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AS AVON FLOWS.

By HENRY SCOTT VINCE.

17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST  
NEW YORK.

George Munro

PUBLISHER

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# AS AVON FLOWS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### MR. ABEL BOMPAS SELLS A HOUSE, AND THE PURCHASER PUZZLES A TOWN.

THE town of Avonham in Marlshire was having a day-sleep.

This was common enough to the place; when the sun was fiercely beating down on the red roofs and pointed gables, blistering the painted beams of the wood-frame houses, bleaching the well-washed pavement, and the cobble stones of the old market-place, touching up the face of the market clock with a blaze of glaring gold, and making of the motionless weather-cock on the church-steeple a burning arrow pointing to the hills from which no breezes came—when it drove the masterless curs into doorways and under garden bushes, and set prowling cats a-nodding in sight of their natural foes, when it fairly beat the inhabitants from the street, then Avonham used to pull down its blinds and indulge in a day-sleep. From the sixteen-arched bridge that spanned its river, to the Bear Hotel, that seemed to close in the end of the town, and keep a good look out down the road for any customer approaching, no one was astir in the street. Occasionally a white-aproned shirt-sleeved tradesman came to the door of his shop and gazed listlessly up and down, then yawning went back to his tradeless counter, and nodded himself to sleep again; the hum of the great mill-wheel at the bridge alone broke the silence, and the town seemed an appanage of the Sleeping Palace, waiting for the prince to come.

It was a pleasant town enough as it lay in the blazing June sun. Planted in a valley, with tree-crowned hills at its western end, and watered by the pretty Avon, it stood in the midst of a smiling land of plenty. Around it and bounded only by the wooded hills on one side, and the great chalk hills of the downs to its east, were meadows rich with waving grass, in which the feeding kine stood knee deep. The river breaking from the chalk was clear as crystal, and sparkled through the valley in generous, ever-full stream that turned countless wheels and rushed over little weirs with pleasant plash, little weirs at the foot of which lurked speckled trout and bold-biting perch; at the town it flashed under a sixteen-arched bridge, built by some ancient abbot of the priory whose ruins stood just outside the town, and whose Hospitium was still the front of the old Bear Hotel. From this bridge to the hotel ran the great broad street which formed the principal portion of the town; on the right were the market-place and town hall, on the left the two local banks and the residences of

the magnates, the successful banker, the respected gray-headed solicitor, and the flourishing old fashioned country doctor. Then, at the top of the town, stood the old Bear, snuggest and coziest of inns, with large yard still echoing to the feet of post-horses and coach-horses, and the spanking tits that drew the traps of the dashing commercial travelers, who still drove their journey through pleasant Marlshire, for there was no railway that had reached Avonham, and the nearest station was five miles away.

Now the Bear, standing at the top of the town, and having been the ancient gate-house of the great abbey, had blocked the straight street up, and, as the place had grown in size, had caused the overflow of population to betake itself to two side streets running left and right of it: one past the church, and round by a small stream that joined the Avon here, and the other branching down to the river itself. At the head of one of these streets stood the splendid Abbey Church of St. Hildegarde's, with its spacious church-yard, crossed by a paved walk leading to the street in question, which it reached by steps. Beyond this church-yard were the Grammar School, and some houses of the better class, and backing on to the little Marden were the grounds of the Priory House. This was a large and imposing mansion, with finely wooded grounds concealed from public view by high walls. In the other side street were both private houses and shops, together with some offices and a brewery; and lower down, and nearer the river, stood a neat modern villa, in some grounds which ran to the Avon.

One of the houses of this street, called from its direction, South Street, was a combination of private house and office, and in one of the rooms of this house on this particular hot day sat a highly respectable family, consisting of father, mother, and three pretty daughters, engaged in discussing the penultimate course of an English middle-class mid-day dinner. The buxom, smiling matron was seated opposite a smoking pudding, of which she had transferred a slice to a plate; she was preparing to pass it to her husband, who sat at the head of the table, when that worthy man stayed the progress of the dainty with an arresting wave of the hand.

"I thank you, Louisa, but I will not take any."

"Not take any, Abel?"

"No pudding, papa?"

"No, Louisa; no, my children. Pudding, my dears—pudding is—(no more ale, thank you, Jane)—is—as I may say, a—kind of pro-vi-sion for the mind—I mean for the body—yes, the body—it is the body that is benefited by the pudding, but the mind, my dears, the mind must work—must work *with* the body."

"Well, papa, what has that to do with the pudding?"

"This, my dears—to cloy—or, as some authorities (from whom I entirely disagree) would say, to *clog*—to clog or cloy the body is a—metaphysically speaking—to cloy or clog the brain; and the brain needs not that—shall I say clogment? yes, clogment—or rather cloyment; yes, certainly, cloyment. So that if (as would be the case to-day were I not firm) I cloy—cloy is *certainly* the better word—I cloy the brain by this pudding—then it will follow, as the night the day, as I believe is remarked by Shakespeare—that the brain and the mind, being cloyed by pudding, will not be in—ah—apposition, may

I say? and they will not work together. I make myself clear, my dears, I hope?"

"My dear papa, is your brain called upon for any very extraordinary effort to-day?"

"My dears, I may, without violation of any of the more delicate secrets of my profession of house and estate agent and auctioneer mention that the elegant and convenient villa residence known as the Coombes, together with the modern and handsome furniture—"

"My dear Abel, we have all read the bill—what of the Coombes?"

"My dear Louisa—I am coming to it—I have received from Messrs. Golding and West, whose names as the—ah—solicitors to the estate, are doubtless familiar to you—"

"Yes, papa, well?"

"An intimation, my dears, that I shall to-day be waited upon by a gentleman who will purchase the property as it stands."

"Furniture and all?"

"Furniture and all."

"What is his name, Abel?"

"My dear, I am not in possession of it. I am to meet him, or rather he is to call upon me here, at two precisely, and as it wants but five minutes of the appointed hour, and as you are aware that anything approaching unpunctuality is most repugnant to me, I will—ah—retire to the office at once and await him."

Mr. Abel Bompas rose, puddingless and imposing, and left the room, where, as soon as his august back was turned, there arose the usual Babel of speculation and wonder, as to the coming stranger and his intended purchase. For the Coombes was nearly opposite Mr. Bompas's house, and of course a great deal depended, so thought the misses Bompas, upon whether the new-comer were married or single, had daughters or sons in the family, were hospitable or not; in fact, whether they were going to have as neighbors "nice" people or the reverse.

Not that the ladies of our friend Mr. Abel Bompas were more curious than the position warranted. For you shall walk many miles, my susceptible young bachelor friend, before you shall find three prettier roses clustered on one stem than Miss Adetaide, Miss Lucy, and Miss Louisa, I promise you. Rosy with health, frank and open, as sparkling as the stream on which they rowed their pretty skiff, and as breezy as the downs over which they daily galloped, they were of the fairest and best type of good, honest, English girls. And if you place these three young ladies in a dull old country town, where a concert is a dissipation, and a yeomanry ball a delirium of delight, where the same "young men" are seen sporting themselves in the same "best clothes" Sunday after Sunday, in an age before Volunteers, and when lawn-tennis was not; and then confront them with the prospect of fresh comers, residing in a house nearly opposite, which has been untenanted for eight months, and whose last occupant, Major Currie, H.E.I.C.S., never showed, on account of congested liver, and was as yellow as a haddock and as touchy as a squib, I think you will allow that the conversation of the young ladies was perfectly natural, and that even if Mrs. Bompas herself gave way to the prevailing feeling, and sur-

mised and hoped as eagerly as her daughters, the good lady in no way overstepped the undoubted privileges of a true British matron.

Meanwhile, the head of the family crossed the hall, with which high-sounding title a three-feet-nine passage was dignified, and opened the door of a small square room, fitted with all the comfortless austerities of counting-house furniture, and bearing on its wire blinds the title and description of its owner, who seated himself in an arm-chair, behind an appallingly stubborn table-desk, and, opening a tremendous volume, in which no man could have written whilst seated, awaited the coming of his expected visitor.

Mr. Bompas was by no means an ill-looking house and estate agent. Prosperity and complacency had so stamped their pleasing impressions on his broad and fresh-colored face that even had not his features of themselves been regular in outline he would have been redeemed from anything approaching ugliness; but they were, if not classically, at least regularly, cut; his forehead was ample, his chin round and cleanly shaven, his hair was carefully arranged, and his whiskers—well, they were British; and what is more respectable *per se* than the British whisker? His business had been transmitted to him by his father, and was an easy and pleasant one; he had married a pretty Marlshire lass, the daughter of a well-to-do corn-dealer, who had amply dowered his only child, and he himself had been honestly and patiently adding to his wealth for years, until it was pretty well known in Marlshire that Mr. Bompas of Avonham, the leading auctioneer and estate agent of the county, a man who was employed and trusted by all the family solicitors around, was one of the warmest men of even that shire of flourishing graziers, prosperous cheese factors and brewers with purses deep. Twice had he filled the office of mayor of his native town of Avonham with a Roman consul kind of dignity which had filled the neighboring municipalities with envy, and his own corporation with awe. His movements were elephantinely delicate and his conversation was slow and stately to a degree, being modeled, indeed, upon the speeches of those exponents of the oratory of the Georgian era, for the choicest examples of whose glowing and burning words the reader is referred to “Enfield’s Speaker.”

From the main street of Avonham a door communicated with Mr. Bompas’s offices, and punctually as the clock of St. Hildegarde’s struck two, it opened and admitted a stranger. The clerk in the outer office, who was an articulated pupil of Mr. Bompas, slid from the dizzy height of a most uncompromising office-stool and faced the new-comer.

“I am here by appointment with Mr. Bompas; is he in?”

“The gentleman about the Coombes, I believe,” said the smiling youth, anxious to have the first portion of a conversation with a prospective buyer of a house, “furniture and all.”

The stranger immediately routed the astonished pupil by frowning and replying:

“I should think, my son, that if you hunted through this town, you’d find about enough churches and chapels to keep your beliefs going hard without pushing your creeds into business hours. If Mr. Bompas isn’t in, say so. I’m not here to listen to your Belief. It’s not a catechism class.”

The artiled pupil opened his eyes and faintly gasped. The unexpected reply had fairly taken away his breath. The farmers and dealers who came into the office were glad enough to stay and lightly chat with Mr. Adolphus Carter, the son of a Marlshire vicar; the solicitors were always friendly, and, knowing his father, and his prospects, extended to him the right hand of fellowship, comparative friendship, that is to say; to the clerks of other callings Mr. Carter was ineffably condescending and sometimes overbearing, regarding only solicitors' artiled pupils and bank cashiers as anything like his equals, and here was a perfect stranger answering his little surmise, made in his liveliest manner, that which he reserved for principals alone, as shortly and sternly as he, Adolphus, would have answered a grocer's boy who ventured to ask him of his health. It was his first snub in that office, and when he had recovered his wits, which had suffered rudely from the shock, he registered the assailant as a deadly enemy on whom consummate vengeance *must* one day surely fall, before answering in a feeble voice, and with every trace of his usual vivacity eliminated:

"Mr. Bompas is in, sir; please to walk in."

He was so completely crushed that although he had been burning all the morning to know the name of the intended purchaser of the Coombes, he did not now ask it, but, opening the door of Mr. Bompas's inner private office, ushered him in. Then he returned to his desk, clutched his ruler convulsively, and seemed as totally overwhelmed by the encounter as though he had been worsted by a waterspout.

He, who had temporarily obliterated this aspiring youth, and who now stood in the presence of the great Mr. Bompas himself, was a young man of about thirty years of age, of fair complexion, with a mustache of that sandy shade which, albeit it betokens Anglo-Danish blood, is so much despised of maidens at first sight: his chestnut hair was short, his eyes were very blue and bright, and saved his face from downright plainness. His form was not cast in a particularly elegant mold, nor were his hands and feet especially suggestive of high-born rank, but he was squarely and muscularly built, if anything a little too broad for his medium height, his arms long, and his hands large. In one hand he carried a pair of tanned driving gloves, in the other a stout stick of some foreign wood. He was quietly and well-dressed in dark clothes, which assorted well with his calm and apparently imperturbable manner. He bowed to Mr. Bompas, who rose to meet him, and at once accosted that gentleman, speaking with an accent not to be identified as belonging to any particular outlying portion of the Anglo-Saxon-speaking race, but suggestive of a long residence somewhere beyond sea.

"You've the selling of that house over yonder, Mr. Bompas."

"The Coombes, my dear sir—the Coombes. I have. Pray be seated. I anticipated your arrival from a communication I received from my esteemed—a—correspondents, Messrs. Golding and West."

"Yes, they told me the price at which you would sell the house and land, but they couldn't say anything about the furniture; said they thought there was to be a sale. Is that so?"

"It was so intended, sir, but the lady who owns—"

"Lady! oh, a lady's the owner."

“Mrs. Stanhope, a widow lady, is the owner, Mr.—”

“Galbraith—that’s my name.”

“Mr. Galbraith—Mrs. Stanhope had instructed me to sell by auction, and I had, with a view to that step, prepared a schedule or inventory from which I should, in due course, have compiled a catalogue as is—ah—customary at such sales. But on receipt of information as to your intended interview, I—ah—suspended operations pending your arrival.”

Mr. Bompas appeared greatly satisfied with the ring of this speech, for he softly murmured the last few words over again to himself.

“Well, I like the house and grounds, and the furniture will do for a bachelor; what is the total price for everything, just as it stands?”

“The house you are aware is—”

“Sixteen hundred pounds I was told, but I want a lump sum for the whole concern.”

“I am not prepared as yet to give a decided answer on that point; indeed I am not quite—ah—authorized to do so, my dear sir, but—”

“Does this lady, Mrs.—”

“Stanhope.”

“Stanhope, live here?”

“She resides, my dear sir, not three hundred yards from where we are now sitting.”

“Can you see her to-day?”

“At once, at once, if you wish it.”

“Very well then, Mr. Bompas, you will find me at the Bear Hotel, where I am staying, and if you will go and see her I will await your answer there. Tell her, please, that I will give her two thousand pounds—pounds mind, not guineas—that coin is out of circulation—for the house, furniture, and fittings, just as it stands.”

“Would you not—ah—prefer to see the furniture and fittings before making an offer, which you seem to wish to be a—ah—definite, and—ah—decisive one?”

“Seen ’em, sir, seen ’em; I walked in there at six o’clock this morning, and went all over the house.”

“Without an order, my dear sir?” exclaimed Mr. Bompas (Galbraith was certainly fated to astonish house agents that day), “without my written order?”

“Just that,” replied the other, coolly, “I saw an old woman inside straightening things, and I went over the house under her guidance.”

Mr. Bompas had no words with which to express his horror at this breach of professional routine; he stared at his visitor; but made no reply.

“I’ll wait at the Bear for two hours for Mrs. Stanhooks—”

“Stanhope, my dear sir, Stanhope.”

“Stanhope’s answer—Good-day, sir!”

Mr. Bompas returned the salutation and courteously escorted the stranger to the outer door, passing through the front office where Mr. Carter, still more or less under the waterspout influence, glared fiercely at his foe, and then, without noticing his pupil, betook himself slowly and pensively to his private room. His face wore a puz-

zled expression; the coolness with which Galbraith had made his offer, and the—to him—unparalleled incident of the morning visit to the house, a visit paid when he who should have been all powerful in the matter was comfortably slumbering, had somewhat disturbed his mind, and it was with some slight perturbation and a little abatement of his usual dignity that he sought once more the bosom of his family.

He paused a moment at the door before opening it, and softly enumerated to himself the heads of his astonishment.

“He—ah—walks over the house without my written order—strange!

“He—ah—seems most uncertain about Mrs. Stanhope’s name—curious!

“And he—ah—makes an offer for a house and—ah—furniture as though it were for a—ah—cow! a *cow* in the market-place!—*a most extraordinary young man!*”

Another few moments were spent with his hand upon the handle of the door of his private room, he then slowly and softly turned, and, instead of entering, took his hat from a peg and sallied forth on his errand.

Emerging from South Street, into the part of the High Street immediately in front of the Bear, Mr. Bompas perceived his late visitor strolling carelessly across the path of the church-yard and pausing occasionally to peruse some inscription or observe some date. At the door of the Bear, lounged Mr. Pinniffer, the landlord, who apparently seemed no less interested in the figure in the church-yard than Mr. Bompas. This latter worthy was not long in perceiving the direction of the landlord’s gaze, and suddenly altering his route walked over to the door of the Bear. Many a time had his portly form filled the chair at public dinners at the Bear, many church-warden’s, waywarden’s, charity, auditor’s accounts had been made up there after cold lunch, passed over punch, and voted correct at a dinner. He and Mr. Pinniffer were old cronies, for there was not a more “responsible” man in Avonham, not even excepting Mr. Bompas himself, than Mr. George Pinniffer, late Quartermaster-Sergeant of Her Majesty’s Royal Marlshire Fusileers, and now mine host of the Bear Hotel of his native town, whither he had retired with a good conduct pension, a couple of medals, and many honorable scars.

“Ter’ble hot, Mr. Bompas, ter’ble hot *to* be sure, sir,” said he, removing his stalwart form from the doorway, and welcoming Mr. Bompas in with a wave of the hand. “I was a-thinking of seeing you this morning; but I had got my Marlham brewer here, and you know I must see the malt fairly cast, lest the beer don’t turn out like the last lot. But if you’ll step into my bar-parlor—there’s not a soul there, sir—I’ll bring you in the rent, and take a receipt over as good a glass of cold punch as ever you’ve had here, sir, and *that* won’t be a bad one, I’ll pound it!”

Mr. Bompas assented to the punch much in the manner of Jove accepting nectar, and the pair repaired to a cozy snuggerly behind the bar where, after a short comparison of papers, and an exchange of bank-notes, coin, and receipts, the two sat down to their punch

solemnly and sedately, as befitted men who had just discharged an important portion of the business of life.

It having been mutually agreed that the weather was fine, that the hay promised well, and that most of it would be in in a week, if the weather held, Mr. Bompas turned the conversation slowly and deliberately to the stranger. Mr. Pinniffer showed himself much interested in the fact that his unknown customer was a man of substance and house-buying ability, and then confessed that although he (Pinniffer) had seen many men and many cities, he had never in his life seen a cooler, offer-handed gentleman than the subject of their discourse, seen by both of them through the little window of the bar-parlor, standing in front of the church-yard gate, cigar in mouth, and gazing down the silent and glaring street.

“He came over in the omnibus last evening about eight. He walked straight in and called for a pint o’ champagne; had it put into a clean pewter and took it off like a—like—a—” Mr. Pinniffer hesitated a moment, and then rushing at his simile, said, “like a marine.” He paused and sipped his punch before resuming.

“He sent his portmanteau up to his room and stood at the door a bit, and then he turns round and, says he, ‘Landlord,’ says he. ‘Yes, sir,’ I says. ‘Landlord,’ says he, ‘are there any houses to let in this place?’ Well, Mr. Bompas, of course I told him about the Coombes and Mr. Miller’s little cottage, and told him your name, and where you lived and that, and then he turned round and says, ‘ah!’ he says, ‘I like the look of the town; get me some supper at nine, and I’ll look at the houses to-morrow.’ With that he walks off, comes back at nine o’clock, has his supper and sits in the corner of the smoke-room for the rest of the evening and never says a word, points to his glass when he wants it filled, and never says a word. Puzzled us all, sir, all of us, none of us knew what to make of him at all; quiet enough, of course, and seems a nice gen’elmanly sort enough, but no company, not sociable like, you know, Mr. Bompas.”

Mr. Bompas acquiesced in this view, and, premising that the secrets of his profession were of peculiar solemnity and weight, gave the history of his morning’s interview with the stranger.

“There, now!” said Mr. Pinniffer, “look at that now! dear, dear; well, to be sure, he *is* a ter’ble cool gen’elman, surely.”

Mr. Bompas, having finished his punch, rose, shook his head solemnly and dubiously, and bidding farewell to the landlord, went on his way to Mrs. Stanhope. Crossing the church-yard he passed Galbraith, who was smoking serenely, and who seemed quite oblivious of his existence, in spite of the labored and stately salutation with which the ex-mayor deigned to favor a prospective townsman, a circumstance which, for the third time that day, caused the worthy man much inward reflection. He pursued his way, however, in his usual imposing manner, and, having to deal with an ordinary and well-known client, was able to effect his business without any other mental shock. After a somewhat long consultation, Mr. Bompas returned to the Bear, and finding Mr. Galbraith standing on the steps and still gazing down the street, was able to inform him that his offer had been accepted, and that only the necessary formalities had to be gone through. He was referred, to

his great astonishment, to the very firm in London who acted as Mrs. Stanhope's solicitors, and in a few days the Coombes, which had been empty long enough to be an interesting topic of Avonham tea-table talk, was occupied by the mysterious young man, who added yet more to the wonder of the town by bringing with him as his whole apparent household only one servant, that servant a man, and that man a stalwart negro with great filed teeth.

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## CHAPTER II.

### GUESTS AT THE PRIORY HOUSE.

MRS. STANHOPE, of the Priory House, was admittedly the leader of fashion and society in Avonham. Her sway was undisputed, and her power apparently limitless. There were two sections of society in Avonham, and there was a Pariah Section which was not in society at all. There was no neutral ground; to one of the coteries every one was bound to belong. True, the exigencies of life sometimes made it necessary that certain persons, by their position, were received by both the society sections, but it was only in business hours that there was familiarity—it ceased when St. Hildegard's struck four, and the professional business of Avonham was over. And there was also one thing which terribly exercised the minds of Mrs. Stanhope and her immediate surroundings, and that was the position in society of the mayor.

Indeed it *was* embarrassing. For the mayor, by virtue of his office, was of course the leader of all the public doings in Avonham, and on him devolved the reception of any traveling great-nesses who might be visiting the neighborhood. He it was through whom was given that great moral support which Avonham has always extended to the Crown, and which the occupants of the throne have esteemed so highly, ever since the days of Queen Mary, who gave the town its charter. In the town hall was the bust of Sir Jabez Potts, who, on being intrusted with an address to George III., on the occasion of the great defeat of the French by Lord Howe in 1794, had been knighted by the king, to his great elation and to the pride and glory of Avonham, of which town he was a cloth-weaver. What had happened before might happen again, and each succeeding mayor of Avonham felt, as he buckled on the sword of office and donned the robes of State, that he too might kneel before his sovereign and after a few sweet and ennobling words might rise and return to his townfolk and family a full-blown doughty knight.

On the other hand, although at present the state of mayoralty in Avonham was satisfactory so far as the position of the occupier of the civic throne was concerned, he being a solicitor and having succeeded Mr. Bompas who was presentable in "society," yet there were times when the gentility had been terribly puzzled as to how to receive a mayor who was a butcher, and stood at his door with his blue apron on, and left the slaughter-house for the town council, and exchanged the chopping-block for the chair. And then

again, although the mayor might be tolerated in his official robes and with the handsome chain of office round his neck, yet, alas! there was one appalling fact to consider, which was that there was neither chain nor scarlet robe of office wherewith to deck the mayoress. So it came to pass that society which, as we all know, has its immense tasks forced upon, and not sought by it, had to suffer greatly in reconciling what was due to itself with what was due to the town. Such sacrifices were, however, made with that patience and courage which has generally characterized all martyrdom; and the town and its gentility managed to work together amicably and for the interests of both.

There was a second section of society, respectable in its way, larger than the Gentility section, and in reality the mainstay of Avonham: from this class came more of the mayors than from the "upper-crust," as the youth of the second section termed it. It had no regular leader, the ladies being less amenable to the rule of one person than the followers of Mrs. Stanhope. It had one link and one link only that bound it socially with the first class, and that was the church and its affairs. But it was as exclusive toward its inferiors as if it had been the highest society in the land; stolid respectability was its great characteristic, its female members inhaunted much tea, its males had their club at which they consumed much tobacco, settled the affairs of the country-side with solemnity, and observed toward the Crown, the Church, and the Constitution, that reverence and loyalty for which the little town had long been noted, but into which reverence a most curious anomaly crept, which was that, though devotedly Protestant and unfeignedly Evangelical, it yet respected and admired, just as most other Protestant communities detested and abhorred, the memory of pastor-roasting Mary, from whom the place held, as we said before, the charter which made it a town.

We mention the Pariah section as cautiously as possible and with this saving clause for it, that it consisted in a great measure of youths, who, not having yet acquired any reverence for the respectabilities, had not become attached to either party, but openly held aloof from both. These were generally reconciled to one of the sections by the face and form of some female member, whose influence induced the youth, first to neglect his old companions and pursuits, next to hover about the outskirts of the section which held his charmer, and finally, having attained the object of his affections in the parish church, to settle down respectably and quietly in the station of Avonham life to which the young lady called him. There were sometimes instances of an inverse working of this rule, when a youthful member of one of the great parties, having been rejected by a lady, left his party in desperation and joined the ranks of the Pariahs, but such instances were rare, and the Pariahs, who were not at all bad Pariahs, but some of the liveliest youths of the place, were not fond of encouraging these deserters, but more often insisted, kindly and firmly, in being suffered to go their own way alone. Many of these wild blades were in the habit of making excursions to Bristol and Bath for their pleasure, rejecting the tea-tables of the Avonham matrons and the long pipes of the fathers of the town, and some had even penetrated to the arcana of London

itself, and spoke familiarly to awe-stricken audiences of the delights of Cremorne and the chops of the Cheshire Cheese.

But neither tradesmen nor Pariahs found their way inside the Priory House gates on the occasion of those special day-parties which Mrs. Stanhope occasionally gave on the smooth-shaven lawn of her beautiful grounds. And to-day the notabilities of Avonham were assembled there to welcome no smaller a luminary than the Right Rev. the Bishop of the Diocese. Seated in the most comfortable of arm-chairs under the shadiest of trees, the worthy father was chatting smoothly and mellifluously with his fair hostess. On various parts of the lawn, but for the most part under the sheltering trees, for the day was hot, were the heads of the gentility party of both sexes. A little more decorum than even this decorous society was in the habit of expressing was assumed for the occasion and in deference to the presence among them; still there was no lack of life and even mild gayety in the picture. The bishop himself was a well-made portly man, who was not at all averse to the good things of this world and certainly not an unnecessarily stern precisian, and he looked with evidently pleased eyes at the groups on the lawn before him. Standing beside his lordship and also in conversation with his hostess was Sir Headingly Cann, Bart., Member of Parliament for Avonham, which he represented entirely to the satisfaction of his constituents who had not troubled themselves or him with a contested election for eighteen years; a tall, fresh-colored, good-looking English gentleman with all the precise and perhaps pedantic courtesy of the good old school.

A little distance from this group, an antique old beau, with a most wonderful assumption of youth, was chatting the smallest of small-talk with the three pretty daughters of Mr. Bompas and with their mamma, while, some paces from them, Mr. Bompas himself and Mr. Boldham, the banker, were discussing some weighty point of finance, which lifted them awhile from the surrounding gayety, and had involved them in a stream of figures so inexplicably dense that it made one hot to listen, for which reason, probably, they were entirely alone.

Regarding the antique beau, whose name was Trumphy, and who was the delight of all the maiden ladies of Avonham, was a young fellow of about twenty six, who was leaning against the pillar of a veranda and casting glances of excessive scorn from a pair of very black eyes upon the unconscious little gentleman, who was smirking and bowing and keeping up a string of extravagant compliments, and who was firmly persuaded of his ability to hold entranced all the pretty maidens at the party, but who was at present especially devoting himself to the undoubted belle of them all, Miss Adelaide Bompas, whom we have already described as a very pretty, merry English lassie. There seemed to be no reason why Mr. Alfred Shelman should not have joined that or any other group that afternoon, but he chose rather to stand by the veranda and scowl at little Mr. Trumphy in a bellicose and unpleasant manner. For he had not a pleasing expression, this black-haired, black-whiskered black-eyed, dark-complexioned young man, and little white patches came and went round his thin lips and nostrils in a manner not good to look upon. He was aroused from his meditation by a voice ac-

costing him—a lazy, drawling voice, a voice that seemed to express half-sloth, half-contempt, and that appeared to have a most pleasing effect on the person who possessed it, and a most irritating one upon him who heard.

“Going to sleep, Shelman, or planning an escape from this outdoor oven, eh?”

“What do you mean?” said Shelman with a start, “planning what? going where?”

“Oh, I see,” drawled the other, “it’s the Bompas girls—Gad, I haven’t seen ’em for an age. Been in London, you know, with uncle. I’ll go and chat with ’em. See you presently, perhaps,” and the young fellow strolled off and joined Mr. Trumphy and his audience.

He was not so morose as Shelman, but had an indolent, sleepy sort of face, which, in its pink and whiteness, its regularity and its want of expression, looked like the face of a doll. He was curled and ringed and scented, and on the best terms with himself, and was as conceited a piece of vanity as any in Marlshire. He affected cynicism and was really a Sybarite, professed contempt for field sports for want of courage to partake of them, and for sheer lack of energy to face any difficulty, expressed himself careless as to the events of life, taking care, however, to make his life at the same time as easy and comfortable as possible, having that pleasant disregard for the feelings of other people which generally accompanies those whose only thought is to please themselves. He was the nephew and heir of Sir Headingly Cann, of whose sister, now dead, he was the only child. Such was Walter Rivers, with whom our history will have much to do.

Mr. Trumphy was visibly disturbed by the advent of this gilded youth. For surely it is not the sweetest portion of the experiences of amorous age when youth comes in and beauty turns away toward it. He had had his cheery little old-world gossip, had paid his well-worn little compliments and earned his meed of praise, having really amused his good-natured hearers, and lo! his triumph was to depart at the first words of the good-looking boy who was sauntering toward them. But he had reckoned without his host; the young ladies certainly bowed, but immediately cast little meaning glances at one another; buxom Mrs. Bompas was the only one who took the outstretched hand, but a cloud passed over her merry face as she did so, and Mr. Trumphy could see with evident delight that the visitor was not more welcome to the ladies than to him. He recovered his vivacity as quickly as he had lost it, assumed his old buckish demeanor, and seemed to preen himself like an amiable old swan.

“Good-day, Mrs. Bompas, good-day, ladies; how d’ye do, Mr. Trumphy; bless me, what an age it seems since I saw you. I was just telling Alf Shelman that—”

“I thought he looked bored and cross about something,” said Miss Adelaide.

“Now, Miss Adelaide, do let a fellow alone; isn’t she too bad, Mrs. Bompas?” Mrs. Bompas, who had given downright Adelaide a timorous warning glance, responded only by an uneasy smile. “You really are so very terrible, Miss Adelaide, that I’m quite afraid of you.”

“ Complimentary, Mr. Rivers, I must say, to one of our sex. And pray, where have you been this age as you call it? London, I suppose?”

“ Yes, Miss Adelaide, London it is, with uncle, you know, and helping him in that awful Parliamentary work, you know. I’m quite knocked up, now, really, I am; I want some country air and quiet, I really do. I can’t make out how it is fellows go on year after year at the pace they do in London. I expect you do, Mr. Trumphy, begad, I’ve heard you used to do it yourself, but I can’t stand it. It knocks me up, you know. I like the country. I like quiet and peace and all that sort of thing, so I persuaded uncle to come down here for a bit of a rest; and here we are.”

“ Yes, and now you *are* here,” said Mr. Trumphy, with a roguish look at the girls, “ now you *are* here, Mr. Rivers, for goodness’ sake *do* keep quiet.”

Mr. Walter was rather discomfited at the hearty laugh with which this sally was received, and after a few more commonplaces withdrew and joined the young man to whom he had first spoken, who still remained leaning against the veranda, and wearing the same morose and repelling expression of face. He sneered as Rivers came up to him, and seemed delighted at the shortness of his interview with the Bompas family.

“ Well,” said he, “ you didn’t stay long with your friends, considering how long you’ve been absent from them.”

The other did not seem in the least degree annoyed, but laughed and replied:

“ No, my dear fellow, I didn’t; why don’t you go and give them a visit, perhaps you’d have better luck than I seem to get.”

“ Adelaide snubbed you, I saw that.”

“ I’m not the first or the only fellow she’s snubbed, I expect; how is it *you’re* not on terms with the family?”

“ Who said I wasn’t on terms with the family?” said Shelman, the white marks coming and going in his face, and with an uneasy twitching of the fingers.

“ My dear fellow, it was the first thing I heard when I came down to this hole; Perry and Watson were both at me as soon as I saw them yesterday—they were full of it.”

“ Perry and Watson are a couple of insolent puppies, and know nothing about it. Because the old man and I happened to disagree in the bank one day over a little matter of business, is that any reason that the family should be brought into question? People disagree about money matters every day of the week, all the year round. I do wish to goodness people would either talk about what they understand, and nothing else, or else not talk at all.”

“ We shouldn’t get much conversation out of Avonham under that arrangement, I’m afraid; and what we did wouldn’t be up to much; but what was the row with Father Bomp; how did you manage to ruffle that old Patriarch’s feathers?”

