at full length upon a sofa, which Elsie and Steinie had drawn close to an open window—for it seemed to Lennard that now he could never inhale enough of pure air—he lay in all the easy comfort of a soft dressing-gown and

cosy slippers, while the breeze without swayed the blinds, the faded leaves and few flowers of the window-creepers, and the dark green ivy that coated the old walls, the buzz of the flies in the sunshine, and the lowing of cattle in the distance coming ever and anon pleasantly to his ear, with the murmur of the flowing Avon.

Was he the same being who but some twelve hours before lay dying amid the poisonous atmosphere and gloomy darkness of yonder subterranean pit, over which a dark cloud of fiery dust was now hovering like a pall; for the fatal mines had been on fire again, and were then aflame through all their most remote intricacies; so death had been close to him, indeed?

“Well, old fellow,” said the cheerful voice of Feverley, who appeared at the window; “how are you this morning—eh?”

“Better, better—thanks to God’s kindness and to you! How can I ever repay you, Frank, for the succour you brought me—how repay you?”

“By saying nothing about it,” replied the Doctor, fixing his eyes on his watch, while laying a finger on Blair’s wrist.

“Pulse regular already—a trifle low perhaps; but you are making a wonderful recovery, for your symptoms were like those of paralysis, with a tendency to the comatose state, but electricity and the cold douche have restored you; so just make

your mind easy, my friend, and don't bother yourself about anything—I'll look in again in the evening."

"One word ere you go, Feverley,—so Miss Vere actually returned to Liverpool while knowing that I was yet in the mine?"

"There you begin to worry yourself already!"

"Answer me, please."

"Well, I suppose she knew; but she was not quite a free agent."

"How so—who was with her?"

"Her father; he conveyed her away, saying that the press of business at home was enormous."

"Indeed! and from a combination of events here have I been since May, and the crops that were green or sprouting then are yellow and ready for the reaper now. How sweet the sunshine is! Well, Feverley, I never thought to hear the voice of a bird or the hum of a bee again!"

"You won't hear much of either, I fancy, at this season, unless among the rooks in the old trees yonder."

"Well, there are the glorious blue sky, the pure air—the fragrance of the leaves and the clover. I shall never forget the hours spent in the mine—the poisonous air, the gloomy blackness, and that kind of unbroken stillness which a writer describes as 'the most awful thing in nature.'"

“All that is past and over, so think of it no more. A week or two must see you at the desk again; and now good-bye—my hands are full enough this morning, I can tell you, and ere long the Sheriff and other folks in office will be worrying you by a visit to make a deposition of all you know of this affair.”

Though “past and over,” Lennard was haunted long by the memory of all he had undergone, and by nervous starts in the night, when he would waken with his old emotion of horror from a dream that he was again in the pit!

In the Scotch papers Mr. Vere read long and amply detailed reports of the whole catastrophe prepared by the useful Mr. Dabchick, who had gone expressly to the spot, being one of the reporting staff of a “penny daily,” and as such was fully resolved to make the most of it per column. He also learned from this source that the entire pits had fired again, and that their total destruction was in rapid progress!

Telegrams and then letters from Feverley informed him and Hesbia of Lennard Blair’s escape and safety, and that he was almost well. Ere long a letter from the latter confirmed all this, so with a clear conscience Hesbia could visit her circle of friends and receive at her father’s luxurious villa a round of visitors who welcomed her return home.

From his impaired constitution and dissipated habits, Travice Cheatwood was longer in recovering than Blair; but there was a pressing necessity for him quitting the neighbourhood as soon as possible, for on the second day of his convalescence Féverley entered his room with some concern visible in his manner.

“Mr. Cheatwood,” said he, “I find that the Procurator Fiscal insists upon visiting you, as he has examined all the other survivors as to the source of the accident, for whether it was the result of gross carelessness, of malicious design, or natural causes beyond human control, must be fully proved for the satisfaction of the public.”

Travice consigned the entire British public to a very warm latitude, and then added—

“But on seeing me, this fellow will discover who I am!”

“Of course; and we all know that will never do.”

“I must remain *incog.*; he comes, when do you say?”

“To-morrow, at twelve o’clock.”

“So soon?”

“Yes.”

“Then to-morrow before daybreak I shall cease to trouble your hospitable household, Doctor, and be off.”

“Exactly. Blair suggested that I should drive

you in a gig over to the Craigellon station, and book you there for Glasgow, where you must ship for abroad."

"To ship for abroad requires money, and I have none," grumbled Travice; "I spent as bribes or lost every fraction of what I had in that most accursed coal-pit."

"And your hopes of more——"

"Are blank as my banker's book."

"And you have nothing——"

"Save a piece of land—a very small piece, certainly."

"Indeed?" said Feverley, all unaware that the other was bantering and sneering at Fate.

"I can give you a *post obit* right to it."

"Is it large?"

"Small, I told you—in some churchyard—place unknown as yet."

"Stop, Cheatwood," said Feverley; "I don't like this style of jest. Blair has sent you thirty pounds—use the money with discretion."

"Blair is a jolly good fellow after all."

"He is one of Nature's noblemen!" exclaimed the doctor, emphatically; "and it was to save you if he could, and the Veres from disgrace, that he so nearly lost his life."

"I'm a luckless devil, doctor! All this sort of thing comes of living fast—'not too wisely, but too well.' I'll turn over a new leaf some of these days;

but like the 'old gentleman' in the couplet, I have often been a monk when sick, and a devil when well. I am well now, and so shall sedulously avoid all examination by your Procurator Fiscal or that bumptious little pettifogger Dabchick, and all other legal and scientific snobs in the matter of the explosion. By Jove, I think I've had quite enough of it!" added Cheatwood, his natural sauciness and brusquerie returning with health, as he slipped Lennard's thirty pounds into his pocket with perfect satisfaction.

Closely shaven of his hirsute appendages, and supplied with a suit of clothes and a pair of dark mustachios erst worn by Feverley at amateur theatricals in his student days, even Juden Grabbie would have failed to recognize Cheatwood, especially in the twilight of the dark autumnal morning when he was driven away from a locality which he now loathed.

His disappearance caused serious suspicions to exist that he was an incendiary, and hence the good-natured young Doctor was subjected to many legal "precognitions" and much annoyance; but Lennard was enabled in a day or two to acquaint Hesbia in distinct terms that he had sought the pit on that most fatal night to avert, if he possibly could, the contumely that would be consequent to the arrest of her enterprising cousin; that he had, by monetary assistance, been able to save him in the end; and

that through the instrumentality of Feverley, he—the luckless Travice—had been sent to the nearest port, and doubtless now was far beyond the sea; and in reply Lennard received a warm and tender—yet he thought somewhat short—letter of thanks.

Oakwoodlee was no longer his—he was actually a visitor there now! He had no object in remaining but to get well and strong, and to kill the lagging time till he could follow her to Liverpool; and when able to walk abroad he loved to linger in those places where they had wandered together; and by association these spots always brought her voice, her laugh and smile more vividly to memory; and so would he dream the sunny days away, recalling how she had looked in her smart hat and feather when she sat on that mossy bank, her pretty balmorals and ankles just visible under the skirt of her piquet; there she culled a bouquet of wild flowers, and in yonder pool she had dipped her round white hand while vainly seeking to catch a fleeting trout.

Her letters were his only solace; tender at first, and daily almost like his own; but they speedily became less frequent, for no doubt she was immersed in a round of gaieties; and now, as they came at longer intervals, he thought them less tender in tone, and she seemed always to close “in haste to catch the post.”

Little fears began to wake within him, making him long more than ever to be gone; and in spite of



the advice of Feverley (who would not yet permit him to travel) he daily taxed, rather than developed his health. A letter from Mr. Vere urged him to prepare at once to start for Vera Cruz, where he must have an interview with Don Juan Leonardo and Co., who held certain papers relating to the alleged scuttling of a ship upon the high seas. "Your passage," he added, "is secured and paid for, on board the *Valparaiso*, mail steamer, which sails from Liverpool on Wednesday the 24th current."

"Wednesday the 24th—and this is Saturday!" exclaimed Lennard, as he sprung to his feet; "this is conclusive; this, then, is a fixity!"

So permission was at last accorded by his medical friend for his departure, when he was to bid a short—or perhaps it might prove a long and lasting adieu to Blairavon and to Oakwoodlee; and now, he knew not why, he was full of sad, almost of foreboding thoughts, as he wandered forth alone when the evening sun was shining on the heath-clad hills, and the brown autumn woods looked almost red or russet in the western glow.

Though young, Lennard was still old enough to feel or to understand that emotion which has been aptly described as "the *superstition* of the heart, which gathers round accustomed relics, making household gods of them and shrinking painfully from their displacement by an unthinking stranger's touch." So all that remained of his father's household lares,

and all of his other possessions were to pass to strangers now—all save the Charter-stone; and on this evening in particular, he felt a melancholy satisfaction that he had obeyed the quaint wishes of the dying in retaining the somewhat useless proprietary of it.

Grim and weather-beaten as when the painted Pictish warriors and stern Druid priests had knelt around it in the worship of Woden, Thor, and Frei, stood up the rough palladium amid its grove of Scottish pines; bronzed and red-stemmed they bristled against the ruddy sun-set, and seemed to exhale a peculiar fragrance on the evening air; while the rabbits and hares shot swiftly to and fro among the long rank grass and the fallen fir cones.

Lennard ascended the slope of the hills to take a farewell view of the rich landscape that for leagues upon leagues stretched far away, clad in red, in russet, and in golden brown, the lovely tints of the Scottish woods in autumn—all the lovelier that in many places the bright green lingers still. And he thought of the days when his father and Ranald Cheyne used to draw the covers there, or pot and bag the grouse in August, and the blackcocks in November—not with percussion locks and breech-loaders, but double-barrelled Joe Mantons; and so on he wandered until he reached the summit of Craigellon, with its deep loch, evidently an extinct crater, and when he thought of his uncle Lennard

whom he had never seen, the lines of Bryant seemed appropriate to the spot:—

“ There is a tale about these gray old rocks,  
A sad tradition of unhappy love,  
And sorrows borne and *ended* long ago ! ”

This was Lennard's last Sunday in the home of his boyhood and infancy ; and as he lay on the green slope of the hill (of old the Piper's Croft) with the last of the mountain bees humming drowsily around him, and the leafy rustle of the pleasant woods in his ear, the tolling of the village church bell came at intervals on the passing wind.

It was a familiar sound, like that of a friendly voice, and was associated with his earliest years.

He was about to rejoin (for a brief space, indeed!)—her he loved, she who had sat by his side when he sat last on that very spot ; yet his heart was not without sadness, for the final time we look on a long familiar scene, or hear a long familiar voice, while knowing that we may never see one nor hear the other more, cannot fail to produce a solemn emotion in a reflecting mind.

On the next Sunday eve, when that old bell was tolling at the same hour, and summoning the same people to prayer, he would be far away ; on the following weekly festival he would be further still—out on the open sea ; and many months, and even years, must inevitably come and go, and much that

was of vital importance to his future life must have been decided and past; many a doubt must have been solaced, many a fear soothed, and many a difficulty surmounted, ere *again* — if ever — he heard that old, old bell booming in the distant tower!

Then he thought, almost with a cynic's smile, where were *now* the doubts, the fears, the joys and sorrows of the past generations which slept under the green turf, whereon the shadow of that village spire was cast by the setting sun, now, as in the evenings of seven centuries ago?

For around that fane generations had been born; within it they had worshipped; there they had been wedded, and in the end been gathered to their kindred dust after a life spent in the narrow world that was bounded by their native hills; and still the old church stands on its holy knoll—God's Acre—the landmark of the rural district now, even as it was when raised by a certain Scottish knight, Sir Baldwin of Strathbroc and Almondale, who had been grievously wounded by an English arrow at the battle of Northallerton.