“ I didn’t ruffle his, confound him, but he put *me* precious out, I can tell you. You know the Coombes?”

“ Old Currie’s place that was?—yes.”

“ Well, I always said that if old Currie left, I’d take that place.

It would just have suited me, and I wanted to settle down in a house of my own, and—and—”

“And ask Addie Bompas to come and look after it, eh?”

“Well, suppose I did, what of it. If I don't very much mistake it won't be through you if ever she did.”

“But she won't, my dear boy, she won't come for either of us, so it's not a morsel of use for us to quarrel over her. Go on about the Coombes and the row with the old man.”

“There wasn't any row I tell you; it was this way:—When Currie left, I went to Bompas and asked him whether the house would be to let. He said he didn't know—Laura hadn't made—Mrs. Stanhope hadn't made up her mind whether to let or not.”

Rivers glanced quietly at his companion as he substituted the hostess' surname for her Christian one, and saw that a fierce flush had swept rapidly over his face, as he made an effort to restrain his rage.

“So I went in,” Shelman proceeded after a pause, “to her and asked her, and she wouldn't let it to me. Said she didn't intend to let it just then. It was to be done up, it was to be altered, half-a-dozen things she told me about it, and at last I gave the thing up, for the present at least.”

“I went past there yesterday, and it seemed occupied; there were blinds up and old Duggan was working away in the front garden. Who's got it, then?”

“Now you're coming to what you call the row,” said Shelman, peevishly; “about three weeks ago, when Mrs. Stanhope had just come back from London, a fellow comes down here one day, from goodness knows where, and puts up at the Bear, calls on old Bompas the next day—I got that from Carter, who owes this fellow a grudge for some cheek he got from him—sees old Bompas, who immediately comes up here, and, by Jove! in a few days' time, this fellow moves into the Coombes, having bought it—bought it, sir—not rented it—furniture, land, house, and every mortal thing. That's what riled me.”

“Would you have bought it?”

“Bought it, of course I would; she must have been mad to sell it for such a price. Fancy, only two thousand for the lot; the furniture was only four hundred, it's true, and the buyer paid all the law expenses; but just imagine, sixteen hundred for the Coombes. Why, it's absurdly cheap. I'd have given five hundred pounds more directly, and so I told old Bompas.”

“What did he say? I thought Mrs. Stanhope took his advice in everything?”

“So she does. I know she does, but in this instance the old fool swears he knew nothing at all about it. It was all done through Goldings in London; this fellow, it appears, is a client of theirs, and they told him of the house. All Bompas had to do, so he says, was to actually sell the thing and take the money. It seemed all cut and dried, he says, and when I told him he ought to have kept the first chance for me, he declared that it didn't matter, for when he mentioned my name to Mrs. Stanhope, she shut him up at once.”

“That's a short expression for Bomp.”

“Well, then, she intimated—she intimated her disinclination to

interfere with current negotiations," said Shelman, with a short and strident laugh; "it's about the same thing though, and so that chance of getting a house is gone. I shall build one, I think, on the Western Road. Will you sell me that piece backing on to the river? I want a boat-house."

"I'm not going to sell any Avonham land, old fellow, thank you. Uncle's sure to get a Railway Bill for the town, and you'll see how land will be then. But who is the man who bought the place? What's his name, and where does he come from?"

"His name's Galbraith, but where he comes from goodness only knows. He's a most extraordinary fellow, and no one in Avonham seems to know anything about him. He's got a confounded great hulking nigger for a servant, a fellow six feet high, with teeth like a saw."

"Sort of Mesty, I suppose. Well?"

"I wrote to the man telling him I'd take the house off his hands and give him a couple of hundred for his bargain, but he sent me a very short note in reply, saying he was going to stop on, and so, as I told you before, that chance is gone—here's the bishop and your uncle coming; let's go and see if old Bowlby's got any wine going—"

"Not now, old fellow, I want to see the bishop—always speak to bishops, it gives one a tone in the place."

Shelman turned moodily away and showed (worst kind of angry man) no relief from having told his grievance. Rivers looked after him with a smile.

"You're a nice young man, Alfred," said he softly to himself, "a very nice young man—you'd make a nice son-in-law, and I envy the girl who marries you. So the widow saw through the game, did she, and wouldn't stand it. I don't wonder at it. Why when I left, I thought she was going to change her name again to Shelman. There's only a half-score years between you, and there's plenty of money on both sides. Well, there's only a half-score years between another man and your charming widow, and there isn't an open attachment to another girl between him and her; and there's plenty of money on his side and will be more. I wonder how uncle would like it? H'm! I'll see."

And here his uncle and the bishop coming up, he was soon in close converse with them, showing marked ability in his piloting of his uncle through devious ways of rhetoric and much skill in keeping him from falling into pit-holes of doctrine or politics, smiling and winning, deferential and polite, the bishop was pleased with him, his uncle was grateful to him, and he was self-satisfied to an inordinate degree. And all through that afternoon, as he went from group to group, there was none of the silent distrust that had been manifested by Mrs. Bompas and her daughters; indeed the matrons of the party seemed charmed with him, the maidens neither chiding nor coy in his presence. Where had he been so long? and how good it was of him to work so hard for his uncle, and what had the bishop said to him? and wasn't he glad to get back to his Avonham friends again?—these were the remarks rained on him from all sides, and to all of them he gave light, chatty, pleasing answers. He found

himself at last close to his hostess, who beckoned him to her side with a smile.

Tall, dark, stately, well-preserved, with much natural dignity and not a little grace; arm well-shaped, hand and foot small; eyes black as sloes and bright and sparkling; somewhat low forehead, and a mouth whose chief characteristic was the evidence of quiet firmness which it gave—this was Mrs. Stanhope.

“You have been at your best, I hear, Mr. Rivers,” said she, motioning him to sit by her side. “You are getting quite a popular character. Have you any design in it? Your uncle’s seat is surely safe enough.”

“My uncle’s seat is safe enough, no doubt, but, you know, a young fellow may have ambitions, and my uncle won’t live forever. It’s his wish that I make myself as agreeable as possible in Avonham; in case of anything happening to him, he would like me to succeed him rather than think of a stranger coming to sit for Avonham.”

“Indeed! is your lordship the only resource of Avonham?”

“My lordship, as you are pleased to say, is not the only resource of Avonham, but Avonham likes an Avonham man to represent it, and, since the Reform Bill, has always had one—and, connected as I am with my uncle, knowing all his parliamentary business, and being entirely in his confidence, why, I have as good a chance as anyone else.”

“Well, when the time comes you shall have my interest, I promise you. Thank goodness, they can’t deprive us of our interest, even though they won’t let us vote.”

“I shall always be happy when our interests are identical,” said Rivers, with a laugh, and a bold glance at his hostess.

She rose, and made him a pretty bow. “Come and get me an ice, you forward boy, you learn the horriddest things in London, I’m sure.”

“Is there nothing to be learned in Avonham, then?” said Walter, laughing, as he gave her his arm; “but I forgot to ask you something. Are you losing your interest in the place, or are you giving us faggot votes?”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you’ve sold the Coombes, I hear.”

“Oh, yes, but my interest in Avonham isn’t diminished. I had a good deal of bother over it in Major Currie’s time, for one thing, and I had a fair offer for it without taking any trouble about it for another, and I had a third reason for selling it, which was most important of all.”

“And that was?”

“I had a debt to pay.”

“A debt to pay, why, good gra—”

“Not a money debt, you foolish man. When I want money I will come to either the present or the future member for Avonham, when my bankers and agents have all failed me. It was another sort of debt altogether.”

“And you paid it by selling the house; ah! I understand now. So you owed Shelman a turn, did you?”

“ Yes, and paid it too—you young men want keeping in order sometimes. So he told you of it, did he?”

“ Only this afternoon. I saw him looking very amiable about something, and got the story from him after a little. He seems very cross over it.”

“ I meant him to be. I must keep my subjects in order, you know.”

“ I thought Shelman was your slave?”

“ Maybe—but he escaped, and this house was the only dog I could send to bite him—so I sent it.”

“ But did he escape? If he did it was to that horrid place that those misguided fellows in America get to—the Dismal Swamp, for he can find no shelter elsewhere, and he’s as glum as possible. I’ve been away, you know, and didn’t hear of it. Well, it doesn’t break my heart, for Shelman and I were never quite David and Jonathan, although we were at Eton together.”

“ Besides which—I think I’ve heard so—wasn’t there a little rivalry between you once?”

“ Of course there was, I’m jealous of all your slaves; every one in Marlshire is.”

“ I don’t mean that, you incorrigible fellow. I’m talking about that pretty daughter of Mr. Bompas. She’s here to-day; I asked them all to meet the bishop. Bompas is church warden, you know.”

“ Which of them? Egad, they’re all pretty. No, there was never anything in that. I never said anything but mere civility to Miss Bompas, and, by Jove! I never even got that from her, for she’s as sharp as a needle, and drops down upon me awfully. Shelman was hit, and still is, I believe, but I don’t know what to think of it, I’m sure. Indeed, I don’t know. I’ve been away, don’t you know. Let me give you this ice.”

Mrs. Stanhope could not hope that one of her guests, however charming, could occupy her any longer. She had to fulfill all those thousand little duties of a hostess, all of which she did to perfection. When the episcopal chariot came for the bishop, he took leave of her in the most fervent and marked manner. The member, the banker, the family solicitor, the magnates of East Marlshire, and the great ones of the West, all said their adieus, and praised their hostess; her graceful winning ways, her hospitality and affability were all lauded to the skies. And when the last guest had departed, and Mrs. Stanhope had had her quiet dinner, cooked by the skillful hand of her *chef*, and served by servants devoted to her, who only asked to live and die in her service, she leaned back in her arm-chair, and fell to thinking over the events of the day.

Now, among the events of the day had been a great deal of openly expressed admiration, and from our young friend Mr. Rivers a few not ill-chosen compliments, and these led her to think of other things, and of the many hints about altering her condition and changing her name, and this led her to think of marriage.

Mr. Stanhope was a wealthy man who, eight years ago, had married her and brought her to his house at Avonham, whither he had retired, after realizing a handsome fortune by trade as a London merchant. Their married life had been perfectly uneventful, and had lasted only four years, when Mr. Stanhope had died, blessing

her with his latest breath as a kind and loving wife, and endowing her with almost all his wealth. And yet, when Mrs. Stanhope, after thinking of her admirers and their compliments, began to turn her thoughts to love and to marriage, the family skeleton came out of its secret cupboard, and held close communion with her for an hour—and a very grim and ugly skeleton it was.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE STRANGER GIVES MR. ALFRED SHELMAN MORE CAUSE TO LOVE HIM.

Now that the first overwhelming curiosity as to the new occupant of the Coombes had somewhat subsided, on account of the apparent hopelessness of discovering anything about him, public attention directed itself with great diligence to studying his domestic doings. The only medium through which the good gossips could find out anything about the interior of the house was a stalwart charwoman, named Hackett, who was an institution in Avonham, and who, it was speedily found out, went to the Coombes for two hours in the morning, to ply the art which she professed. Even from her, the good ladies could make out very little. The house, she said, was pretty much the same as in Major Currie's time; the new tenant had purchased no new furniture; some shelves had been put up, and there was a "sight o' books" in the front parlor, and some new and incomprehensible utensils had been added to the kitchen. The gentleman was a real gentleman; her money was always laid reg'lar on the mantel piece for her every morning, and she got as much for her two hours as ever she'd got for a day anywhere else; sometimes it didn't take her two hours, and then she just finished her work and went; the beer-cellar wasn't locked, she sometimes pointedly remarked (in houses where it *was* locked), and the tap was to be turned for the turning, and no questions asked. The gentleman seemed an early riser, and in general walked about in the garden after breakfast a-smoking, and he didn't smoke no Avonham cigars neither, she knew the smell on 'em better. She never had no cooking to do—the colored gentleman done all that. Well, some people might call him a nigger, if they liked, but since she'd known him she didn't know but what she'd a-changed her mind a bit about it like; anyways, he was always polite and civil enough to her, and handsome is as handsome does, and what was beauty but skin-deep after all, was what she wanted to know. All she knew was that it was the best job o' charing as she'd had ever since in this town she'd a-bin, and how long it lasted she didn't care. Thus spoke Mrs. Hackett, a stalwart charwoman, earning many a glass of pleasing and comforting strong waters from her narration.

The tradesmen of Avonham spoke of the new-comer with respect as a gentleman who paid for everything as he had it; ran no bills, all cash down on the nail, they wished everybody were like him that way. He seemed to live simply; his servant was rather exacting toward Mr. Killett (the ex-butcher mayor) in the matter of special cuts and small dainties, but—there, foreigners, particularly them of

a different color, were expected to be a bit curious in their tastes and fancies, and the man was a civil, well-spoken man enough—the chief wonder in the minds of the Avonham worthies being that neither his speech nor his manner in the slightest degree resembled that of the wandering companies of Christy Minstrels who had occasionally visited the town, and who were popularly supposed to be faithful delineators of the manners of the African race.

From the remainder of the town Mr. Galbraith kept carefully aloof as it seemed. Perhaps the feeling was slightly too strong on that point, but it is certain that he sought no introduction to any of the townsfolk, and had a calm but startling manner of answering any questions, which we have seen brought into play with Mr. Bompas's unfortunate pupil, and which effectually checked any approach to familiarity. By the time he had settled down in his house he had the usual call from the vicar, whom he had received politely, whom he had told, in the five minutes that the interview lasted, nothing of himself, and whom he had dismissed—politely, it is true, but still dismissed—much puzzled by the cold and impassive demeanor of a man, young and apparently in full health and strength. So that although Galbraith did nothing very strange or eccentric, nothing more strange, that is, than to evince a desire to be left entirely to himself, yet had he been in the habit of launching out into the wildest extravagances, had he at once joined the very outermost circle of the Pariah section, he would not have excited a tithe of the gossip and curiosity which followed his settlement in the town, and which lasted for the first month of his residence.

Then the subject began to drop a little; interest strained to its uttermost must relax at last, and it was so in this case. The town had to prepare for its great fair, held at the end of July, and lasting three days; two mill-owners had a dispute about water-rights, in which dispute every male inhabitant (always excepting Galbraith) took one side or the other; children were born in the families of two or three prominent citizens; Mr. Sander, the young grocer, married Miss Halton, the veterinary surgeon's daughter, who had thrown over Mr. Speckley, the optician, whom every one had thought was to have been the happy man; and old Mr. Rax, the senior member of the town council, died, and was honored with a public funeral; in a word, Time, which effaces the deeds of the evil and the good alike in the great world wherein we all toil and moil, gradually wore away the impression which the stranger had created on his arrival in the quiet little town.

With Mr. Bompas alone had Galbraith kept up anything like intercourse. It had arisen very naturally out of the first arrangements for the transfer of the house; for in this land of property, and among this nation of shopkeepers, the sale and purchase of houses are not conducted in dumb-crambo; naturally enough, also, they exchanged greetings whenever they happened to meet. Sometimes Mrs. Bompas leaned on the arm of her Abel, in which case the hat of the young man was raised with more formality; it had happened that Mr. Bompas had one of the young ladies with him, in which case also we know it is necessary to bow. Now, to acknowledge the salutation of a young gentleman, when leaning on papa's arm, is undeniably correct, and Prudery herself must countenance it; also

when mamma receives the compliment, miss must also admit it, and having gone thus far it would be hard hearted to refuse to see the gentleman's bow when two or three sisters are together, and are saluted collectively, and so on and so on, till you find that you will naturally incline your head to a respectful hat-lifting male, even when walking down the street of a country-town alone. Of course the Misses Bompas bowed to other gentlemen, but they were the only young ladies in the place who ever received any notice from Mr. Galbraith.

From time immemorial Avonham had its special trade in which it surpassed towns twenty times its size, and for which indeed it stood first in all the land. It had the largest market for cheese in England. At its great fair, in October were "pitched," that is, brought into the town and exposed for sale, mountains of cheese of all sizes and kinds, but principally of those made in the district twenty miles round, in the two greatest grazing and cheese-making counties we have. On the second Friday of every month the ordinary cheese market was held, that of October being the largest; but in addition to all these cheese pitchings it had an unual fair lasting three days, a fair which brought in all the country-side for miles around, which filled the town with horned cattle, rosy-cheeked farm hands, and shows and stalls of all descriptions. To receive the visitors took the town a week of preparation, to get rid of their traces, a week of cleaning up; it was the one great event which really broke the routine life of Avonham; open house was the order of the day, and every outlying native made shift by hook or by crook to get back to the home of his youth on at least one of the three days.

On the first of these three days was held the annual "Mop" or hiring fair. Scarcely a farm servant for miles round but was engaged in this way. Standing in the market-place, and lining the main street, were two detachments of them, men in one, women in the other, all waiting to be engaged for a year from "Mop" day. Farmers in want of carters, plowmen, odd men, or shepherds; their wives seeking dairy-maids, kitchen-helps, and "such-like," went amongst these two parties, seeking persons looking likely to suit them, making their bargain, and binding it with earnest money, the passing of which makes the contract good for a year. A specimen of this kind of hiring would be about as follows:

FARMER (speaking to a man who, from having a piece of twisted whipcord in his hat, is known to be a carter). "How many hosses thee bin a used to mind?"

CARTER. "'Bout a ten, zur."

FARMER. "Where hast a bin a livin'?"

CARTER. "Up to Master Dingle's, o' Lie Dillimer."

FARMER. "Be main heavy land, there-away, eh?"

CARTER. "Ees, zur—a be ter'ble heavy to be sure—'twere shockin' wark a cleaning o' en. I be a aimin' for to get more downs way like."

FARMER. "Thee can'st gi' a hoss a ball now, can'st?"

CARTER. "Ay, sure, zur, an' niver want nur a doctor around my steable nuther."

FARMER. "How much dost 'ee ask, now?"

CARTER. "Vourteen zhillin', zur, an' I don't aim to goo under it."

FARMER. "Whoy, theest askin' a zhillin' moor nor any man i'th mop as I've a-spoak too yit."

CARTER. "Pack o' macky moons! Spooasin' I be—I count mysel' a jonik at it, zur—not one o' they silly sort as look at a hoss an' think as he'm dressed. Yo'll find I'll arn all o' that, zur, an' zave it thee aaver an' aaver in oats an' bron."

FARMER. "Well, I've a heerd on thee, an't a zhillin' 'ont part us—there's thee arnest. Come aaver a Monday and make a start. Long-bottom Varm, 'yond Cumberford Giate."

CARTER. "All right, master! Thank'ee kindly, zur. I'll be thur, zur, never vear."

And the pair separate, well pleased, the farmer going to look after his wife who is chaffering over a pound a year with a red-armed stalwart dairy-maid, their business being conducted very much after the same model.

The second day was devoted to cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs, which swarmed in the streets. The unfortunate bulls were tied to stout posts in the upper market place, and at four o'clock were released to go plunging blindly down the street, scaring the women to death almost and clearing everything before them in their career. The sheep were sold by auction in pens outside the Bear, which was thronged with visitors from morn to night; horses were found at the entrance to South Street, and pigs everywhere.

It was of little use for the purveyors of amusement to open their shows till the third and last day, but then they reaped a silvern harvest. Then the spotted boy, the pig-faced lady and the knock-kneed giant drew crowds to see them. Then was the gingerbread nut hot i' the mouth, and the foaming sherbert hissed in the glass; then were the gathers torn out of mother's dress as eager little ones dragged her to gayly painted toy stalls where the agile monkey climbed the yellow stick, and pop-guns and side-drums, whistles and humming tops made a display irresistible to boyhood; there on all sides were the "fairin'" ribbons so dear to the female heart, cheap jewelry, peep-shows, Punch and Judy, the wonderful collection of wild and "fabulous" animals, the five-legged horse and the two-headed boar. The little place was in a whirl of excitement for once, and the very nature of the townfolk was changed. Without entirely throwing off the bucolic stolidity so welded to the character of the Wessex county folk, they ran riot with heavy humor; the good old jokes that had done duty for years were all cracked again, and, having received their usual attendant guffaws, were carefully laid aside to be produced again next fair—to be artfully led up to in conversation, or lugged in neck and crop at any and every opportunity. In many a house, the parlors, the kitchen, the sacred drawing-room or best parlor, only opened on rare occasions, were filled with noisy, good-humored friends, bouncing lasses from country farm-houses, boisterous bachelors making rough love and meeting no reproof, all hoydenish or boyish misdemeanors being pardoned on account of Fair Day, which, to say truth, was the starting point of many a rustic wooing.

Of course, when every one was entertaining company, the house

of Mr. Bompas, one of the most hospitable of men as well as a county magnate, was not closed. Indeed, the very best of country-side society, the cream of the landed interest, the golden youth of agriculture, were cordially received by the genial, albeit pompous, host. Mr. Bompas did not sell in the market-place; fair-tide was a holiday with him, a season of feasting and meeting country-side cronies, of hearing reports of farms and land, crops and rents, prospects and profits. For his wife it was a time to air the newest dress, to produce the oldest wine, to cut the richest cake, and to live again the days of her youth in hearty communion with a score of matrons, her school-mates and girl-mates of yore; whilst for the Misses Bompas it was the occasion of receiving the undisguised admiration and attention of half the youth of the shire, some of whom hoped, some of whom despaired, but all of whom were avowed admirers of the three pretty sisters of Avonham. Here they were now the center of a group of young men, a group occasionally lessened by the departure of one swain, to be speedily increased by the coming of another.

Adelaide Bompas and her sisters were tall and fair, with a great family likeness in all. If there were any difference in their beauty it was that the twenty-four years of Adelaide had given a little more ripeness to her form than the twenty-two years of Louisa, or the twenty of Lucy. Why they had not married before was sometimes a matter of wonder, sometimes a matter for inquisitiveness, and sometimes a matter for spiteful rejoicing. But young Grains, the brewer, had wooed Adelaide in vain; the Rev. Adolphus Gran had fruitlessly sought the hand of Miss Louisa, and Lucy had laughed so at the sight of Lieutenant Moody as, arrayed in a tight shell jacket, he kneeled at her feet to propose, that the youthful warrior had risen to his feet in dudgeon with all his honeyed words unsaid. And rumor spoke of others also.

Rumor said that Mr. Walter Rivers had been also sent away by one of the trio, to which statement was sometimes added the fact that the young gentleman had been astounded by getting that curious social entomological specimen a "flea in his ear" from the lady whom he supposed he was honoring by those attentions so welcome to many, but so unrequited where he most wished them favorably received. It was a mooted point as to how far Mr. Shelman had gone, or was prepared to go; however, it was universally agreed by the Avonham matrons, that however much people may have thought he was smitten with Mrs. Stanhope (and the very idea of him marrying a woman ten years older than he was), the widow had had, whether she knew it or not, or whether she cared or didn't, at any rate, a temporary rival in Miss Adelaide. Whatever the young women wanted in the shape of husbands, the matrons went on to observe, was more than they knew; that they were good-looking girls with good figures nobody ever went to deny; but for being handsome—well, that was a matter of opinion and taste—they were well off no doubt (at least the father was), and rode their horses, and had been to school at London—but after all their father was in business just as the fathers of their own darlings were, and they only hoped their own girls would never look above their stations, for it was well known that pride often had a fall, and it was also well known that

crows couldn't expect to live in eagles' nests, and a great deal more proverbial wisdom to the same effect was always quoted whenever the question of the Misses Bompas and their marriages cropped up at tea. They, however, went their way very much as they chose, and seemed—and probably were—entirely careless as to the opinions of the self-appointed arbiters of courtship and marriage. Whenever it happened, as it sometimes did, that the feminine spite of some good lady could no longer be restrained, but broke out, in sugar-coated innuendoes made to one of the young ladies herself, the attacked one would take up the cudgels on behalf of herself and sisters so very efficaciously that more than one mamma had retired from the contest with the tables so completely turned upon her and in such a routed and demoralized condition that she herself could not completely realize the extent of her overthrow till an angry son, or a tearful daughter, informed her that the sisters had carried the war into the enemy's country by repeating the facts of the encounter to a number of the youth of both sexes and making at least a nine days' laughing stock of the whole of the aggrieved and innocent family.

The group in Mr. Bompas's handsome drawing-room was one of the merriest in Avonham that day; from the host downward, all were full of fair-time fun and fair-time jollity. Servants came and went with refreshments solid and liquid, the windows toward the garden were open, and the noise of the fair in the main street was subdued and deadened by the intervening trees. Conversation was therefore easy, and it went on in one continued flow. At the further end of the room near the window looking on to South Street were the three sisters and their attendant suite; on the hearthrug was Mr. Bompas with a knot of his particular cronies, and at the garden end of the room was Mrs. Bompas with her own especial lady friends. A fresh-colored young farmer was endeavoring to interest the girls in a favorite mare, the new curate was waiting to put in a clerical joke warranted of the mildest and purest Oxford brand, and Mr. Adolphus Carter, who was, as every apprentice or articed pupil should be, violently in love with his master's daughters (in this case he never could make up his mind which), was gazing fondly and earnestly at them all, when Adelaide suddenly exclaimed:

“Luce! Loo! whose horse is that? What a beauty! Oh, he's for sale, I see!”

“Yes—he's good-looking enough—but you should see this mare I was telling you about,” said the young farmer. “I assure you, Miss Lucy—”

“Mr. Shelman seems to be going to buy him,” said Louisa. “Papa, is that one of Dingle's men, with this horse here?”

Mr. Bompas adjusted his glasses and approached the window.

“My dear, I am unable to identify the individual as being connected with Mr. Dingle.”

“It's a splendid horse, anyhow; Shelman's most decidedly smitten,” said one of the young men; “ah, I see Dobby's going to sell him by auction; there's the duke's whip looking at him now; he'll fetch some money.”

“So he ought,” said Lucy, an enthusiast in horseflesh, as every Amazon is, “I wish papa would go and buy him.”

"Not a bit of use, Luce," said Louisa, "we should only quarrel over him. I wonder what he'll fetch."

"I'll go down and see and bring you word again," said the young farmer; and he was soon standing in the ring which surrounded the horse, in front of Mr. Dobby's rostrum, a kind of wheeled reading desk which was drawn by a pony from point to point.

The bidding started briskly, and very soon reached a hundred guineas, for the duke's whip made a sudden and bold bid when sixty was reached and seemed to fancy that the horse was his. Mr. Shelman, however, and a little wiry local steeplechase jockey, still opposed, and at a hundred and thirty he turned aside with a sigh—he had really exceeded his limit, but he said to his neighbor, "I know the duke 'ud a liked him, and it's a shame to lose him, on'y I got my orders very particular about price this early time."

The little jockey was still manfully bidding against Mr. Shelman, to the latter's visible annoyance, so he crossed the ring and went to him.

"Why the devil can't you let me have the horse, Hart? You don't want him."

"I must have him, sir," said the man, touching his hat respectfully, but speaking firmly.

"Nonsense, you mean you want a tenner for yourself. Well, you can have that to leave him alone."

"Any advance on one hundred and forty guineas," said the auctioneer, raising his hammer, for he noticed the conversation, and guessed its import.

"A hundred and fifty," said Shelman. "Now, then, let the thing alone and you can have ten for yourself."

"Can't do it, sir! A hundred and sixty!"

"Seventy," said Shelman, viciously.

"Eighty," said the jockey, quietly.

"Hang you, take the brute," said Shelman, scowling at the man, the horse, the auctioneer, the crowd, and the surroundings generally; and elbowing his way out of the ring he walked slowly down the street.

He paused at Mr. Bompas' open door, and twisted his glove, hesitatingly.

"I haven't called, and I suppose I must: it's best to keep in with these people. I'm blessed if I know what to do about the girls, though. I've a good mind to make up to Addie again. Hang that brute," and muttering to himself he entered and walked upstairs.

He was cordially welcomed, of course, for he was one of the first young men in the county, a partner in the bank, a landed proprietor, and a rising young man; but there was observable in his greetings a sense of showing no desire of gaining affection, but rather of exacting respect, and those who saluted him and shook his hand did so respectfully, yet not heartily, and spoke to him as to a power rather than to a friend.

He made his way to Mrs. Bompas, and was greeting the ladies in her circle, when the young farmer, who had volunteered to bring back the news of the sale, returned. He saw Shelman in the room and so told his tale in a low tone of voice, but the news evoked an exclamation of surprise from two or three of the group.

Shelman turned and advanced toward them, saluted the young ladies, and shook hands with some of the young men, amongst them the young farmer, the son of one of his largest tenants.

"I thought you meant having that chestnut just now, sir," said the latter.

"Ah," said Shelman, carelessly, "you were there, Watson, of course, I saw you—yes—but he went too high. I don't mind what fair prices I pay, but I don't give fancy ones. I suppose Hart will send him abroad; I hear he is picking up some horses for Germany."

"Oh, no! I asked him," said Watson; "he bought it for a gentleman in Avonham here."

"Who on earth is that?" said Shelman, flushing up with sudden anger, and then turning pale; "Mr. Rivers?"

"No, sir, the gentleman that's bought Mrs. Stanhope's house over here."

"You look pale, Mr. Shelman," said Mrs. Bompas, who had crossed the room to speak to one of her daughters, "won't you take a glass of wine. Abel, give Mr. Shelman a glass of wine; why, you're as white as a sheet, sir; it's the weather, I suppose."

He took the wine and drank, in the country-side fashion, to his hostess and her daughters, but looking at Adelaide, saw that she was intently regarding him, as if reading what was passing in his mind. He recovered himself with an effort and was soon engaged in county small-talk with the other guests.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A DISCUSSION ON AN IMPORTANT SUBJECT.

SIR HEADINGLY CANN and his nephew sat at breakfast one summer morning, about a week after the fair. The young day was so bright and the interior of the room so hot that Sir Headingly, who was a late riser, had given orders that the table should be laid under the veranda, and that the meal should be taken in the open air. They were sitting there in lounging chairs before a low table covered with materials for a repast altogether rather more tropical in its nature than our ordinary English feasts. We have so few opportunities for eating out-of-doors, and such very conservative notions of the viands which we consider proper to a breakfast-table, that a meal such as Sir Headingly and Walter Rivers were now engaged in discussing, might be considered somewhat of a novelty in domestic life. Fruit formed a considerable item; the coffee-pot was certainly present, but seemed neglected for a long flask of Hock flanked by a silver pail of glittering ice; the table was bright with flowers, and the veranda gay with clustering roses; the stately peacocks strutting on the smooth lawn gave a lordly air to the scene, and Sir Headingly surveyed it with an air of feeling both eye and mind pleasantly relieved from the turmoil of London and the labors of the session. For though Westminster legislators were still engaged in piloting the good ship *Britannia* into shallow water and on to mud-banks, in order, as it seemed, to have the gratification of bringing her noisily into port afterward, yet this member of the crew was not at present on board, and the good ship *Britannia* had to sail

on without him, a feat which she managed very well indeed and without appearing to be at all affected by his absence, so stupendous are the resources of our great country.

Here he sat then, toying with some strawberries, and opposite him his nephew, whom this sort of luxurious ease just suited. Breakfast was nearly over and hitherto had been eaten in silence, for Sir Headingly seemed buried in thought, and Rivers had lazily waited for the outcome of his meditations: his uncle was, he knew, a slow thinker, and that he did not consult him at once with a view of being extricated from a mental difficulty showed him, as his experience bore him out, that the subject of the baronet's cogitations was himself, and this being so he waited with apparent unconcern, but in reality with some little anxiety, for the result.

"Walter," said Sir Headingly, rousing himself at last, "I want to have some conversation with you this morning on an important subject—"

"What is that, sir?" said Walter.

The old man paused again—the ice was broken, it is true, but he was about to enter upon his topic with a statement which few men like to make for the first time.

"Well, Walter," said he after a little, "you see, the fact is, I feel sometimes, my boy, that I'm—I'm not getting any younger than I was."

"No doubt, sir," said his nephew, "no doubt; but you are very well, are you not? You don't feel ill, do you? and you have been remarkably hearty down here this last month; nothing amiss, sir, I hope?"

"No, my boy, no, thank'ee; I feel as well and hearty as I have for ten years past, but that doesn't alter the fact of my age, does it? I was just thinking, sitting here now, that I shall be sixty-nine next Sunday, and that's getting on, you know."

"Why, sir, it's not a great age for a man like you who has passed most of his life in the country."

"And led a pretty easy life too, you would say. No, Walter, it's no great age, that's true, but it's an age, my lad, at which, if a man wants to see another generation springing up round him, he must begin to think about making arrangements for them, eh, Walter?"

Walter opened his eyes, and slightly changed color. "You're surely not thinking of—"

"Of marriage?—yes, my boy, I am."

"I—I give you joy, uncle, I'm sure!" said Walter, suddenly holding out his hand, but looking anything but joyful; "who is the lady, uncle, may I inquire?"

"No, no, my boy," said Sir Headingly, laughing; "I'm not going to take my first wife at my age; if I were thinking about marriage, and I was, as I tell you, it was for you I was planning—"

"Oh," said Walter, much relieved; and after a few seconds he added, "Have you found a wife for me then, sir?"

"No, no, my boy," said the baronet, looking fondly at him, for he loved the child of his dead sister. "No, no, young men should choose for themselves, Walter, and if I speak to you now upon the subject at all, it is only because I don't see any signs of your having looked out yet. You're twenty-six, Walter, aren't you?"

“ Yes, sir, last birthday.”

“ Well, twenty-six is a good age to marry—a good, sensible age; boyish foolishness is over, or ought to be, and you’re a man then, able to judge of a woman—that is so far as any man ever *can* judge of a woman—by that time. Walter, my boy, I should very much like to see you engaged to some nice lady-like girl of good family; it would carry out one of the dearest wishes of my life; and if I saw you well married, my boy, and could take one of your little ones on to my knee before I went, there would be nothing wanting to me then—I should be ready to go, my boy, then, quite ready,” and the good old fellow’s eyes twinkled and he used his handkerchief to wipe them, quite unfeignedly.

The faults of Walter Rivers were rather those arising from an indolent and weak nature, and want of heart could scarcely be alleged against him. He really had for his uncle a great affection, and would have been heartily sorry to hear of any misfortune happening to him. Had he died he would have mourned him—his death would make very little real difference to him, for to do the young man some justice he was no spendthrift, and his uncle’s handsome allowance, together with the comfortable property which he had inherited from his mother, gave him an income so much more than sufficient for his wants that he never spent more than the half of it; he was already manager of all his uncle’s affairs and as much master in his houses as the old man himself. And he was really grateful to him for his kindness, was old enough to remember how his dying mother had confided her orphan boy to the charge of her brother, and was just enough to acknowledge the faithful and generous manner in which the trust had been carried out, so that it was not without a share of the old man’s temporary emotion that he answered:

“ My dear uncle, you’ve always been most kind; I’m sure you know I’d do anything to please you; and if my marriage will make you happy, why so be it—I’ll be a Benedick to-morrow. Only”—he added, laughing, throwing himself back in his chair—“ you must pick the lady, uncle, for really I’m fancy free myself.”

Sir Headingly laughed in his turn, and then said, “ Do you know, my dear Walter, that I once fancied you were sweet upon—that’s your young men’s expression, isn’t it?—sweet upon one of those pretty girls of old Bompas, eh, sir?”

No change of color in the face of Mr. Walter Rivers, as he answers:

“ My dear sir, every one admires them, of course—why, they’re the prettiest girls in the county—but one doesn’t marry a girl because she’s pretty, that is—well, she must have *some* position, you know, sir—and really the father—”

“ The father is a very worthy old fellow, as I have known for many years; but I’m glad it isn’t the fact that you favor the young ladies—most charming and well-bred young ladies, too, begad!—in any very particular way. I was at one time rather afraid of it, and I had always made up my mind—I don’t mind telling you so now, Walter—to use my influence with you against such a match—mildly of course I mean, for I won’t force you, my boy, either to a marriage or against a marriage; but that really was my fear; I’m glad to find it was ill-founded.”

“Quite so, my dear uncle, I assure you,” said Walter, “there was never the slightest fear of things going to any length there, and there really isn’t anybody else, I assure you, sir—at least not any one to whom I’ve ever laid any matrimonial siege.”

“Well, my boy, you shall choose for yourself when you do marry, but I shall be glad to see you in the way of it, and there’s *one* thing I *do* want to say—”

Walter waited with unmoved countenance; but the old man paused. He played idly with a rose-bud blown on to his knee by the light breeze, and plucked it from its slender stem before resuming—

“There is a lady—a lady for whom I have the highest regard”—and he paused again.

“Come, uncle,” said the young man with a tone of heartiness, but with a glance very observant of the old man, “let me know the lady; I assure you I’m heart-whole as yet, and I promise you that you shall not be balked in your fancy if it can possibly be avoided. Is she young or old, rich or poor, black or white?”

“She is older than you, my boy, but not much—that is to say, not a great deal, not so much as need—need—need interfere with perfect happiness to both of you. She has been—been married before; but, dear me, what is that? She has no children, and her fortune is in her own right—that is no slight recommendation.”

“Do I know the lady, sir?” said Walter.

“Yes, my boy, yes, you do, and the other day—you dog!—I thought she seemed—you seemed—that is,” finished the baronet, with a laugh, as he also threw himself back in his chair, “both of you seemed to understand one another very well, at least I thought so.”

“I think I know whom you mean,” said Walter.

“I won’t leave you in any doubt, my boy—Mrs. Stanhope is the lady—she likes you, I’m sure; you’re a smart young fellow, likely enough, as she knows, to get on, and she’s a woman just calculated to help an ambitious man on his way. I won’t say anything about her money, though I happen to know that that’s not at all a trifle; she’s a most charming woman is Mrs. Stanhope, and I believe, Walter,” said Sir Headingly, rising, and patting his nephew on the shoulder, “that if you choose to say the word you can make that lady—and a lady she is that any young fellow might be proud of—you can make that lady Mrs. Rivers, whenever you like. Think over it, my dear boy, think over it,” and having made his point and disburdened himself of his opinion, the fond uncle withdrew into the house and left his nephew to ponder over his idea.

Walter sat for some few minutes in profound meditation, and then rose, and taking a cigar from his case, lit it and strolled across the lawn and into one of the shrubberies. There was an air of complete satisfaction on his face, and he was bright and radiant with delight, and laughed softly to himself as he strolled to and fro.

“By Jove!” he said to himself, “it’s exactly my handwriting. I should have mentioned it to the governor in a day or two, and I was half-afraid he wouldn’t like it: how splendid, his hitting on the idea himself; who on earth could have dreamed of such luck?”

Backward and forward he walked exulting in his youth, his health, and his fortune, with the sun shining on him, the birds sing-

ing round him, light-hearted, joyous, with no more cloud in his life than he could have seen in the sky above him. He fell to thinking over his past career, and there was nothing in it that he could recall (with the exception of his mother's death) but was gay and cheerful and painless, and free of all care, and now came this crowning piece of good fortune. He liked her very much, this stately beautiful widow, with the shining black tresses that framed the handsome oval face, lit with those glorious dark liquid eyes; almost loved her; would not break his heart if she refused him, but would go dutifully back to his uncle and be sure of his sympathy; thought she would make him an excellent wife, and really determined to be a good husband to her—if—if it came about; stood a little in awe, perhaps, of his splendid lady, and cared not to risk the danger of making those dark eyes light up with angry fire, and quite honestly resolved not to bring *that* about if it were possible to avoid it.

“What will she say to me, I wonder?” he said, as the blue rings of smoke went curling among the laurels; “most likely laugh at me at first; I know her little weakness for being fond of conquest. I wonder if there's any fellow—I don't believe there is—I think Sherman got his dismissal some little time back. Yes, Mr. Alfred, I fancied I heard the knell of your hopes sounded when you were telling me of that little matter of the Coombes, and I'm not sorry for it, for you're an ill-conditioned fellow at the best of times—and I'm *not*—I think I can say without any self-laudation I am *not*. No, madam, if you elect me for your husband you won't get a bad-tempered brute with a confoundedly murderous twitching kind of a nostril and with a vicious homicidal pair of thin lips. You won't get *that*, madam, as part of your bargain, and I congratulate you with all my heart, and when I thought you *were* going to get the thin lips and the twitchy nostril, I was rather sorry for you, I was indeed; I may say I was *very* sorry for you; and I think I may also say that you're about to have a much better offer—a much more comfortable sort of offer, madam, much more comfortable, I assure you.”

He resumed his walk, which he had interrupted for his soliloquy, and serenely and calmly puffed away at his cigar; he knew his uncle would be pleased at his giving some little time to the consideration of his weighty scheme; would think, perhaps, that he was throwing over some pet plans of his own to please him, and he knew and estimated to a grain the value of such a thought in his uncle's mind. When he had twice traversed the path he stopped again, and his face became more thoughtful.

“I suppose there will be a scene between us, Master Alfred, if she should say ‘yes’—yes, there will certainly be a scene; well, things must blow over. I don't much mind you as a rival for the widow's good graces, my dear fellow, but I don't want you for a rival for the borough's good graces. Uncle has been lucky to have no contest for all these years—precious lucky; electioneering would come pretty expensive in Avonham, I expect, after so many years quiet, and the Carlton would expect the place to be kept at all hazards. Well, it must all be risked, and, by Jove, it's worth risking, too. Uncle wants to see me settled. I wonder if he'd agree to seeing me settled in Parliament. Does he fancy the party will give him a peerage?

I don't. No, no, the baronetcy was his reward for holding this part of the county so long. It was a ticklish thing with a Radical borough four miles off, but it's safe enough now, I think. We'll see, we'll see; there was no hint that way this morning, but it must be made a reward for obedience, too. It all falls out as well as possible; I must really be in an upstream of luck. Well, now for uncle."

As he stepped on to the lawn he saw the old man, seated in the chair which he had occupied at breakfast; he had ordered the table to be cleared, and his newspapers and two or three books were now on it; he was composing himself for his afternoon reading. He smiled as Walter crossed the grass as though he could see by his face that his wishes were in a fair way of being carried out. Walter spoke first.

"Well, my dear uncle," he said, holding out his hand, which the other clasped heartily, "it shall be as you wish, and without anything but pleasure on my part, I assure you."

"Right, my boy, right," cried the baronet, joyfully. "I'm glad to hear it—glad to hear it, my boy."

"We mustn't hurry matters though, you know, sir," said Walter. "Ladies who have so many swains at their feet won't be rushed into matrimony by the first impetuous youth who proposes it to them, you know."

"Take your own time, my dear fellow, take your own time, and your own method of wooing; I don't understand the business at all; but Walter," he added, looking up at him rather seriously, "don't, my boy—don't marry any woman or propose to any woman just because you wish to please your old uncle; let there be love and respect and admiration in the matter, I pray, my dear fellow. If I thought that I had induced you to ally yourself with any woman with whom you didn't live happily, I should be very miserable and unhappy about it, I can assure you."

"My dear uncle," said Walter, in a burst of frankness, "you need not have the slightest delicacy about that; you said just now jokingly that we seemed, that is, Mrs. Stanhope and I seemed, to understand one another very well. Well, really, sir, there is a good deal of truth in your jest. I think, without being in the least conceited about it, that I have as good a chance with the lady as any one else. I've a very great admiration for her, and although it isn't the usual thing for young men to marry women ten years older than themselves, yet such a handsome woman as she is never seems old to any one who admires beauty. I only hope," finished Walter, "that she won't upset your plans by giving me a plump and plain 'No' for my answer when I do speak finally; but of course you know I must take my chance of that, and my word for it, uncle, I'll do my best to win her!"

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## CHAPTER V.

THE GOOD TOWN OF AVONHAM IS THOROUGHLY EXCITED.

ONCE a fortnight, not in solemn conclave, but in conviviality and good-will, the fathers of the township met. The oldest of all these

fathers could not remember the foundation of the club; its early history was obscured by fable and was well-nigh legendary. Summer or winter, wet or fine, the large oak-paneled upper room of the Bear Hotel received on club nights the worthiest burgesses of Avonham, who sat and gossiped, smoked and drank together on every alternate Monday, and four times a year dined in great state, having previously ransacked the county for dainties and delicacies of the season.

The club was nameless; this was a great and solemn fact; it needed not the bush of a specific designation, of itself and by itself it was good. It was select in the broadest sense of the word; election to it was rare. When some well-known face was missing, when some town-worthy had smoked his last pipe and eaten his last club dinner, when the remaining cronies had stood round his grave and, as they expressed it, "seen the last of poor old So-and-so," then, at the next meeting, it would happen that, after much reflective smoking and meditative sipping of tumblers, some one or other of the fathers would allude to the loss they had sustained, and the club would proceed to fill the vacant chair. Or it would sometimes chance that, some honor being done to an Avonham man which transformed him into an Avonham worthy, he would be told that the club was willing to receive him with open arms, and, this compliment being most rarely paid, never failed to overwhelm the individual (so he always said when his health was first proposed at a club dinner) with so keen an appreciation of the honor done him, that he was utterly unable to adequately describe it in words. Thus the club flourished like a well-grown oak, never perceptibly increasing in size, but maintaining unimpaired its pristine vigor, and standing the envy and pride of the country round.

The room in which these worthy men met on Monday evenings was one of the fine old oaken chambers which are, alas! now giving way before the cold, encaustic tiles and maddening minute mosaics of the railway-fed hotels of to-day. But there are yet plenty of them in England, mind you, for him who loves them and looks for them. Down in classic Warwickshire, merry Wiltshire, breezy Sussex, pleasant Norfolk, glorious Kent, they may yet be found by the score. I used to know two or three in Bristol—are they yet there? There is a glorious one at Stratford and a model one in Leicester; and one or two still resolutely hold out, like the sturdy old tree from which their wainscots are cut, against the improvements and changes of house-leveling London itself. I swear that in them the ale is stronger, the spirits have a richer taste, the ghosts of countless bowls of departed punch give a mysterious flavor to the toddy of to-day. The old oak is impregnated with the subtle spices and the piquant lemon, and freely imparts of their aroma. Encaustic tiles quotha! What do encaustic tiles know of punch? The making of punch will be a lost art soon, like the staining of glass or the reading of the stars, and we shall hear some day a lecture on a punch bowl and ladle, as I once heard a lecture on a tinder-box.

But there was punch enough in the world at the time of our tale and maybe even a tinder-box or two in some of the farm-houses round about; and the bowl would have been smoking no doubt but for the fact of its being summer, one of the warmest too within the recol-

lection of old worthies. But the large windows at the end of the room were thrown open, a pleasant evening breeze was cooling the sun-parched town, Mrs. Pinniffer, who made the club her own especial charge, was as skillful in the concoction of cold drinks as of hot, and so it came about that on this particular evening eight o'clock found the club-room pretty full, and the evening breeze had plenty to do to dispel the fragrant blue clouds that rose from the pure white bowls of twenty slim, wax-tipped churchwarden pipes. The club did not meet during the week of the fair, so that it was a month since it had assembled, and all present knew that in addition to the ordinary proceedings of the evening there would be some mention made of the loss sustained by the death of old Mr. Rax, and very likely another worthy would be elected. The chairmanship of the meeting was arranged by rotation, each of the members in turn filling that office, and on this evening old Mr. Beadlemore Arto, the corn dealer, miller and straw salesman, after hanging up his hat and giving a cheery "good evening" to his cronies, seated himself in the place of honor at the head of the room, and calling on the obsequious waiter for a large glass of cold gin, and receiving from him a screw of mild Bristol bird's-eye, filled and lighted a pipe which he took from a pile before him, and, solemnly smoking, looked round the room to see who were already assembled.

Seated at his right was Mr. Abel Bompas, who was a most respected and influential member of the little circle, and who had scarcely ever been known to miss a meeting; next him was Mr. Christopher Raraty, the postmaster of the town, learned in horse-flesh and eloquent of the old coaching days when he himself drove the *Defiance* a hundred and sixty miles in eighteen hours, stoppages included; and then Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt, who was rough of exterior and affected—only affected, mind you—a grumpiness of manner which caused strangers to look upon him as having been improperly named by his sponsors, and as being anything but a son of consolation. Then sturdy John Rann, the market clerk, who was the center of all the political business of the town. Next to him was the enormous form of ex-mayor Killett, most prosperous of sinecurists, the only butcher in Avonham, as his father and grandfather had been before him, a giant with the carcass and strength of a raging bull, and the manners of a Southdown lamb.

As a contrast in size, but a counterpart in manners, Mr. Reuben Matley came next to him: the organist of the parish church and teacher of music and drawing, a real genius blushing unseen in this little Marlshire town for sheer want of that impudence and dash that had taken men with half his ability into the front rank of native musical talent. Opposite his burly son, to whom he had transferred his business some years ago, was old "Master" Killett, the Nestor of the country side now that Mr. Rax was gone, a hale, weather-bitten, fresh-colored man of over fourscore years, who fifty years before had been the foremost man at backsword and elbow and collar wrestling for twenty miles around. And facing the chairman was Dr. Mompesson, who used laughingly to declare that there was no rest for him, for his old patients would not let him retire; he was the antiquarian authority of the place, and was generally supposed in his knowledge of the Sarsen stones and Kistvaens on the Marl-

shire Downs to be a very Druid. And beside him was Mr. Sennett—Lawyer Sennett he was generally called—who made all the Avonham wills and injured his business but increased his circle of friends by patching up half the country-side quarrels, and on whose shoulders this year rested the awful responsibility of being mayor.

On Mr. Arto's left was Mr. Daniel Follwell, the proprietor of the small woolen factory of the town, who turned out a small quantity of cloth each year, but that of so rare a quality and so precious a value that it was whispered that the one great London tailor to whom it was all sold reserved it entirely for the backs of dukes and earls, and that an untitled dignitary might pray for a coat of it in vain. Mr. Follwell was a short man, who, to judge by his dress, neither wore his own cloth nor employed the great London tailor aforesaid, and whose rebellious stubby head of hair gave him the uninviting appearance of an overgrown cloth teazle. Mr. Benjamin Pollimoy was his neighbor: a man of mark in the club, a traveled man, a man who had seized the advantages offered to all who would expand their minds, and had expanded his by visiting the Exhibition of '51, a man most loyal of the loyal, almost royal indeed, he having once seen the queen; he was not the rose exactly, but he had been very, very near it, and was looked up to accordingly.

Then came two brothers, the inseparables of Avonham, Wolstenholme Pye and Hoppenner Pye, fellmongers, two little wizened-faced old men, who silently absorbed vast quantities of liquor with no other effect than that produced by the air-pump upon a wrinkled apple—the good spirits seemed to smooth out the lines on their faces by degrees, until at the close of the sitting they looked quite sleek-faced for a time. Next to Hoppenner was Mr. Timothy Rapsey, an amiable Paul Pry, always burning for information and utterly unable to resist the temptation of diving into his neighbors' affairs; a good-humored little fellow, however, and without the least grain of mischief in him.

Mr. Beadlemore Arto surveyed the club in silence for some minutes, laid down his pipe, buried his face in his goblet, then placed it on the table and gave a sigh. This was a signal thrown out to the club, and was immediately replied to by a universal shake of the head and an answering sigh.

“Well, gentlemen,” said Mr. Arto, “I suppose there ain't much need for me to say what we're all a-thinking of this minute. Pore old Mister Rax, he've a-gone at last.”

“Ay, ay, for sure he have,” said old “Master” Killett, amid a soft murmur of “ah!” from the rest of the club.

“Ninety-one years,” said Mr. Raraty, “ninety-one years an' hearty an' well till pretty nigh the last, warn't he, Mas'r Killett?”

“Ay, sure he were,” said the old man, “he sent for I two days afore he died, an' he says, ‘Mas'r Killett,’ says he, ‘you'm my fust pall-bearer you know'—picked 'un all out a' had—‘mind you see,’ says he, ‘as they don't carry I no ways head fust,’ he says, ‘n'yet contrariwise agin the sun,’ he says. He were just as sens'ble as that you see, right up to the very last. Why!” said the old man, looking round, “we was at school together, we was, nigh upon eighty years agone. Lor', I was a little 'un then, an' he used to

mind an' see as t'other chaps didn't steal my dinner; lor! lor! I can mind it well."

"Been a good man for this town too," said Wolstenholme Pye, who was immediately followed by his brother, who croaked in chorus, "A good man for this town."

"Ah, yes!" said Robert Killett the younger, "and lived here all his life too—that he have."

"All his life, all his life!" said Mr. Pollimoy, the traveler—the royalist—"never went above twenty miles from the town in his life, I don't believe—'ceptin' to Bishopsbury when he was vicar's churchwarden, times. Why, when I was going up to London—just to improve my mind, you know—he was one of the very men I asked to go too—so he was—you was another, Mr. Sennett, so you was."

"Yes I was, Ben, I was," said the mayor.

"And you went up, Mr. Bompas, didn't you? Ah, so you did."

"I visited the World's Fair in company with Mrs. Bompas; Mr. Pollimoy, your recollection of incidents is unerring," said our friend Abel, sententiously.

"But you didn't see the queen, you know, did you, Mr. Bompas? You wasn't there whilst she come to the great exhibition, was you, sir?"

"The felicity of beholding the lineaments of my sovereign has yet been withheld from me," said Mr. Bompas. "Her most gracious majesty has no more loyal subject than myself, Mr. Mayor, but I have never seen her; I believe our friend, Pollimoy, is alone in that respect in the club."

"I am, I am!" said Mr. Pollimoy, "and if poor old Rax had only a' come with me he might a' seen her too. Dear, dear, if he could only come back again, and could only, so to speak, *go* and see her—lor! what a comfort that 'ud be, if it was for ever so little a time. Ah dear!" he added, slowly, raising his glass to his lips, and sighing profoundly, "what wouldn't he give to be able to come back and do so now?"

The club audibly sighed and replied—in detachments—"What indeed?"

"Well, gentlemen," said the chairman, "what Mr. Pollimoy says is always improvin', and of course ef we *could* on'y see the pore old gentleman back again, it 'ud be a great comfort for us all. But we can't, pore old fellow, and so it ain't a bit o' use talkin' about it. On'y I was thinkin' as it's usual for us to send *as* a club a bit of sympathy like, nicely wrote out and that, and I was a-goin' to move as it should be done, but you see there's no one to send it to—old Mr. Rax he'd outlived all his relatives, and, as we all know, left his money, and quite right too, mind you, to charities here, and down in Bath and Bristol, hospitals and such-like, besides mourning rings for this club, which I daresay every gentleman in this room's a-wearing his now."

General survey of hands.

"Consequently I was thinking that as it's our rule—I won't go so fur as to say our invariable rule, but at any rate, our very frequent rule—to elect another member of this here club, why I move as we set about it."

This proposition meeting the approval of the club, the election

proceeded. It resembled no other kind of election whatever. Mr. Chickleholt, who had sat very quiet, grunted out the name of an old Avonham tradesman, and his neighbors said, "Ah! he'd be a good man." And after a pause Mr. Raraty mentioned another name, and everybody else said "Yes, or him either;" and then Mr. Matley mildly suggested that Mr. Arto should ask the first-named gentleman whether he would like to join them, and that if he would, why then perhaps the other gentleman might—here he made a pause, for he was about to say "wait for another vacancy," but that seemed calculated to upset Master Killett, who, being the oldest man in the room, was more likely to make a vacancy than anyone else, so he contented himself with saying "that the other gentleman might, if the first one consented to come among them, be elected as well as he, but that in case Mr. Arto's application to the first gentleman proved ineffectual, then the second party might drop in naturally to the vacancy." This, though somewhat in advance of the ideas of the club, was well received, and the cronies said in chorus, "Just so, first rate!"

And then, as if by mutual consent, the subject of old Mr. Rax dropped, and conversation became general and was carried on in louder and more cheerful tones. There was not a wide range of subjects in Avonham, but to wear those few threadbare was the delight of the club. These friends had met on hundreds of nights and had talked the same small-talk; the same subjects had lasted their fathers' time and their own too, and it was only very rarely that any matter of special import cropped up; but to-night the club, which had already gone a little out of its usual course, was to be still more excited and interested by its interchange of ideas. The talking had been proceeding for perhaps half an hour and was pretty nearly in full swing, when Mr. Robert Killett turned suddenly to his left-hand neighbor and said,

"Why, Mr. Rann, you're very quiet t'night; anything amiss, sir? I don't think I've hardly heerd you speak yet. Nothin' wrong is there?"

The ex-mayor's hearty voice was heard above all the surrounding hum of talk, and everyone stared at Mr. Rann, who, slowly taking his pipe out of his mouth, answered Mr. Killett's kind inquiry.

"Lor! no, Mr. Killett, what should be amiss, sir. I was just turning public affairs over in my mind a bit, that's all—that's all, sir."

Now Mr. Rann was, as we have said, the center of political life in Avonham; he had been bursting with desire to speak, but knew full well that the best way of attracting attention was to be conspicuous by silence, which would lead to his being drawn out, and he hailed the opportunity with quiet joy.

"Anything fresh from London, Mr. Rann?" said the mayor.

"Well, Mr. Mayor," said Mr. Rann, "the fact is that if it hadn't been for the very painful opening part of this evenin's proceedings, I should have put before this meeting a proposition for discussing the present po-liti-cal crisis, but I thought it better not, sir—I thought it perhaps on the 'ole better not."

"I saw they were a bit at sixes and sevens in Parliament House," said Mr. Rapsey. "Whatever is it, Mr. Rann? what *are* they go-

ing to do? *will* there be a election—*has* Sir Headingly been telegraphed to? I saw Mr. Rivers in the street to-day, and I was just crossing the road to see where he was going to, but I saw Mr. Galbraith's colored man go into the grocer's, and I couldn't make out what he was doing there on Monday, for he bought three pounds of coffee and his usual lot of butter and things on Saturday, and it seemed so curious that he should want to go in again on Monday that I—ah—missed Mr. Rivers."

"Ah! well, Mr. Rapsey," said Mr. Rann, sagely nodding his head, "p'r'raps Mr. Rivers might have told anyone as asked him, p'r'raps he might not—my opinion is that he wouldn't, even if he knew—ah—half as much as I expect I do."

There was an assumption of knowledge in this last speech so impressive and interesting that no one attempted to answer the politician, but the entire club kept silence for a space.

"It's pretty well sure, mind you, gentlemen," proceeded Mr. Rann, "as Parliament will be dissolved, for mind you also, the ministry won't go on any longer as the country is now, no, Mr. Chairman, they'll dissolve themselves and go to the country, that's what they'll do; and then we shall have an election."

"Not much likelihood of one here, Rann," said the mayor.

"Begging your pardon, Mr. Mayor, but do you know, gentlemen all, that I shouldn't be so very much surprised if there was to be an election *here*."

The sound with which the members received this announcement was not a cry, nor a groan, it was something like a gasp of astonishment, and, being unanimous, was very impressive in its volume. Mr. Rann was evidently elated by it in no ordinary degree; he laid down his pipe, leaned a little forward with his hands on his knees and triumphantly surveyed the astonished room.

"I opine," said Mr. Bompas, breaking the silence, "that you have reliable information in this matter."

"Avonham won't know itself, having a 'lection, that it won't," said Mr. Arto.

"Wake things up a bit," said the doctor, rubbing his hands; he was a sturdy partisan of his own side, and it is distressing to see the camp in possession of the enemy for eighteen years and no attempt made by your leaders to take it from them; there were one or two more in the room who would welcome any such attempt as well as he.

For eighteen years Sir Headingly Cann had been the member for Avonham, in the Conservative interest (or Tory as it was then called), and his position had never been assailed. He had been a steady voter for his own side, a constant and regular attendant at St. Stephen's; he never gave the Whips the least anxiety, and seldom troubled the House with a speech, certainly never bored them with a long one; when he did lift up his voice it was on some agricultural topic, and he was admitted to be an authority on that point; he had never sought office, had no poor relations to be provided for by the country, and was altogether a model representative of high character, and very much liked by members on both sides of the House. In Avonham he was generous to the poor, watchful over the interest of the town; hospitable and affable, and a general

favorite in the neighborhood; so that it had come to pass that, for many years, party politics had been a dead-letter in Avonham. Contented with a member who was a moderate and liberal-minded man, people were unwilling to run the risk of that upheaval of society which takes place in a small town at election times, and, when they read of scenes of riot, of military interference, and damaged property, they congratulated themselves upon their immunity from such scenes, and were entirely satisfied with the old state of things.

But all this time there had been slowly and almost imperceptibly growing up in Avonham that unreasoning dislike to long continued customs so characteristic of younger generations, four miles from Avonham was the pocket-borough of Dunstalne, which returned a very advanced Liberal, with the same consistency that Avonham showed toward its mild Tory; and the advanced Liberal member for Dunstalne was one of the great lights of Parliament, a brilliant speaker, an able statesman, who had been twice a member of the Cabinet; so that Dunstalne was apt to be loud in praise of the man it had chosen, and the praise reached four miles, and excited interest in Avonham, so much so that when the great man came down to address his constituents, he would have fifty or sixty of the younger politicians of Avonham among his audience, and this fact was not unobserved by the leaders, the great wire-pullers of the party, so that a kind of thumb-nail note was made of Avonham at the Reform Club, and it was hinted at as a place not unworthy the honor of an assault. Still it was somewhat hard to realize at first, particularly as not half a dozen people in the town had really seriously thought about the contingency at all.

"Why," said Hoppenner Pye, for once startled into speaking before his brother, "whatever makes you think we shall have an election, Mas'r Rann. Who is there to put up against Sir Headingly?"

"Ah!" echoed Wolstenholme, "who's going up against Sir Headingly?"

"They'll send a man from London," grumbled Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt, "and a fine chance *he'll* have."

"Not they," said Mr. Rann, with great scorn; "not they, there's one or two near about here as'll be chosen before any Londoner."

"We don't want any strangers here," said Mr. Follwell, "nor yet we don't want any election that I can see; what's the matter with our member, I should like to know; he's been our member for eighteen years, and nobody's ever put up against him before. It seems pretty late in the day to begin now, I think. Come, Mr. Rann, you know more about these things than we do—leastways you take more interest in 'em than we do; who do you think's going to oppose Sir Headingly?"

"I'm not saying for certain that anyone's going to oppose Sir Headingly, but this I do know, that I've been told by three or four Dunstalne men, ay, and good men too, that Avonham's going to be fought for next election, and I can see for myself, and so can anyone here by just looking at the paper, that we sha'n't be many weeks, no, nor not many days, before the ministers'll go to the

country, and then we shall see what we shall see, you mark my words if we don't."

In a few minutes all tongues were going on the one topic. Every man in the room was, of course, a voter, and although the majority of them were "blue," there was a sprinkling of "yellow" material sufficient to cause just the proper amount of friendly argument necessary; to the astonishment also of the landlady, the Club exceeded its usual time of rising by at least half-an-hour, and the members left together, and until midnight small knots of them stood at street corners discussing eagerly the astounding information conveyed to them by Mr. Rann, who, perfectly satisfied of his own importance in the eyes of his club fellows, went home by himself, chuckling.

The next morning, Sir Headingly Cann and his nephew were seen by the indefatigable Timothy Rapsey, driving swiftly through Avonham toward the railway station, five miles from the town; this event was duly reported by him to those of his friends whom he met during the day, and was at the present stage of affairs much commented on. The next morning's papers contained an account of the ministerial defeat in the House—and following hard upon this came the dissolution. Then, for the first time, for eighteen years, was any political excitement visible in Avonham. In every public-house, at every tea-table, on the market, in the street, in shops and offices, and everywhere that men do congregate, nothing was talked of for a week but the election. For a week no sign was made, and the old Conservatives of Avonham were just lulling themselves to sleep again when a most surprising event happened.

Sir Headingly had issued small and well-printed handbills, which had been posted to every voter on the register, announcing briefly the fact of the dissolution and his intention of offering himself again for election, but had made no other public sign. One Tuesday night the little town went serenely to sleep as usual, and when it was buried in repose certain mysterious figures emerged from the Woolpack Inn, and, after a short consultation at the door, separated and dispersed in various directions. They traveled in pairs, one of each couple bearing a large can, the other a bundle of printed papers. For two hours they were absent, and returned to the Woolpack as quietly as they had left it. When Avonham woke the next morning it was as though a shower of yellow bills had been rained on it in the night; some of these bills called on the Men of Avonham to free themselves from the political yoke which had too long pressed on their necks, to protest against vested interests, to demand correct representation of themselves and their town, to be no longer slaves, but to think and act for themselves. These were signed by "A Townsman." Other yellow bills were more modest in tone; they set forth that the author had been waited upon by a large and influential deputation, and had been requested to offer himself as a candidate for the great honor of representing the town in Parliament; that he thanked them for this mark of confidence, and would so offer himself. It described his principles; it assured the town that though "progress" was his motto, "loyalty" was his text; that he pledged himself to spare no efforts to obtain for Avonham a Railway Bill, "long promised, but apparently forgotten;" that this

and all other matters affecting the town should be his peculiar care, and wound up by hopefully and trustfully committing himself to the hands of his fellow-townsmen, for Avonham had no more sincere well wisher than its obedient servant, ANTHONY HUMBERTON BOLDHAM, who dated his address from the local bank.

“What did I tell you, Mr. Mayor?” said Mr. Rann to his friend next day. “We shall have an election, after all! What chance has Mr. Boldham against Sir Headingly?”

“Not much, I *think*,” said the mayor, who had been rather anxious for the last few days at the thought that he must venture into the fray, whichever side gained.

“I don’t know, Mr. Mayor,” said the keen old market clerk. “You see, Sir Headingly hasn’t got much Avonham property—hasn’t half-a-dozen voting tenants in the town, and don’t mix up with the trade of the place.”