Deep in his thigh had sunk the fatal barb, and all the leech-craft of those primitive days when St. David I. reigned in Scotland failed to extract it; so for years the knight who had become a Brother of St. John, and a hermit by Lochness, was lame and

enduring torment. Yet he made pilgrimages afoot, say the legendaries, to every church that was dedicated to the blessed Virgin, imploring her intercession, and as the ballad has it :—

“ Far, far he rade, and far he gaed,  
He often sailéd the sea,  
And crosséd owre the Alpine hills  
To distant Italie.  
Beyond Lochnesse his Tempill stooede,  
A cell of mickle fame ;  
A knight of gude Sanct Johne he was,  
And Baldwin was his name.”

Once he vowed that, if cured of his wound, he would found a church in honour of Our Lady on the *blair*, or open field beside the Avon; and then even while he vowed and prayed, he felt the corroding iron pass forth from his limb; not a trace of the wound could be found, and he became a hale man and strong. Thereafter in fulfilment of his vow, for the health of his own soul, the souls of all his ancestors, and of David, then King of the Scots, he founded Mary's Kirk upon the knoll, where, four hundred years after, an ancestor of Lennard's contrived to save it from total demolition amid the general chaos of the Reformation.

But ere the church was finished, Sir Baldwin, with the cross upon his breast and shoulder, had departed in company with other Scottish Brethren of his

Order to close their days in defence of the holy sepulchre, and he fell in a conflict in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Still true to his adoration of the Mother of God, continue the legendaries, as he was expiring he cried—

“Hail, O Mary, Mother of mercy!”

Then there appeared by his side a beautiful lady over whose face there was a wondrous brightness; she had shining white raiment, flowing tresses of gold, and around her head shone a glory studded with thirteen stars. Then the dying crusader knew that he beheld that Mother Mary unto whom he had prayed so often, and he passed away in rapture with his head upon her arm.

So Baldwin, of Strathbroc and Almondale, found his last home beside the brook of Kedron.

While Lennard was dreaming of those pre-railway times and legends, how fared it with Hesbia in Liverpool?

Her letters to him—alas! that we must confess it!—had become markedly cold and strange, and then they—ceased; at least he had received none for several days. Was she ill? Her father's last, his only and most impressive letter concerning the journey to Vera Cruz, made no mention of her.

Painful doubts began to rise in Lennard's mind. He strove to keep them under; but they would

recur again and again with growing poignancy. However, with the morrow's journey, he hoped to solve them all, and while he is making his final arrangements, therefore, we must leave him for another chapter.

## CHAPTER XX.

## SELF.

“**A**NOTHER letter from that young man Blair, and for *you*, Hesbia?” said Mr. Vere, in a tone of angry inquiry, selecting the missive in question from the heap of letters, notes, and papers which the butler emptied at his elbow from the leathern post bag on the breakfast table; and though Mr. Vere had imbibed a most excellent meal, which included coffee and hot muffins, marmalade, ham, bloaters, and eggs, a stormy expression darkened his usually placid face—an expression which grew deeper as he took in at a glance the addresses and postmarks of some of his correspondence.

“Thanks, papa,” said Hesbia, colouring slightly as she received the letter, with which her father seemed to part reluctantly. She did not open it, however, but laid it by her cup.

“Thanks!” echoed he, contemptuously, after the butler had withdrawn; “this absurdity must cease!”



“What absurdity, papa?”

“This almost daily correspondence.”

“But he has had so much to tell us.”

“Well, we have heard that he escaped safely, and Tralice too; that he is recovering, and all that sort of thing; that he is coming here, and then going to Vera Cruz, by the *Valparaiso*; so what need I say for all this useless correspondence?”

“Papa,” said Hesbia, her heart beginning to beat quicker, though the colour left her cheek; “a little time will tell all.”

At this pretty plain hint which somehow escaped her unintentionally, Mr. Vere thrust aside his pile of unopened letters, and regarded her gravely.

We have already hinted at losses by sea and otherwise, sustained by the firm of which he was the head; of policies of insurance in dispute, consequent on dark rumours of alleged scuttlings among the West Indian Keys, and off the shores of South America; then came actions at law for damages to widows and orphans under the Mines Inspection Act, and many other involvements resulting from the destruction of his valuable pits at the Mains of Kaims, all of which entanglements had produced a serious effect upon the exchequer of Vere and Co., who were secretly affirmed in Liverpool to be getting “shaky,” “fishy,” or into shoal water; and nods and winks of deep import were exchanged by knowing clerks and cashiers over their pipes and beer

in those little clubs and snuggeries where they were wont to congregate after business hours.

Hesbia saw her father's frown, and knew what was coming. Of late many hints and mysterious or cutting speeches, had prepared her mind to view the cadaverous baronet as an actual suitor for her hand. In fact, by letter, he had openly proposed, and that letter remained as yet unanswered.

On the night of the catastrophe, when Lennard's death was considered a certainty, and on the previous occasion of his suffering and danger, Hesbia's emotions of repentance and grief for many little acts of coldness, duplicity, and coquetry, have been referred to, and her love for him then seemed to become genuine; but now there were moments when in her worry—it did not amount to a melodramatic agony of distress—a feeling of angry selfishness actually filled her heart.

Why should she suffer alone? Why—she thought—be the victim of an impoverished father on one hand, or of a half-penniless lover on the other? Wealth and luxury were necessary to her existence as rain and sunshine to nature; but Lennard Blair could give her neither, and if her father spoke truth, *he* could not continue long to do so; thus on the baronet with the absurd name must centre all her hopes of continuing her present mode of life in splendour and affluence.

All these considerations were rushing through her

mind, as she sat with her ears tingling, and Lennard's letter unopened in her hand; but now she became aware that her father was speaking again.

“What does all this mean? You are still, I find, in correspondence with Mr. Blair, who in a short time now must sail for South America at last.”

“Papa, you know not what you speak of.”

“You are polite, Hesbia!”

“I mean, how you rend my heart.”

“The very cant of novels and dramas. It cannot be,” said Mr. Vere with something of genuine astonishment, “it cannot be, Hesbia, that you have really allowed your heart, as you call it, to be fooled with by that dangler Blair?”

Hesbia was silent; but her eyes were full of tears, and her paleness increased.

“Speak!”

“I do not love Sir Cullender at all events.”

“Fool! who asks you to love him? Who pretends that love is necessary on either side? There is money on both—splendid wealth on his, at least, and what more can be necessary?”

“But did you think thus when you married mamma?”

“Yes—decidedly! Had she not had those fourteen thousand pounds which were of such use to me when I began the world, she had never had the honour of being your mother.”

“Oh, papa, how can you talk thus?”

“ Sir Cullender is rich ; he proposes marriage, and that begins the affair.”

“ Does it end it ? ”

“ What do you mean, girl ? ”

“ Can any one foresee the end of a marriage that is made without love ? ”

“ No ; but one can very easily foresee the end of one that is made without *money*.”

“ You are severe on me, papa.”

“ Hesbia, I am just and sad—yes, and desperate, too, if you could but understand it.”

“ Desperate ? ” said she, in a faint voice.

“ Sir Cullender has become possessed of several of my acceptances to a great value, and if I cannot meet these and other claims within a month at the latest,” he continued, lowering his voice, and glancing about him with a stealthy and cunning eye, “ the house of Vere & Co. will inevitably collapse like a paper balloon ! ”

“ But to marry him—*him*—oh, papa,” exclaimed Hesbia, her pale lip trembling.

“ It must be so—there is no resource for you—for me. Money is wanted imperatively ! Our firm has met with many an ugly loss, and I shrink from the investigation of them.”

“ Yet is not Lennard Blair’s errand to Vera Cruz one of scrutiny and research ? ”

“ You do not understand,” said he, speaking hurriedly ; “ the world knows not all yet ; but dark

whispers are, I know, muttered on 'Change. Sir Cullender can pull us through, and will do so, Hesbia, if you favour his suit."

"So he makes me the price of his pecuniary assistance!" said she, scornfully.

"As the wife of a baronet, Hesbia, you will have many advantages, such as my daughter merely, you could never possess. You will be eligible for the drawing-rooms—for presentation at Court——"

"Has Sir Cullender ever been presented?" asked Hesbia, to whose memory some of Lennard's hints and slighting remarks occurred.

"Well—no—I believe that he has not."

"Why, papa?"

"He cares little for such things, probably; though a man of family, of course—of course—he is thoroughly—a man of business, Sir Cullender."

What a wonderfully magnetic power lurked in the deep hazel eyes of Hesbia! Even her father was sensible of this, when at that moment they were full of mockery, flashing, and magnificent with disdain of the baronet and his so-called passion for her; but the next instant saw them cloud and droop with sorrow for Lennard, and fear for herself—fear lest she should become poor!

"What say you to all I have urged?" asked Mr. Vere, after a long and very uncomfortable pause.

"How can I ever pretend to show a love for this man?"

“To demonstrate much regard before marriage would be, I presume, unbecoming.”

“But I hate, papa—almost hate him.”

“Any strong feeling is better than total indifference. Regard will come after marriage. I did not care a doit for your poor mamma before I married her.”

Nor much after, he might have added, though he gave her a pompous funeral, and a white marble slab; and now this living mass of selfishness was ready to yield up his daughter, even as Jephtha did of old.

“Ah, dearest papa, she urged,” with uplifted hands, “can you really ask me to sell myself?”

“No—I do not.”

“What then?”

“To save yourself and me from impending ruin—it may be poverty—the most humiliating poverty, in this very place where we have been so honoured—so long looked up to. I ask you, will not such a reverse be intolerable?”

Again those ominous words and that chilling prospect, which in her mind was only associated with seedy and anxious governesses and poor needlewomen, in garrets and places of squalor or of close work-rooms, where for sixteen, or it might be twenty hours out of the twenty-four, she had seen young girls of all ages, making up those elaborate toilettes which were to figure in Rotten Row, the

ball-room, or the levees of British Royalty—their cheeks blanched, their eyes listless, temples throbbing, and premature death only as the award of a life of suffering—for such scenes she had beheld, and they haunted her. She looked at her father timidly, and recognized a peculiar expression in his smooth and flabby face, and knew it of old—a species of subdued fury, when he meant to *crush* those who opposed his will; so her tears began to fall.

This completed his exasperation, for, sooth to say, he had external matters more than enough to worry him just then, and every letter he tore open and half perused with a malediction on his lips, seemed to add fuel to the flame.

“Begone to your room, girl, and there weep like a child, if you will; but remember that such folly as you have been guilty of, and still persist in, suits not me, and certainly becomes not you!”

And here ended this remarkable conversation.

Hesbia retired to her room, and wept, and pondered, and gazed listlessly at the broad waters of the Mersey, which shone at a distance amid the golden haze of noon—for so long had their conversation lasted.

Broken by many a hedge and fence a vast tract of stubble-fields lay there, with pasture-land of yellowish green, interspersed by autumn woods, and the white sails of the craft that studded the river far above the docks by Dingle Bank and Sefton Street. One

moment she thought she would fly with Lennard Blair to South America, to exile and penury, even if their reverse of fortune came to that! But could she ruin her father, selfish though he seemed to be? Then she thought of the splendour and luxury she would lose on one hand, with a make-shift life of prudence, parsimony, and hardship—it might be sordid poverty—on the other; and the result of her pondering was, that there came to be a lapse in her correspondence with Lennard Blair, whose last letter imploring an answer to several sent before was not attended to, and long before he reached Liverpool, the mind of Miss Vere was “made up” as to the course she would pursue—made up irrevocably.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## THE LOST TICKETS.

SO the final, or fatal day, as Elsie Graham thought it, came at last, when Lennard Blair was to leave Oakwoodlee; and when she and Steinie were to become the joint tenants of a little cottage which he had taken for them in the village—a dwelling rendered empty by the recent catastrophe.

“Go, Master Lennard, my brave lad!” said Steinie, with confident enthusiasm, as he strapped the portmanteau, rugs, and so forth, in the hall; “go on and you cannot fail to prosper; though, as we are told, the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong; yet—yet, with youth and experience, what may not a man achieve? What brae may he no climb, even were it ten times as steep and high as Kirkyetton Craig?”