“Well, what of that?”

“Well, sir, Mr. Boldham *do*. There’s two or three men—ah, a dozen or more—men of influence, that ’ud look very queer if Mr. Boldham was to get away from behind ’em. And we’ve been without any party feeling for so long that there ain’t much real politics in the town. People’ll vote a good deal by interest, Mr. Mayor.”

Mr. Mayor walked slowly up the street, pondering.

“We *must* work hard, sir,” said Walter to his uncle. “We *must* have a meeting this week. Let me get the bills out to-night.”

“I am astounded,” said Sir Headingly, “at the ingratitude of Boldham. A man whom I—but there, Walter, do as you wish. It was my desire, when I saw you settled, to have resigned in your favor; and really, I am too old for such a strife as this is likely to be. I wish you had to—”

He paused, and Walter waited with beating heart.

“No,” said the old man, rising to his feet, “there’s another fight left in me for the good cause. Get out the bills to-night. I will meet the electors in the Town Hall on Friday. I will leave you to your work, my boy, and go and prepare some facts for my speech.”

“H’m!” said Walter to himself, as the door closed behind his uncle, “this falls about badly; no time for courting now. I was in hopes that he—well, well, it can’t be helped. I suppose, Master Alfred, you’re helping *your* uncle over this. Come along, my boy, I think we hold the winning cards. It’ll hit a big hole in four thousand pounds, though.”

“Lawks a daisy how, Bill! Fancy a ’lection to Avonham!” said Mrs. Hackett to her liege lord. “Why, thee’lt happen get a vive-pound note for thy vote, Bill!”

“Vive pound be dazed!” said the free and independent elector, laying down Mr. Boldham’s address. “No vive-pound won’t suit me, I tell ’ee. I means to miäke thicky-thur ’lection last me aal aaver winter time, see now.”

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE "RECLUSE" COMES OUT.

THERE was one point concerning Galbraith upon which all Avonham was agreed. He was a thorough horseman. In a county of hunting men he was already distinguished for the grace of his seat, for the fineness of his hands, and for the dashing style of his riding. It was not exactly the English hunting seat which he adopted—there was something in it, men said, that told that the horseman had been used to wilder scenes than an orthodox fox-hunt; but it was certain that between horse and man there was such a thorough understanding that the two together might have formed a Centaur. Riding seemed the chief amusement in which the occupant of the Coombes indulged. Every fine morning saw him mounted and quitting the town in some direction; already another fine animal had been brought over by Hart, and the two horses were regularly used. The negro, it was found, rode almost as well as his master, and was not indisposed to talk about horses to the grooms whom he met at exercise.

One morning Galbraith, mounted on the horse he had first purchased, rode quietly up the street, and passing carefully through a small knot of townfolk who were engaged in talking over the approaching election, stopped in front of the Bear. Mr. Pinniffer saw him pull up, advanced to the door and bowed.

"Good morning, sir!"

"Good-morning, landlord! I'll get down for a moment."

"John, take the gen'l'man's horse. Walk in, sir."

"I suppose," said Galbraith, when they stood in the old-fashioned bar-parlor, "you could knock me up a dinner of some sort on Friday?"

"Friday, sir. Yes, surely, sir. For how many, sir?"

"For six, landlord. I shall have some friends down and shall want five beds here for them, and a good dinner."

"Yes, sir, five bedrooms, sir, and dinner for six, sir. Now, what would you like for dinner, sir? Would you like—"

"I should like the best dinner you can put on the table, landlord. I leave the choice of it entirely with you, and the price too."

The pleased Mr. Pinniffer bowed, and inwardly resolved that the dinner should be worthy of the reputation (the well-deserved reputation too) of the Bear.

"You shall have the best the house can give you, sir," he said. "I'll look after everything for you, myself, sir."

"Thank you, landlord."

"Hope you like Avonham, sir?" pursued the worthy man.

"Very well, landlord, it seems a healthy place."

"Very healthy, sir, very healthy," said the landlord, with emphasis; "as healthy a place as there is in the county, built up and down hill a bit, you see, sir, easily drained, generally a breeze in the hottest o' times. My native place, sir," Mr. Pinniffer said,

drawing himself up as if to confer honor on the town, "and, as I say, one of the healthiest in England, I do believe."

For an uncommunicative man, such as Avonham had put him down as being, Mr. Galbraith seemed very much inclined to chat this morning, and Mr. Pinniffer felt extremely proud at having engaged the quiet, somewhat mysterious stranger in something like a conversation; he now remembered the rites of hospitality, and said, after praising his native place,

"But won't you take a glass of something this morning, sir?"

"Thank you, landlord, I was just going to ask you," said Galbraith, seating himself and laying his whip upon the table; "let me see what sort of champagne you intend to give us on Friday."

The delighted host was not long in producing a bottle of most excellent wine, and the bar-parlor customers coming in for their various morning drams were not a little surprised at seeing the stranger, whose quiet and reserved manners had been so often the comment of the town, seated opposite to Mr. Pinniffer, listening to his cheery town-talk, whilst both were doing justice to the flask of champagne standing before them. One or two had been in the house during Galbraith's stay there, previous to the purchase of the Coombes, and these, venturing on a "Good morning, sir," were so affably answered, that they took heart and entered gladly into conversation with him, to their great delight. Among these favored individuals was Mr. Timothy Rapsey, who was quite unable to conceal his joy at having at last got into conversation with the stranger who had baffled his most determined efforts, and about whom he had been able to learn next to nothing during his residence in Avonham. He knew not where to begin to tackle him; he wanted to know so much that he ran some great chance of letting every opportunity slip in his anxiety to put the question that should tell him most; the election was, of course, the safest subject as being the most natural at the present time, and so on that he started; but, alas! he was foiled; Mr. Galbraith had no interest in it, did not possess a vote indeed, and said so, rather curtly; he seemed to understand Mr. Rapsey pretty well, as that gentleman was quite shrewd enough to perceive.

But, if Mr. Galbraith had no interest in the election, others had, and to start the subject was like starting a fire in a straw-yard. Worthy Mr. Pinniffer, whose neat wines and choice spirits were innocent of politics, was the only other man in the room disinclined to enter upon the topic, everyone else seeming to fancy that the matter could be just as well settled then and there by his own individual vocal exertions as at the hustings.

Galbraith lighted a cigar and listened, making no remark.

The chief interest of the election seemed to be that it was less of a political than a personal contest, and that, however ardent a partisan of one candidate a man might be, he was always willing and indeed eager to admit the virtues of his opponent; it soon appeared that the Church party would follow Sir Headingly Cann and the Dissenters Mr. Boldham; that the "gentle-folk" were supposed to be about equally divided, and lastly, that Sir Headingly seemed to have the better chance of winning, but that Mr. Boldham would be sure to run him pretty close and make a hard fight of it.

“Tell you what, though,” said Mr. Arto, who had “popped in for a small toothful,” and who did not seem inclined to pop out again, so engrossing was the conversation, “tell you what I thought we should a-seen, instead of an election; and that is, gen’lemen, Sir Headingly a-resigning and a-putting his nevv’y up instead.”

“Ah! yes, that was more like what everyone thought,” said Mr. Pinniffer, who could safely agree so far.

“Well, then, I’ll tell you what,” said Mr. Raraty; “I’ll tell you what you’d have seen, you’d have seen Mr. Shelman put up against *him* as sure as you’re born, and all you’d have had instead of a fight between the old gentlemen, would a-been one betwixt the young ’uns.”

“Ah, and there ain’t overmuch love lost between them two now, mind you,” said Mr. Pollimoy, who was also a morning customer. “You should see them scowl at one another just now, in the market-place.”

“There wasn’t much scowl about Mr. Walter Rivers, I’ll pound it,” said Mr. Rapsey, “it’s the other that’s the—”

“Hush!” from two or three; there seemed to be a dislike to any direct personality.

“What’s to hush about?” said Mr. Rapsey; “why, dear me, dear me, it ain’t the election alone as makes the young men enemies; lor’ biess me, I could tell you something different from that,” and the little man pursed up his lips and looked most monstrous wise. “Young men’ll quarrel about lots of things besides politics, mind you, and we all know there’s one object that they’ll *very* soon fall out about, sooner than anything you can name a’most.”

“And what’s that, sir?” said Galbraith, as the speaker looked knowingly round the room.

“What’s that, sir?” said Mr. Rapsey, “why, sir, it’s the ladies, sir, the ladies, that’s what it is”—and the little man rubbed his hands and chuckled; “that’s what’s the cause of half the young men’s quarrels in this world, sir, you take my word for it, sir.”

“Well, I’ve no doubt you’re right, sir,” answered Galbraith.

“Right! of course I’m right, sir,” said Timothy; “why, my belief is, gentlemen all, from what I’ve seen and heard in this here town—ah—and from what I’m pretty well sure is right too, that if you were to look down to the very bottom of this very election business that’s exciting this town now, you’d find a lady in the case, you mark me if you wouldn’t.”

“Look here, Mas’r Rapsey,” broke in old Barnabas Chickleholt, who had entered a moment before Mr. Rapsey’s knowing little speech, “your tongue is a running away from your brains, as it very often does, I’m sorry to say, when you get a-talking like that there; you ought to have more sense than to do it; first and foremost, the two young gentlemen as you’re a-speaking of is in a measure *bound* to be opposed at sech times as these, on account of their uncles. Why, who’d a thought three months, ay, or even three weeks ago, if you come to that, that Mr. Boldham ’ud a put up against Sir Headingly?—tell me that. Well, then, if it warn’t supposed three weeks back that the old gentlemen were going to oppose one another, why, who could have said that the *young* gentlemen would? As for any young lady being in the case, if you can show me any

young lady in this town who's got influence enough, or half influence enough, to get up an election in a place where such a thing hasn't been known for eighteen years, why all I've got to say is you'll have to point out some one that I've never seen, nor anyone else either!"

"And pray, Mr. Chickleholt," said the busy little gossiper, who had had a hard task to keep from answering before the end of the speech, "pray, Mr. Barnabas, what might be your opinion of a young lady, now?"

There was a pause. Each man looked at his neighbor, and Mrs. Pinniffer stopped with an ale glass half-filled, and turned from the engine toward Mr. Rapsey. Chickleholt himself stared, but it would never do to be disconcerted, so he boldly and safely demanded:

"What d'e mean?"

"What do I mean, Mr. Chickleholt? Why I mean to say that, I don't know whether you heard me right, but I said, 'ladies,' not 'young ladies.' Now the lady that I'm thinking of isn't exactly what some people would call a young lady, seeing that she's been married before."

Mrs. Pinniffer handed to Mr. Raraty the glass of ale that she had filled in a great hurry (and not without spilling a little over her wrist), and held up a warning finger to Mr. Rapsey.

"Mr. Rapsey," said she, "if Mr. Chickleholt was to talk from now to to-morrow morning, he couldn't say anything truer than what he said just now."

"And what was that, pray, Mrs. Pinniffer?"

"Why, that your tongue runs away with your brains when you get a-talking sometimes. I know who you mean, Mr. Rapsey, and so do every one here, and I'll lay you a farden cake and have the first bite of it, that she wouldn't no more have either one of them young gentlemen than that she would have you; an' what's more, Mr. Rapsey, it ain't your place, nor no one else's that I can see, to go a-using of ladies' names before people like this."

"Mrs. Pinniffer," said Mr. Rapsey, "I haven't mentioned any ladies' names, have I?"

"Not as yet, Mr. Rapsey, you haven't, that I'll own."

"Well, then, Mrs. Pinniffer, why be hard on me for what I haven't done?"

"If you haven't mentioned names, Mr. Rapsey, you've pretty well hinted who you mean."

There was a murmur round the room as the company said softly, with many sage nods, "Ay, ay—we know pretty well—best let names alone, Mas'r Rapsey!"

Mr. Rapsey was discomfited and discomposed, and silently buried his face in his tankard; Mr. Galbraith rose, took up his whip, and having paid for the champagne and given a quiet "good-day, gentlemen," to the room, walked out, and, mounting his horse at the door, rode off out of the west end of the town. Those left behind had now a new topic of conversation.

"Don't see a many gentlemen about here better mounted than what Mr. Galbraith is," said the host, returning from the door whither he had escorted his guest.

“Fine horse that chestnut; bought him last fair-day.”

“Yes; Sam Hart bid for him; Mr. Shelman were purely vexed, for he wanted him badly hisself,” said Mr. Rarity; “he’ve bought another one of Sam, just as good a one as that one; Sam got him from Melton; must a-got some money, I reckon.”

“Must have,” was the opinion of the room.

“Fine seat a hoss-back,” said a young farmer, “and lor’ a’ do goo when a’ gets on they downs. I see ’un last Tuesday, as I were out beyond Merhill, galloping over the turf just below the White Horse as hard as ever a’ could goo.”

“Nice affable gent, too, he seems,” said Mr. Pollimoy; “I never saw him here since he stayed here before he bought the Coombes; don’t come in here generally, does he, Pinniffer?”

“No,” said the host; “he’ve been a pretty good customer, though. Haves his spirits from here, and a cask o’ my beer now and again. Got to get him a dinner for six o’ Friday; leaves everything to me—no matter about price. A good sort o’ gentleman that way—pays on the nail, and don’t grumble. I wish I had fifty private customers like him.”

“Dinner for six,” said Mr. Rapsey, recovering from his late setting down; “who’s coming, Pinniffer, Avonham people?”

“Don’t think so,” said Pinniffer; “I’ve got to get beds ready for them.”

“Beds for them!” Was this connected with the election? thought the room. Mr. Raraty opined not, as Mr. Galbraith had expressed no interest in the proceedings; Mr. Rapsey was eager to know all about it, but Mr. Pinniffer could give no information. Another strange circumstance connected with the stranger; it certainly was most curious.

Meanwhile the cause of these surmises and queries was quietly riding along the Dunstalne Road and up the rather steep Berry Hill which intervened between that town and Avonham; he cantered easily along, skirting Dunstalne without entering it and emerged on to the high road which exactly divides the rich table-land of the Marlshire Downs; there is scarcely another galloping ground in the kingdom like this, as the four or five trainers who daily use it know full well. More than one Derby winner has set the Marlshire village bells a-ringing; many of the equine heroes of Newmarket and Yorkshire have had to succumb to Marlshire trained racers, and horses who are not perfectly sound give their trainers less anxiety on these velvety downs than at any other horsey center of England. Leaving the road, Galbraith pulled his horse together and sent him at a smart pace for about a mile, then walked him quietly at the side of the road, just on the turf, riding past barrows where lay the bones of unknown heroes, unsung dead, and boulders and stones whose use and meaning have baffled sages of all times and of which nothing certain is known even now. He had proceeded in this way for some two miles, when he saw in front of him two horses, on one of which sat a lady, who was watching with great interest the action of a groom who was examining the foot of the other. As he approached nearer he perceived that the lady was Miss Adelaide Bompas, and that the old coachman and groom of the family was lamenting over his horse, which was dead lame.

" 'Tis no good, Miss Addie," said the old fellow, rising from his inspection, "you'll hev to goo alone, uthar back or forrard; old Brownie can't goo no further. I shall ha' to lave 'un up to Mas'r Simmonds' and walk into Dunstalne."

"What a pity, Watts. Well, that's what you must do; give me the papers; I must go on to Beytesbury myself."

The sound of the hoofs of Mr. Galbraith's horse as he came up caused her to turn round and perceive the new-comer, who raised his hat; he drew up and looked at the groom's horse.

"Have you met with an accident, Miss Bompas?" he courteously asked.

"Yes, Mr. Galbraith. Poor Brownie has just fallen lame, I'm sorry to say."

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked. "Take my horse, my man, and let me have a look at yours."

"'Fraid you can't do nothin', sir," said Watts, touching his hat and taking Mr. Galbraith's horse.

"I'm afraid not either," said he, after a brief investigation of the quadruped's foot. "You'll have a job to walk him home."

"You must do as you said, Watts," said Miss Bompas. "Leave him at Mr. Simmonds'. Give me the papers, and I will ride on to Beytesbury; you must get a lift home from Dunstalne or a horse from the White Lion stables."

She took the papers from the groom, and turning to Mr. Galbraith, thanked him for his offer of assistance.

"Indeed," he said, "I'm only sorry I can't do any good. If you will allow me, though, Miss Bompas, as I'm going the same road, I will ride with you in case you want a groom."

Miss Adelaide was as frank a specimen of a young lady as you would meet anywhere; she made no scruple as to this offer, but cheerfully accepted the proffered escort, and they rode on together.

"He's not *entirely* a recluse," though Adelaide. "It's rather fun having met him like this; he rides well, too."

"She's prettier on horseback than she is afoot," was Mr. Galbraith's meditation. "I'm rather glad we came across each other like this. It's better than a formal introduction."

"You know the country pretty well I suppose, Miss Bompas?" said he, after a little silence.

"Yes, pretty well. My sisters and I are always out riding; they've gone to Bath with mamma this morning, though, and as papa wanted some papers taken over to Beytesbury, I said I would ride over with Watts. Brownie stopped dead lame, though, just now, and I didn't know what to do, for Brunetta here won't stand very well, and is rather fidgetty to mount."

"You're fond of riding, of course?"

"Yes, very. Papa was a capital horseman when he was younger, and he had us all taught when we were quite children. I can remember my first pony as far bnck as I can remember anything. You seem pretty well accustomed to a horse, too, Mr. Galbraith."

"Pretty well, Miss Bompas," said Gabraith, with a quiet smile, "my recollection of horses goes back like yours to very early youth."

"Do you like Avonham?" said Adelaide, as the next subject.

"Very well," answered Galbraith. "It is very prettily situated,

and I suppose there is some sport round here in the shooting and hunting seasons?"

"Oh, yes, plenty; there are three packs of hounds. Lots of shooting, and some of the best coursing in the country, I believe, just round about here. You hunt, of course?"

"I have never seen a fox-hunt, if you mean that."

"Never seen a fox-hunt?" said Adelaide, opening a very bright pair of blue eyes in astonishment. "Why, how is that?"

"I have never lived anywhere where fox-hunting has been a sport. I have hunted other animals, but not the fox as yet: that has to come. I hope to have some sport with the hounds this winter."

"Then you've lived abroad, I suppose?" said Adelaide. "At least, of course you must have done so; I needn't ask, they don't hunt anything in England but foxes—except deer and hares and otters, that is— What have you hunted?"

"Oh, all sorts of things," said Galbraith, smiling; "deer amongst them, but we didn't gallop after them with hounds; we shot them."

"As they do in Scotland, I suppose?"

"I never was in Scotland, Miss Bompas."

This answer savored rather to Adelaide like a piece of word-fencing, and she looked pretty keenly at her companion. He returned the glance, and there was something so comical in the situation that Adelaide rippled out a merry little trill of laughter and Galbraith followed with a hearty peal, and then Miss Bompas slightly blushed and struck Brunetta smartly with her dainty whip.

"Here we are," she said, after a short period of silence. "That is Beytesbury House on the green there."

"You are going to dismount?"

"Yes, I must, I have to give these papers to Mr. Millard himself, and he, I know, can't get out."

"I will take care of your horse for you till you return."

"Oh! thank you, one of the men will do that, Mr. Galbraith; pray don't trouble."

They drew up in front of a fine old-fashioned house on the green. Galbraith leaped quickly from his horse and assisted Miss Bompas to dismount. A peal at the gate bell brought out a neatly-dressed handmaid, who summoned a man to take the horses.

"I will wait for you here, Miss Bompas," said Galbraith, and Adelaide thanking him, went into the house.

Mr. Millard was an old friend of Mr. Bompas, and Adelaide had been a great favorite of his for many years. Now it is one of the privileges of old friends of a family to be very facetious with the daughters of the said family respecting their admirers, and Mr. Millard, who had seen from his window that Adelaide was accompanied by a gentleman, was not slow in availing himself of his rights. He listened gravely to Adelaide's account of Brownie's lameness, and of the meeting on the road, and then laughing, said,

"Well, my dear, it's an ill wind that blows nobody good, and if poor Brownie got lame, you see, you got rid of an old man and met with a young one, so it's not so bad after all. Ha, ha, ha!"

"Well, I couldn't help that, could I?" said Adelaide.

"Why should you, my dear?" said the merry old fellow. "A

good-looking young gentleman's better company any day than an old groom, isn't he, Martha?"

"Lor', Addie, my dear," said Mrs. Millard, "you mustn't mind John's fun, it was very lucky indeed that you met the gentleman; that mare of yours is so skittish you want some one with you when you ride it, I'm sure. But won't the gentleman step in and take lunch?"

"I'm sure—I really can't—I don't—" said poor Adelaide, feeling very uncomfortable at this turn of affairs. Mr. Millard laughed again. Mrs. Millard was already down-stairs instructing the girl to ask the gentleman to come in.

To Adelaide's intense dismay he came.

He gave her a quiet glance as he entered, half embarrassing, half reassuring, and, sitting down, plunged at once into conversation with Mr. Millard, by that means saving Adelaide the task of introducing him, a task she had been dreading ever since she came into the house. After thanking Mr. and Mrs. Millard for their hospitality and commenting on the weather, he drew the conversation to the surrounding country and its agricultural resources. He talked easily and fluently, and was an excellent listener. Mr. Millard, an agriculturist of note, was struck with the keenness of his remarks and the extent of his knowledge of the subject; he took his listeners with him abroad to the laboriously irrigated rice-fields of India, to the enormous grain-fields of Iowa, to the vineyards of France and the pear orchards of Jersey. He discoursed with Mrs. Millard of the virtues of Annatto in cheese, and told her husband of a dressing for sheep. His host and hostess were charmed with him, and Adelaide sat in wonder at hearing the man, whom she and her laughing sisters had dubbed the "recluse," taking the chief part of the talking on his own shoulders, and bearing the burden so easily and so well. When she rose to go, Mr. Millard was most pressing in his invitation to Mr. Galbraith to come again.

"Now mind," he said, shaking him cordially by the hand. "I shall look for you very soon. I shall be quit of this rheumatic touch in a few days, I hope, and then I'll show you round a good English dairy farm, and see if any of your foreign ones can beat it. Good-by, Addie, my dear, mind you bring Mr. Galbraith again, my love."

Poor Adelaide blushed and looked piteously at her companion. He was quite calm, and apparently unconscious that anything was wrong.

Mr. Galbraith was very dexterous at assisting a lady to mount, and his wrist was much more steady than old Watts's Miss Adelaide thought as she sprung to her seat; after all, what could possibly be said? It had been quite an accidental meeting—the result of an accident, indeed. Mr. Galbraith was *obliged* to offer assistance, of course he was; any gentleman must have done so, and how *could* she have refused him? Impossible. And he was a very—what a shame of Mr. Millard to have chaffed her so.

They rode along briskly enough, their horses refreshed by the rest, and rapidly approached Dunstalne. Now what was Miss Adelaide to do? She was almost as well known in Dunstalne as in Avonham, yet she must call and see that Brownie was all right. It really was

very embarrassing having this escort with her. And yet she liked it too.

At Dunstalne Mr. Galbraith found old Watts, who had had, he declared, a "ter'ble job" to get Brownie to the veterinary surgeon's, and who had only just arrived; he had been going to hire a saddle-horse, but had found a farmer going to Avonham, and had got a lift from him. Mr. Galbraith rode back to Miss Adelaide with this news, and they proceeded on their way to Avonham. It was three o'clock in the afternoon when they reached that town, and almost the first person Miss Adelaide saw in the street was Shelman.

He started as though a blow had been given to him as he saw who her companion was; she rode rapidly past, giving her mare the spur lightly, and swiftly crossing the market-place; as they reached her father's house Mr. Bompas was just entering his office. He, too, stared as he saw Galbraith, who again jumped down and assisted the young lady to alight.

"Oh! papa," she said, "pray thank Mr. Galbraith for his kindness; poor Brownie fell dead lame at Cumberford, and Watts had to lead him back to Mr. Simmonds and leave him. He's coming home in a trap. Mr. Galbraith came up just after the accident, and was good enough to ride to Beytesbury with me. I don't know what I should have done without his help."

Mr. Bompas was most politely grateful. "My dear sir, I am most sincerely obliged to you, I am sure—ah—will you walk in, Mr. Galbraith, and—ah—take a glass of wine?"

Mr. Galbraith would be most happy it appeared, and Mr. Bompas ordered his stable-boy to take the gentleman's horse home.

"My dear," said Mr. Bompas, ushering Mr. Galbraith into the room where Mrs. Bompas was sitting, having just returned from Bath, "allow me to—ah—present to you Mr. Galbraith—this, sir, is Mrs. Bompas—my daughter Louisa—Mr. Galbraith—my daughter Lucy—Mr. Galbraith."

Polite bows from all parties and much curiosity on the part of the ladies.

"Mr. Galbraith, my love, was fortunately—ah—most fortunately present to-day at Cumberford at the time when—ah—Brownie fell lame—Brownie, my dear, is lame—and he has been good enough to—ah—render Adelaide the service—for which I am sure I am most intensely obliged to him—of—convoying—that, I believe, is a term more usually applied to merchant vessels and—ah—frigates of war—but—let it stand—of convoying her home."

"I'm sure it's very kind of you, sir," said Mrs. Bompas, rather flustered at having in her drawing-room this quiet young man whom her daughters had been calling the "recluse," the "hermit," and various other disparaging names.

"I'm only too happy at having been of any service to a lady," said he, quietly.

Whilst the wine was being poured, Miss Adelaide, who had been changing her habit, entered the room and told her mother and sisters of the kindness of Mr. Galbraith, saying nothing, strange to say, of Mr. Millard's teasing her or of her embarrassment on the journey home. Mr. Galbraith drank a glass of wine and then politely took his leave, Mr. Bompas accompanying him to the door; Mrs.

Bompas proceeding to the lower regions to "see after" her servants, the girls were left alone.

"What a puss you are, Addie," said Louisa; "fancy, Luce, hasn't she luck?"

"What sort of a man *is* the recluse, Addie?" said Lucy.

"A very good sort, I think, Lou; he's not so very 'reclusy,' when he begins to talk, but he doesn't say much about himself either."

"Fancy your meeting him like that," said Lucy. "Lou, I see the hand of fate in this," said the merry girl, clasping her eldest sister round the waist and kissing her; "this young woman is hooked at last, look at her blushes."

"Nonsense!" said Adelaide, blushing very much, however. "Well, girls, I'll tell you something."

"Tell! tell!"

"Well, he really *is* very nice; he's not like any one else I've met at all."

"How does he differ, dear?" said Louisa, laughing at Lucy, who laughed again at her.

"He's more of a Man, I think," said Adelaide. "Lucy, what on earth are you making that horrid noise for?"

Lucy, who had given a most unmelodious bellow, as if the admission had hurt her, now shook her head, and in a tone of mock sympathy, replied,

"Oh, Addie, Addie, it's come at last! You've got all the first symptoms, my dear, as plain as mumps! The others will come in time, my child, but these are as plain as mumps."

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## CHAPTER VII.

### FRIENDS FROM FAR WEST.

MR. PINNIFFER had not broken his word. He had provided for Mr. Galbraith and his guests a dinner, to which, he declared with becoming pride, the lord lieutenant might sit down; it was being cooked under the direction of his wife, and those who knew the Bear and its special dinners knew what *that* meant; he had himself superintended the laying of the table, had looked after the wine with the tenderest of care, and now could at last find time to step into the bar parlor and fill himself a comforting dram, informing those few friends who were there that everything was off his mind and he had time for a quiet glass before his guests came.

Generally speaking, there was no one in the bar between five and six, for which latter hour the dinner was fixed; but this evening, at least half-a-dozen, including, of course, Mr. Timothy Rapsey, were present.

No conversation was passing, for no one wished openly to evince the curiosity he felt, but each man fixed his eyes on the door, to scan everyone who entered. At half-past five, Mr. Galbraith drove up the street in one of Mr. Raraty's dog-carts. By his side was an elderly gentleman with a smiling round face and white hair; they alighted at the door of the hotel, and the boots extricated from the back of the vehicle a portmanteau which he carried into the house.

Mr. Pinniffer met them at the door and they proceeded at once to the room upstairs next to the one in which they were to dine.

The company in the parlor stared at each other without comment.

In ten minutes' time an open carriage in which two gentlemen were seated, drove to the door of the Bear. Mr. Pinniffer going to meet it received orders to put the horses up for the night. Mr. Galbraith's room was asked for and Mr. Pinniffer showed the way, the boots again bringing up the rear with some luggage. The driver of the carriage was promptly interviewed by Mr. Rapsey, who conveyed to his associates the intelligence that the party came from Bath, and was to return there to-morrow. Excitement was yet at a high pitch when there came rattling up the street the omnibus which was the means by which the good folks of Avonham reached the railway, which was yet fully five miles from reaching them. From this alighted two young men, one in a naval uniform, but not an English one, as Mr. Pinniffer, who had seen service, whispered, and the other the ordinary frock coat of everyday life. More luggage, more excitement. Next, Mr. Galbraith's black servant entered the hotel, and, bestowing a grin upon Mr. Pinniffer, passed upstairs. The company could hear the sound of laughing, talking and greeting as the door opened. Then a waiter came down in a mighty hurry, received a bottle of bitters from Miss Pinniffer, and disappeared again. And now having seen all they were likely to see until the dinner was over, having taken in the stupendous fact that there were five gentlemen, entire strangers to the town, dining with a resident scarcely better known than they, the company fell to smoking stolidly.

Upstairs the dinner proceeded merrily; the two waiters, and Mr. Pinniffer who superintended them, attended assiduously to the gentlemen who seemed to have had their appetites thoroughly sharpened by the Marlshire air. Mr. Pinniffer's heart swelled with pride as he listened to the encomiums passed upon the cookery and the wines. The conversation was disappointing in the extreme to the worthy waiters, who had, like the Bath coachman, been interviewed by Mr. Rapsey, before dinner; two of the gentlemen, the party from Bath, in fact, had been making a tour of the Continent, and imparted freely their impressions and experiences. Mr. Galbraith was uniformly addressed as "Harry," but as most people in Avonham knew that he had signed the few written notes and checks which from time to time he had sent his tradesmen "H. Galbraith," that did not seem very valuable information to give to any inquirer. And once, in the middle of the dinner, when Galbraith had drunk most cordially to his friends (as far as they could make out), the language in which his short speech was made was entirely unknown to the attendants, as was also that in which his guests had replied; and the rest of the talk whilst dinner lasted had been of things for the most part beyond their ken. Hints they got that the party had been long known to one another and that they had passed through adventures, the recollection of which caused sometimes laughter and sometimes sorrowful murmurs of regret; but as the dinner drew to a close, and the wine was freely circulating, the conversation was carried on almost entirely in this "forrin' tongue," which the party all spoke, and which Mr. Pinniffer was ready to avow was not French, nor anything like it.

At last, the dinner was at an end, the cloth was removed, and the wine having been set, the waiters and Mr. Pinniffer, with many bows, left the room. Cigars were lighted and the decanters were briskly passed. Galbraith waited till all were primed and smoking, and then turning to his servant, who had entered the room, said—

“Edward; you’ll take a few cigars, and a bottle of wine, and sit in the next room, so that you can see if anyone comes to the door. If anyone does, send them down-stairs again; if I want you I will ring the hand-bell you brought.”

“Very well, sah,” said the negro, and taking his cigars and wine he withdrew.”

“Now, boys,” said Galbraith, turning to his guests, “bumpers! here’s to the Old Squire Gulch boys, and here’s to the old squire!”

(Mr. Reuben Matley down-stairs took his pipe from his mouth and mildly observed that the gentlemen upstairs seemed to be enjoying themselves.

“Drinking the queen’s health,” Mr. Follwell supposed.)

“Well, boys,” said the elderly gentleman, who had first driven up with Galbraith; “they were good days while they lasted, and we didn’t do badly out of them, eh?”

“No, squire, thanks to you and your iron rule.”

“How many times I’ve thought over the dear old place,” said the young naval officer; “and the squire and you, Harry, and old Polecat that ran the saloon, and how he got shot that time you fellows went over to Cinnabar Mountain, and came back so dead-beat—such a trio of scarecrows.”

“Served us right,” said another; “we haven’t forgotten how you took us back, and never shook us, but chummed us in again as if nothing had happened; you haven’t forgotten that, Harry, have you?”

“No, Fred, and never shall, old fellow; here’s to the stay-at-homes of Old Squire Gulch!”

(“They’re going through the list of toasts proper,” said Mr. Pinniffer, down-stairs, “that’s the Army and Navy, I s’pose.”

“Most likely,” said the customers.)

“How queer though,” said Fred, “that we should all be in Europe together, and that you knew it, Harry.”

“Precious lucky, I think; the sight of six old gulchers, and the squire one of them, is a sight for sore eyes, I think. What have we all been doing that we haven’t met before?”