Even Steinie was, like Lennard, of a different temperament from his late master, who had been

fonder of retracing and falling back upon the past than of boldly facing the *future*.

As a treat for his young master's last dinner at home, poor Steinie Hislop went forth with his rod to whip the old familiar pool for a salmon trout—he was doubtful whether such fish were to be found in English waters—he rather thought not—but whether it was that he was growing dim of sight, or less expert than of old, or that the fish of the Avon preferred those vagrant flies which floated on the stream to the mimic insects of Steinie's manufacture, we know not, but he came sadly home with his basket empty; so Lennard and Feverley, who took a farewell dinner at Oakwoodlee, had to content them without fish.

“Frank,” said the former, as Steinie removed the cloth and lingered a little, after placing, with a wistful expression of eye, the last bottle of the old wine-cellar before him—lingered, as one who would from that hour would find his “occupation gone,” his old labours at an end; “Feverley, in a combined spirit of vanity, perhaps of sentimental superstition, or what you will, I preserved the proprietary of that old block of stone upon the lea, when I forgot to make quite an adequate provision for these two faithful old servants of my father; but, whatever they may require, you will see to it—you will take care of them; and not fail to draw on me at once?”

The Doctor promised, and filling his glass, drunk

to Lennard's pleasant journey, and to his "joyous success at the end of it."

"And now, with regard to this sort of thing," began Lennard, lowering his voice, "I may as well speak now, for I have little time to spare. Your cousin Milly is still a widow——"

"True," said the other curtly, as a flush rose to his temples, and then passed away.

"When I come back I shall hope to find you in a better location than yonder little cottage in the village. You understand."

"Poor Milly! I should never have revealed our wretched story."

"Even to me?"

"Not even to you, Lennard; but there are times when, inspired by some strange impulse, the heart uncloses the secret cell wherein lie hidden the thoughts and treasured hopes of years. So, on that night, either some instinct told me that you would sympathize with our sorrowful separation, or the memory of it loaded me; I know not which," said Feverley, sadly.

"And so you poured your story forth."

"Well, such revelations often soothe the human heart, though men may, at after times, repent that sorrow, or wine perhaps, made them so garrulous and communicative."

"But not in you to me, I trust?"

"Ah no! my friend; but do not speak of Milly

now, and foster the old hope that can revive no more.”

But Lennard only laughed at this.

An hour later saw them separated, with all good and kind wishes on both sides, and Feverley waving his hat on the platform of the solitary little station, while fast sped the thundering iron-horse which bore Lennard back to England. He chose the same time and train as when Hesbia went, that he might see the same scenery on which she had looked at the same hour and under the same light, for there is no such day-dreamer as a lover; but, in many points, the varying landscapes were changed even since then. In fields which had been laden with waving grain, the thick green clover was replacing the brown stubble; a shot or two in the distance, and white puffs of smoke among the dark hedgerows, reminded him that pheasant-shooting had begun; the last of the martins had passed away, and the wild duck and the jack-snipe were seen about the marshes and lochs of Lanarkshire.

As the train sped away into the green mountain gorges, an old man and an old woman were lingering on the lower slope of Craigellon, watching the white streaming steam of the locomotive, till it finally melted into thin air, and the sound of the train died away in the distance, when, with slow steps, they sought their new home in the village. They were Elsie Graham and Steinie Hislop, who seemed to

stoop more than ever over his staff, and communing in their own fashion, they were marvelling when again they might see the comely face of the lad they loved so well; for to their humble comprehension and localised ideas, Vera Cruz was a genuine *terra incognita*—a land beyond the moon.

“We’ve seen the last o’ him—the last o’ *them*—it’s a sair, sair wrench!” said Elsie, clasping her hands.

Lennard had many thoughts crowding on his mind, as he lay back in the corner of a well-cushioned first-class carriage, and puffed his cigar leisurely and reflectively. Much had happened since last, in the same carriage, perhaps, he had traversed the same line of railroad for the north.

He was going away, perhaps finally, from Blair-avon and Oakwoodlee (he gave a backward glance, but both the old places had vanished now, and even Craigellon was out of sight), away from the spot where the graves of his father and mother, and the most of his kindred lay; he had a long sea-voyage before him; but then he was first going to her—to Hesbia, drawing nearer and more near, at the rate of forty miles an hour. Posts and wires flew past as if they madly ran a race towards the north; yet to the lover how slow seemed the train—a very laggard.

Now it was at Covington, under the giant peak of Tinto—“the Hill of Fire,”—and by the hamlet

where the Covenanters were wont to conceal themselves of old, burying so much treasure that, when an old house is pulled down, specie enough is always found in the walls wherewith to build a new one; now it was at Lamington, with the old castle wherein the mother and daughter of Wallace resided, in the stormy days when "the Hammer of the Scots" won his battle at Dunbar, and the Forth at Stirling bridge ran red with English blood; and now they were among the Lowther hills, the finest of the mountain ranges in pastoral Lanarkshire; but, heedless of the scenery, Lennard was indulging in dreams of his own; he had actually vague ideas of a private marriage, if Mr. Vere refused his consent to a public one,—of solemnly written promises and terrible vows, and all manner of melodramatic *dénouements*, even of asking Hesbia to elope with him to Vera Cruz, if a "flinty-hearted" father drove them to desperation.

Would the train be behind time?

He sat with his watch in his hand, and consulted *Bradshaw*, as the sunset declined on the Border hills and the towers of Carlisle; and so on, and on, till, ere long, they steamed into the crowded station of Preston, where much bustle of changing carriages ensued.

"Twenty minutes' wait here, gentlemen," shouted the guard, or some other official. "Change here! change carriages for London, Liverpool, Man-

chester;" and many more places were enumerated.

The gas was lighted now, so Lennard sprang forth to have a cup of coffee and another cigar.

Amid the bustle of the platform, the banging of carriage-doors, lighting of lamps for the various night-journeys, bewildered passengers jostling each other in search of their trains, the transference of luggage and goods from various vans and carriage-tops, and all the hurly-burly, secret tipping of guards, and intense care of self—the "looking after Number One"—which pervade a railway-station, Lennard prudently buttoned his paletôt over his watch and its appendages, while drawing near a crowd which had gathered round a lady and gentleman with whom the guard and ticket-collector were maintaining an angry argument—angry, at least, on one side; mild and expostulatory on the other.

They appeared to be foreigners, and the lady alone spoke English.

"Jack," shouted the guard, "have you made a thorough search through that Scotch first-class?"

"Yes, blow'd if I ain't!"

"Well, look again; I doesn't want to be unpleasant."

With an oath, the already exasperated official flashed his lantern into every part of the carriage, and fussily tossed about the cushions and seat-rugs; then he growled,—

“Well, I s’pose you’re satisfied; there ain’t nothing there—so help my Bob! there ain’t.”

The foreign gentleman, a sallow little personage, with deep dark eyes and large grizzled mustachios, seemed to understand that the final search was over, for he lifted his hat to the guard, and said with a low bow,—

“Sin complimiento, Señor Guarda, le doy las gracias.” (Without compliments, Mr. Guard, I give you thanks.)

“Precious gammon!” growled the other. “Why the devil don’t he speak English? but them foreigners are an absurd lot! I’m not to be come over, though,” he added, for the politeness of the Spaniard only added to his suspicions; but now Lennard, on hearing the Spanish language, with which his commercial experiences had rendered him familiar, became interested and pressed forward to listen.

“I assure you, sir, that my guardian’s pocket has been picked of his portmonnaie—tickets and all; it is most unfortunate!” urged the young lady to the guard; “and I have but a few shillings in my purse.”

“Gammon!” was the response of that personage, now appealing to the platform-superintendent, or some such official, whose livery and hirsute appendages gave him a semi-military aspect. “I ask this here foreign gent for the tickets of hissself and his



girl; but they ain't forthcoming. 'You must pay from the station from which the train started,' says I; but he parleyvoos in some foreign lingo, and the girl tells us in English that they are towerists on a tower, booked through from Hedingburg to Manchester, and that their tickets have been stolen. 'Can't help that, miss,' says I; 'you must pay again.' 'Pay again!' says she, quite proud like; 'blow'd if we does!' 'You must, miss,' says I; 'them's our rools and regulations. Any passinger as carn't produce a ticket pays full fare from the pint of departure. This train is from Hedingburg and the North; and from Hedingburg and the North you two pays at once, or I call in the perlice!' "

"Of course," said the other official; "but this will be a last resort, I hope."

"Then the old covey whispers something to the girl, and she tells me that his pocket had been picked; that he ain't got no money—yet travels in a first-class like the Prince of Wales hisself! I asks if his luggage is labelled; then says the girl, 'We ain't got no luggage—it's gone by sea to Liverpool from Glasgow.' "

"First-class folks don't usually travel without luggage of some sort—doocid pretty gal, though!" muttered several of the bystanders.

"Luggage gone by sea to Liverpool from Glasgow, and themselves booked through from Edinburgh to

Manchester? I can't make it out; it's a rum start, Jack," said the guard.

"I should rayther think so; but look sharp now—full fare from Hedingburg it must be!" he added, raising his voice, after the fashion of all Britons when speaking to a foreigner.

"Hija de mi corazon,\* tell them again," said the old gentleman, with growing alarm.

"Come, come, young 'ooman, you understand the Queen's Henglish, and must pay for both," said the guard, as he very deliberately laid his hand upon her arm.

"Dare you touch me!" she exclaimed to the speaker, a burly red-headed fellow in a brass-bound cap and elaborate collar-badges, who shrank back, muttering,—

"Well, I *am* blowed!"

She looked like a little lady playing the part of an Empress, the carriage and will were so grand and proud, and the power so tiny; yet she seemed so lovely and so fearless amid all that gathering and cold-eyed crowd, whose chief emotion was curiosity, tinged, of course, with suspicion, as the two infringers of the railway bye-laws were only foreigners, penniless apparently, and utterly unfriended.

In vain did the young Spanish lady repeat that the old gentleman must have had his pocket-book

\* Child of my heart.

and portmonnaie, which held their tickets, abstracted by a passenger who sat next him and had left the train at Carlisle, or some station before or after it—she was not quite sure; and in vain did she promise to pay any fares that might be demanded on reaching Manchester, where they were known and had friends. “Es verdad—es verdad!” she added, in her energy lapsing into her native language.

“Neither money, tickets, nor luggage—here’s a go!”

The fair stranger was evidently a lady—a Spanish donna; but, in lieu of the orthodox veil, high comb, and black mantilla, she had a little black velvet hat with a piquant ruby feather, a yachting jacket of dark blue cloth with gilt anchor buttons, a rich silk dress of paler blue, tiny Balmorals with high brass heels, a Japanese parasol with a deep white fringe, well-fitting gloves on marvellously pretty hands, and was in bearing as thoroughly English as any girl one may see on Brighton pier or Margate sands.

She was considerably under the middle height, and seemed to be barely eighteen; a vast quantity of golden hair, drawn back from her ears, fell in heavy volume behind; she had a pure, small profile, a minute and lovely little face, with large, soft eyes, of a hue that appeared to alternate between hazel and dark grey, but were really violet, and with her long lashes and dark brows they seemed to be black at night.

We have been thus minute in describing these personages, as they were fated to have a very material influence in shaping out the future destiny of Lennard Blair, who met them more than once again.

Two policemen now appeared upon the scene, stolid in aspect, blue-coated, and helmeted; dexterously thrusting back the crowd, they placed themselves on each side of the old gentleman, and one, with a thumb pointed over his shoulder, briefly indicated the route they were to pursue. The little man started and twisted his large moustachios with nervous anger, for already the first bell had rung, the guards were shouting "seats" and "tickets," and there was much swaying of lanterns and clinking of hammers, as the soundness of the wheels was tested, amid a vast bustle and hurrying to and fro; and, looking piteously about him, the old Spaniard urged in vain that he was a "caballero—y hombre de bueno—hombre honorado!"

Lennard could no longer resist interfering.