The speaker looked round the table, as he made the inquiry. “Come, squire, make us all confess.”

“Ay, ay, well said,” exclaimed the officer.

“Well then, boys, own up all of you, one at a time. You begin, lieutenant. Come, Ralph Derring, tell us how you got those clothes on your back.”

“Easily told, squire. When we broke camp at the gulch and all came East, I went home, found the old people glad to see me, and more glad perhaps because I’d full pockets to show for empty ones. The old man was on the navy board. He soon worked me into a ship, and here I am, second of the ‘Santee.’”

"Pile gone?" said the squire.

"No, *eir*," said the young fellow, laughing; "pass the deal, squire!"

"Now, Fred Markham."

"Not much more to say than Ralph had, squire. Came back to England; folks glad to see me; old man found I'd sown the wild oats; took me into his business, and here I am, at Harry's invitation."

"Then your pile isn't gone?"

"Bigger than ever, squire. I wish some of you fellows looked poor!"

"Now, Tom Reynolds."

"Faith, I'm comfortable, too. I'd no parents to go to when I left the West, so I stayed in the East a while. I speculated a bit in land, and had tearing luck, and I'm living in Brooklyn, and very comfortable."

"Married, Tom?"

"Yes, begad I am, this two years. She is in Bath this minute. Walter and I came over to-day together."

"Bravo, Tom, good record! Now, Bryceson, where's *your* wife?"

"No, no, squire," said Walter Bryceson. "I've kept my pile and swelled it somewhat, but I've not gone so far as Tom as yet. I'm down in Essex; my father's been dead about two years, and I'm a squire, like yourself, now."

"Well, Harry, there's only us two, go on, you first."

"Much as you see, squire. Pile all right and health all right; living here quietly! No wife as yet, and no thoughts of one."

"Strong as ever, Harry?" said Ralph. "My cats! how you used to heft things."

"Much the same in all ways. I fancy, boys, the squire's going to give his experience, and then we want to talk to you—so heave ahead, squire."

"Bless your hearts, my boys," said the old fellow, beaming round the table, "I'm just the same as ever, only richer for the gulch; living quietly in Concord, and just allowing myself a scientific run over to Europe now and again, as I am now. That's my tale, or experience, as Harry puts it."

"Well, then, boys, as we're all well," said impulsive Irish Tom Reynolds, "here's the old toast—'here's to us.'"

("Wonder what that one is," said Mr. Rapsey.

"Something popular, you may depend upon it," answered Mr. Follwell; "I wonder if they're a-going to sing?")

"Now, Harry," said Derring, after the toast had been uproariously honored, "what is your news? What have you and the squire to talk to us about?"

"I want to talk about my brother," said Galbraith, after a short pause.

There was a dead silence, a sympathetic silence, one such as falls on a circle of friends who know that the next words which break it will be fraught with unpleasant meaning, leading to the opening of

some hidden wound, the marring of some dream of joy; then Walter Bryceson said—

“Ah! poor Reginald, poor fellow, his was a sad death, old man.”

“Yes, Harry,” said Fred Markham, “that woman was the ruin of his happiness; she broke up his life; what a pity he ever saw her!”

“Ah, indeed,” said hearty Reynolds, “but, Harry, my boy, you weren’t to blame in the affair. Faith, you were only a boy. Is it good to grieve over it now? Why, that’s years back—before we first went West with the squire.”

“I know that, Tom,” said Galbraith, “and how you took me with you just because I was his brother, and, out of your old friendship for him, you adopted me, old fellows.”

“Of course we did, and a bright and promising babe of grace you’ve turned out. A credit to his foster-fathers, hasn’t he?”

“Fred, Tom, squire, you three were with Reggie when he saw this woman first, weren’t you?” asked Galbraith.

“Yes,” was the reply.

“Would you know her again if you saw her?”

“I should know her anywhere,” said Fred.

“I fancy I should too,” said the squire.

“I’m not very confident about it,” observed Tom, “but I think I should recognize her. Bedad, she was a fine woman.”

“Walter and Ralph, you never saw her, did you?”

“No!”

“You heard the tale of her and Reginald?”

“Yes, partly; you know it was always a subject we hesitated to touch on.”

“Well, then, I’ll tell it you again, that you may really know the facts of it, and after that I want you to hear what the squire has to say.”

“You must know that I have never seen my brother’s wife; that’s necessary in the first place. Reginald and I are sons of the same mother, but Reginald’s father died when he was quite a child, and mother married again. My father was never particularly fond of either of us, that I could see; but he was anything but kind to Reginald. That was the reason of his going away from home; an uncle took care of him, and, when he died, left him a small income, about £200 a-year. Of course Reginald was under age, and so he came home for a bit, and my father managed his money. Well, they couldn’t agree, and one day after a terrible row Reginald declared he would stay at home no longer; he was eighteen years old, and I was only twelve then. Mother was in delicate health, or I believe Reginald would have gone before. At any rate, go he did, and of course America was his destination. When he had been there three years, and I was only fifteen, mother died, and I was left at home with father. I believe he was fond of me in his way, but he was a reserved kind of man, and whatever he might have felt he kept pretty much to himself. My youthful days at home were not my happiest ones, and I was always glad enough to get back to fagging at Rugby, I can tell you. Reginald was twenty-one when he made his appearance at home to claim the money his uncle had left him, and was a fine, manly-looking fellow. Father and he were

no more affable to one another than usual, and although the money was scrupulously accounted for, and father had really managed the affair in the best possible way for Reginald, yet there was a row over the settlement, as indeed there was over almost all that passed between those two. It was then that Reginald conceived the idea of taking me over to America with him. I had been grumbling to him one day about some fancied wrongs in home-life, and eagerly accepted his offer. We left home on a visit to an aunt, my mother's sister. We did not go there, but went to Liverpool, and before father knew that we had not paid our visit we were three parts of the way across. Well, when we got there, Reginald decided to put me to school, and I went first to a tutor's, and then, as you know, Walter, to Yale, where we were class-mates."

"We were, for three years," said Bryceson.

"It was during that time that Reginald went West. It was there he met this woman, who was singing at a theater in St. Louis. He was fascinated with her, and married her: she was, as some of you know, a remarkably handsome woman."

"She was, indeed," said the squire, "and poor Reginald was very fond of her, and she of him at first, apparently."

"Well, you know how she treated him: how she made him jealous with other men, how she refused to come East, how her tantrums drove him nearly wild, and how, one time when he had run East to see me one vacation, she left him forever, and drove him to madness and death."

The speaker's voice trembled, and he paused and drank some wine before resuming,

"I shall never forget how Reginald took the news, how he rushed away from me—it was the last time I ever saw him—quite frantic. You know the rest of the tale even better than I, for I did not know you then, and had never set eyes on Constance—a pretty name, forsooth—in my life."

"Well, what we know of the matter," said Fred Markham, "is just this. After Reginald Wilding had gone East to see you, this woman, as you say, left with a fellow from New York, an engineer. Reginald was of course told of it by one of us. We'd no idea of anything wrong until the mischief was all done. He came back quite like a madman, refused all offers of help, but traced the runaway couple to Memphis and Baton Rouge. There, by all accounts, he met them; and there, as we learned afterward, was shot by the fellow who had robbed him of his wife, and died in a few days, delirious and unknown."

"That's right, Fred," said Tom Reynolds, "we both tried all we knew to get hold of the blackguard and have a shot at him, but he got away to New Orleans, and from there to Havana, as far as we could make out, and we never set eyes on either of them—bad luck to them."

"But, Harry," said Ralph Derring, "why is it, old fellow, that you bring this up again? Do you remember that when you came West to St. Louis, where we all were, and whence we had intended starting for Colorado with poor Reginald before this affair happened, it was agreed after we had, as Tom says, adopted you, that we shouldn't let you brood over these matters?"

"I'll answer that," said the squire, breaking in before Galbraith had time to reply. "The reason is one that Harry can hardly give you. This is my hand. Harry brought this up here because I asked him to, and doesn't himself know the reason of my request. Tom and Fred, you went down to Baton Rouge after Reginald Wilding?"

"We did."

"Where did he die?"

"In the Central Infirmary there, raving mad and shot through the chest."

"You're wrong, my boys—sit still, Harry—Reginald Wilding is alive. He has been under my care in Glenbrook Private Asylum for four months past, and if you see him—and see him you will, I know, as soon as you can get to him—I'll stake my professional reputation that he will be a sane man ten days after you meet."

"Well," said Mr. Timothy Rapsey, taking his pipe out of his mouth and looking round for corroboration, "Mr. Galbraith's one of *the* very quietest gentlemen I've ever come across, but his friends are making up for him to-night, I'm blest if they ain't. There's the bell, Mr. Pinniffer, again. They're not going to spare the wine either, it seems. Ah, there's nothing like youth after all; it's the time for diversion. Give me another little drop of Hollands, miss. We may just as well enjoy ourselves down-stairs as up, for all I can see."

## CHAPTER VIII.

### CANVASSING.

"How many 'lections have you seen in Avonham, in your time, father?" said Ex-Mayor Killett, grazier and butcher, taking his clay pipe from his mouth and lifting a healthy-looking brown jug thereto.

The pair were seated in the little summer-house which had been the work of the old man in the first summer after his retirement from his flourishing business in favor of his son. There was no more affectionate and dutiful son in the country-side than the brawny Hercules who had succeeded him; and no one paid him more deference. The old man was the oracle of the neighborhood, and the son sat at his feet as at those of another Gamaliel. It was acknowledged that no one could compete with the old Mas'r Killett in local lore, and the evening of his life was spent in telling the younger generations around him what had passed and happened in Marlshire in its morning. He now in turn removed his pipe, and, taking a draught from his own especial brown jug, conveniently placed at his elbow and filled with his son's best home-brewed, proceeded to answer his question.

Now when Mas'r Killett or any other Marlshire oracle spoke of the days of yore in reply to any query put, a certain manual and extension exercise was gone through with time-honored solemnity. First, the capacious waistcoat was slowly pulled down until its wrinkles had well-nigh disappeared, then the disengaged hand (*i.e.*, the hand which held neither pipe nor tankard) was rubbed slowly and softly up and down the side of the leg a few times; after that the body was inclined forward, and the pipe stem pointed to the in-

terlocutor (if there were no pipe present the fore-finger performed its office), and, lastly, the rubbing hand stopped and rested on the point of the knee, emphasizing the answer by a series of taps or slaps, according to whether the subject were being calmly or excitedly discussed—and the first word of the reply was generally “who’y!” This was the cabalistic forerunner of the speech of the average Marlshire oracle.

There were great advantages in this. In the first place, you got your reply diplomatically, and therefore trustworthily. Having surrounded the desired information with all the ancient ceremony and pomp due to its merit, no Marlshire sage would think for a moment of advancing anything but the best at his command. Then, again, it was not a hasty answer, but one which was being painfully and carefully revolved in the mind whilst the hands were gracefully preparing the way for it. Lastly, it precluded heat and anger, and showed that your question was respected as it was expected the reply would be. All the appropriate maneuvers having been performed by old Mas’r Killet, and the preliminary “who’y,” having been produced, he answered his questioning son.

“Not more than about a five, my son; Sir Headingly (Mr. H. Cann he were when he first come here), he’ve sat here for eighteen year, and afore him was Mr. Heeld, him as is Sir John now, a notable old man he must be, and lives somewheres abroad. Thirty-four year he sat for Avonham. There was Mr. Mathews sat with him till the Great Bill of ’32. There was never any ’lection in those days—the seat was the surest there was anywhere. A real fine couple of gentlemen were Sir John and Mr. Mathews. Sir John never gave up knee-breeches let who would. Mr. Mathews was master of the hounds a many years, and you must remember both of them well—yes, surely you do.”

“Why, surely, father. I mind Mr. Mathews’s funeral as if ’twas only yesterday. Why, Sir John was member then, and it was before Sir Headingly sat here at all.”

“To be sure, my son, to be sure it was. Well, now, before Sir John first came, there was a lord sat here, a fine young fellow he was, and was shot somewhere close to London by one as cheated him at cards, such things young blood will do; six years he sat, and came in the first of the eighteen hundreds; before him was a very great general that fought the Americans in his time, likewise the French, at that great rock Gibberalter. One arm he had only, and great doings there was at his ’lection. I was but a lad, but I remember it well. There was a banker gentleman who was sitting member here then, and when the ’lection time came, this General Handred he came down and beat him. Money was spent in those times, and long purses were a snare unto many. And that’s all the ’lection doings that’s been in Avonham this eight-and-sixty years, as many men could testify if so be as they were alive to do so.”

“’Tis surely seldom a town does have so few,” said the son, reflectively.

“Yes,” said the old man, “and ’twill put many good men into a quandary now how to vote to save giving offense.”

“’Twill that, father. I wish the ’lection were further; we’ve been living quiet and neighborly for years, and had nothin’ to come

in between friends 'cept maybe a bit o' market-day trading that seemed to pinch one side now and again. But lor', that was soon settled and made up, and 'twasn't like these political disputes. Why, dear me, Mr. Arto and John Rann were quite at words in the shop yesterday morning when they were waiting. Mr. Rann he's all for a change, and he's working for Mr. Boldham. Mr. Arto he's against new measures, and don't seem to lay much heart to the 'lection, that's where Sir Headingly's side are making a mistake, I reckon. Well, they were quite sharp over it. Mr. Arto says he's none for upsetting a town this way. 'Corn,' he says, 'is my ockipation and oats is my change of method.' Out comes Mr. Rann with what I must say seemed rather rough, and said as that was the sort of choice and change a donkey or an unreasoning dumb horse would make. And really, father, without taking on me to measure Mr. John Rann's words and meanings, I believe he only put the horse in to save Mr. Arto being too raw over the donkey. There was going to be words over it I could see, only I hurried cutting Rann's steak and drew Mr. Arto off on to a saddle of mutton and saved trouble so."

And the good-hearted giant shook his head sadly as he thought of the division in the town.

He was not the only inhabitant who regretted the existing state of things; the younger men of the town delighted in the contest, and went heart and soul into the fray for their respective sides, but the seniors shook their heads. Among them Sir Headingly Cann had a perceptible majority, although some like Doctor Mompesson were in favor of a younger and more energetic man. There was no burning question of the day imported into the election at Avonham as was the case with larger constituencies. Mr. Boldham made the Railway Bill his trump card, and twitted his rival with having so long delayed bringing it forward. Sir Headingly again promised the Bill and rested his claim on his long services, on his Church and State proclivities, and on his personal influence in the town.

To say truth, the old man had a task before him which was not only uncongenial but repugnant to him. For eighteen years his annual address had been for him only a small part of a connection which long use had made very pleasant. To reply for the House of Commons after the great local banquets, to preside at the Agricultural and Horticultural Show dinners, to see his name as patron or president of almost all the societies or associations in that part of the county had led him gradually to adopt toward the town a paternal and protecting air which was eminently pleasing to him and not at all resented by Avonham. So that now when he came to face a meeting only half sympathetic with him, when he was "heckled" by suddenly sprung-up local politicians, and when his bland and conciliatory responses were stigmatized as "blarney" and "soft soap," the old man, who was the soul of honor and tenacious of it to a degree, felt almost inclined to choke at what he called the "unthankful depravity" of his constituents. Nevertheless, the very meekness with which he bore himself was one of his strongest recommendations. Many an Avonham elector, who had felt aggrieved that the Railway Bill had not been obtained for the town and who had made up his mind to show Sir Headingly that he individually would submit to no further delay, came away from the meeting fully set-

ting in his own mind that after all it was a shame to desert the old man, and that he for one would stand by him once more.

Much of Sir Headingly's labor and anxiety was taken off his hands by his nephew. For no one in Avonham recognized more clearly than this young fellow the exact position of parties, and no one was more keenly alive to his own interests in the matter. Defeat for Sir Headingly meant just such a golden chance for Boldham and Shelman after him as his chance had been considered for the last few years. He saw clearly that if his uncle lost this seat his own political career would receive a rough check from which it would not readily recover. His uncle would be so grieved at the loss of the seat that he would doubtless at once sever all connection with the town, and retire altogether from political life. Where then would be his chance of stepping into the shoes which he had always considered such an easy fit for him? Gone, and nothing left for it but either to wait a new election and fight Avonham on his own account, or to seek another constituency under the wing of one of his uncle's political friends. Would he get another chance? Not very likely, for he was looked upon as being sure to retain Avonham for the party after his uncle's career was finished, and if this opportunity were allowed to slip, farewell to political patronage for some time to come.

On the other hand, there was more attached to the contest than the mere seat victory. Holding the seat against the growing power and the fierce attacks of the other party would be rewarded without doubt. The old man had received the baronetcy for conciliation, might not the young one expect nobility for successful resistance after his uncle was gone? He left no stone unturned to insure success, he was more affable than ever; even political opponents were not made aware of the slightest change of feeling. The younger politicians were keenly argued with, but the argument was never allowed to get to the length of a dispute: there was no fault to be found with him, and he frankly told the "Boldhamites," as his uncle's opponents were called, that he was glad that the contest had occurred, as it gave him an opportunity of showing his real feelings toward all in Avonham, political friend and political foe alike.

Alfred Shelman came out of the ordeal very much less skillfully than his rival. Never accustomed to conciliate, by nature rather aggressive than yielding, with a hasty temper under scarcely any control, and with an ill-disguised contempt for the people whom he had to visit and fraternize with, he compared most unfavorably with the suave and courteous Rivers. If the baronet were helped by his nephew, the banker was rather hampered by this, although Shelman worked hard and energetically in his way, and took the greatest possible interest in the conflict.

The Pariahs whom we mentioned before were the ones who extracted the most enjoyment out of the turmoil. Here was a legitimate chance for a fling at respectability at last. The heavy fathers of the town, the sobersides, were set by the ears, the youthful spirits had their turn. True, most of them had no votes, but their fathers and uncles had; their crusade could be carried into every household. Mr. Pinniffer and the Bear Hotel did not care over much for the company of these young men, but the Blues of them mustered at

the Great George, and the Yellows at the Woolpack, and from these two strongholds the warfare was waged.

Of course the first thing to be done was to vocalize the contest, so a soaring genius at the Great George decided. Having collected a chorus of boys from the Church schools and elsewhere, and enlisted them on the Blue side, he supplied them with a soul-stirring election song, which went to the popular tune of the day, so that the youngsters, who entered hugely into the fun of the thing and were made bold by the unwonted license of the whole surroundings, made the side streets, the smaller lanes and the very church-yard itself echo with their chant:

“Vote, boys, do,  
For the old true blue;  
Blue is the color of the sky;  
So vote every man  
For Sir 'Edin'ly Cann,  
And we'll make old Boldy fly.”

This, of course, was felt by the Woolpack contingent to be a political movement of very deep significance, and one to which a counter mine must be sprung; after deep cogitation and much poetical outpouring, another song was evolved from the inner consciousness of the Yellow bard, and some Yellow boys having been enlisted and duly trained, the town was made hideous with another song. The same tune was adopted, it being considered that a monopoly was to be denied the Blues, as it was an air well known to both parties alike. So the Yellow side sung:

“Cann, Cann, Cann,  
Will never be the man,  
And the Tories 'll say he sold 'em;  
And all the silly Blues  
Will be shaking in their shoes,  
When we bring in Mister Boldham.”

This second effort was voted by the Blue part weak, and the singing boys complained that the extra feet of verse fitted the tune but ill, and that the Blue boys had the advantage. A few deserted and sung the original chant, and altogether the Yellow party had the worse of the poetry. The Yellow poet on being appealed to to remedy this defect waxed wroth, declared that his version was infinitely superior to the other, that a redundancy of feet was a positive advantage as giving the song more “go,” and finally threatened to transport his genius and efforts bodily to the Great George, if he were bothered any more about it. His loss would have been such a dire calamity to the party that the bard was suffered to rest in peace.

Mr. Sennett, the mayor, had no enviable position; he, of course, in virtue of his office, held the post of returning officer, and he heartily wished the whole business at the bottom of the Avon. The club was excited over it. Wolstenhomle and Hoppener Pye were staunch supporters of Sir Headingly. Dr. Mompesson and Mr. Follwell, on the other hand, were just as keen for Mr. Boldham, and the opposition of Mr. Rann (yellow) and Mr. Beadlemore Arto (blue) was, as we have seen, pronounced and spirited. So that the club was not so harmonious as usual, and Mr. Sennett was not the only member who sighed for peace. Mr. Bompas, Mr. Raraty, quiet Reuben Mat-

ley, all hated the fuss and pother which had taken possession of the town, and wished the business well over. But in others the feeling was not so pacific. John Rann was in his glory; Barnabas Chickelholt and he were political cronies, and from Rann's office steps held forth to all comers. Benjamin Pollimoy brought all the vast experience of a traveler to bear upon the election, and loudly upheld the Crown, the living wearer of which it had been his privilege to behold; and Timothy Rapsey, in his eagerness to know what was being done by both sides, ran some risk of being trusted by neither. So the contest went on, with both sides confident of success, and each party narrowly watching the other and ready to countercheck all movements which seemed likely to lead to victory.

It was on one of the evenings when there was no meeting of his uncle's supporters, and after a day's patient canvassing of the electors, that Walter Rivers, after standing for a few minutes at the church-yard gate, looking somewhat wearied and bored, turned his steps across the church-yard path, and descending the steps at the end, reached the gates of Priory House. Here he halted, and stood for a minute as if debating some question with himself, and then, having apparently made up his mind with a certain amount of effort, rang the bell and was admitted. In a few minutes Mrs. Stanhope came into the room where he was standing, and greeted him cordially.

"Have you found your way here, at last? Where is Sir Headingly? I haven't seen either of you once, ever since this worrying election work began; how is your uncle?"

"Fairly well, considering the worry he has gone through; you know he feels very much aggrieved at having any opposition to him."

"Didn't you expect any?"

"I did, certainly. I foresaw that Dunstalne was likely, sooner or later, to influence Avonham politics; but I never liked to let uncle think so. It would only have worried him, and I had some idea that if a dissolution came this year—" and he paused.

"That he would resign the seat to you; you mean that?"

"Yes, I do; it has always been understood between us that it was to be so, and nothing but the opposition of Boldham has made uncle put up again."

"Do you think you would have been sure of your seat?"

"I think so. Boldham might have opposed me, or Shelman, but I fancy I could hold my own against either of them, backed up, of course, by uncle's influence and help."

"You are sorry, of course, that that didn't happen?"

"Yes, of course, and a good deal disappointed; you know that I have ambitions, and I was in hopes of being able at once to begin Parliamentary life; yes, I am certainly sorry that things have turned out so."

Mrs. Stanhope looked very kindly on this good-looking young politician. It is not unpleasant to a handsome woman to console a man for disappointment.

"It is a pity," she replied, with a little sigh; "I am very sorry. I was in hopes, myself, that you would have the seat."

"I am quite consoled if you are sorry," he said. "I am glad you take an interest in my career."

"An interest? Of course I do—you know that; I've told you that before. I hope to see you a Member of Parliament in another year; it would be ungracious not to be interested in an old friend."

"Boldham is an old friend too," said he, laughing.

"Yes, it's the worst of these elections, they come in between people in several ways; I'm almost thankful I haven't a vote; indeed I am quite glad; I'm sure I shouldn't know what to do with it; I should refuse to vote at all, I think. Are you and Mr. Shelman friendly?"

"Oh, so so, we met soon after the business began and agreed that no private feeling should be changed by it, but of course in the heat of the contest one sometimes loses sight of that, and we were never *very* attached to each other, I believe."

She slightly colored, she had an idea that Rivers had some reason for the remark, founded on what had passed between them at the Priory House on the day of the bishop's visit.

He saw the flush and saw his chance as well. In the low, earnest tones, which he knew how to use so effectively, he led the conversation to his uncle, thence to that wish of his which we have heard expressed before; he pleaded earnestly and skillfully, for himself, urging his suit with modesty and warmth; she could not but be flattered, the consciousness of triumph was strong upon her. Here she had the two foremost young men of her little world at her feet, and he, the handsomer and more eligible of the two, was asking her to be his wife. She had expected it; she had guessed that under the joking words of the interview at the party lay a deeper meaning, and she had made up her mind what her answer should be when the question came. Yes—she would marry this man, she would help him in the great world of London, he was talented, ambitious, and wealthy, so was she: they would be *somebodies* on a greater scale than in this little quiet country town; a bright career lay open to them, and the ball was at their feet.

So Rivers found his task an easy one. She accepted him with dignity and the grace that was peculiarly her own; there was something almost protecting in her manner: she seemed to devote herself to him as a guardian and a help. There was a calm yielding of herself to him, as of a strong nature unbending itself and dedicating itself to the service of a weaker one. He was very grateful; his joy was unbounded. He had won a great prize here; he would keep it and cherish it for its own sake and his.

The moon was shining brightly when he took his leave, and walked down the quiet street and up the church-yard steps to where the white stones watched over the graves of Avonham's dead. It was a night of peace, and he was just in the mood to take in all its beauties. A hard day's work had been succeeded by an evening of inexpressible calm and joy, and his cup of content was full. Only let the election go right and all would be well with him. Wealth, honors, rewards were all before him; there seemed no turn of fortune's wheel which he had yet to desire. He passed down the High Street of the town, exchanging cheery good-nights to those few townsfolk yet in the street, and reached his uncle's house. He

would tell him the good news before he slept. The old-man had had a wearying day, he would cheer him with his tidings and share his joy with him. It did cheer Sir Headingly greatly. It was touching to see how the old man rejoiced in the young one's love and happiness. The cares of the election were forgotten, and the two talked far into the night of the fortune that had fallen to Walter.

"I shall see her to-morrow morning," were the baronet's parting words, "and welcome her as I would a daughter; you're a lucky fellow, Walter, and you deserve to be, for you have always been a good boy to me. Good-night, my dear boy, God bless you."

She stood long at the window after he had gone, and watched the moon silvering the little stream, that ran to feed the river at the town bridge, and as she turned away she murmured—

"Perfectly happy, but for the past—perfectly—and the past seems far away. There have been years of sorrow and years of doing good. Surely they will atone. I will forget the past; there is a future coming now!"

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## CHAPTER IX.

### MR. BOMPAS NOTICES MANY THINGS.

MR. ABEL BOMPAS had very little of Mr. Timothy Rapsey's curiosity in his composition. He liked, of course, to know what was going on around him, and took care to keep himself posted in the affairs of the town, but there was nothing obtrusive in the man. He would chirp (if so venerable an old bird might with propriety be said to chirp) at his family table over the small-talk of his neighbors, would retail what he had heard in the street, or at the club, and would increase his store of news from the gatherings of Mrs. Bompas, who, as most plump, amiable, well-preserved matrons do, dearly loved a bit of gossip with a neighbor over the fragrant Souchong. This was the extent of Mr. Bompas's share in the chatter and scandal of Avonham. The confidential nature of much of his business demanded a reticence, which had by degrees become customary, and the really good heart of the pompous, but kindly old gentleman shut out from his nature that spice of malice, which is indispensable to your well-regulated male town-gossip. So it came to pass that Mr. Bompas at this stage of our tale, being much exercised in mind respecting certain occurrences taking place under his eyes, did shut himself up within himself, and ceasing to retail to others any of the observations which he took by wholesale, gave his mind solely to taking very particular notice of certain events happening all round him.

About the election Mr. Bompas was quite easy; he had been duly waited on by both candidates in person, and had frankly, and at once, declined to have anything to do with the matter at all. He would vote for neither party, would attend no meetings, would have neither lot nor part in it. Never a politician at heart, the very reverse of a noisy man, he left the struggle to those who were interested in it, and went on his own way.

But Mr. Bompas had matters nearer his own household to attend

to, and circumstances affecting the well-being of his own household to watch; and, first among these matters, was the conduct of his artied pupil, Mr. Adolphus Carter.

From time immemorial it has been accepted as a perfectly satisfactory and orthodox state of things that the 'prentice, artied pupil, or probationer of any merchant, craftsman, or professional man possessing any daughter with good looks as a portion of her endowment, shall fall in love with the said daughter. Whether the passion he requited or not has nothing whatever to do with it; the young man must bow to his fate and the young lady likes it—expects it—looks for it as a perquisite and a right. She may not return the soft feeling, she may not definitely accept the proffered devotion, but she would most assuredly feel that the foundations of apprenticeship were shaken to their center, and that the fountains of the great deep of commerce were broken up if she did not receive it. Mr. Adolphus Carter had, of course, followed orthodoxy as befitted the son of a county parson, and had even exceeded the prescribed limits of passion, for, whereas, it is undoubtedly correct to attach one's self to one fair object in a family, Mr. Carter had allowed his tender heart to become enmeshed in the toils of all three of his master's daughters. Until lately this had been a position of great comfort to him, and he complacently basked in the smiles of the Misses Bompas, and was not in the least averse to being gently rallied by his companions upon the state of his heart. When all the countryside youth were sighing for the fair ones, when schemes for gaining brief entrance into the private apartments of the house of the worthy auctioneer were laid with a depth and circumstantiality befitting a political plot, how blessed was the lot of the fortunate youth who met the charmers every day, who was frequently partaker of the cheerful tea and the more jovial supper, and who stood well enough in his principal's graces to be able to indulge the not unreasonable hope that he might effect in time a double partnership, and enter the business and the family at the same time. Which of the ladies he would honor he had not yet made up his mind, but that was a matter which could be decided upon at leisure or perhaps might be better left to accident to determine.

Mr. Adolphus had, therefore, resented as a personal injury to himself the escort, which has been described in a former chapter, and the face and form of Mr. Galbraith were odious to him. His nerves had been roughly shaken by their first interview; he had vowed vengeance then, but his wrath had somewhat subsided until the day of the ride to Beytesbury, which had caused it to burst forth again with increased fury. He grinned savagely at Galbraith when he saw him in the street, and hinted mysteriously to his friends of a dark and dreadful fate overshadowing some one whom he hated, finding in this that subtle relief which little men and little minds feel in venting their spite on some absent and unconscious person. But after the dinner at the Bear his enemy had become insupportable; he could stand him no longer, his very life was imbittered, and made a burden to him; not alone through his first foe, but through his friend.

And this friend was also the cause of much heavy pondering to Mr. Carter's employer.

When Mr. Galbraith's guests had consumed Mr. Pinniffer's excellent dinner, and had tried and approved of the luxurious feather beds which were the pride of his worthy spouse, and had eaten a hearty breakfast and seen the lions of Avonham, which were few, they had driven away from the town in the highest spirits, bearing with them their host who went to see them all off. Two of the party who were going to Bath by road, parted from the rest at the end of the town and the remainder proceeded to the railway, being driven by Mr. Galbraith himself in Mr. Raraty's dog-cart; but only two of the occupants of that vehicle quitted Marlshire at that time, for Mr. Galbraith, and a young friend whom he addressed as Walter, returned to Mr. Raraty's stables with the trap. The negro Edward had moved a portmanteau to the Coombes, and the Avonham carrier had, in a few days, carried a portly looking and weighty trunk there from the railway. This trunk had at once come under the scrutiny of Mr. Rapsey, who announced that the gentleman staying with Mr. Galbraith was a certain Walter Bryceson, Esq., and Mrs. Pinniffer and Miss Pinniffer, her rosy-cheeked daughter, declared that he was as handsome a looking young man as any one might wish to see, and Mr. Pinniffer gave it as his opinion that Mr. Galbraith was a quiet gent, a little too quiet for a young gent, and that if there was a gent as was calculated to wake a gent up a little this one seemed the very gent to do it.

Indeed, Mr. Walter Bryceson, having seen that he was in a goodly land, proceeded to make the best of it, and amused himself greatly with the town and its inhabitants; he would stroll through the market-place, cigar in mouth, and chat to the farmers; he speedily knew the face of every young lady who assisted in the commerce of the town, from Miss Pinniffer, at the Bear, to the milliner's apprentices at the bridge foot, and such an admirer of the fair sex was, it may be sure, not long in discovering the pretty faces and graceful shapes of the acknowledged belles of the town. Mr. Carter was agonized to find that Mr. Bryceson had obtained an introduction to Mr. Bompas, and was high in the good graces of his employer's helpmeet. So his brow grew darker than ever, he puzzled his friends by hints still more obscure and deadly, and startled Mr. Bompas greatly at times by a snappishness and abruptness which greatly discomposed him.

Mr. Bompas also noticed about this time that Miss Adelaide was in the habit of blushing in the rosiest manner whenever Mr. Galbraith's name was mentioned, and he also made the discovery that the name *was* mentioned very frequently by the young lady's sisters, apparently with the intention of bringing about that pleasing state of confusion; and finally the good father made up his mind that something was amiss between his family and Mr. Shelman, and that, in some inscrutable manner, Mr. Galbraith and Mr. Bryceson were concerned in this matter also.

One evening, as the worthy old fellow was jogging homeward, after a sale at an outlying village, filled with that calm which comes of a good day's work well done, he overtook on the road his old friend and crony, Mr. Sennett. Mr. Bompas pulled up and offered his friend a lift, which was accepted.