"Pray allow *me* to settle this," he exclaimed, pushing forward and drawing a ten-pound note from his portemonnaie; "I think you mistake these people, my good fellow. I shall advance what is requisite to send them on to Manchester."

"I thank you, sir—thank you sincerely for this great kindness. Once in Manchester we shall be neither without friends nor funds," said the young lady,

with an air of great gratitude, curiously mingled with haughty reserve. "My father (here she mentioned a name which, being foreign, Lennard failed to catch) will not allow you to be a loser by this politeness, if you will favour me with your card."

"Quick, get their tickets for Manchester," said Lennard, slipping a little bribe into the hand of a porter, "and bring them to us in the refreshment-room."

Then he hurried the strangers out of the crowd, but there was scant time, and the very grand young damsel who, with her hair frizzed, and dressed in the extreme of the mode, presided over the realm of dry sandwiches and old sausage-rolls, buttered bread, doubtful-looking fruits, and scalding tea, was in no mood to hurry herself, and the tickets were brought with the warning, "Train's a-going, sir—look sharp, please," before a glass of wine had been finished by the young lady, who was reiterating her thanks, while her guardian, father, or friend, though the receiver of Lennard's kindness, was cold, sullen, and, like a true Spaniard, an observant and suspicious little man.

The deep liquid eyes of the Spanish girl were fixed upon Lennard with a beautiful expression of fervent thanks, which he never forgot; he had saved her from a serious and public affront, and her voice, when she spoke, had a charming chord in it that was full of tremulous pathos.

“Gracias à Dios! and thanks to you, kind sir; all this shall be amply requited, be assured of that, and that we shall not forget your address.”

Lennard was about to take her hand, when—

“Come, señora, we must begone, if we would not lose the train,” growled her male friend in Spanish, and pulling her hand so impatiently that he burst her lavender coloured kid glove.

The impulsive girl’s eyes sparkled as she tore it off, and threw it on the floor.

“Señor Saavedra, you forget yourself! Good night, sir—a thousand thanks, and a thousand more,” she added, holding out her hand, a lovely little one, on which more than one gem was glittering, and then she was hurried away.

Bang went the carriage door, the bell jangled, the whistle screamed, and away shot the crowded night train for Manchester, with all its varied lights and faces; the pretty Spaniard was gone, and the adventure over.

“Who the deuce can they be?” thought Lennard, as he loitered at the door of the refreshment-room; not father and daughter, certainly—the affair of the glove showed that—more likely husband and wife—a Spanish actress or dancer and her secretary—a singer, perhaps; the girl seemed thoroughly a lady. Poor thing! how glad I am that I was at hand. Only think if Hesbia had been in such a fix among a parcel of foreign fellows! Well—I hope some one

would have befriended her, as I did the little Donna. But what is this? My card, by Jove! The old fellow has either dropped it or left it with her glove—so my ten pounds are gone! Awkward that. Have I been fooled after all? But what a pretty hand the girl had; and such eyes!”

“Seats for Liverpool!” cried a voice without.

Almost without thinking he put the glove into his pocket as he sprang into the train, and was whisked away at a right angle from the line traversed by his foreign friends.

And so for the next forty miles Lennard was again left to his own reflections, roused only now and then as the whistle blew, and the train glided slowly into some station, the name of which would be shouted in that singularly professional and totally unintelligible mode peculiar to railway officials everywhere.

At last he found himself in a region of ten thousand lights, as the train on emerging from a long tunnel, swept over the Leeds canal, and he saw himself again in Liverpool.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## WHY DID I LOVE HER ?

“ I FIND that I have loitered too long at home—  
or, rather, where was once my home ; ” thought Lennard, as he found himself in his slippers and dressing-gown, seated before the fire in his old lodgings in Liverpool late on Monday night ; “ to ship on board the *Valparaiso*, and drop with her down the river on Wednesday evening, leaves me but one entire day to see Hesbia, to propose to her father, to pack up, and do Heaven knows what more.”

Next morning he was up betimes, and when again he saw the beams of the morning sun streaming lazily athwart the dense forest of masts in the docks, and on the huge ungainly masses of brick-buildings, his sojourn at home among the silent woods and hills, his father’s death, his wound and the catastrophe of the mine, more than all his engagement to Hesbia, seemed a dream that had passed, and as if he had not been out of Liverpool an hour.



He remitted home money to Dr. Feverley for his two old dependants at the village, and as the hour was too early for calling on the Veres, after visiting the dock where the *Valparaiso* lay to ascertain her exact locality, he proceeded along Bath Street and the quays to Canning Place, where he turned, almost mechanically, into the old Alley and the counting-house.

There, as if they had never quitted their desks since that night when he came in such haste to draw money and announce his departure for the north, sat old Abel Envoyse, and all the juniors of the establishment, seated on the same stools in the same corners, busy amid the same day- or letter-books, and red-edged ledgers; the same hazy light and sombre shadow in the office; the same cobwebs and fly-blown prospectuses and almanacks on the discoloured walls; but now all sprang from their places and crowded about Lennard, who was a favourite with them, and now regarded as something of a lion after his strange adventures at home, his reported death and escape. All their expectations, however, of "a jolly little dinner somewhere, and hearing the news," were nipped in the bud by his announcing that he had not an hour to spare, but hoped to see some, if not all of them, at an hotel near the dock, ere the *Valparaiso* got up her steam on the morrow.

"Mr. Vere has gone to London," said Mr.

Envoyse, polishing his bald head with his handkerchief till it shone like a billiard ball, "and we've had no end of things to worry us here since you left—things I daresay you are pretty well in the dark about; but I shall have your South American memoranda ready for you to-night."

"In London!" exclaimed Lennard, [with disappointment in his face and tone.

"Yes—and his address if you wish to write him, is at Sir Cullender Crowdy's place of business. By the way, it is whispered on 'Change that there is a chance of Sir Cullender's being taken into the firm; but Mr. Vere has hinted nothing about it to me."

A stern expression gathered in Lennard's face as the quiet, contented old man said this unthinkingly.

"Sir Cullender a partner; by Jove it will then be high time for me to cut the concern if I can!" was all he said, as he turned away muttering that he had much to do, but would return to the Alley in the evening for his instructions, money, and so forth.

Again he sallied forth into the bustle of the sunny streets, and turned his steps southwards, through the Princes Park, till he reached the Aigburth Road, and proceeded on until he was quite in the suburbs.

The hour was eleven now, and though still very

early, he thought that, under the circumstances, he was fully warranted in breaking through conventional rules, and venturing to call on Hesbia. Her father's unfortunate absence in London, and the knowledge that he, Lennard, would have to sail without seeing him, somewhat deranged his previous plans; and the rumour, though perhaps groundless, that Crowdy was about to come into the firm, considerably disturbed him.

Crowdy, whom even the little pettifogging Scotch barrister, Dabehick, had so openly denounced as a charlatan and projector of bubble companies? The idea was intolerable!

He was about to see Hesbia again—she who must have mourned for him as one who was gathered with the dead; but why was it that all the hope and ardour of yesterday seemed to have passed from him? Why was it that he felt so low in spirit, and had in his heart a sense of immediate evil rather than of joy? Do “coming events cast their shadows before”? was it only the gossip of Abel Envoyse, with the inevitable separation, or was it something worse?

Anyway a shiver came over him, when he saw Vere's beautiful Tuscan villa that crowned a plateau to which a succession of grassy terraces and gravelled walks bordered by the rarest flowers, gave access; its walls of red brick were covered by carefully-trained rose-trees; its oriels were all of polished

stone ; and its plate-glass windows shone brightly in the morning sun.

It was situated in a lovely spot on a gentle eminence that commanded a view of the upper portion of the Mersey. Liverpool was almost in the distance, and the only sounds near, were those which usually occur in the open country, the cawing of the rooks, or the twitter of the little birds in the hedgerows. A faint silvery mist enveloped the Cheshire side of the river, and into the pure bright air above it, the smoke of many a cottage ascended from the woodlands in high unbroken columns ere they melted away, and the dew yet lingered under the shadow of the gnarled oaks that bordered the old coach-road to Warrington.

The household of Mr. Vere did not seem to be in a great state of activity, for Lennard had to ring twice, and had full time to rally his thoughts, ere the great front door was unfolded by his small acquaintance Buttons, who greeted him, as he thought, with a grin and a leer in his boiled grey eyes, rather than with a respectful bow of welcome.

The double ring had also brought a lumbering, hugely-whiskered, and amply-calved "Jeames" in plush to the door.

"Mr. Vere was in London," this solemn personage condescended to observe ; "he was not sure whether Miss was at 'ome at that hour ; but if Mr. Blair would give his card, he would be 'appy to

henquire—he rather thought the carriage 'ad been hordered.”

All difficulties on this head were abruptly solved by the appearance of Hesbia in person; attired for visiting, with a charming little hat and feather, and one of her most showy striped piquets, in her fancy for which she almost rivalled the famous Marchioness de Gallifet, who frequently favours the promenaders at Dieppe with a view of sixteen different striped dresses in one day. She started, coloured, and then grew pale, painfully so, on being so suddenly confronted by Lennard.

Knowing when he would be in Liverpool, and that but one entire day would intervene ere the *Valparaiso* sailed, she had feared to see him, and shrunk from denying herself; blushing to do so even before Savonette, who was wholly in his interest, she had been on the point of issuing forth betimes, to spend the whole day in visiting, or in the park, the gardens, anywhere away from all chance of meeting him whose eye she dreaded, and now—now he met her face to face in the hall, and under the observant eyes of several domestics!

“Welcome, Mr. Blair,” said she, presenting her hand, nervously, but politely, and feeling constrained to turn back with him, an inconvenience for which (though he heard Maxwell ordered to “countermand the carriage”), he did not feel himself called

upon to apologize, and they entered the drawing-room together.

“And you arrived in Liverpool——” she began.

“Late last night, Hesbia—too late to call here;” said Lennard, about to embrace her, but Hesbia skilfully contrived to keep several tables, couches, statues, and glass shades between herself and him, while she personally and fussily closed two of the windows, readjusted some of the blinds, and caressed little Fussy, her terrier, which lay coiled up in a beautiful basket on a console.

Again Lennard felt the cold shiver come over him. He was painfully sensible that in her manner and in her eye, he could read the evidence of a change since they had parted. Yet he looked at her wistfully, and thought—was this the rapturous reunion, after an escape such as his?—this the meeting for which his soul had yearned?

“Mr. Blair,” she was beginning, when an exclamation of surprise and grief escaped him; “so thank God, you survived the horrors of that night?”

“I escaped and am before you still a living man, Hesbia; but have you not one kiss for me dearest? Oh, what do all this coldness and agitation mean?”

“Ah, do not ask me!”

Her agitation *was* excessive—almost painful to witness. She threw her parasol and hat upon a table, scattering the bijouterie that lay on it; she pulled off her gloves and cast them on the carpet;

she tossed back her rich brown hair from her throbbing temples as if to court coolness, and, while she did so, her white hands trembled violently, and her face grew ashy pale; yet she strove to steel herself for the cruel part she had resolved to play.

“I sail to-morrow, Hesbia,” said Lennard, steadying himself by placing a hand on the back of the couch whereon she sat.

“To-morrow—so soon?”

“Yes, so soon; but what does this change mean in you? Are you ill?”

“Oh, no—not ill—not ill. You are going to see grand sights and a beautiful country, after a long sea voyage.”

“Two thousand six hundred miles and more, dearest Hesbia.”

“And you will soon learn to forget me, to love another, perhaps.

“Hesbia,” he exclaimed, with positive alarm, for her manner became hysterical; he approached her, but she started and withdrew to another fauteuil. Then he gazed on her with reproach and pity mingling, as he said, “Have I escaped assassination at the hand of your precious kinsman, and afterwards, by God’s mercy, from a horrible death in yonder mine, only to meet with you and to part from you thus? It is inexplicable!”

As yet not a tear had fallen from her eyes, but

the brightness had gone out of them and they looked hard and stony.