"Not sorry to find a friend driving homeward," said Mr. Sennett, as he climbed to his place.

"I am returning from Mr. Poysener's sale," said Bompas.

"Ah, ha! good sale?"

"Moderately so, mo-de-rately so, Sennett. Any news?"

"No, none particular; the nomination, you know, of course, takes place on Monday."

"I shall be most remarkably pleased when the contest, which I can only regard as a most unfor-tu-nate occurrence," said Mr. Bompas, "is all over."

"Yes," said his friend, "you won't be better pleased than I shall."

"I really think," said Bompas, "that I shall send Mrs. Bompas and the girls down to Weymouth, in order that they may be away from the consequent turmoil and excitement."

"Good plan. Are you going to stop at Beytesbury? I want to say half a word to Millard if you are."

"I can easily do so; Millard has just recovered from his last attack, and I should like to see him."

Mr. Millard welcomed his friends heartily, and they were soon discussing the contents of a cobwebbed and tenderly-handled bottle which he brought reverently from some dark nook. Mr. Sennett's errand done, a general chat followed, in which, of course, the election was the principal but not the all-absorbing topic.

"That was a smart young fellow that Addie brought over here with her the other day," said the host, at last.

"He is a young man of very pleasing and quiet manners," said Mr. Bompas.

"Anything up between him and Addie, Bompas?"

"My dear sir!" said Mr. Bompas, holding up his hands in surprise, "what ever induced you to imagine that?"

"Imagine it," said Millard; "come, Bompas, you know what our fathers used to think about us when we were young, and went riding about the country with *our* present wives—what do you say, Sennett?"

"Ah, you see, you have the advantage over me, Millard; we bachelors—"

"Don't know anything about it, of course, of course. Well, Bompas, judging from what I saw of the spark, my pretty god-daughter might do far worse. That young fellow has his head screwed on the right way. Gad, he could teach some of us something in farming even, I think."

"But, my dear Millard," began Mr. Bompas, "I assure you I know of nothing—"

"Not yet, of course," said the hearty old fellow; "well, well, you'll know in time. By the bye, Sennett, talking of young people and their settling in life, young Shelman is at me to sell him some of my land backing on to the river, the Downholmes—you know."

"Yes."

"He wants to build and settle down," he says. "Do you know, Bompas, I can't quite make that young fellow out. As an old friend I may tell you in confidence, and Sennett here won't say anything, I know, I once had a very great idea that there was something be-

tween him and one of your girls, I couldn't quite make out which. And you and he used to be more friendly than you are, usen't you? What's the matter?"

"My dear Millard," said Mr. Bompas, again holding up his hands in astonishment, "your power of observation appalls me—really staggers me. It is most undeniably true that—ah—Mr. Shelman and I have lately been on terms which have been—ah—less—well, less cordial than usual; but consider, my dear sir, con-si-der, I pray you, how very much engrossed—yes, engrossed and engaged, Mr. Shelman has been by this—this"—(Mr. Bompas paused and then reverted to his original expression) "this most unfortunate occurrence—"

"The election!"

"The election—precisely. I say he has been so over-burdened with work and—ah—anxiety that, doubtless, he has had but little time to spend over one to whom the whole affair is obnoxious, and who has refused to take any part in the matter."

"Come, come, that's not it, at least, not entirely. Listen here. Wasn't there some little disagreement about that house of Mrs. Stanhope's that you sold for her to young Galbraith?"

"There certainly was a modicum—a mere modicum—of irritation shown toward me by Mr. Shelman on the occasion of which you speak, but it was—ah—transitory and was—ah—easily explained away. Our mutual friend Sennett here will bear me out when I assure you, as I assured Mr. Shelman at the time, that the sale of the house to Mr. Galbraith was the—ah—outcome of Mrs. Stanhope's own personal—ah—desire. His disappointment was in no way attributable to me."

"No, no, Millard," said Sennett, coming to the assistance of his old friend, "Bompas is right enough there; that was entirely the lady's doings. Why she did it, goodness knows. I always fancied, and so for that matter did many other people, that she and young Shelman would have made a match, but it seems otherwise now."

"Well, well," said old Millard, after a pause, and looking from one to the other of his cronies, "why Mrs. Stanhope didn't sell the house is very little matter of mine. If Shelman wants Downholmes, and gives me my price for it, he can have it; it's an outlying bit for me, and I had always intended putting some houses on it to serve me as an excuse for riding into Avonham now and again. But time has gone on and I've never built, and I'm too old now to begin; so, as the lad seems to want the land, why he can have it; so if he should call on you, Sennett, will you settle the business and let him see the deeds?"

Mr. Sennett assented.

"By the way, Bompas," said Millard, when two or three details had been settled, "I've a letter here from Carter, the parson. He wants me to meet him in Avonham next Monday, but I sha'n't go into the place on the day of nomination—there will be a great crowd, or else I should like to see friend Sennett here doing his duty at the head of things."

"Sennett wishes *he* could stop away from Avonham on Monday," said that worthy.

"So I sha'n't go. I've a gun of Carter's, which he lent me, and I want to return it: he'll want it for the first. Will you take it into

Avonham and give it to young Carter in your office and ask him to hand it to his father?"

"With pleasure."

"Thank you. How's that boy getting on with you?"

Mr. Bompas hesitated before answering. There rose before his mind's eye the vision of *two* Messrs. Carter in one and the same individual. One, the brisk, chatty, familiar Carter of yore, whose little airy quips and cranks had given to his stately office just that light and cheery tint which so admirably set off and showed, in colors strong by sheer contrast, his own stately port and solid gifts of eloquence; and the other, Adolphus Carter, of the past few days—snappish, irritable, incomprehensible; the two characters were as different to the puzzled Mr. Bompas as though they had belonged to two individuals, and it was therefore some moments before he hazarded a reply.

"What's the matter with *him*," said Millard, "have all the youngsters gone wrong?"

"Do you know, Millard and Sennett," said Bompas solemnly and deliberately, "do you know, I really think they *have*," and he proceeded gravely to inform his friends of the altered manner of Mr. Carter, of the puzzle in his own family, and of the strange way in which Mr. Galbraith's name had been coupled with Addie's, of Mr. Bryceson and his off-hand ways, and finally of the very cool reception which Shelman always seemed to get both from Mr. Bompas and his daughters.

"I really must confess," he concluded, "that I have been fairly—ah—puzzled by many of these things. Of course I must have anticipated, and indeed always *have*, the—ah—probability of having my children disposed of in—ah—holy matrimony; and I also looked forward—nature having blessed my girls with—ah—their share of good looks—"

"Which they inherit from both sides," said Sennett.

"Thank you—that their preference for one—ah—lover over another, might lead to some heart-burnings and consequences naturally attending the—ah—rivalry of young men; but this seems to be most curious. I really cannot say that my position, or rather *the* position, has anything—ah—tragic in it, but it has emphatically much—very much—that is embarrassing. Here," said Mr. Bompas, stretching out his hands and looking appealingly at his friends, "here are three or four young men, and three or four interests, all of whom and which I begin to think are somehow influenced by my—by the—by some portion of my family, and yet there is no open—ah—statement—no—ah—patent fact before me to enable me to deal with this most pe-cu-li-ar state of things."

"Well, I don't know," said Sennett, "you seem to be a very lucky man in one sense, even if your position is a little queer. All the gentlemen you have named are eligible sons-in-law, and the only difficulty I can see in the matter is which of the young ladies each wants. One man can't marry them all. Now do you really want a bit of advice?"

"My dear Sennett, my dear Millard, I was hoping to get your advice when I told you of my difficulty."

"Well," said the mayor, "the difficulty—if there really is much

difficulty beyond the one point which I mentioned just now—lies partly with yourself. You are fidgeting over a state of things which there really isn't much need to worry about; now take a little advice."

"What is that?" said Bompas.

"You were saying this morning as we rode over here that you had a good mind to send Mrs. Bompas and the young ladies down to Weymouth out of the way. Do so—a month's absence makes a wonderful difference to a young lover—it spurs him on remarkably. If you were a match-making mamma, Bompas, instead of an unsophisticated old dad—who is not the first whose daughters' intentions and likes and dislikes have puzzled him—you would have hit on this scheme long ago. What say you, Millard?"

"Of course, of course, best thing in the world."

Mr. Bompas reflected sagely for some minutes, and filling his glass from the bottle which his host passed to him, sipped his wine slowly and deliberately.

"I trust," he said at last, "that I am in no indecent hurry to—"

"To what? To see your girls settled? Pooh! nonsense," said Millard, "it's the first duty of a parent. What else have the old ones to live for? Tell me, Bompas, what makes you work as you do?"

"What makes me work as I do?" said Mr. Bompas slowly, "well I—I suppose—I think I see what you mean, old friend—you mean that I work for the children, and—"

"Of course I do. Well now, doesn't it strike you that the mere money and property which you leave your children is of very small value compared with their opportunities of enjoying it, and of living happily with it."

"Most decidedly—what other opinion could one form?"

"Very well, then, apply a little of the diplomacy and energy which you devote to your business to the object. You're sure to be straightforward and honorable in the affair as you are in business. Devote that a little to clearing up this tangle and setting matters straight. Take Sennett's advice. Send the ladies away for a month, and ten to one you'll gather—if it's only from their dutiful inquiries and polite messages—from the lads themselves who want whom and how the land lies. There, now we've thrashed that matter out for you—now for the other bottle."

The bottle was fetched, and gravely discussed as befitted its vintage; and yet another made its appearance, for the three old cronies were noted for a rare and exquisite taste in port, and had priceless wines in the yawning old-fashioned cellars, so that the moon was high as the mayor and his charioteer drove into Avonham that evening.

The hour of breakfast in a well-regulated, well-to-do country family is, or ought to be, one of the pleasantest of the twenty-four. It was so at Mr. Bompas's house. The table would have groaned under the good things but for its solidity and strength. The girls in their morning dresses made a picture very pleasant and pretty to the eyes of their proud parents. The cares of the day had not yet begun, and the troubles of the day before had been forgotten in sleep. Mr. Bompas had indeed not forgotten his perplexities, nor

his friend Sennett's advice, but he knew that his scheme would result at any rate in giving his women-kind pleasure, so it was with feelings of complete satisfaction that he broached the subject on the day following.

He commenced by alarming Mrs. Bompas by what he described as the immensely insecure position of the non-voting inhabitants during the election, and then proceeded to express his wish that it were possible for him to arrange for their absenting themselves for a few days from Avonham. This, of course, was well received, and following up this success, Mr. Bompas suggested that a visit to the sea-side would perhaps be the best means of flight. But here he had reckoned without his host. Nothing but a trip to London would satisfy the young ladies. They were staunchly backed up by Mrs. Bompas, and soon carried their point.

"Well, my dears," said the father, "London be it, then. When will you be ready to go? You will want new dresses, and—"

New dresses! The idea of such a thing! As if they would take country-made new dresses to London instead of purchasing them there. What an idea of dear papa.

"But I thought that you always wanted new dresses to visit a place with?" said the strategist.

"My dear papa," said Adelaide, "why we'd shut ourselves up for a week, surrounded by no other human creatures but dress-makers, rather than get things here. We're ready to start to-morrow. You dear old dad, how good of you to think of us. Won't we start packing directly! Just fancy, another sight of London"

"What about apartments?" said steadier mamma, her face, however, lighting up with the prospect; "and, Abel, my dear, it will be no good going for a week. A week is no good."

"No good at all," chorused the girls.

"Well, my dears," said Mr. Bompas, "do not limit yourselves to time. I shall myself be glad of a week in London, and will join you there. I shall of course accompany you there and see you settled, and then return." And congratulating himself on his capital tact, the worthy man left his family rejoicing at the prospect of their holiday, and went to his business with a serene mind.

Mr. Adolphus Carter and the other clerks had arrived, but Mr. Carter had not yet commenced business. He was standing at the door of the office, and scowling in a very dark and agitating manner at two gentlemen who were passing down the other side of the street, Mr. Galbraith and his friend. Mr. Bompas had taken his hat from the hall as he crossed it, and he now touched the unconscious artichoke pupil on the shoulder to make him sensible that he wanted to pass out into the street. Adolphus started as he felt the touch of his employer's hand, and then hastily gave him the usual morning salutation as he made way for him.

Now the intention with which Mr. Bompas went out this particular morning was to visit Mr. Raraty and engage a conveyance to take his party to the railway on the morrow. He had no sooner stepped out of his office door, however, than the young men walking on the opposite side of the street stopped in their course and crossed the street to speak with him. Mr. Adolphus Carter, with a darker

scowl than ever on his face, listened eagerly to what was being said, still retaining his place in the doorway.

The customary greetings having been exchanged, the young men entered on their business.

“Mr. Bompas,” said Galbraith, “I am anxious to acquire, if possible, that meadow next to my lawn hedge. Can you tell me whose land it is?”

“It belongs, Mr. Galbraith,” said Bompas, “to your former landlord, or, as may be deemed more fitting, considering the fact that she is of the opposite—ah—sex, *landlady*, Mrs. Stanhope.”

“She seems to own lots of land about here,” said Mr. Bryceson, taking a cigar from his case. “You smoke, Mr. Bompas? not so early? Cigar, Harry?”

“The late Mr. Stanhope, who was a native of this town,” said Mr. Bompas, “but who went from it in youth to achieve dignity and wealth in the vast metropolis, on retiring from business invested largely in land in the neighborhood, so that at his death his—ah—widow, or, I may say, relict—relict seems more legal and appropriate to a conversation having a commercial, or at least a financial, end in view—became possessed, as your friend says, Mr. Galbraith of a considerable extent of landed property in this immediate vicinity.”

“How long has this interesting widow *been* a widow?” said Bryceson.

“Four years, my dear sir; four years.”

“Harry, you haven’t introduced me to this lady. You really must.”

“I’ve never met the lady myself, my dear fellow.”

“Dear me, Mr. Galbraith; is it possible that you have not yet been introduced to Mrs. Stanhope?”

“Quite true, Mr. Bompas. You managed the business between us, you know. No, I never met her.”

“You have seen her, of course?”

“Oh, yes, I’ve seen her out driving two or three times. By the bye, Mr. Bompas, I want a loose box built. I must talk to you about the plans of it.”

“I shall be quite at your service, my dear sir, and glad to assist you.”

“Will to-morrow be convenient for you?”

“Why, no, Mr. Galbraith, I purpose to-morrow, if all is well, to accompany my wife and daughters to London.”

Mr. Carter perceptibly jumped.

“I hope you’ll have a pleasant journey, Mr. Bompas. Do you stay long there?”

“My family will remain there some time, and I shall ultimately join them.”

“I hope you’ll have a good time, Mr. Bompas, and the ladies too. Well, I’ll call in one morning when I see that you have returned. At the same time, I want to see if I cannot obtain this field. Do you think if I saw Mrs. Stanhope it would be of any use, or do you transact all her business for her?”

“Mrs. Stanhope is good enough to place the landed portion of her property in my hands for management, and would doubtless refer you to me; I will, however, speak to her upon the matter, for I

have some accounts to submit to her to-day, and shall see her most probably this afternoon."

"If you will do so, Mr. Bompas, you will oblige me. I like your town, and I shall be glad to invest money in it, for I fancy when you get your railway it will improve."

"Doubtless, Mr. Galbraith; my own opinion decidedly."

"Well, good-morning, Mr. Bompas, we're just going for a gallop; by the way, how is your friend Mr. Millard? I've got some pamphlets—American ones—from the Agricultural Department at Washington that I should like to show him."

"I was at Mr. Millard's last evening; he has recovered from his late attack."

"Well, we'll ride over and leave these. Good-morning."

"Good-morning."

Mr. Carter went to his desk with conflicting emotions; he sat for some time moodily regarding the West Country Fire Office Almanac on the wall before him, and then, rising and taking his hat, said to the office lad—

"Tell Mr. Bompas I've gone out on some private business," and as he passed out into the street he muttered, "I must get away somewhere and think this out; if this fellow is going to live forever in the same town as I do, I must strongly restrain my feelings or they will end in—"

"Ha—a—a—h!"

He moodily shook his head, and hurried into the High Street.

"And the family going to London too! What does that mean? There goes Mr. Shelman, canvassing I suppose. I wonder if he's got time to spare—I'll see. I fancy I know his feelings in a certain quarter and toward a certain party. I don't see why I should have all the worry and irritation to myself."

In an hour's time Mr. Carter returned to the office from which Mr. Bompas was still absent. He was in high good humor, declined to grovel in any way by attempting to work; whistled portions of popular airs, hummed snatches of familiar operas, and in short resumed the gay and caroling lark-like manner which had lately been changed and supplanted by the moody genius of jealousy.

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## CHAPTER X.

### HOW MR. SHELMAN SPENT A SPARE AFTERNOON.

"CANVASSING," said Walter Rivers softly to himself, as he stood looking out of the window of his uncle's committee-room at the Great George on the day following, "canvassing doesn't agree with Master Alfred, I can see."

He was alone in the room, for Sir Headingly's committee had finished both their business and their luncheon, and Sir Headingly had gone home, so no one heard the soliloquy.

"No, Master Alfred," he proceeded, looking after Shelman, who was passing up the street, "it certainly doesn't do *you* good, and I'm very far from certain that it does your worthy uncle any good, the way you go about it; and I'm sure it doesn't do us very much

harm, so canvass away, my dear fellow, we hold the winning cards, however you play the game."

And Walter Rivers left the subject and the window together, and soothed himself after the work of the morning with a cigar.

Meanwhile his unconscious rival made his way up the town, and, after calling at the committee-room at the Woolpack, and having a brief interview with his uncle, he proceeded toward the church-yard path leading to the Priory House. He had not reached the gate, however, when he espied the mayor, who was coming toward him—to him of course he must speak. The first words of Mr. Sennett did not improve his ill humor; they were words of condolence on his appearance. The mayor thought he looked ill, supposed that it was the effect of the election work, and threw in a good-natured caution not to overdo matters. To all this Shelman listened, chafing the while. There was nothing specially irritating in the remarks, and he was inwardly ashamed of himself for allowing them to fret him; so he concealed his feelings, confessed to feeling tired, and smilingly promised to take care of himself. To his great relief the conversation took a turn, and the everlasting election topic was shelved for a time.

"I saw Millard last night," said Mr. Sennett, "and he was telling me that you had made him an offer for the Downholmes land."

"Yes, I did. I want to buy some land to build on, and enough to make a kind of park on a small scale with two or three meadows and home paddocks. There is just about the right quantity in Mr. Millard's piece, and it is well wooded near the road, and runs down to the river, two very important things."

"Oh, yes, if you were thinking of building you could not have a better site."

"Millard is willing to sell, I believe."

"Oh, quite, quite. He originally intended to lay out a small estate there, giving each house about two acres of land for garden and small paddock, but the fit has passed off, and you can have the land if you like."

"I wish I could have bought the Coombes and Millard's land as well. I would have built a wing on each side of the present house, thrown a light iron bridge across the river, let my garden and lawn run down to the bank this side, and had a stream right through my property."

"Why didn't you buy it?" said Mr. Sennett, for once yielding to a little curiosity, for he was really anxious to know.

"I didn't know it was in the market, I assure you. I had made Mrs. Stanhope an offer for it at the time Major Currie left, and she had declined to part with it then, or even to let it. Its sale took me quite by surprise, and I don't think Mr. Bompas knew anything of it until he got instructions from Mrs. Stanhope's London lawyers. I wish to goodness she had put the matter in your hands."

"Messrs. Goldings and West were Mr. Stanhope's solicitors for many years, and it would not be reasonable to expect Mrs. Stanhope to change them. They stand extremely well in the profession—at the top of the tree, in fact. I can't expect to get *all* the clients in Marlshire, Mr. Shelman."

The mayor spoke rather stiffly. This young man was evidently

very peevish over something, and besides, was good enough to assume that any matters left in his (the mayor's) hands for management would have been subject to *his* peculiar wishes and *his* particular fancies. Shelman was decidedly unlucky; somehow he did not make friends of people whom he really needed.

"Well," he went on, "the property can't be bought now. I offered the present proprietor a good round sum for his bargain, and was refused, and as there is no other house in Avonham that I should care about for a country seat, I must build one for myself, and if Millard does not want too much for Downholmes I shall be very glad to buy. You have the management of this, at any rate?"

"Yes, and full power to treat, so if you will give me a call to-morrow we can talk the matter over. At present I am going to a meeting of the Market Committee. Say ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Very well. Good-day, Mr. Mayor."

"Good-day."

"Come, that's something done, at any rate," mused Shelman, as he turned into the churchyard path. "And now for the other matter."

His ring at the bell of the Priory House gate brought a servant who ushered him into the room in which, though he little dreamed it, his rival had successfully pleaded his suit but a few evenings before. Here he sat for a few minutes toying with a paper-knife until the door opened and Mrs. Stanhope entered.

She was dressed with even more than her usual richness, and had jewels shining and flashing back the sunshine from neck and hand and wrist. Something more than her usual stately grace there was about her that made her more queenly than ever. She greeted him with the brightest of smiles and the gentlest of gentle hand-pressures that sent the blood coursing through his veins, and signaling his rapture from his cheek.

"At last, then, you have paid me a visit. I began to think I should never see you again."

Shelman muttered something about "pressure of public affairs" as he took his seat opposite to her, and watched her jeweled fingers playing with the fan she carried.

"Another of the disadvantages of not being the possessor of a vote. Had I been an elector I should have had a call from your uncle and you together long ago. But I suppose you really have been very busy, and only able to call on people who could grant you favors."

"I hope," said Shelman, rather nervously, for the ring of satire was not to his liking, "that you don't give me credit for being selfish or mercenary where you are concerned, although I'm afraid, perhaps, you will think so when I tell you that I am come now to ask a favor of you."

"Come, then, you must admit there was something in my remark, after all?"

"Your remarks are always to the point, but you really must consider how very much I have had to do. I should not be in Avonham at all, and have had to give up a capital trip to Switzerland

and Italy with some London friends solely on account of this election. I assure you uncle has worked me like a nigger over it."

"And I hear that your opponents are likely to beat you, after all."

"Indeed! it's by no means certain. May I ask who your informant was?"

"Mr. Rivers, of course. I have scarcely been outside the gates since the affair began. He seems to be very confident of Sir Headingly Cann's success."

"Well, you know the wish is father to the thought in his case; no doubt he thinks a great deal both of his chance and of himself, but I can tell him—"

"Pray, don't tell *me*. As I haven't any vote, for which I am sincerely grateful, do let this house be the one spot in Avonham where the different parties can meet on neutral ground. Let us change the subject; it was my fault for starting it. What is this favor you are going to ask me?"

Shelman bit his lip and shifted uneasily in his chair; then, after a few seconds' pause, he said:

"Do you know the land on the other side of the Avon, opposite the back of the Coombes?"

"Yes; it is not mine, you know."

"No, it belongs to Millard of Beytesbury, who is willing to sell it to me; but on this side of the river, next to the Coombes, there is a meadow skirting the river which is yours."

"Yes, that is mine; it is called Poundpiece in the old titles. It was part of the Abbey lands, as all the land on that side was. I have, or rather Mr. Bompas has, some very curious old title deeds relating to it. My husband was interested in those matters, and has often shown them to visitors here."

"I hope that you are not specially attached to that meadow."

"Oh, dear, no; not specially. It is let to Mr. Killett, the butcher, for grazing."

"Is he a yearly tenant?"

"I believe so; why do you ask?"

"Well, I want to build myself a house on Millard's land; it would be, perhaps, twelve months in being built, but I should very much like to buy Poundpiece. I could throw a light bridge over the river, and it would give me an entrance into South Street, instead of driving all round the Bath Road or trusting to the wooden bridge, which is under water in winter very often. The favor I was going to ask was that you should sell me this piece and further my views that way."

She did not answer at once, but sat looking at him smilingly, as if only to express the necessary interest in what he was saying, and toying still with the fan. In a minute or so she said:

"Mr. Bompas, you know, manages all the affairs of my land and houses."

"I know," said he; "but I did not like to go to Mr. Bompas first, as the land was not announced for sale; of course, if it had been it would have been a different matter. I came to ask whether you would consent, as a personal favor to me, to part with it. It is so far away from your house that it could never be of any use to you."

as a garden or home paddock, and, as you let it to Killett, I thought you would not mind selling it to me."

"Do you know I have declined to sell it to Killett?"

"No, I didn't know that."

"Oh, yes, some years ago; and since then I have had an offer for it. Well, will you see Mr. Bompas about it? I won't give you any answer to-day. I must consult someone else, too; but never mind that at present. You are not in want of an immediate answer, are you?"

"Well, I am to see Mr. Sennett to-morrow morning at ten o'clock about Millard's land, and I should have been glad to know, because, of course, I should, perhaps, be influenced if I could have it."

"You shall have an answer by ten: it shall be sent to the bank. By the bye, I suppose your uncle is too busy to be able to call on me, isn't he? I want to consult him about some securities and other matters. Perhaps I had better come down to the bank as an ordinary customer would."

"Why not tell me what the business is? My uncle will certainly refer the matter to me, and, you know, I am just as much head of the bank now as he is, indeed more, for he is gradually giving up the active share in the concern. I shall be only too glad to serve you."

There was an insidious tenderness in the last words which she did not miss.

"Is it judicious, think you," she replied, casting down her eyes, "to trust one's secrets to a young man? My worldly wisdom is not great, but it makes me doubtful on that point."

"Ah," said he suddenly, and with fervor, "give me the right of being trusted by you in all things, of serving you always, and of always being with you. That is what I want; let me ask you for that."

They had both risen, he with flashing eyes and burning cheeks, and trembling with excitement; she was calm and stately, and the hand which he took for a moment was cool and steady. She drew it gently away, and said, looking steadily at him, but with a smile which he did not care to see:

"This is a new way of purchasing land and asking simple favors, Mr. Shelman."

"It is an old way of telling a woman you love her; and you know that is true."

"I thought so once," she said, in tones so calm and cold that his heart died within him, and he shivered as with the cold. "There was a time when, if you had spoken as you have now, you might have been answered differently. It is too late now, Mr. Shelman. I am sensible of the honor you have done me, but my answer must be 'No.'"

"How have I offended—"

"You have not offended. I have no right to feel offended. There was never anything between us, how could you offend?"

"There is something else in the way, I suppose," he said, coarsely, for his temper was no longer under control, and his face was livid with passion.

“Mr. Shelman,” she said, quietly, “you were imprudent just now in leaping before you looked; pray, do not add impertinence to your imprudence. Remember that I am a woman, and, in spite of your assertion, alone. You will, I am sure, see the necessity of terminating this painful scene, if only for your own interest.”

“My own interest!”

“Yes,” she said, her dark eyes kindling with a dangerous fire, “do not make an enemy of me; go away and forget this affair, as I shall, unless you give me cause to remember it. You can find consolation no doubt; you have sought it before when you had little need of it. You tired of me once and now you have come back again. I am not a child’s toy, and if I were I am no toy for you. Remember that I, too, have formed other ties since then, as you have been graciously pleased to assert. I make no denial of it: you shot in the dark but you have hit the mark. Let that be sufficient for you, and do not provoke me against you. There is no reason why we should not part friends. I have told you that I am sensible of the honor you have done me and—”

“And you have told me something more,” he answered, not violently, but with no less rage, “you have also made me sensible of an honor, which, six months ago, you would have conferred upon me by your own showing. Six months ago I might have had that dainty hand, which you have refused me to-day.”

Not a shadow on her face, nor a trace of anger in her tone was apparent as she replied:

“I did say so, and it is true; I am thankful that you did not throw me the handkerchief then, and I am much too wise to pick it up now. You do not seem at all a desirable person with whom a woman would have to live forever. You are playing into my hands by showing your temper now, and you are very foolish. Since you will have war let it be war; and let me tell you how I am enjoying my revenge.”

“Your revenge!” he said, hoarsely.

“Yes, my revenge; do you think that I do not know what happened last spring, last spring when you might, perhaps, have had what you have been asking for to-day? Was it on account of your great desire to serve me always as you put it to-day—and really you put it very prettily for such a sudden outbreak—was it on that account that you hovered round Adelaide Bompas, the daughter of my house-agent” (she sneered as she named her) “until your names were coupled together by the idle gossips of this tattling place, and my very housemaids and grooms were indignant for me? Ah, Mr. Shelman, you over-reached yourself there, for I fancy you did not find all that you wanted in the family of my worthy agent, Mr. Bompas; no, you only succeeded—perhaps that is what you wanted—in alienating me from you, though I have concealed it till now. I am not a perfect woman, I am not above resentment, my hour of resentment has come, as I knew it would, and I am satisfied. Do you be satisfied too, and do not provoke me. Sit down with your disappointment and don’t rise up against the cause of it. And if you slight another woman and then try to whistle her back, let it be one with a shorter memory than mine, and with a smaller knowledge of the world and of men.”

Choked by his wild rage, and with his brain in a whirl with passion and disappointment, he did not for a moment trust himself to speak, he laid his hand upon the handle of the door, and turned to where she stood like a queen dismissing some worthless follower. She had never, he thought, looked so well. Her anger had made her cheek flush, and her eyes were ablaze with light—they twinkled and flashed like the diamond which shone on her heaving breast. What a fool he had been! What a woman he had lost, so fair in her moments of loving, so fair in her moments of rage! He recovered himself with an effort and said,

“Mrs. Stanhope, I have been wrong. Allow me to take my leave.”

“I am waiting for your departure, sir.”

“When we are both a little calmer and think over this short, but highly dramatic scene we shall both laugh—”

“At each other, very probably.”

“That even may happen, but it is not exactly what I was going to say; we shall both laugh at the way in which we have played at battledore and shuttlecock together, with the pretty phrases of love and constancy which we have been using to-day.”

“You are becoming sensible; we shall part with some outward show of respect after all.”

“Oh, believe me, I admire and respect you very much; your character is one which commands respect.”

“And yours too, Mr. Shelman. You are sure to make your way in the world—somehow.”

“I will try,” he said, stifling his rage, for he was getting much the worst of this repartee, and he was thankful to see her hand on the bell. “I have your good wishes of course?”

“Decidedly, now that you are sensible again.”

“And I will ask my uncle to come up to-morrow afternoon, if you will be at home,” he added, for the servant was in the room.

“If you please, tell him I will not detain him long. Good-morning, Mr. Shelman.”

“Good-morning, Mrs. Stanhope.”

She heard the door close behind him, walked to the mirror and looked steadily in it for a few minutes, then turned away, murmuring to herself,

“He must have been a fool not to have read my face better—well, at any rate there is an end of *him*.”

And summoning her maid she left the room.

He walked unsteadily to the gate, and was thankful that no one saw him. When he stood in Priory Street, the ground appeared to heave, and his eyes seem full of blood; he paused a moment to steady himself, and looked up and down the street uncertain which way to take.

“I must get away somewhere quietly and think this over. I’m not fit to be trusted among men. I should have murdered her in ten minutes more.”

He walked quickly down the Priory Street, turned down a lane which ran past the back of its stables, and reached the bank of the little Marden, which was crossed by a little foot-bridge; here he sat on the rail at the side, and drawing his case from his pocket, lighted

a cigar, and gave himself resolutely up to getting the better of his rage.

There are some tempers which terrify even those possessed of them; such an one was Shelman's. He had startled himself by the violence of the passion which had torn his breast, nor was that passion easy to quiet. He had played his cards so badly, had blundered so egregiously, and had laid himself so open to defeat that his reflections were of the bitterest kind; he railed against himself, against his lost love, and against his rival unknown. He gave no thought to Rivers; the idea that he was the man who had supplanted him never occurred to him, and he puzzled his brains in vain to couple a name with the widow's. And, again, the manner of his defeat had been so galling; what an ass he had been not to take his rejection quietly instead of letting his temper get the better of him, and run away with his reason as it had. It was an hour before he felt fit to move from the bridge and enter the town. His cigar had gone out, and had been crushed between his fingers and plucked at and broken, and finally thrown into the little stream to sicken some nibbling gudgeon. He took another from his case, lighted it, and rising from his seat strolled backward and forward across the bridge, and then went slowly back toward the town. His face showed clearly enough the effects which the terrible mental struggle had had on him; it was white, and haggard, and drawn, like the face of a death-stricken man. He passed the gates of the Priory, mounted the steps of the churchyard path and crossed it, going toward the bank. As good luck would have it, there was no one in the street who noticed him, and he entered the bank and walked through into the room behind. Here he touched the hand-bell on the table, and the chief clerk entered.

"Dear me, Mr. Alfred," said the old gentleman, starting, as he looked at the ashy face of his young superior, "how ill you look, sir; what *is* the matter?"

He forced himself to speak calmly. "I am overworked, I think, Norton, and I have been walking in the sun, and feel rather faint. Is there anything special to see after?"

"Nothing at all, sir, of any importance. We are just going to close, and the balance is correct. If you would allow me to advise you, sir, I should go home and lie down. You look as if you were going to drop, sir."

"I shall be better presently, thank you, Norton; if you have nothing for me I will take your advice, I think."

The clerk withdrew, and Shelman rose and turned to a looking-glass in the room.

"By Jove," he said to himself, "this has told on me." The sight of his bloodless face seemed to do more to quiet him than his previous seclusion. He opened a cupboard in the room, and taking a decanter of brandy from it, mixed himself a glassful, half spirit, half water, and drank it hastily. He sat down again for a few minutes, still smoking, until the bank doors were closed, and then went into the street again, crossed the market-place, and walked down South Street until he came to the office of Mr. Bompas. Here he entered. Mr. Adolphus Carter was just putting on his hat and

taking an affectionate glance at himself in a hand-glass which he kept in his desk. He looked up as Shelman entered.

"Good afternoon, Carter. Is Mr. Bompas in?"

"Good gracious, Mr. Shelman, how white you look!"

"I've been walking in the sun with this confounded heavy hat on, and it has turned me sick. Is Bompas in?"

"In? no. Didn't you see him yesterday? He's gone to London!"

"What a nuisance. When did he go?"

"This morning at ten o'clock. They've all gone. Mrs. Bompas and the girls have gone for a month, and the governor took them up. Why ever didn't you see him yesterday?"

"Why, what difference does it make? It will do when he comes back."

"But didn't I tell you yesterday that that fellow was after the land, and had asked Bompas to see about it for him?"

"Yes; well—"

"Well, he's bought it, that's all."

"Bought it?"

"Yes, sir, bought it. I never was more savage in my life when I heard it. I would have asked my father to buy it himself rather than he should have had it, but I made sure that if Mrs. Stanhope sold it at all she would sell it to you."

Shelman stood astounded. "Bought it," he muttered two or three times; "bought it?"

"The purchase isn't completed, but he has paid two hundred pounds as a deposit; not that Bompas wanted it, but Goldings have the deeds, and Bompas has written to them for them. Of course that makes no difference; the land is his to all intents and purposes."

"Well," said Shelman, making a desperate effort, and speaking with a forced laugh which had very little of hilarity in it, "this stranger is too quick for us altogether it seems. We must give up trying to outbid him;" then turning suddenly to Carter, he said, "Where are you going to this evening?"

"Nowhere in particular."

"Come home and have some dinner with me at five; my uncle has gone to the meeting at Dunstalne, and I'm all alone at home. Come and keep me company."

"With pleasure, my dear fellow. I'll be with you as soon as I've dressed."

"Oh, hang your dress. Come as you are. I'm too lazy to dress, come along now. I'm bored to death up there alone."

The two young men walked along the street together, one half cross at the failure of his project, half proud of his company, and the other turning over in his mind and murmuring to himself savagely—

"Bought it? She knew it when I went, and mocked me with her pretense of consulting and letting me know to-morrow. Well, she has fooled me properly this time. I would give all I have to be even with her, and I will be yet."

It was not a peculiarly cozy dinner-party. Carter had been to many much more convivial entertainments.

## CHAPTER XI.

## INTERVIEWING.

MR. WALTER BRYCESON seemed very comfortable in the cozy quarters of his friend Galbraith, and in no hurry to quit them. So freely had he mixed with the townspeople during the weeks which he had spent in Avonham, that his intentions and opinions were pretty well known there. His health, he stated, was far from good, though he had a rosy cheek, a pair of bright eyes, and a merry laugh that smacked very little of the invalid; rest, he said, was what had been prescribed for him, rest, country air, and pure milk. The two former he partook of freely, the first from choice, the second, as he spent much of his time in the open, from necessity; how much of the last of his requisites he took no one knew as no one in the town ever saw him drinking any, although it was rumored that the quaffed enormous bowls of it in private. His looks, he declared, were fallacious and deceptive in the highest degree; nothing but a long course of invigorating Marlshire air would ever give him the use of his lungs and his strength again. Having gravely told this to good, motherly, sympathizing Mrs. Pinniffer, he would wind up with a laugh that made the glasses ring in the bar-parlor of the Bear, and emphasize his woes with a hearty slap on her husband's back, which made the ex-fusileer stagger.

In his visits to the town he was not always accompanied by his friend and host. "My friend Galbraith," he would say to any listeners who happened to be in the coffee-room of the Bear, "is a devilish good fellow, devilish good fellow; but," he would add, "he's a little too studious and quiet for me—too bookish, you know—bless me, my health would never stand his amount of study. No, sir, rest and fresh air is what I require, and where could I get it better? Your air around here, sir, is pure and soft, your downs are breezy and large and healthy, your town is quiet, although it is, as you say, somewhat agitated by the election, and of course in a grazing country like this I get the richest and best of milk. Pinniffer, my good fellow, if you have any stock of this claret I wish to goodness you would sell me some. You haven't a large stock? Pity! pity! Well, send as much as you can spare up to the Coombes, will you, and charge it to me? Upon my word, next to milk I think this does me more good than anything. Though mind you," he would add gravely, "I think, perhaps, I am injudicious in drinking it in the morning. Champagne is much better for the lungs, I really believe. By Jove! here's my worthy host come to look for his patient. Galbraith, my dear boy, come and take a glass of wine. Pinniffer, some of that Piper, *you* know. Harry, let Ned bring the nags round here. Sit down and make yourself comfortable. I declare I feel better in this beautiful air already."

It was not long, of course, before Mr. Bryceson made acquaintance with some of the leaders of the two political parties of the town. His opinions were so broad that they at first shocked the politicians, and his ideas of conducting elections were startling in the extreme.

Although in those days there were many old parliamentary boroughs which now have to watch the struggle from afar without being able to participate in the fray; although the "Man in the Moon" was by no means unknown in this country, yet some of Mr. Bryceson's schemes were too much advanced for any ordinary election agent, and the members of the committee to whom he explained some of the most successful of transatlantic tricks upon voters held up their hands in amazement at the stories he told them. Even a royal commission might have sat at his feet and gained information. Getting thus into notice as a gentleman of somewhat advanced views, but one who took a great interest in the coming struggle, it was not very long before this young fellow found himself being introduced to both the young men who were fighting the battle and bearing the burden of the day for their respective uncles. Shelman was disposed to treat him chuffly, and with scant courtesy as not being of much use to him, but Rivers, whose plan it was to make friends of everybody, took vastly to him, invited him to lunch, laughed at his stories, and was not so short-sighted as to miss any of the really good suggestions for carrying on the election; more especially did he incline his ear to those methods of annoying an adversary which Mr. Bryceson had in plenty, and over which the young men laughed heartily as they smoked their cigars after lunch. Sir Headingly Cann coming into the room one day when they were thus engaged was introduced to the stranger, and, on learning that he had spent some time in America, was interested enough to put many questions respecting some of the institutions of that country to which he received such bright and amusing answers that he went away highly pleased with his nephew's new acquaintance and with a cordial invitation to his house so soon as the now rapidly approaching struggle should be over. Bryceson, who did not care twopence which way the election ended, was yet more favorably disposed toward the Cann faction than the Boldham. He accepted the invitation and wished the baronet success.

Meanwhile Galbraith went on in his old quiet way; of course the friends were often together, but Bryceson was about the town alone a great deal in search of that fresh air which he averred was so indispensable to his well-being. By alone is meant without his host, for it was not in his nature to retire from society, and he was generally found in company somewhere, listening in an exemplary manner to the fathers of the town, or giving the benefit of his observations of men and things in a very free and off-hand but still in a very popular style. He seemed as much at home at the Woolpack with Mr. Boldham's party as he did at the Great George among the supporters of Sir Headingly Cann, though his favorite house was the Bear, where he made himself thoroughly at home.

It chanced one day that he was passing up the street in company with one of the young men of the town, with whom he had struck up a friendship, when outside the shop of Mr. Pollimoy, the traveler, the Royalist, the stationer, they saw the carriage of Mrs. Stanhope, the leader of society in Avonham, as Mr. Bryceson was informed by his companion. Mrs. Stanhope was leaning back in the carriage, and listening to some explanation which Mr. Pollimoy, who stood bareheaded by the side, was giving her. After a few

moments' conversation, the stationer returned to the shop and presently emerged with a specimen of the particular article she was wanting, and handing it to her explained that he had a variety within. Mr. Bryceson left the arm of his friend for a moment, and excusing himself, walked into the shop. He requested to look at some small article, which he had noticed in the window, and was examining it most attentively when Mrs. Stanhope, having been coaxed out of her carriage by the obsequious Mr. Pollimoy, entered the shop. On that side of the counter where Mr. Bryceson was standing, there was only one chair, this he immediately handed to the lady with a bow, Mrs. Stanhope thanked him, and taking the chair proceeded to explain to Mr. Pollimoy how she wished her order to be executed. Mr. Bryceson, who was waited upon by Miss Ruth Pollimoy, a rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed damsel, also busied herself about stationery, and seemed absorbed in the business. It was a business which necessitated a good deal of search on the part of Miss Ruth, and some apology as to giving trouble was needed. Mr. Bryceson seemed to want a good many little knick-knacks; a card-case, a pocket-book (which took some little time to select), a leather purse (several bead ones having been inspected and rejected), and a pen-knife were already marked down, and the young friend outside, tired of waiting, had strolled up the street, and still Mrs. Stanhope sat in the shop or moved from side to side making selections of small articles, or giving instructions for the order of new dainties in leather and gilt-edged paper; still, also, Mr. Bryceson remained and kept Miss Ruth employed. Mr. Pollimoy beamed with joy and regarded both purchasers with eyes of favor. A glass ink-bottle, a hundred envelopes, an ivory paper-cutter, and a pack of playing-cards were added to the gentleman's list, when the lady rose to go. Mr. Pollimoy accompanied her to the carriage, and bowed profoundly as she drove off. Mr. Bryceson wanted change, it appeared, when he came back to his shop--had nothing but a bank-note for ten pounds; Mr. Pollimoy was sorry to keep Mr. Bryceson waiting, but would have to send to the bank for the money. The customer was perfectly affable and chatted agreeably whilst waiting for his change. Mr. Pollimoy informed him that the lady who had just gone out was a widow, very well off too, nice lady and quite the leader of the town. Mr. Bryceson listened politely, but seemed uninterested in the subject, and the change arriving took his leave, ordering the goods he had purchased to be sent up to the Coombes. When he rejoined his companion, however, he appeared to have forgotten what the stationer had told him, for he asked two or three questions about the lady, and on hearing that she was a rich widow, declared he would make love to her himself.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't have much chance," said the friend.

"Pooh, nonsense, my dear fellow," said Bryceson, "these widows always want fresh husbands."

"Yes, and there are two or three who would like to marry her, too!"

"Humph! how long has she been a widow?"

"About four years."

"Ah! well, she's a good-looking widow, and a rich one, and here's her very good health, and her 'next wentur's.'"

“Then you give her up?”

“Not a bit of it—Miss Pinniffer, aren't you going to make me a rosette for the election?”

“What colors will you have, Mr. Bryceson,” said rosy Miss Pinniffer; “blue or yellow?”

“Both—both certainly—half blue and half yellow. I'm on both sides.”

“Then you'll have both sides against you; you'd better go neither.”

“Quite right, quite right, I'll look on and see the fun.”

Mr. Bryceson had amused himself thus until the Friday preceding the election week. Friday was market-day, and being the second Friday in the month was also cheese market, and consequently the town was full. The “pitch” of cheese was not large in this particular month, and the covered part of the market yard sufficed for that commodity. The bulls as usual were attached to stout posts in the upper part of the market-place, where they remained (unless sold and driven off) all day with angry eyes and parched lips, until they were released at four o'clock to go charging down the street to the welcome water where they were reclaimed by their various owners and driven home. The sheep were hustled into pens, and the poultry cackled and screamed, the taverns reeked with hot brandy-and-water and tobacco, and the tables at the farmers' ordinaries were heaped with solids and fluids of the most substantial sort.

On this occasion Mr. Millard, of Beytesbury, had ridden in on his rare old cob, and having put up his nag at a friend's, was wending his way down South Street to call on Mr. Bompas, when he met Galbraith, who, with his friend Bryceson, was going toward the market-place. A cordial greeting took place between the three, and when Mr. Bompas espying them came out of his office and crossed the road to shake hands, it needed very little persuasion to induce the elders of the party to bend their steps back to the Coombes, and experience the hospitality of its owner. Mr. Bompas had not been in the house since he had sold it to Galbraith; Mr. Millard had never visited it at all, and both were somewhat glad of the opportunity of seeing the interior of a residence of which so much was talked, and so very little known. Entering the dining-room by the back way through the French windows that looked out on to the lawn and the river beyond, Galbraith summoned the black servant, who presented himself to the eyes of the two visitors clad in the white jean suit which is the usual costume of the negro attendants in American hotels, and which set off the black face and woolly hair of the African to perfection.

“Bring some drinks, Edward,” said his master, without entering into details, and shortly after, a host of decanters, large and small, two flasks of champagne, ice, sugar, soda-water, lemons, and iced water made their appearance on a large tray.

“Now, Mr. Bompas, what'll you take, sir? Let Edward make you some juleps, or cup, or something. Mr. Millard, have you any choice?”

“Really, my dear sir, so long as the drink is cool and refreshing, I have no choice,” said Millard; “there is such a large variety here that I should have some difficulty in making a selection.”

Mr. Bompas was of the same opinion.

“Very well, Edward, then go to work as you like. We’re all thirsty. Walter, reach down some of those cigars; come into the veranda, gentlemen, it’s cooler out there.”

“You have very much added to the natural charms of this place, Mr. Galbraith,” said Bompas, as he sunk into the coziest of rocking-chairs.

“It’s a pretty place,” said Millard, accepting a cigar from Bryce-son, and praising it even before he lighted it.

“Yes, there are capabilities in it,” said Galbraith. “I’m very well satisfied with it, and now that I have the extra land, I shall do something more to it, and have a real good garden ready for next year.”

“Mr. Galbraith has bought the land next to this,” explained Mr. Bompas,

“What, Mrs. Stanhope’s! oh, indeed? You seem to have got into her good graces, sir; it isn’t every one she’ll sell land to, I can assure you.”

“I think I must thank our friend here,” said Galbraith, indicating Mr. Bompas; “he seems to be able to induce the good lady to do anything.”

“I certainly pressed Mrs. Stanhope, on behalf of our worthy host,” said Bompas, “as I perceived that he was somewhat anxious to add the adjoining tract to his garden ground, and I represented to her that the property in question being remote from her residence and separated from it by the entire width of the town, it would be no deprivation of her own private grounds, which, gentlemen, are extremely beautiful—perhaps you have seen them?”

The two friends, it appeared, had not.

“You have, if you are fond of gardening, a treat in store—they are really beau-ti-ful. Well, that argument—if that can be deemed an argument in which one persons puts forth certain views and another accepts them—that argument prevailed with the lady and I have to congratulate you on the acquisition of a piece of land which will doubtless add much to the comfort and elegance of your home. Dear me, your—ah—the—ah— Your servant is remarkably dexterous in the combination of fluids.”

Edward was fully engaged in putting the finishing touches to the tempting drinks he had been fixing, and was performing what seemed to the astonished eyes of Mr. Bompas a conjuring feat, tossing the contents of one tumbler into another, juggling with ice, palming sugar, and whisking subtle herbs and essences about in the most bewildering way. He then presented to the two visitors a beverage in beaded glasses, topped with glittering ice and fragrant as a nosegay. Both the old fellows applied themselves to the straws, and when the jovial faces looked up there was on each that expression of sweetly satisfied content that is best seen after a cool draught on a boiling day.

“Upon my word,” said Millard, setting his goblet down on the table beside him and looking round as if to emphasize his speech—“upon my word, Galbraith, I do not remember that I ever tasted anything so capital in my life.”

“Most admirable,” chimed in Bompas; “perfectly delicious.

That is, I presume, a luxury peculiar to America? May I ask its name?"

"What do you call this, Ned; is it anything special?"

"No, sir; jes' plain cobbler, sir."

"The concoction must take a considerable amount of practice, I should imagine," said Bompas, looking fondly into his glass.

"It seems to come to Ned by nature," said Bryceson. "Ned, when did you fix your first cobbler?"

"Long time ago, sir," said Ned, with a grin—" 'pears t'me you known ole Ned's fixin' long time, too, sir"—and with another grin the negro disappeared, tray in hand, to prepare more materials for quenching thirst.

"A truly valuable man," said Bompas, with much feeling.

"I'm glad you appreciate his efforts," said Galbraith. "By the way I've a check for you, Mr. Bompas, whenever you are ready for it."

"I am not yet in receipt of the title-deeds. I imagine that Mr. Goldings, who personally attends to all Mrs. Stanhope's papers (except such as are in my hands), is out of town; there is, however, no need for you to stand still, my dear sir—any alteration you may wish to make can be at once commenced; you will find no interruption."

"Well, I'm very glad you persuaded the lady. Your health, Mr. Bompas, and your fair client's, too," said Bryceson.

"With all my heart," said Bompas.

"How long has Mrs. Stanhope been a widow?" said Galbraith.

"About four or five years."

"Was Mr. Stanhope a native of these parts. I think you were saying something about him the other day."

"He was,"—said Millard, answering for his friend; "he and I went to school together, and Bompas here went to the same school a few years later. Nice fellow Stanhope was; we were always great friends. His father was a miller in a large way, and did a good deal in malt as well. Meant to bring his son up to his own business, but George never seemed to care to settle down to country life. He went to London when he was about twenty and got into some Indian house, proved himself a smart young fellow, and traded a little on his own account; got on well—old man backed him up with a few hundreds,—and he went into business for himself. When his father died—he was an only child—he dropped, of course, into a very handsome sum of money, which he was able to lay out to the very best advantage, and so he went on gradually getting richer and richer, until about eight or nine years ago, when he met this lady in London, somewhere, and married her. She was fond of a country life, it appears, and he was always very much attached to his native place and held then a good deal of land and some houses here. Might have been our member eighteen years ago if he had wished. So they came down and bought the Priory House, which was formerly the residence of an old fellow whose will was disputed and in Chancery for some years, and there he settled down. Whether it was that his native air didn't agree with him after so many years of London, or whether it was that he missed the business pursuits and habits he had been accustomed to, I don't know; anyhow, although when he came here he was hearty and hale enough to all appearance,

he never seemed to be well here, and about four years after he came here he died."

"Suddenly?"

"Oh dear no; he was ailing a long time, and confined to his bed for about three weeks before he finally went off."

"Any cause assigned?"

"Well, it was put down to some bronchial or asthmatical affection. Dr. Mompesson here attended him and Dr. Repworth, from Bath; but they couldn't do anything, poor fellow."

"Rather sad," said Bryceson. "Not much time to enjoy his wife and his new home, had he?"

"No."

"What aged man was he?"

"Sixty-one—he was a year my senior."

"Dear me! no age at all for a healthy man."

"No, it is not. Perhaps London life is not so conducive to longevity as the less tumultuous existence which we enjoy amid more rural scenes," said Mr. Bompas, who had listened quietly to the narrative of his old friend's life and death.

Bryceson muttered something about existence and fossils which could not quite be caught.

"And since then the widow, I suppose, has practiced resignation on the old—on her—I mean to say," he went on, "that she has since then been living on a good income."

"With the exception of legacies to old friends and servants, which probably did not exceed five thousand pounds, including some charitable bequests to this town and to some London institutions, the whole of Mr. Stanhope's property was left to his widow for her whole sole use and benefit," said Mr. Bompas.

"And that, I suppose, was something handsome?"

"Extremely so, my dear sir. Mr. Stanhope's will was proved under nine-ty-se-ven *thou-sand* pounds personalty!"

"By Jove!" said both the young men together.

"So you see, Mr. Bryceson," said Millard, laughing, "if you have nothing else to do here, you may do worse than induce Mrs. S. to change her name for the second time. Fine chance, sir, fine chance for a smart young fellow like you. I'd offer it to you, Mr. Galbraith, but I've other views for you, ha, ha, ha! which I'll explain to you some other day. Here comes this fine fellow of yours again. Why, this is a different sort of drink altogether; what do you call this?"

"Mint Julep, sir," said Edward. "Jes' as good as the other, sir. Try him, sir."

"By George, Mr. Galbraith," said the merry old fellow, as he set down his glass after following Edward's advice, "if you change your condition don't change your butler; what say you, Bompas?"

Mr. Bompas took his lips from his straw, and looked affectionately and gratefully at the negro. "A gifted man," he murmured. "A highly endowed domestic, indeed."

"I like those two old boys," said Bryceson, after the visitors had left. "Bompas is great fun, and Millard is just one of those genial cheery old fellows that might have walked straight out of Brace-

bridge Hall. I say, Harry, just fancy that woman having all that money. Gad! we've learned something to-day."

"The devil's own get the devil's own luck. Walter, you and I learned that over 't'other side long ago, old boy, didn't we?"

"That's so. I wonder when we shall get news from the squire?"

"Not for a month very likely. Let's go into the market and see the animals."

"Which? The bipeds?"

"Ay."

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## CHAPTER XII.

### THE ELECTION.

THE important day arrived at last. The nomination of candidates had but whetted the appetites of the country-side politicians, and they now made ready for the substantial dish of the contest. Old elections are gone in the Limbo of Days and Things, and our modern ones have assumed a gravity and dignity much at variance with the stormy saturnalia of bygone struggles. For in truth, although men of our land may turn with pride to the records of our Parliaments and the wisdom of our statesmen, for at least a hundred years our country was in a sad condition whilst they were being elected, when every place that was not led by its owner to elect whomsoever he would (till even a black footman was threatened as an alternative to some temporarily stubborn borough, and would have been returned had he been sent), when every place not so owned was a scene of riot and confusion that would have put old Rome to the blush. It speaks volumes for our old statesmen that, with such material as they got sent to Parliament in those days, they kept the good ship Britannia on her course at all. And certain it is that those who were seeking the suffrages of the electors paid dearly for their victories or defeats, not in money alone, but in dignity. To be for a fortnight at once the host and the butt of all the greasy vagabonds of the town, to be cap in hand and hand in fist with men from whom at ordinary times the width of the street was scarcely division enough, to fawn on men whose usual habits were to fawn, to put up with the arrogance of a term, the importance of an occasion, the haughtiness of an hour, and there is no such arrogance, no such importance, no such haughtiness as that of your Jack in office, your political pork-butcher, your vintner with a vote, this was the way in which the candidate earned his victory, if he gained it, and with this was his defeat imbittered tenfold when he lost the day. And after all this humiliation and unbending, the candidate faced on the day of election about as much actual danger as the leader of a cutting-out expedition in a foreign harbor, and had doubly to unbend, or rather to bend, first to the plaudits of his friends, and next from the missiles of his foes.

Add to this the knowledge that the mob were in those days at least, totally without influence over the election, that the noisy, unwashed, vicious crowd which made the town hideous for a day had not a single vote to the hundred of them. No, their suasion was that of force, the argument of the bludgeon, the logic of the boot; and it

was with very small satisfaction indeed that the good people of Avonham saw that from early dawn there poured into the town all the loafers and roughs from the country round, eager for sport, as they termed the day's proceedings, and, like all the bucolic roughs, ready in a moment to exchange the stolid bovine indifference of every-day life for the cruelly unreasoning bovine madness which, when it does break out, which, thank God, happens but seldom, leaves far behind in its vicious destructiveness the hunger-spurred vengeance of the Lancashire meal mob or the cowardly brutality of the race-course rough. Riot is short and sharp in the North, desperate for an hour and then invisible for a year, but though the West rises but seldom, when it does rise it means blood—from both sides too. The Western man will take his opponents by "fair fighting and no knives," and grudges not his own, fights best indeed when a little is let out; your ordinary mob has no taste for defeat, and none but Western men will stand against troops.

There was no election in Dunstalne. Their business was done on nomination day, and the yellow candidate had a walk over, but he had not omitted to range himself on Mr. Boldham's side at Avonham, and was here to-day with many of his prominent supporters to help the cause and strengthen the hands of his party. Of course, the Dunstalne folk were here in force; they had had no fun in their own town, it was obvious that they must patronize the entertainment provided for them by their neighbors, and as it would be unfair to come without some addition to the performance, they brought over with them a powerful but roughly-trained brass band, which stationed itself outside the Woolpack at seven o'clock in the morning, and raised the hair from the scalps of early breakfasters by its first terrible blast. Forth sallied at once the members of the two bands, already engaged by the rival candidates, and in ten minutes more quietness and peace were gone, at least, for that day, from the town. In half an hour the early breakfasters were out in the streets, and the late ones were eating in Pandemonium. The polls were opened at eight. The mayor was in his place as returning officer, and already the public-houses began to be patronized. The quieter portion of the electors hastened to place their votes on record, and the fray fairly began.

Of course for such a small town as Avonham there was but one polling-place needed, and this was a wooden erection covered by a sloping board roof, and approached by steps; up these the electors climbed and recorded their votes aloud for either candidate. Behind the returning officer were the friends of the two opponents, and from time to time during the day the principals themselves looked in to see how the parties were getting on; saluting one another courteously when they met, partly from the innate respect each felt for the other, and partly with a view of setting a good example to the two mobs who, as the hour of noon approached, began to get very noisy, and hailed with tumultuous enthusiasm the various states of the poll as exhibited from the balcony of the George and the window of the Woolpack. These were received from the checking clerks, who were posted behind the returning officer, and scored each vote as it was given, and vociferously aided their party by shouting as the votes were recorded: "Thank you for Mr. Bold-

ham," "Thank you for Sir Headingly Cann." These gentlemen got hotter and louder and more enthusiastic as the day advanced—munched at sandwiches and quaffed bottled ale and sherry provided by the candidates, and felt greatly uplifted by being part and parcel of the election itself, and second in importance only to the two combatants themselves. Two hours after the poll opened the first announcement of numbers was made:

|              |    |
|--------------|----|
| Boldham..... | 97 |
| Cann.....    | 89 |

This was received by the Dunstalne contingent, and the Yellow party with great cheering, replied to by the Blues with equal vigor. Then an hour after came the second list:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Boldham..... | 173 |
| Cann.....    | 166 |

—after which Sir Headingly took a drive through the town and gave his followers heart. There was as yet, however, comparatively little excitement, and beyond being made the peg on which to hang cheers and chaff, the figures roused but little real interest. Walter Rivers was, however, busy, and had promised his uncle that he should be ahead at noon. He accordingly marched down from the George a large number of voters, and although the movement was vigorously responded to by the opposite party, he was able to keep his word, and shortly after twelve o'clock the baronet was received at his committee-rooms with a hearty burst of cheers, and saw to his great delight that he had headed his opponent, the numbers shown being:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Cann.....    | 246 |
| Boldham..... | 231 |

Of course the change of affairs gave new zest to the struggle. The voters from the village immediately in the neighborhood began to come in. From twelve till two would be the busiest part of the election, and both sides girded up their loins for the encounter. Mr. Daniel Follwell, an ardent supporter of Mr. Boldham, escorted his own workmen to the poll, and having seen that each man registered for his candidate, he recorded his own vote, and gave his men holiday for the rest of the day. Most of the small shopkeepers followed his example, not only as to holiday, but as to voting, for the influence of the bank was great, and none dared go against his own interest so far as to run counter to a moneyed man who had the voter in his power. It was greatly on this that Mr. Boldham and Shelman relied for their success. Mr. Rann had spoken truly when he said that politics in Avonham had been dead so long that interest would greatly influence the result of the election; and Sir Headingly felt somewhat this way himself, for he said to his nephew as they took a glass of sherry together in the middle of the day, "We're beginning to find the bank influence now, Walter."

"We hold them safe, sir," replied Walter, "though the fight will be closer than I thought at first; but I am sure of a hundred majority—I have very nearly that on the books. In another election they wouldn't do so well as they are doing now. Besides, we are

fighting two towns. Look at Wilmslow (the member for Dunstalne), haranguing away there opposite the Woolpack."

"He has greatly influenced the villages between here and Dunstalne. I'm afraid we did not look them up enough."

"We shall soon see their effect. They will all be polled by two o'clock. We're in the thick of it now, uncle."

"Yes," said the old man with a nervous laugh, "we're in for it now."

"Yes, and we shall win, and win easily too," said Walter.

"I hope so."

"I am sure of it, uncle. Boldham can't get a majority without bribery, and both he and Shelman know that that won't pay. Come in there! Who's there?"

The door opened, and a head was slowly put into the room. The eyes in the head looked inquiringly at the two gentlemen, and the mouth emitted a slight cough.

"Come in, man," said Rivers impatiently. "Now, Hackett, what do you want? Out with it!"

Mr. Bill Hackett, the husband of the charwoman before mentioned, shambled slowly into the room and began twisting his rough moleskin cap nervously round and round in his fingers.

"Now then, Hackett," said Walter, signing to his uncle to leave the conversation in his hands, "what can we do for you?"

"Well, gen'l'men boath," said Mr. Bill Hackett, who eked out the earnings of his better half—of whom he stood in mortal dread—by a little poaching, a little fowl breeding, a little gardening, a trifle of petty larceny, and an infinitesimal modicum of honest work, "I be onwillin' to ent'rupt you when you'm so busy, on'y you see, gen'l'men," he added with a writhe in Sir Headingly's direction, "I be a pore man I be, a'mazin' pore man I be fore sure."

"That's your own fault for not working, my man," said Walter, "and I don't see what it has to do with us either."

Mr. William Hackett looked sheepish and puzzled.

"There's a main lot o' us pore chaps about, gen'l'men," he said. "'T'es surely hard if the gentlevoak can't gie 'un a tarn when they do want 'un like."

"What do you mean, sir?" said Sir Headingly with much state-  
liness. It was bad enough to have been worried by this sort of voter in public, but to be intruded upon now and patronized by this fellow was too much.

"What du I mean, zur?" said Hackett. "Whoy, what I mean is this here—what's the use o' my vote to me, Zur 'Edin'ley? I can't yeat 'un, can I? I can't drenk 'un, can I? Thick 'ere 'lection 'baint a gooin on right way noohows as I can zee," he said, raising his voice a little.

"Do you mean to stand there and tell me," broke in Sir Headingly—"To tell me you—you—you vagabond—"

"Now lookee 'ere, Zur 'Edin'ley, vair words, zur, vair words. I'm a 'lector, I am. I a got my little bit o' vreehold as my vather left I jest so much as you've a got your big vreehold. D'ye zee that, zur?—vair words vor I, zur—I'm a 'lector, I am."

"Now just you listen to me, Mr. Hackett," said Walter, again

motioning to his uncle to leave the man to him. "I think I can understand what you want."

"'Tis likely, Muster Rivers, 'tes likely," said the man, with a grin.

"How many voters have you brought round here with you on this errand?"

The man hesitated.

"Come, don't waste my time. How many fellows did you leave at the bar down-stairs? Tom Purcell was one, wasn't he?"

"Ees, zur, 'a wur."

"Of course he was, and Edwardes, of Springhill, and his son-in-law Mackerey make three. Now who else was there?—come, out with it!"

Mr. Hackett, freeholder and elector, seemed rather cowed by the younger man's bolder way of taking up the running, and answered, rather sheepishly,

"Well, Muster Rivers, there's them three, an' me an' Bill Whiston, him as married my niece, and Jack Onslow, my missuses brother law, him as had her sester s'naa, an' we all come in town together, us zix, an' there's Joe White down-stairs 'long wi' 'em, as ain't a voted neither not yet. That's all, zur!"

"Oh, that's all, is it? Well, that isn't much; stop a minute till I put their names down, and yours at the head of them."

"My dear Walter," began Sir Headingly, in a hoarse whisper.

Walter answered rapidly in French which was not among the "lector's" accomplishments,

"Let me manage this man, uncle, don't you bother, he will get nothing from me."

"Now, Mr. Hackett," he went on, "I've got all these names down, and I make seven of them, what's the next thing?"

"Well, zur," said the poacher, brightening up as he fancied he spied his expected reward, "the question be just thick-here-a-way, zur. Be they there votes any good to you, gen'l'men, or baint they?"

"That's the question, as you say; well, suppose they're not, what then?"

"Spoasin' they 'm *not*, did you zay, Muster Rivers?" said Hackett, wonderingly.

"Yes, that's what I said, you can have it the other way about, if you like, you can either suppose they are some good to us or no good to us, just which you please."

"Well, then, zur, I'll make zo bold as to goo fur to say as how they *be* zum good to 'ee."

"Go on."

"Well," said Bill Hackett, in a deeply injured tone; "sure-ly, Muster Rivers, you don't want I to zay no more?"

"Oh, no, you might have stopped some time ago, if you pleased."

"Well, then, come, zur," said the fellow, with a sudden burst, "me an' my mates is ready to goo and vote right straight vor Zur Edin'ly, see now."

"Well, why don't you go."