“Let us be brief and end this most painful interview at once, Lennard,” said she, speaking rapidly, with something of a sob in her throat. “Oh, forgive me and spare me your reproaches, for I should have written and explained all, but I pitied you—I pitied you—and could not trust myself to write.”

“Pitied me—all, Hesbia—all what?” he asked, furiously.

“I am to marry this man Crowdy. Papa is even now in London arranging the settlements. I am but one victim more among many of the curses brought about by the love of money, ‘that joining of house to house and field to field, which corrupts the better part of man’s nature.’”

“And woman’s too, I think—to marry Sir Culender!” exclaimed Lennard with growing rage.

“Listen,” said Hesbia, imploringly; “do you remember the situation of Pauline in ‘the Lady of Lyons,’ when Claude Melnotte returns, and when Beauseant offers to her bankrupt father the means of extrication from his monetary difficulties?”

“Yes—yes; but what raving is this? Your father is not situated as old Deschappelle is in the drama.”

“I cannot tell you, but I have given my promise in writing.”

“To whom?”



“To Sir Cullender.”

There was a pause, during which Lennard stood with a pale, almost ghastly face looking down at her, as she cowered upon the sofa with her eyes covered by her hands.

“Betrothed to that man say you—betrothed after your promise to me?”

“I deserve your upbraiding——”

“I do not upbraid you—heaven forbid! I have too much sorrow, too much horror in my heart for that. But tell me more, Hesbia; how came this about?”

“I cannot—I cannot—save that papa has suffered severely by the loss of his mines. Sir Cullender proffers him every monetary assistance, and my hand is the price of it. Now leave me, Lennard, for I cannot bear your presence, while your eyes are full only of indignation and contempt, though I feel myself to be well deserving of both.”

“This change is incomprehensible! But oh, Hesbia, before planting the arrow in my heart, you might in mercy have written to me, were it but to take away the poison from its point, though the rankling barb remained. This shock is somewhat sudden! Do you really mean to say that all is at an end—all over between you and me?”

“It must be so, Lennard.”

“Must!”

“Yes—I am powerless.”

“Is all the past, with its tender vows and passionate kisses, no tie between us?”

“None—none!”

She was weeping freely now, and he held her right hand between his own.

“You reject me then?” he whispered with intense sorrow.

“Now and for ever,” replied Hesbia, who had thought over all this beforehand, and had secretly and resolutely schooled herself to brave all rather than risk the life of lost wealth and luxury—the career of thrift or poverty predicted by her father.

“Dare you say so, after all that has been—vows and promises?”

“All are broken or given to another. I have no power, no will of my own, so, dear Lennard, do not torture me.”

He was going, but the words “dear Lennard” made him linger, and in a torrent of eloquence, supplied by his love and desperation, by the charm of her presence, the brevity of his time, and the priceless object at stake, the retention or revival of her regard for him, he pulled her hands from her face, he showered kisses on her eyes and lips; he prayed her in mercy and in the name of God, not to cast him off for ever; not to blight and blast his future life, for he loved her—loved her better than his own soul; he urged her to elope with him, to leave her father’s house that instant; to marry

and sail with him on the morrow; but poor Lennard urged, and she heard him, in vain. She wept bitterly, but steadily refused.

His strong, deep passion, so tender and so true, was it, he thought, to be received thus, by one so shallow, so fickle, and so faithless? Love, it would seem, might be foregone, a heart trampled on, and hopes crushed; but while wealth and luxury were secured and kept, what did a few tears matter, hot and salt though they were!

He dropped her hands, and for a few minutes regarded her gloomily and in silence. Then he said,—

“Had you written and broken to me this sudden change, Hesbia, I might have been spared the horror and grief, and you the shame, of an interview like this. And you are actually engaged to this fellow, Sir Cullender, as he calls himself?”

“I am.”

“Since when came this cool event to pass?”

“Ask me not. What can that item of the affair matter to you, Lennard?”

“Have you weighed well the end of such a love as his may be for you?”

“I have—I have,” said she weeping.

“Oh think what is before you, Hesbia Vere, with such a mate as he.

“As the husband is, the wife is: thou art mated to a clown,  
And the grossness of his nature will have weight to drag thee down.  
He will hold thee, when his passion shall have spent its novel force,  
Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse!’

How often have we read those verses together, Hesbia? What a bleak history will that of your married life be?”

“The happiest woman, like the happiest nation, has no history,” replied Hesbia, quoting a popular author; “we have ever been good friends, Lennard Blair, and as good friends let us part.”

The bitterness of the storm was over, and he could be calm now.

“Then you will not leave your selfish father’s roof and trust to me?” he urged.

“No, Lennard—now and for ever, no! There are others in this world more deserving of you than I—others whose love you may win.”

“True, Hesbia; but none that can ever be to me what you have been,” he replied, with his eyes full of tears, as he again forcibly took her hand; and Hesbia, fearing her own resolution, abruptly requested him to go, to leave her, to release her, and he did so at last, retiring a pace or two and taking up his hat, but slowly and reluctantly.

“Miss Vere,” he said, in a low but piercing

voice, "for the last time I ask you, is all over between us? do you actually cast my heart back upon myself, and finally reject me?"

"Despite myself," she replied, amid a torrent of tears, "I am the promised wife of another—one of whom my papa approves."

"Then be it so! Fool that I have been, *why did I ever love her?*"

He turned away, reeling like a drunken man. He tried to open the door on the side opposite to the handle, and Hesbia had not strength to ring the bell as a warning to the servants in the hall below. She heard him descend the staircase unattended, his steps die away, and the street-door close.

In a burst of passionate sorrow, that triumphed for a time over her own selfishness, Hesbia buried her face in the down cushions of the blue satin fauteuil, exclaiming, as an apology to herself,—

"Oh, if he could only have looked into my heart, he would have seen how I loved him—loved him—though he is too poor to marry!"

Lennard Blair was gone; the closing of the house-door found a terrible echo even in her hollow heart; for she knew his indomitable pride, and that never again would he cross her father's threshold.

Never again!

For a time the pretty sensationalist was touched

—actually cut to the soul; and certainly, with all her impulsiveness, it was seldom that Hesbia Vere was so deeply moved.

However, it was past now, thank Heaven—that worrying interview! it could never be gone over again, though she might get letters full of reproaches and upbraiding; and now she was compelled to hasten to her own room and summon Savonette, for a carriage with visitors had stopped at the front garden-gate, and already Maxwell was ascending the stair with their cards on a silver salver.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## PARTED FOR EVER.

HE was again out into the bright sunshine, and walking away with lagging steps and a heart full of bitterness, sorrow, and rage. In the strength of the first emotion, he cursed the hour in which he first saw Hesbia Vere, so fair in face, so seductive in manner, and yet so false in heart! In his sorrow he felt that he could forgive her yet, and take her to his breast again; and while his rage lasted it would have been a perilous moment had he encountered the pale cadaverous face and Jewish eyes of Sir Cullender Crowdy.

“Hesbia, with her Judas kisses!” he muttered; “shame on her; she is well fitted to be the daughter of such a father—the bride of a truculent Jew!”

Deluded and tricked, as he felt himself to be, Lennard lashed his wrath into fever-heat. Avoiding the city, he strolled further into the fields to the end

that he might talk, mutter, consider, and commune with himself alone, unwatched and unseen. One fact stood vividly before him—that all was over between Hesbia and himself—a fact most difficult of realization; and that, unless summoned by her, no more would he present himself before her, and never again look into those eyes whose smiles in times past haunted him still.

Ever and anon the bitterness of wounded self-esteem rose poignantly in his heart.

“I might have read this girl’s cautious and intriguing character—cautious amid all her external air of impulsiveness—before I threw my heart away, before I wasted my honest love upon her. Who but she,” he asked of himself, “would have conceived in such veiled and curious terms that letter which her rascal cousin must have read—and so correctly, too?”

Memories of her past flirtations, of coquetries he could remember, seemed now to assume colossal proportions in his jealous mind. He could recall visits of Travice Cheatwood long ago, when *he* was denied admittance, or her non-appearance was excused; and thoughts of these and other instances of petty duplicity came back now like oil upon the flames.

Amid the misery of his mind, he imagined and talked to himself matter enough to have filled an orthodox three-volume novel. Of all the heroes of



whom he had ever read, he considered himself the most scurvily used, and now came to the conclusion that however pleasant love-making may be in reality, that the misery of disappointment, rejection or falsehood, was much more entertaining in print than in practice.

Giddily he walked on, and heedless of whither he went.

His hatred and jealousy of the "baronet," who had supplanted him were only equalled by his contempt for Mr. Vere, and—alas! that such should ever be—for his daughter; though with this growing scorn, were much of sorrow and of pity mingled.

Long smouldered wrath and aching doubts all set to sleep of late—the same doubts which tormented him on the night of his journey homeward, months ago—were blazing in his heart again! In fancy, he saw his bright Hesbia in the arms of the snake-like Sir Cullender; he saw them at the theatre, the opera, in the park, on horseback or in the carriage, ever and always by that man's side, while he—he who loved her so!

\* \* \* \* \*

Harrowing were the pictures he drew of Hesbia's future, amid all her wealth a joyless, hopeless lot; and in his wrath he pitied, for he loved her still.

Were all those years and days and hours of loving dalliance gone for ever? More galling was his regret rendered by the conviction that had he pos-

sessed wealth enough to have given him virtue in the eyes of Vere, he and she had not been thus separated, and he had never known her secret selfishness; she had never sold herself, and as he pondered thus, the refrain of the sweet old Scottish song came now to memory:—

“Oh, why should fate sic pleasure have,  
Life’s dearest bonds untwining;  
Or why sae sweet a flower as love  
Depend on *fortune* shining?”

By angry thoughts he strove to nurse himself into a steady and settled emotion of contempt, but failed most signally, for times there were when he thought his heart would break, yet only as some will do that “breakingly live on.”

He thought he would get over it in time; but at present the wrench was sharp and keen; and so completely was his spirit crushed and oppressed, that for the first few hours he cared not what became of him; then there grew in his heart the craving, aching desire to get from Liverpool as fast and far as possible.

Oakwoodlee was gone; he had no dependence now, save on the house of Vere & Co.; and yet to be a subordinate, a clerk, a mere fractional partner therein; or be even an agent for Crowdy (if, as Envoyse hinted, the baronet came to the firm)—

Crowdy, his rival and successful supplanter, was an intolerable prospect and rankled in his soul.

The golden dream of wealth which his father had fostered in him, the superstition of the Charter Stone, and his hopes for the future seemed to be sorely blighted now or blotted out for ever.

A dim hope, a tender longing, a mere human instinct that she might prove true after all—that she might write to him again—lingered in the heart of the poor fellow. Even now—now—a letter full of love and repentance might be waiting for him at his lodgings in the city!

He looked at his watch, it was now three o'clock, four hours had he been wandering in the fields, and already shorn of every ray amid the smoke of Liverpool, the autumnal sun was shining in the westward above the villas of New Brighton and the mouth of the Mersey.

Full of the new hope that inspired him, Lennard turned and hastened homeward, and a cab soon whirled him through the streets to his temporary residence.

“A letter? Yes, there *was* a letter!”

He snatched and tore it open only to toss it on the mantelpiece again. It was merely from old Abel Envoyse, containing his instructions and a letter of credit on the house of Don Juan Leonardo & Co. at Vera Cruz.

So the whole day passed away; darkness set in,

and the lines of gas-lamps came, like fiery garlands in the streets to replace the set sun ; but no message, no letter arrived, and the last hope faded away.

“ Yes, life is over,” thought he bitterly ; but he learned ere long to know that there are overmuch of life and hope too, in the heart at five-and-twenty, to indulge in a conviction so disastrous, save for a time.

He had looked for the last time on a bright and sunny face. The loneliness of his lodgings became insupportable, and heedless of his landlady’s request that he would take some food, he walked forth into the streets feeling himself intensely forsaken amid the vast multitudes that hurried to and fro.

“ Well, well, to-morrow, thank God, shall see me far away from this, and on the broad Atlantic.”

He turned his steps towards Canning Place to post a letter of farewell and of explanation to Feverley.

“ Ah, my good friend,” he had written, “ I now know and feel all that you must have endured in that past time at Monkwood Moat ; but your love was true to you, while mine has been false to me. Yet our stories are the same in effect.”

As he passed up Canning Place he saw the gas-lights gleaming from the windows of the old familiar counting-house, and heard within the merry voices of some of his hard-worked but heedless young chums of the desk and ledger. He knew that in common

courtesy he should bid them all a formal farewell ; but shrunk from the task, lest they should see the misery which he felt was so legibly written in his face ; and so he turned away and trod restlessly on and on, without object, through the streets, though now the night was chilly and the rain was falling heavily.

“Parted for ever !” he muttered ; “ parted for ever !”

Thenceforward the paths of Hesbia and himself in life would be separate—separate as two parallel lines, which can never, never meet.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## A SERPENT IN ANOTHER SKIN.

IN his errant and reckless mood of mind, Lennard had wandered far, so completely immersed in thought that it was not until he found himself in a part of the town with which he was quite unfamiliar and almost in the dark, for the lamps were few and irregular, and the rain pouring heavily, that he thought of a necessity for turning homeward.

A suspicious-looking personage, with his hat drawn over his eyes, and a muffler up to his nose, bluntly inquiring the hour, sharpened Lennard's faculties; but at that moment a church clock striking eleven, relieved him of the necessity of parrying the question, or pulling forth his watch, and being, perhaps, released from all future care for it.

"Eleven, and where am I?" thought he; and as he turned in the direction which he conceived to be homeward, the rain and the wind came with increasing violence against him.

A recess off the street—a species of arcade of bricks and timber—within which he could see the flywire blinds of a tavern of humble, even of mean appearance, lured him to take advantage of the temporary shelter it afforded, amid the gloom of the narrow street, from the chill wind and the drenching rain. He had been there some time before he perceived that another person shared the same asylum—a pale-faced and shivering wretch, apparently the same man in the hat and muffler, who had so recently accosted him. Completely roused and suspicious now, Lennard drew nearer to observe him by the light that streamed from the window of the tavern.

“O-o-oh! it is so jolly cold, isn't it?” said the stranger, shudderingly, while rubbing one hand over the other in the vain attempt to warm them.

Startled by the voice which was familiar to him, Lennard drew still nearer, but kept in shadow while reconnoitring his companion, who was exposed to the full glare of light from the window. Then, despite the broken and sodden hat, the greasy muffler, the worn and tattered surtout buttoned well up to the chin, the trowsers all frayed at the feet—despite the gaunt misery that hollowed the cheeks and bloodshot eyes, in this squalid creature he recognized Travice Cheatwood—and Cheatwood in the same moment recognized him!

In no mood to speak, Lennard gave him a glance

of mingled detestation and contempt, and turned away.

“Perhaps, Mr. Blair, if you knew that for eight-and-forty hours I have scarcely tasted food—” he was beginning.

“Bah! do not appeal to my clemency—you who would have shot me if you could. Begone, sir!”

“This place is as free to me as to you,” said the other, with a little of his old *brusquerie*; “so I’wont ‘begone, sir.’”

“Not if I call in the aid of the police?”

“That is about the last thing you would do,” replied Cheatwood, quietly; “I know you better than you do yourself, perhaps. I shot *at* you, true; but, by Heaven, and may I never taste food—I who am starving and know too well what hunger is—if I meant to do worse than merely to wound—to wing you!”

“A cool admission; but why—what wrong had I ever done you?”

“You had exposed my play at cards, and I was mad——.” His thick unpleasing voice became more husky as he spoke.

“Mad?”

“Yes, with love for my cousin Hesbia.”

This was not quite true, for love had never disturbed the equanimity of Cheatwood’s mind; but to own it served his purpose now, better than he supposed, for as “a fellow feeling makes us wondrous



kind," Lennard was disposed to view the erring Travice with a more compassionate eye.

"I, too, am almost mad," he muttered, "if you knew all. And you are starving?"

"Yes, look at me."

For the entire day no food had passed the lips of Lennard Blair; he had never missed it, but now a frightful thirst was upon him.

"And all the money I gave you, Cheatwood——"

"Is gone—gone beyond recall."

"Come with me," said Lennard, "you shall get some food in this tavern. I have but a few hours to spend in Liverpool, and they may as well be passed here as anywhere else. First tell me, why were you so rash as to venture back to this town?"

"When in Glasgow," replied the unabashed Travice, "I thought that instead of trying a distant colony, I might find, perhaps, 'fresh woods and pastures new,' in Ireland, where I am unknown. I got screwed with your horrid poisonous Scotch whisky, tumbled on board at the Broomielaw; but instead of being for Belfast or the Liffey, she proved to be for Liverpool, so here I am again."

"Then, how about—about the bill of exchange?"

"Somehow, the idea has luckily been set about by Nathan Nab, that I perished in old Vere's mines, so at present I'm pretty safe, being supposed to be defunct. A devil of a mess that affair was underground, and all through my lighting a cigar!"

“Oh, Mr. Cheatwood, think of all those who perished in the pit!”

“Why?” said he, with disdain in his pale green eyes.

“Have you no pity?”

“Is that a pun, my friend?—for if so, it is a deuced bad one. What were they but a parcel of obscure wretches, of whose lives, had they survived, no trace would be remaining fifty years hence, more than of the rats and mice in yonder old store. Bah! such people are foredoomed to oblivion anyway.”

In the shabby coffee-room of the tavern the waiter, after scrutinizing their appearance (and having evident suspicions of Lennard from the equipment and general air of his companion), brought to order a supper of chops and ham and eggs for Travice, with brandy-and-water hot for both, all of which were paid for by Lennard, who had not failed to perceive, above the mantelpiece, a framed and flyblown placard, announcing to all whom it might concern—“Pay on delivery.”

Travice having removed his sodden hat and worsted muffler, placing both within the influence of the fire, the flame of which he roused with the carving-fork—the poker having been removed from motives of prudence or economy—proceeded to eat like a famished ostrich, and to talk with increasing fluency, while a succession of brandies and water hot were ordered, and duly paid for by Lennard.

“Yes, by Jove! I’m low enough now, Blair—seedy as you see. God knows, I’m come down like the man on ‘his last legs,’ from ‘sunshine and champagne to clouds and bottled porter;’ and times there are when, in lieu of a *petit verre* of cognac or La Grande Chartreuse, pure as crystal, I take a draught from the nearest pump as a relish to my dinner—a dinner at which a cat’s-meat-man would turn up his nose, and the cats, too, perhaps would turn up theirs.”

As he ate and talked, his hollow cheeks seemed to expand, and the colour to return to them.

“That thick moustache—well corked I think—alters your appearance greatly,” said Lennard.

“Artistically done— isn’t it? Ah! my fair moustache has changed its cut as well as hue, and I have done for ever with the goatee beard—of Yankee rather than of formal cut. If I could only revive my toggery—but even the pump won’t do that!”

Lennard’s heart was softened—his spirit crushed by what he had undergone with Hesbia; hence he was more enduring to the fallen and degraded Travice Cheatwood.

“Reform if you can, Travice,” said he, after a pause; “you have had many warnings of evil—many chances for good. Take heed while you may.”

“It is too late—too late,” replied the other huskily and half-savagely, with his mouth full.

“Too late for what?”

“To become the prodigal son—to do the ‘repentant sinner’ dodge. I am a deuced deal more likely to continue the ‘frightful example’ the parsons cant about.”

“It is never too late to do good—never too late to see the truth on this side of the grave.”

“Don’t bother in this sententious fashion, and don’t take to preaching, whatever you do. Drink and be jolly! I am as thirsty as the camels in the desert—or was it the Cossacks, we used to read about at school, in Hume’s History of England—or some such book? And so you sail to-morrow for South America?”

“Yes—by the *Valparaiso*.”

“I wish your luck were mine! For, though the affair of old Vere’s bill has partly blown past, I am in danger of arrest for other pranks and misfortunes.”

“Hush—in danger?”

“Yes—hourly,” said Cheatwood, drawing down the discoloured window-blind, lest some face might be peering in from without.

“Such a life must be horrible!”

“Deuced unpleasant anyway. But how do you and the divine party stand—eh? Speak—you look uncommonly low to-night.”

The supper had been removed, and more brandy—double allowances—ordered. Lennard had barely

eaten a morsel, and now the fumes of the potent spirit were mounting into his head. The tavern was lonely and silent; the shabby-looking old waiter sat half-asleep in the bar without the room, wishing the two late visitors in a very warm climate indeed. In the streets no sound was heard but the rain, as it lashed the windows and bubbled in the choked sewers and surging gutters.

In the fulness of his overcharged heart—in his anxiety perhaps to share his secret with another—even with such a creature as this cousin of Hesbia Vere—Lennard was weak enough to relate all that had transpired at the Villa in the forenoon; and a covert gleam of malignant triumph and of satisfaction gradually stole over the face of Travice as he listened.

“You tell me just what I would expect of her,” said he; “she is a case-hardened lot—barely had she left school when she had two engagements, and half a dozen very serious flirtations, so don’t sorrow for her, or fancy that she’ll ‘waste her sweetness’ on old Crowdy. Not a bit of it; I know my gentle cousin better. Why, I was her fool and plaything, when she had no better game in the cover!”

“Don’t talk of her so slightly, Cheatwood. I am sorry I told you.”

Travice laughed hoarsely and loudly, and then added—

“A confounded skittish jade! She’ll lead that

fellow Crowdy a dance yet, or I am much mistaken. I wonder who the lucky swain may be that—that—”

“She will really love?” said Lennard, mournfully.

“Not at all—nothing so stupid.”

“What then?”

“Endow with her worldly goods, after he has put the magic ring on her third finger.”

“Crowdy is to be her husband—did I not say so—Crowdy who is to become a partner in the firm of Vere & Co.,” said Lennard, bitterly and emphatically.

Cheatwood gave a long and angry whistle, for he considered that his uncle had somehow, in the matter of the firm, always used him scurvily.

“You can never know, Cheatwood, how much I loved your cousin! It was for her sake I have ever sought to screen and serve you.”

“Thanks—don’t for a moment imagine that I ever supposed it was for my own sake, or my own virtues. And your constancy, my unhappy Lothario——”

“Will endure for ever!” sighed Lennard, as he drained his glass and sighed.

“For ever is a mighty long time—wish these goes of brandy would last so!”

Acting on the hint Lennard rung the bell, rousing once more the sleepy waiter.

“I could cure you of this love of yours in a year—or a month or two more at furthest.”

“How?”

“By a very simple process if I had the power. I’d marry you to your Dulcinea, and by the time mentioned she would be sure to bolt with some tenor singer or d——d dragoon fellow; or see the error of her ways, perhaps, and leave all her money past you for the conversion of the Spaniards or the Fejee Islanders.”

“The hour is late,” said Lennard, impatiently, for he was in no mood for banter.

“Don’t be in a hurry, pray; it is so jolly comfortable here—so cold and wet without.”

“But consider the waiter.”

“Bother the waiter—Who ever considers such people!”

“Are your lodgings a long way off?”

“Yes; a deuced long way off—so far that I don’t think I shall ever find them,” was the significant reply.

“You have a little money—of course?”

“A little—yes,” said Travice, eyeing wolfishly the portmonnaie which Lennard was holding open; “devilish little indeed!”

“How much, now?” he asked, smiling kindly.

“Pray spare my feelings—don’t inquire. How much is a man likely to have in his purse who has

been starving for eight-and-forty hours?" exclaimed Travice, with a strange but ferocious laugh.

"True—pardon me."

"Go-ahead! 'What's the odds so long as you are happy;' a beautiful axiom that, old fellow, and many a time I've found it answer me."

Lennard slipped a couple of sovereigns, and all his loose silver, into Cheatwood's hand, which closed like a vice upon the welcome cash.

"Thanks—thanks; but one good turn deserves another—you'll have a cigar from me?"

"With pleasure," said the other, but doubtfully, as he had a serious horror of a bad cigar.

"I am not so poor as to be unable to procure a luxury of *this* peculiar kind," said Travice with a smile, the analysis of which was impossible, as he produced (not as he used to do, from a beautiful silver case, but from a well-worn old pocketbook) a couple of cigars and proffered them to Lennard, who bit the end of one and proceeded to light it, and saying—

"Try mine," laid his embossed case on the table.

Travice watched the process of lighting the cigar, and the first few whiffs thereof with more interest than such a simple action seemed to merit.

"You like it?"

"Yes," said Lennard, as Travice accepted one of his.



“It’s a real Luger dita brand—thirty shillings per hundred.”

Lennard made a grimace—for he thought this but a poor recommendation.

“You can have a light from me,” he said.

But this offer Cheatwood hastily declined, preferring one from the gas jet.

“You’ll have a tidy lot of tin to take out with you, I suppose?” he observed in his old slangy way.

“Not much; but I have ample letters of credit on the bank of Vera Cruz, and on the firm of Leonardo and Company.”

“Ah—indeed—and who are they?”

“Spanish merchants. So I shall get on very well, no doubt.”

“And your passage is taken in the *Valparaiso*, you said?”

“Yes—luggage packed at my lodgings—all ready to start after breakfast to-morrow—and then—then, thank Heaven, I shall turn my back on Liverpool,” said Lennard, who began to feel strangely exhilarated and light in the head. Fearing what he might say, for he seemed to have lost control of his tongue, he continued to smoke and listen to Travice.

“A sly, cold-blooded old humbug is Vere,” said the latter; “but he is safe to come to grief, with his Great Pacific and Panama circumbendibus line of steam clippers, or whatever the deuce it is—and his precious baronet, too! even the little Scotch lawyer

prig—what's his name—Dabchick—saw through that fellow! So you like the cigar, eh? they are pretty strong; you won't smoke another," added Travice Cheatwood, with a laugh so mocking, that Lennard, whose faculties were rapidly becoming more and more obscure, and who was striving to excuse himself, and explain that he had been without food since morning; that the brandy or the cigar were hence making him extremely giddy—sick in fact; that the room was whirling round him; that it seemed to be full of mocking Travice Cheatwoods; that he must begone and so forth; striving we say, but in vain, to speak, for his powers of utterance and of volition seemed alike to have left him.

Then he suddenly fell on the floor in a fit of utter stupefaction, the last sound of which he was sensible being the fierce derisive laugh of his companion.

The cigar had been drugged by a powerful narcotic.

## CHAPTER XXV.

## OUTWITTED.

COLD and stiff, benumbed and sick, giddy and utterly bewildered as to his whereabouts, Lennard awoke for a few minutes, and then closing his eyes again, believed that he was dreaming, for the place in which he found himself seemed so strange and unusual in aspect.

A bare little chamber, totally destitute of furniture, with a small and very dirty window, high up in the wall, and well secured inside by bars of iron, between which a network of dusty spiders' webs had been spun and left undisturbed.

He found himself in his shirt and trousers, lying on a hard and bare wooden bench or bed, the pillow of which was like a wooden step, but only some three inches or so in height.

"A strange dream this!" he muttered; but anon the fumes of coarse tobacco, stealing through an open door from an outer chamber, forced upon him

the conviction that it was no dream, and shudderingly he sat up and looked around him.

The loss of Hesbia now rushed to his memory, rousing him to full consciousness.

It seemed as if his sky had grown dark; as if the face of nature had changed, and the old crushing, blinding, and bewildering sensations of yesterday returned in full force! All that had made his course of life so hopeful; all that made wealth and position worth the struggle and attainment had passed away. Before him were doubt and grief; behind a past to be viewed only with regretful contempt and disdain.

But his present plight was more bewildering than all. He knew not what to say, or do, or think. Where was he? Had he gone mad? His blood ran cold at the idea. What strange place, what desolate den was this in which he found himself? How had he come there? had he been tipsy? in a row, or what? and where were his clothes? He strove to recollect; but the memory of last night had passed from him. He only remembered the last glance of Hesbia, and leaving the villa to wander aimlessly in the fields.

“Hollo there!” he exclaimed, on hearing voices and footsteps in the outer chamber.

The door was thrown open, and two men—in one of whom, with disgust and alarm, he recognized an inspector of police—appeared.

“What — stirring at last!” said the latter, a pleasant and jolly-looking man, with a strong Lancashire accent.

“Have I slept here long?” stammered Lennard, who was still giddy and confused.

“Long, by jingo; I should think so! some eighteen hours or so, more or less.”

“Eighteen hours?”

“Yes—by my watch.”

“And it is now—now—” added Lennard, feeling for his own; but he sought it in vain.

“About six in the evening.”

“The evening, and I should have been on board the *Valparaiso* by noon!” he exclaimed, staggering to his feet, only to fall back on the bench, as his limbs refused to support him.

“Take care, my good fellow,” said the inspector, kindly, “or you may hurt yourself. The Doctor said that some time would elapse before you got over the effects of it.”

“*It*—effects of what?”

“The cigar that was found beside you when taken in charge. You’ve got yourself into a fine mess, my lad.”

“Sir, I do not understand you,” said Lennard, haughtily.

“Perhaps so; but how came it all about?”

Lennard’s faculties were still far from clear, so he could not reply to the question.

“Water,” said he, “give me water—for I feel as if dying of thirst.”

Then he drank deeply from a jug of water which was handed to him by a little man who had not yet spoken, but whose sharp ferret-like eyes had been regarding him attentively; and Lennard, though he knew it not, had a black ring round his hard baked lips, while both his eyes were bloodshot and rather wild in expression.

“You must have fallen among bad company last night,” said the inspector, “and got yourself drugged and robbed, it would appear, for when found in a low tavern near this station-house, you had been stripped of every article save your boots and trousers; but the Doctor has seen you twice, and says you shall be all right in a day or two.”

“Travice Cheatwood!” muttered Lennard, through his clenched teeth, and he saw it all now.

The cigar had been drugged! Travice had then, on its taking fully effect, stripped him of hat, coat, vest, and tie, for his own adornment, leaving in their places the old tattered surtout, the dirty muffler, and the sodden wide-awake, girt by a rag of black crape; but Travice had done worse, for he had carried off Lennard’s watch, card- and cigar-cases, his portmonnaie and pocket-book. Even a set of valuable studs had been torn from his shirt-front. An attempt had evidently been made to wrench off

his father's signet-ring. It alone was left; but the finger it encircled was severely bruised and sprained. He had been found thus by the waiter, who immediately summoned the police, so the mystery was a very prosaic affair after all.

"So—so, this has been your doing, scoundrel!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice; "but I may yet overtake you, to your fear and confusion. I have no cause for mistaken mercy now, Mr. Travice Cheatwood!"

"*Who* did you say, sir?" asked the little man, now bustling past the inspector; "did you mention the name of one Travice Cheatwood?"

"I did."

"Then this here has been one of his little games; but is he alive—can it be the same?"

"I have been again the victim of a wretch, compared with whose horrible career that of Thyestes was a joke!"

"I don't know the gent as you're a-speaking of, but this I know—you've been the wictim of one of the most precious rascals in Liverpool, and that's a wide word, as Inspector Smith will tell you. And now that I looks at you, I find we have met before."

"Indeed!" said Inspector Smith suspiciously, as he came a pace nearer Lennard.

"Lor' don't you mind o' *me*, Mr. Blair—Mr. Nathaniel Nab as came to Scotland with a warrant

for the arrest of Travice Cheatwood, on charges of felony, and got flung into an 'ole or hold quarry, along with one Grabbie, in the hexecution of our dooty."

"Who, then, is this person?" asked the inspector.

"Mr. Lennard Blair, of the 'ouse of Were and Co., in the halley off Canning Place. I knows the young gentleman very well, and a very 'spectable young gentleman he is."

"All right—in that case you'll be able to take care of him, see him home, and so forth."

"With pleasure. I read in the papers all about your escape from the coal-mine; but s'help my bob, I thought you had surely had enough of that ere Cheatwood to make you avoid him—keep out of his way at least!"

"I was doing him a kindness, even after all the mischief he had wrought me—a mere act of human charity, for he told me that he was starving—and this is his mode of repayment."

"Knowing his character as you do, why did you condescend to sit at the same table with him?" asked Inspector Smith.

"You may well ask the question; but the night was cold and wet—I was broken in spirit, too—but how singularly constituted is the human heart!"

"Yes, by jingo, a remarkable utensil; but only a force-pump arter all," commented Mr. Nab.



“This is Wednesday, the twenty-fourth of the month—the day on which I am to sail by the *Vaiparaiso* steamer for South America, on important business. I have not a moment to lose,” said Lennard, starting forward; “would you kindly get me a cab that I may drive off at once?”

“Wait a little, please Mr.—what name did you say?”

“Blair,” suggested Nab to the inspector.

“You may yet be required by the police magistrates.”

“Detention may cause the greatest confusion!” urged Lennard, with an emotion of intense annoyance.

“Can’t help that, sir; as Mr. Nab says, ‘duty is duty,’ and mine is to have a memorandum made of this affair, and a note of all you have lost—the number of your watch, for instance, if you know it. Such may readily lead to the arrest of this Travice Cheatwood, for Mr. Nab and other able detectives shall at once be set on his track.”

“I thank you sir,” said Lennard, to whom the delay was intolerable, while the inspector slowly and deliberately entered a list of all the items he had lost with a minute description thereof into an official book; after this a cab was procured, and Lennard, in a fever of impatience, was driven to his lodgings, accompanied by Mr. Nab.

On turning into the familiar street, and arriving

at the equally well-known door, a fresh surprise awaited him, though the emotion of his landlady on seeing him in his present peculiar plight was only equalled by her astonishment in seeing him at all!

“Ain’t you gone, sir—ain’t you sailed?” she exclaimed, with uplifted hands.

“No—do not you see that I have not;” I have come for some clothes.”

“Lawk, sir, at ten this morning your luggage and everything were taken on board the *Valparaiso*.”

“By whom?”

“The gentleman you sent for them.”

“I sent no one,” said Lennard, with a groan, while Mr. Nab gave a low whistle, expressive of surprise or professional satisfaction on hearing of a fresh piece of roguery.

“And is everything of mine gone?” asked Lennard.

“All but some letters you left on the mantelpiece, and which, fortunately, I forgot to give to your friend.”

“Friend, indeed!”

“Lor’ bless me, Mr. Blair, what has happened?” she asked kindly, when Lennard reeled, as if intoxicated towards his old room; and then, leaving him to tell his own story, Mr. Nathaniel Nab plunged

again into the cab, and was driven at a furious speed on an errand of inquiry to the dock where the *Valparaiso* lay, or rather had lain, for by that time she was out of the river, and at sea under sail and steam. "Mr. Lennard Blair was aboard with all his luggage," as he was duly informed by a clerk (at the Shipping Office), who averred that he had seen that gentleman—or one who called himself Blair—select his own berth, and thereafter take a glass of sherry and Angostura bitters with the captain, in the saloon cabin.

"It is as rum a start as I ever come across! so he's off to Werra Crooz!" soliloquised Mr. Nab, as he drove back to Blair's lodgings, and then the whole story was made plain.

At ten that morning a well-dressed gentleman, whose description and personal appearance exactly tallied with those of Mr. Cheatwood, arrived at Lennard's residence, and, showing a card which the landlady at once recognised as one of Lennard's own, announced that he had come with instructions to settle her bills, to give Mr. Blair's kindest regards, and take his luggage to the docks. A cab had been called, and, with all Lennard's property, the enterprising Mr. Cheatwood had gone on board the *Valparaiso* in his name, just as she was slowly steaming out into the fair way, and had sailed with her for South America, leaving all his debts,

duns, and rogueries as a legacy to his friends and country.

“Another jolly swindle is the cabin-fare—thirty-six pounds to South Merricker by the bi-monthly line,” said Mr. Nab, laughing heartily; “he’s given us the slip anyway. S’help my bob, but it’s enough to cure one of smoking this is! By one cigar, in a coal-mine, this fellow blows hissself and every one else up; and by another he floors you outright, and gets a free passage to Werra Crooz, with no end of houtfit and plunder. Brayvo! it’s as good as a play, it is!”

“To you, sir, perhaps it may be,” said Lennard, angrily; “but you must excuse me from seeing it in the light you do.”

To Mr. Nab the whole affair appeared a joke—a clever trick; for every hour of the day he was face to face with roguery. But it was a serious loss for Lennard. Everything he possessed was gone, save his letters of instructions and credit, which yet lay on the mantelpiece, with a torn glove beside them—the tiny kid glove of the pretty foreign girl, whom, in his now jaundiced views of humanity, he believed to be also an impostor, or the aider and abettor of one.

He felt baffled, beaten, and disgusted with the game of life; and, after despatching an almost illegible note to worthy Abel Envoyse, stating all

that had just happened, he retired to bed, for his whole system was yet oppressed by the poisonous nature of the cigar by which he had been deluded.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## OFF THE BELL BUOY AT LAST.

ILL and alone at his lodgings—ill and miserable—Lennard found even the visits of old Abel Envoyse a species of relief. To his more heedless chums of the counting-house he ordered himself to be denied; and no message or letter ever came from the Veres.

Abel had secured a passage for Lennard in the next vessel, the *Golden Dream*, one of those large and magnificent ships of the West Indian and Pacific Company which was to sail on the 10th of the next month for Vera Cruz, *viâ* Port-au-Prince and Kingston.

“It’s all arranged, for I’ve just been to Dale Street; and this time I shall see you on board myself, sir,” added the old man, laughing; and then he gave Lennard much good advice, urging upon him the necessity of cultivating that which he justly termed “an enthusiasm in life.” “You are too

young," he would say, for he shrewdly suspected Lennard's secret, "far too young to have that glorious emotion either blunted or dissipated. You have not come in contact with mankind sufficiently to be so; and in battling with the world, the spirit of enthusiasm should be deepened and strengthened in the hearts of us all!"

Then Lennard would blush for himself as Abel Envoyse spoke, for he knew that the hard-working managing clerk had a sickly wife, a large family, and several poor relations all dependent on his health and exertions for their daily bread; and yet this fine old fellow could preach thus of enthusiasm in life!

Something of his spendthrift father's pride of birth, with other emotions he had learned to deem absurd or behind the age, would come back at times to Lennard's mind; and then he would think, with a revengeful scorn, which, if not soothing, was nearly so, of the cold-blooded *parvenu* and his selfish daughter who had so lured and beguiled him.

A letter came from Feverley, with a package from Steinie and Elsie. The gift of the former—having heard of his illness—was an old hunting-flask of his father's, full of the purest Glenlivet: from the latter came a well-corked bottle of water from the well of the Tor Hill, her own sovereign remedy for all ailments; also, some thick woollen

comforters, stockings, and wristlets, to keep him warm and cosy in the tropics—a quarter whereof Elsie's ideas were somewhat vague and strange.

Mr. Envoyse mentioned incidentally that Miss Vere had gone to London to join her father. "To London—where Crowdy is!" thought Lennard. This quite accounted for her oblivion of him and of the ill-treatment he had received anew from her wretched cousin. She had, indeed, thrown him completely over; and now there were times when he felt himself alone—almost as much alone in spirit as when he had been shut up in the mine, that living grave, with God and the Dead!

In anger and with hatred, he recalled the face and figure of Mr. Vere, jingling, as was his custom, his loose silver, as if the sound thereof was grateful to his ears and to his soul; Vere, whom he now deemed the very incarnation of mammon and of mercantile hypocrisy, combined with an assiduity to business and a regularity of habit unsurpassed by the sun himself; Vere, rigidly wearing black, sleek and smooth-faced to unpleasantness, rather inclined to corpulence, very fair-complexioned, with colourless eyes, and light hair barely tinged with grey. He could picture him now, with his subtle suavity to the supposed wealthy Crowdy, with his bland smile, and his jaw which might have been modelled from that of a tiger-cat, and, like those of a tiger-cat, his large and quick eyes ever watchful and on the alert.



He was a regular attender at church too, especially when at home in Liverpool, where none made louder or more sonorous responses than he.

Of him and "the Crowdy"—as Lennard termed the baronet, in angry derision—there came no news to Mr. Envoyse, not even the most vague rumours now.

"Had I not assigned Oakwoodlee for a further interest in the firm, I might have turned its value to other account," thought Lennard, "or perhaps retained it altogether; but to be their petty neighbour at Blairavon—*her* neighbour—no, no, never! I must realize what I actually possess as soon I may, and get rid for ever of Vere, Crowdy, and Co. But action and change of scene must first be tried—so Vera Cruz be it!"

That his son, by industry and toil—though, oddly enough, Richard Blair despised them both—might regain the wealth and position of which extravagance had deprived him, had ever been, as the old gentleman a thousand times averred, "his earnest prayer—his golden dream;" and Lennard, who, despite his practical experiences, was by education somewhat of a visionary and one who clung to fore-shadowings, deemed it a strange coincidence that the very ship on board of which Envoyse had secured his passage for the second time should be named *The Golden Dream*.

So the time passed on; the 10th of the next

month came, and Lennard found himself on board the great ship and bound for the sunny tropics.

Would he ever return?

At that moment he cared little whether he ever did so. His first desires were action, change, and excitement—to be away from where he was! If he did return, months or years hence, how might Hesbia be situated? A widow, perhaps; there certainly did not seem to be overmuch of life in that cadaverous baronet. Anyway, in the first instance, there seemed to be ninety-nine chances to one that, unless death or disaster occurred, she would, ere the month was out, be the wife of Sir Cullender.

Well, well, ere that came to pass he would be under the Southern Cross.

Even if she did not figure at St. George's, Hanover Square, would *he*, Lennard Blair, marry her now? No, a thousand times no, and he struck the deck with his heel at the thought.

Farewells were passing around him on all sides—farewells that were warm and kind, or earnest and sorrowful, according to the ties that were being broken or the hope of return. His old chums of the office stood on the receding quay waving their hats; little Joe Slobkins, who played the flute and sang sentimental songs; Jemmy Piper, who was so great in private theatricals, and believed himself quite equal, if not superior, to Toole; old Abel Envoyse, with his green goggles, huge gingham, and

yellow bandanna; Smith, Brown, and Jones all were there crying, "God bless you, old fellow—God speed you Blair!" and his heart yearned towards them—poor drudges of the desk and ledger—and he thought of all their well-worn jokes and little enjoyments in which he would share no more; but he knew that all of them would drink to his health and success that night, when he should be far away on the world of waters.

Evening was closing when the great ship was warped out of the wilderness of docks, and began to steam slowly down the broad bosom of the Mersey, with her fore and aft canvas set. They were soon abreast of the Bell Buoy, and when they rounded the Battery and Point of Newbrighton, with all its beautiful villas, Liverpool was sinking amid the haze and mist astern, and the *Golden Dream* was hauled up for the Irish Sea.

On her lofty poop, Lennard remained long watching the flat shore grow fainter and more faint, dimmer and lower, as they glided past lights and headlands, bays and sandbanks.

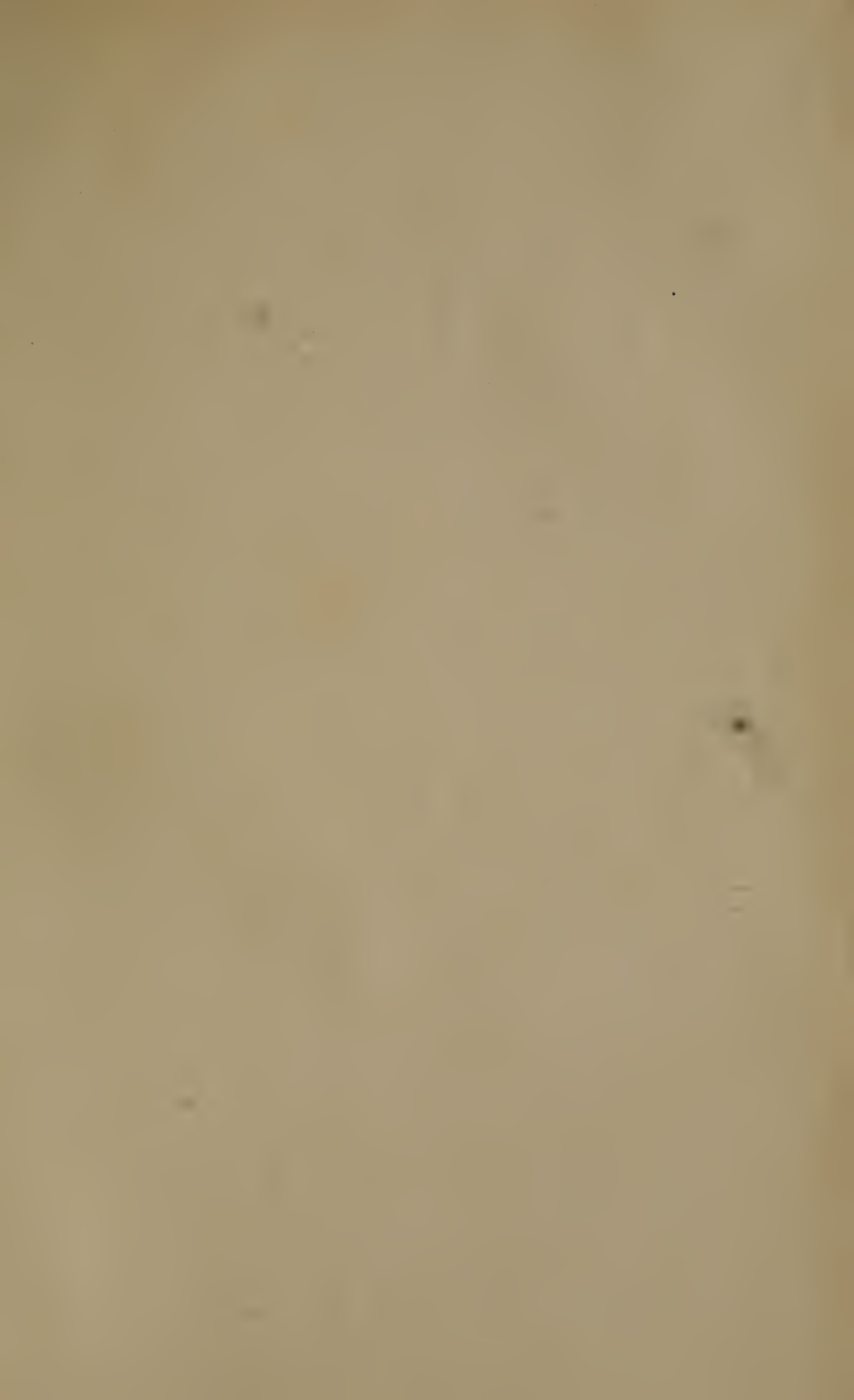
The cordage strained; the bell clanged out at times; the engine-room lights cast weird red gleams aloft on sail and spar and smoking funnel, and now the square canvas was braced sharp up, for the wind and sea were setting hard in shore. The great ocean-steamer heeled over to port, and ever and anon, as she plunged amid the black waves, the

spray flew over her, hissing white and salt to leeward.

“The gloomy night was gathering fast;”

it was already stormy and cloudy in aspect; yet Lennard continued to linger on the poop, as he preferred it to the crowded and brilliantly-lighted saloon—crowded with strange people, strange faces and voices, though with many of these he would become familiar enough on the morrow; and when ultimately he sought his berth and turned in for the night, the revolving lights that twinkled at the horizon, were those of the rugged and precipitous island known as the Calf of Man; and they then bore north and by west, as the *Golden Dream* flew through the Irish Sea.

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END OF VOLUME SECOND.







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