"But, Muster Rivers, baint we to get nothin' for all these 'ere votes—why, look, see, there's zeven on 'em."

"How much do you want, Hackett?"

“ Well, zur, I reckon as they'm wuth a vive pound a-piece to me for a-gettin' on 'em for 'ee—there now!”

“ And that is what you want?—five times seven that makes thirty-five. I suppose you want five pounds for your own vote?”

Mr. William Hackett fairly laughed with glee at his success. What a simple thing it had been to manage “ the gentlevoak,” and how easy it was to get favors from them at “ 'lection time ”—why wasn't there a 'lection every year instead of once in eighteen. He rubbed his hands, and answered the little query with a chuckle.

“ Well, I spoase zo, zur.”

“ Well now, Hackett,” said Rivers, rising, and placing one foot on the chair, and pointing one finger airily at the chuckler, “ just you listen to me a minute.”

“ Cer'nly zur.”

“ You've come here to-day with your precious seven votes and you expect us to give you thirty-five pounds for them—”

There was an unpromising tone to these words, so Hackett listened open-mouthed and very open-eared, and made no reply.

“ Now you can just turn round and walk straight out of that door, for you won't get one farthing.”

Mr. Hackett's fingers lost their hold of the moleskin cap, and it fell to the floor.

“ And, another thing I'll tell you, now you're here. You'll go straight to the other side and make your offer there; try it on—you'll find when you do come to vote that you are marked men; the other side won't have you, for I shall see Mr. Boldham's agent at once and tell him of your offer, or at least my uncle will, you've made the offer to him, and I witness it. Boldham's man will be afraid to poll you, for he knows that if you vote for him we shall be down on them for bribery, and win or lose, they get the worst of that. Try it and see. How much are the seven votes worth now, eh?”

Mr. Hackett much chapfallen here.

“ And how much is your personal liberty worth? Do you know what you've been doing by offering to sell votes?”

Mr. Hackett, much chapfallen still, gasped out a negative.

“ You don't; go and ask a lawyer then, or wait till the assizes, for we shall prosecute you and your mates for doing it, and you'll find out then—you especially. Now you can walk and tell your friends how nicely you've managed for them. Come—pick up your cap and march!”

A more deeply disgusted elector than Mr. William Hackett, freeholder, has never gone out of a committee-room, and never gone out with a more woe-begone and forlorn appearance.

Sir Headingly turned to his nephew with an air of relief.

“ Well, you certainly managed that fellow remarkably well; I was really half afraid at one time, Walter, that you were actually going to treat with him. I wouldn't have missed the vagabond's discomfiture for the world; of course, you intend to tell Boldham's man?”

“ My dear uncle, I am in hopes that there will be no need for doing so; if I am not very much mistaken, Hackett's terror, which I flatter myself was genuine, will communicate itself to his comrades, unless some Dunstalne man gets hold of him first, and that's not very likely in this house, and we shall have a deputation of them

here presently begging for mercy and promising to vote for us. Hark, I can hear some one stumbling up the stairs now— Come in!”

Two of the companions of the discomfited Bill Hackett appeared at the door and looked pleadingly at Sir Headingly.

“What is it, my men?” said that worthy.

“Whoy,” said the elder man Edwardes, and then he nudged his son-in-law, and remained silent.

“Whoy,” said Mackerey, and also spake no more.

“You’ve come to ask for fifty pounds instead of the thirty-five that your precious friend Hackett wanted, I suppose,” said Rivers.

“No-a, zur, us baint,” said Edwardes, in a kind of mild despair, “doan’t ’ee goo for to mex us up along o’ he, Muster Rivers, ’twertn’t noo vault o’ ourn, zur.”

“Well, what do you want to say; are you going to vote for us, or against us? Now, come—sharp—out with it—do you think I’ve got nothing to do but talk to you all day?”

“We coom in town s’ marning,” said the younger man, elbowing himself past his father-in-law, and standing sheepishly in front of him, “fur to vote fur yeou, zur; wall, on th’ road we meets Bill Hackett, an’ he says as how we in got to zee yeou ’fore we goos to vote. Well, zur, he do liave we down-stairs, and when he do come back, he do tell we as how yeou be goin’ to gie we all up to jail for hee’s vault; well, us baint goin’ fur to ha’ that s’naa, zur, zoo we’en come up here for to tell ’ee as we be goin’ right away fur to gie ’ee our voates, and then we be goin’ whoam like; good-marnin’ to ’ee, gen’l’men,” added Mackerey, hurriedly backing past his father-in-law, “an’ good luck to ’ee, doan’t ’ee goo fur to be hard wi’ Bill Hackett, gen’l’men, he be a poor mackey moon zort on’t, zir, and I do think he’ve a got beer a’ready this marning. Good-marnin’, gen’l’men. Come on, you;” and clutching the arm of his father-in-law, who was overpowered with respect at the clever way in which his son-in-law had extricated the party, he left the room, and Walter and the baronet were again left alone.

Walter laughed quietly.

“I’ll see that those seven votes are registered, they may be useful; here is the latest state of the poll coming, uncle; you must go out on to the balcony and say a few words; well, Simmonds” (to a young man, who entered, bearing a paper), “what news now?”

“Still ahead, sir; still ahead, Sir Headingly. Here are the figures, sir. They’re pretty correct. I’ve kept a careful check over the registering clerks, and I think you will find this right.”

The new record showed that Sir Headingly’s position was still better than it had been at noon. The numbers now were:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Cann.....    | 406 |
| Boldham..... | 323 |

Ringin’ cheers greeted this announcement when it was displayed from the balcony, and Sir Headingly, in response to the calls of his followers, stepped out and made a short speech. The old man’s mettle was up, and he was elated with his success.

As he and Walter drove up the street to the hustings they saw Mr. William Hackett and his fellow electors standing at the polling-place and recording their votes. The clerks were shouting, “Thank you

for Sir Headingly Cann" as each one gave in his adherence to the winning candidate, but the voters seemed as though they were not combining pleasure with their duty.

"We get those votes, thanks to your cleverness," said the baronet, looking gratefully at his nephew.

"Oh, no, uncle; it was Bryceson who put me up to that trick. You must thank him when you see him. He was the man who gave me that idea, and a capital one it was for us. Look at that fellow Hackett's face."

And indeed, Mr. Hackett went home to his better half in such a desponding, disgusted, and petulant humor that she was compelled to break a stave of a butter-tub over his devoted head before she could restore him to anything like himself; and when she heard the result, the barren result, of his negotiations with the only candidate he had dared to interview, she fell into so great a passion, and made such determined preparations for breaking the rest of the tub in the same manner, that the foiled elector quitted his freehold in undignified haste, and sought to dispel his chagrin and disappointment by a course of strong liquors and smoke.

Meanwhile the hopes of the Yellow party declined as those of the baronet's rose. At two o'clock the numbers were again exhibited, and again the Blue candidate was seen to be more than holding his own. Good fight as Mr. Boldham was making, he had great odds against him—the odds of prejudice and unwillingness to bring about change, and well liked as he himself was in the town, the personal popularity of the baronet was against him as well. The state of the poll at two o'clock was:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Cann.....    | 534 |
| Boldham..... | 410 |

"Well, Wilmslow," said Mr. Boldham, cheerfully, as they met in the private room at the Woolpack, where they were joined by Shelman, who looked as amiable as usual, "we seem to be out of it, eh? The old influence too much for us, I expect?"

"We have made a capital fight, for a first struggle. You will certainly have over five hundred votes, and that is wonderful for a little place that has for forty years been represented by the other party, and has gone eighteen years without a contest at all. I feel much encouraged, and I am sure you will receive the congratulations of the party on your gallant battle."

"Well, well, we mustn't despair. As you say, we have stirred up the other people a bit, and they must know now that they can't expect always to have matters their own way."

"We must have an association as soon as this is over," said Shelman.

"Do you think Cann's people are better organized than ours?" inquired the member for Dunstalne.

"Oh dear no," replied Shelman, "they never dreamed of a contest. The news was like a thunderbolt in the market-place. We posted our bills at night, you know, and next morning we were canvassing. Oh, no, we had rather the start of them, in fact. Rivers has worked well, of course."

“But not better, I am sure, than you have, Mr. Shelman. I must felicitate you on your first effort as an electioneering agent.”

Shelman bowed.

“The town seems quiet, that’s one thing I’m very glad of,” said Boldham.

“It won’t be very quiet after four o’clock,” said Shelman, sharply. “There are a lot of quarrymen in town, and they’re drinking pretty freely, and so are most of the country people. The roughs about here, too, have got the idea into their heads that there would be plenty of occupation and heaps of money for all of them if the railway came here, and that Cann is trying to keep it away; and I shouldn’t wonder if they let him know it before the day is out.”

Mr. Boldham looked grave. “I trust not,” he said. “I should be very grieved if there were any violent scenes in the town after the poll is closed.”

“Well, we must hope for the best,” said Shelman, carelessly. “Now, uncle, I am going round to the polling place again, and I sha’n’t return here till after four o’clock.”

Shelman did not remain long at the polling-place; he set off up the town in a few minutes, and visited several of the houses. He had a short interview with Messrs. Jack Onslow and Bill Whiston, two worthy members of the family of the hen pecked Bill Hackett. These two gentlemen had imbibed just enough to make them extremely cross with their disappointment, and to have disarmed them of any caution. He listened to their tale and then condoled with them, recommended them not to go home yet, but to wait till the evening, and assured them that they had been shamefully treated.

A little after three o’clock he mounted his horse, which was kept saddled and ready for him at the Woolpack, and rode again to the market-place. The town was getting a little tired of this election plaything, and the hoisting of the last hour’s numbers only partially aroused the crowd; they were:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Cann.....    | 597 |
| Boldham..... | 459 |

There was some cheering as Shelman rode up, and just at this time a large number of voters were registering. All who had not yet done so were pressing up to the poll, and the agents were very sharply watching for any last great move on the part of the enemy. For the first time in the day Rivers and Shelman met. They raised their hats to each other at first and then shook hands, at which the friends of both parties cheered and commented in various ways on the incident.

“That’s right,” shouted one. “Let ’un shake hands afore they do vight.”

“We’ll put thee up next time, Muster Shelman,” cried another, and the Yellows cheered.

“So ’ee may,” roared a brazen-lunged Blue, “an’ we’ll put Muster Rivers whur we be a-puttin’ ’s uncle neaow,” which was the signal for acclamation by the Blue party, and the Blue song was loudly raised, to be replied to when a line of it had been sung and roared by the Yellow version. The bands blared defiance at one an-

other, the banners waved and the crowds hurrahed, as if noise and color would yet alter the fortune of the day.

But although the votes of the last hour were pretty evenly distributed, and although to make their minority as small and their defeat as creditable as possible Mr. Boldham and his lieutenants brought up every available unit of their forces, it was of no avail. Four o'clock struck, the mayor declared the poll closed, and the election was over. It was not long before the official report was known, and Mr. Sennett announced the result of the day's struggle:

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Cann.....    | 665 |
| Boldham..... | 512 |

But Avonham's troubles were not over for that time; the worst of the day was to come.

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## CHAPTER XIII.

### A VERY ROUGH EVENING.

THE one inhabitant of Avonham who was devoutly glad that the business of the day was done was the mayor. He had discharged his duties that day most ably and courteously, and to the satisfaction of everybody connected with the election, he had been thanked by both the candidates in the set speeches which each had made on the declaration of the result, and he sought his home self-satisfied, but intensely weary; never was man so glad of slippers and loose coat; he descended to his cellar for a bottle of his choicest wine, and sat down to his dinner with a feeling of intense gratitude for his deliverance from the turmoil of the day. His meal finished, and the bottle half, or perhaps a little more than half, emptied, Mr. Mayor placed his legs on a chair, carefully adjusted his silk handkerchief over his head, and slept the sleep of the hard-worked just man, after the manner of his forefathers. Doubtless if he could have removed the roofs of the houses of the burgesses over whom he that year held sway, and peeped Asmodeus-like, into their rooms, he would have seen many a one just as tired of the affair as he was himself, and seeking to forget the derangement which the town had suffered, in very much the same comfortable way as his worship. Had the place been left to its own devices, and had none but the real electors been consulted as to the way in which the rest of the evening should be spent, there would have been little difference between the close of that day and the evening of any great market, and the white boards of the polling-booth, and the election posters, still covering the walls in all directions, would have been the sole remaining signs of the bygone contest. Every one would have gone gravely and peaceably to his business again, one to his farm and another to his merchandise, as the good old Scriptural phrase puts it, and the election would have been comfortably stowed away in people's memories, to serve, perhaps, as a topic of conversation for many a future day, but to trouble the town no more.

It would have been with it as it was periodically with the river; for eight months in the year the Avon flowed peacefully over its pebbly bed limpid and pure, for three months more it was swifter,

deeper, and, as the country-folks called it, "muddly-like," and very often during the one remaining month of the year, or at any rate during a great part of it, the Avon would assert itself, would come plashing and tumbling into the houses in the lower part of the town, driving the inmates to upstairs rooms to be rescued in boats, swimming the family wash-tubs and large crockery merrily round the ground floor, and finally leaving an inch deep deposit of mud on the boards and the street pavement outside, return to its bed for another eleven months. Nothing was ever done; the town-fathers did not dream of raising the banks and keeping it out, they were perfectly acquainted with its ways and did not heed its winter vagaries; you see it was their own river and they understood it. So with the election—for eighteen years the tide of events had flowed on peacefully, occasionally local excitement had raised ripples on the stream, and now the election had come, and the tide of events slopped over and flooded the minds of the township, just as the river flooded its houses. And just as the floods were forgotten yearly, when the river resumed its peaceable behavior, so would the election have been forgotten if the Avonhamites had been left to themselves. But there were outside influences at work and pressure from without, and the town was destined to be flooded this time in a manner which would not easily fade out of the memories of its inhabitants.

The inns, both great and small, were full; at the George there was jubilation, at the Woolpack irritation, and cogitation at the Bear. The Blue party celebrated their victory by much singing of songs, much shaking of hands, and draining of glasses and cans; the Yellows were no less noisy, were indeed, even louder, but not so hearty; and the customers at the Bear were noisy, but only conversationally so, the two parties met there more, the ground was neutral and argument more rife, but the frequenters of the hotel were of the better class, and whatever discussion went forward was carried on decorously and without heat. The general feeling seemed to be that there had been a much closer contest than was expected, that a majority of no more than a hundred and fifty-three was calculated to cloud the victory of the Blues with some degree of apprehension for a seat which had been deemed so secure. However, the Blues did not seem cast down, they took their victory as they found it, and were quite satisfied. "So long as they won," their leaders said, "that was enough for them." Mr. Boldham had been the strongest man they would ever have arrayed against them, and no other would have got the votes he did. Meanwhile, in the small inns and beer-shops, the roughs of the town, the quarrymen from the down, and the Dunstalne mob had collected and were singing, and dancing, and drinking, and fast working themselves up to the point where mischief begins in these matters.

It was about eight o'clock, and still perfectly light, when out of a beer-shop in the neighborhood of the canal wharf, the favorite resort of the bargees who worked the fly-boats which brought Avonham the most of its London and Bristol merchandise, came pouring a stream of half-tipsy roughs, who made a ring and surrounded a Dunstalne man and an Avonham man, who, having differed as to the number of times Nelson defeated the "Hemperor

Bonyparty," or the age of the "Duke" (there is but one duke for the West of England men), were going to settle the matter in the good old English fashion. Hot and flushed with drink and excitement they came rushing out into the open place next the wharf and watched the varying fortunes of the struggle, encouraging each his man with loud shouts, dancing, howling, disputing, but never interfering with either of the two bruisers who pummeled away at one another for half an hour until the Dunstalne man yielded and was led away by his friends, whilst the Avonham hero was seized by his own party, taken off in triumph to the house where the dispute had originated, and regaled at the expense of his admiring townsmen. From that time and from this slight incident was Avonham's peace once more taken away. The Dunstalne men who had come into the town that day were all on the losing side, the party they had assisted had been defeated, and the tide of generosity which would have flowed so freely from winners was trickling from losers much too slowly and in much too scanty a volume to please the recipients who had imagined, the wish being father to the thought, that they were coming into a land of rejoicing and plenty, where, after assisting in beating the common foe, they would be bountifully regaled at the expense of the "emancipated slaves who had long groaned beneath his yoke," to quote one of their most prominent orators; but the Yellows in Avonham were not dispensing their favors as conquerors. The Dunstalne men found that the joyful libations of the victors and the despair-begotten draughts of the conquered were different things entirely. It was therefore with a great access of delight that a Dunstalne man who, having met in the street three of his comrades tired and thirsty, had taken them into the Five Stars to eat and drink, received in response to his inquiry as to what was to pay, the answer from the usually gruff landlord, "Nothin' t' you, nur noo one else as is on right side."

"Right side's bin wrong side t'day," said an Avonham man sitting near.

"'Twon't be that thur way long, thoo," replied the Dunstalne man; "here, coom drink you, surr, an' let t'ooother chap drink; there's nowt to pay, thee sayst, fill another pot, then."

The landlord readily complied.

"Matey," said one Avonham man to another, up street, "dost knoo Sam Willums be gi'en away aal hees beer fur nowt?"

"Noo!" said the other, galvanized into sudden interest, "whur?"

"Down to Vive Stars, mun; will 'ee coom an' ha' a drop o't?"

"Ah, will I nuther?" said the other, wiping his lips.

But they were disappointed, the landlord was obdurate, they were "dirty blues," they were informed, and they were expelled with more force than politeness. Rejected in this rough manner, they sought counsel and help of their friends, and, collecting a force of their allies, drove furiously at the Five Stars; the windows were broken in, the Dunstalne men inside roughly handled, the heads of two of the landlord's barrels staved in, and the landlord himself flung out into the street, whilst the invaders ran riot in his bar and cellar. Bitterly regretting his action in refusing liquor which was so soon to be taken from him, he sought advice and counsel of his cronies and of his recently expelled customers, and having been re-

enforced, made another attack upon his own house and reinstated his free customers at the expense of all his windows and bar-fittings.

This time, however, the combat was carried into the enemy's country, and the Blues were chased down the street, until they reached the shelter of a little house called the Swan. Alas! this proved the destruction of the Swan, for although the fugitives managed to make good their escape and flee through the back way, yet the house was given up to the vengeance of their pursuers, the blue flag torn down, the whole of the windows broken, and the bar wrecked; and then the Yellow mob, by this time a couple of hundred strong, and re-enforced every minute, paraded the upper side streets of the town, and saluted every Blue house with a volley of stones which went smashing through the windows, scaring the inmates almost to death. Presently, not contented with alarming this portion of the town, they marched in fair order, but with immense noise, into the open space in front of the church, where they halted for a moment as if irresolute, and then raised deafening shouts of defiance of their enemies. In a minute or two they were joined by all of the Yellow party, who were ready for mischief, a considerable contingent who were of no party at all, but ripe for any riot, and a sprinkling of Blues, who found, to their great disgust, that their halloaing and whooping on behalf of their side had not been so productive of solid and liquid benefits as they had anticipated at the commencement of the day; finding then that nothing was to be gained by peace they gravitated easily to the riotous faction and were soon as prominent as any; it is, perhaps, unnecessary to say that Mr. Hackett and his disgusted contingent, having drunk themselves pot-valiant, were of this party.

Some unconscious road surveyor had aided the Goddess of Discord by leaving at the side of the street three heaps of stones, with which it was intended to repair the road at the top of the town. Certain it was that their mission to-night was not to repair the town; hastily the mob armed themselves with the missiles, and before the affrighted inhabitants had time to protect their windows with shutters, the crashing of glass and the shrieks of terrified women proclaimed that the riot was assuming formidable proportions. In five minutes the town was in a state of panic, and the mob were masters of the situation.

The mayor, hastily summoned, showed both courage and good sense; he went at once into the street and endeavored to reason with the mob, but his eloquence was vain, he was driven back to his house, but escaped by his garden, and making his way to the market-place, surrounded by a few faithful followers, there read the Riot Act, that ancient ceremony which still ranks among our most cherished and useless remedies against Force. But the mayor did better; he sent his own man on a good horse to the railway station, at which was the nearest telegraph office, and dispatched a telegram for troops. All over the town the householders were barricading their dwellings, conveying their women and children into the back rooms, and preparing to make what stand they could against the mad crew, who were wrecking the town. There was no time to swear in special constables; many of the rioters were armed in some fashion with staves and pokers, hatchets and stones, and it would

need a well-organized and trained body to cope with them; the local police were so few in number as to be helpless though they did their duty well, and so the work of destruction went on, and the unimpeded ruffians were going systematically through the town, breaking the windows, and destroying, as far as they could, all the property of the voters for Sir Headingly Cann. The Bear was attacked, and though the ex-soldier landlord fought gallantly for his property and made two or three of the party wish they had not joined the fray, he was wounded by a stone and dragged into his house bleeding and exhausted, only just in time for his servants to close the ponderous gateway door, which, being built of massive oak planks and iron clampings, resisted all efforts to break it down.

Foiled in this attempt, the rioters next divided themselves into three portions, one continuing down the main street toward the bridge, one crossing into the church-yard to attack the house beyond, and the third, which we will follow, to commence the destruction in South Street. Acting under some instructions from some one in authority, they passed Mr. Bompas's house without injury, but smashed in the panes of the two next to it, and then, with loud shouts, crossed the road to the gate of the Coombes. It was known, of course, that the proprietor had no vote, but there seemed to be an understanding that something special was to be done here, for a louder outcry than had yet been made was raised as they halted before the gate. But here, for the first time, they were confronted and cowed. As Tom Purcell, the leader, a brawny six foot ruffian, thrust his hand through the gate to get at the lock, he started back with an awful scream of pain and fell fainting into the arms of his nearest follower, his arm broken at the wrist. There was a moment of indecision and then a voice from inside the gate, cried, in deep, firm tones:

“What do you want here, you vagabonds?”

There was a pause, and a silence, and then some one who had made a strategic movement to the rear on seeing the fate of the unlucky ringleader said, “Look 'ow 'ee've as sarved pore Tom Purcell's arm.”

“I'll serve your head the same fashion if you put it this way, young man,” said the deep voice again. The figure of the speaker was not seen.

“Break down th' giate,” shouted some one (also in the rear).

“Oh! you want the gate open, do you?” said the same voice, and the gate swung inward on its hinges. “Now then!”

A man rushed forward, but in a moment came flying back and crashed down on the pavement as though a horse had kicked him. Next, another peeping in cautiously to see where the owner of this mysterious voice was concealed, received a rap on the head which made him doubt for a minute or two whether he had a head left to rap. This was a chilling reception for the crowd, though a very warm one for those who had sampled the fare which the garrison of the Coombes was providing for them. Obviously the only thing to do was to let fly at the windows, and not to come to close quarters with those at the gate, so four or five of the fellows drew back to the other side of the street and threw. There was a shiver of glass and a cheer from the crowd. But it was rudely interrupted by a

sudden charge from the gate. Galbraith, who now showed himself for the first time, came first, followed by the negro and Bryceson. Dashing at the men nearest to the gate, they struck boldly and fiercely each at his man, and one fellow was seized in the negro's powerful grip, hauled half-way across the road, and flung down into the garden. Then Galbraith and Bryceson retired to the gate and waited for the foe to advance. But the foe had no stomach for the fray. Evidently these were not long-suffering citizens, but dangerous men who meant fighting. There was an undignified scuffle, and a great show of assisting off their wounded, and, with a parting yell, the portion of the rioters who had undertaken the assault of South Street withdrew, taking with them their unfortunate leader with a broken arm, the inquisitive peeper with a "confused" brain pan, and three others with substantial marks and sanguinary proofs of the courage and determination of the garrison. Entirely occupied with their own safety, they forgot all about the unfortunate prisoner, but left him behind in a most uncomfortable position, lying on the gravel path, with the heavy foot of the negro on his chest.

"Pick him up, Ned," said Bryceson, "and take him into the house. We'll see who he is."

The victim was jerked upon his feet, and hustled into the house with a roughness that surprised him and took away all power of resistance even if he had intended any. Ned pushed him along the hall and into a room, where Bryceson and Galbraith followed with a light.

"Now then, turn him round, and let's have a look at him."

Ned twisted the captive round to face the lamp, and there, blinking and shivering with light and fright combined, was Mr. Adolphus Carter.

Galbraith looked sternly at him as he crouched under Ned's powerful hand. Then turning to Bryceson, he said,

"Why, this fellow is one of Mr. Bompas's clerks. What's the history of this?"

"Ask him," answered Bryceson, laying down his formidable club. "Now then, sonny, speak up! Give him a shake up, Ned. That's right. Now then, what were you doing out there wrecking and plundering, eh?"

Mr. Adolphus had already expended all the stock of courage which he had ever possessed. He burst into tears, and made no answer. The only movement, either, of which he seemed capable, was that of flinging himself at the feet of the two friends and groveling on the carpet before them. They looked at each other for a moment, and burst into a roar of laughter, in which the negro joined.

"Get up, you unhappy little cur," said Galbraith, contemptuously. "What harm have I ever done you or your ruffians, that you should attack my house? Ned and Walter, as the street's clear just walk over to Mr. Bompas, offer him any assistance, and if you want me fire a shot, and I'll be with you in a brace. If not, ask Mr. Bompas to step over here under your escort. I should like him to see this object."

Mr. Bompas had been out to endeavor to assist his friend the mayor, and by dint of much courage and moral suasion had per-



“It was a mi—is—is—take of the mob. I was try—i—ing to stop them.”

“That’s a lie,” broke in Ned, “you jus’ done frowin’ one rock, an’ when I pick you up ’n run in de garden wif you you was pickin’ up ’nudder one. You bad scoun’rel—w’at you wan’ int’fere wi’ my master fo’! he nebber int’fere wi’ you, you bad li’l—li’l—li’l—tater-bug!” Ned had fished about for this word a few times and brought it out with a scream that made Carter jump again.

“Mr. Bompas,” said Galbraith, “there’s some mystery in this—this fellow’s tale is not true and your suggestion as to my having nothing to do with the election is a very good one; he has some motive which I don’t fathom. Where can I put him into a safe jail for the night—this town’s no good? Ned, saddle the horses, we’ll start at once.”

“Mr. Galbraith,” said Bompas, “will you deign to listen to me for a few moments if I venture to urge something in mitigation of your suggested plan?”

“My dear sir, whatever you say will, I am sure, from all I’ve ever seen or heard of you, be straightforward and honorable; you may speak freely and with authority here if you choose.”

“I thank you, sir! Gentlemen, I have known the father of this unhappy lad for many years; he is a clergyman who is known and respected all over Marlshire. The occurrence of to-night, to find his son in this position, would break his heart, and this young man’s mother’s heart, too. The lad is but young, gentlemen—he may have been led astray—his brain may have been turned by the deplorable turmoil of this hor—ri—ble day which I wish the town had never seen. Now, if you will consent to release him conditionally on his confessing to me the reasons which actuated him in his insane attempt on your house, I will use all my endeavors to induce him to make them known to me or to his father. My dear Mr. Galbraith, I ask this not as any favor to myself, but in mercy to my two old friends, his father and mother, who would be heart-broken if they knew of their son’s wickedness.” The good old fellow’s voice trembled as he made his appeal. Galbraith was moved by his plea.

“God forbid, Mr. Bompas, that I should add any sorrow to an old man’s gray hairs; let it be as you say, with all my heart, though the vagabond isn’t worth the trouble of a good man’s help, and perhaps he’s not worthy an honest man’s enmity. Take my advice, young sir, and go home to your father; keep out of Avonham for a week or two, I dare say Mr. Bompas will give you a holiday, and keep out of my sight for the rest of the century if we live so long. Open the door, Ned, and let him go.” And Mr. Adolphus Carter, with downcast eyes and abject mien, crawled out of the room.

“Mr. Bompas,” said Bryceson, heartily, “you’re a brick! Harry, Mr. Bompas and the mayor have been trying to restore order in this place—if they can get fifty fellows together they can keep the peace—if not, half the town’ll be down; we must help, too, old boy. We’ve seen many worse troubles than this, Mr. Bompas. Ned, mix us three stiff horns, and then come out and fight.”

Ned grinned at this, and speedily appeared with the desired refreshments.

"We none of us want Dutch courage, Walter," said Galbraith, smiling, as he took his glass.

"No matter," said the irrepressible Walter, "we shall be none the worse for it any way. Now, Mr. Bompas, we'll see you safe. Come along, Ned."

They left the house perfectly deserted and dark, at which Mr. Bompas made some demur, but was answered that the house might look after itself, and that they were not afraid that, after their first reception, the rioters would return. Mr. Bompas could not but admire the calm and quiet manner and the total absence of fear in the young men. They walked swiftly down to the town hall, where the mayor and his followers were.

"Come in to re-enforce you, Mr. Mayor," said Bryceson.

"I am in hopes they have partially dispersed," said the mayor.

"Not a bit of it," said some one; "just hark to that row!"

A loud shout resounded up the street.

"They've got down to Killett's house," said a young fellow, grasping his heavy stick; "let's go and help him."

"Come along," said Galbraith, and he, Bryceson, the negro, and half a score young fellows started down the street. As they arrived on the outskirts of the crowd, they perceived that a regular siege was being laid to the ex-mayor's house; that the besieged and two of his men were holding out stoutly, and that he had just saluted the mob with a pail of scalding water, this at first had provoked a laugh, but the rioters were in an ugly temper, and a quarry-man, elbowing his way to the front, shouted to one of his mates,

"Gi' me hold o' thy crowbar, thee fool, doesn't thee see corner stwun o' th' house here? gi' me hold, we'll ha' th' lot deawn in vive minutes."

But as he dealt his third heavy stroke, trying to wedge the point of his crowbar in between the stone and brick work, a heavy cudgel descended on the side of his head, and he fell prone. At the same time a cheer was raised, and the rescue party, attacking the mob in rear, dashed through it, smiting right and left as they passed, and facing them, fairly drove them back. They were at once joined by Killett and his men, who ranged themselves alongside them. The giant forms of the butcher and the negro, and the determined attitude of the rest, made the crowd hesitate for a moment. Next, a man dashed out at Galbraith, who was on the right of the party—he had never made a greater mistake or a worse selection in his life. Before he could strike a blow, he was seized by the throat, flung down on the pavement, lifted up and held a moment over his adversary's head, and then hurled violently forward on to the heads of some of the rearmost of the crowd; a feat like that had never been seen in Avonham; she had had her famous wrestlers, and was the center of as tall and stalwart a race as any that lives in England, but never a man there had seen such a show of strength as that; even for such a foe there was for a moment a buzz of applause and a murmur of commendation that almost drowned the cries of the crowd. Not a few were the immediate deserters of the cause. Throwing stones and breaking Blue windows might be very good fun, but to be dashed on to a pavement and then sent spinning into the air at men's heads was a little too cooling for the hottest enthu-

siasm to resist; and when the little band, headed by the very man who had shown twice this night that he would not be attacked without sharp retaliation, dashed forward with a cheer into the front ranks of the crowd, and by dint of sheer strength drove them back half across the road, half the fellows felt the game was getting too exciting, and fled. The rest of the combat was short, sharp and decisive. Twenty people, who had only before wanted leaders to attack the rioters, now joined the fray, and in a few minutes the largest of the three crowds, which were doing so much damage to the town, was dispersed. As they straggled past the town hall, pursuers and pursued mixed up together, the loud voice of the mayor was heard proclaiming that he had sent for troops, and calling on all to go home. A sudden thought struck Bryceson; he whispered a few words in the ear of Galbraith, who laughed and nodded at his friend as he disappeared round the corner of South Street.

Five minutes later as a second crowd was forming in a threatening manner before the town hall, high above all the storm of cries and shrieks, rang out the sharp clear sound of a bugle. It silenced the mob as if by magic; again it gave out its warlike message, and that settled the matter. "The soldiers! the soldiers!" was the universal cry, and one wild rush was made to the top of the town, where the leaders of the riot had determined to face any troops which might be sent. For an hour they stood on their guard, shouting defiance, but doing no more mischief. It was one o'clock in the morning, and all were pretty well worn out, when the first troops arrived in answer to the repeated appeals of the mayor; without in the least exaggerating the danger, he had made such alarming representations that two companies of the Guards had been hastily dispatched by a special train. They marched into the town, and the riot was at an end. In every direction those concerned in the work of destruction and plunder scattered; a strong force of county police followed the soldiery next day, and the magistrate sat daily receiving information and granting warrants for the arrest of ringleaders. The townsmen breathed freely once more.

"By Jove, sir!" said an officer of the Guards to Bryceson, as he laughed at the bugle stratagem, and praised Ned's mixed drink, "I never saw a town in the state this was; what a little spitfire of a place it must be; upon my word it only wanted a little blood in the streets and a few broken accouterments scattered about here and there, to look like a street on the north side of Sebastopol."

Thus was the Avonham election lost and won, and thus did they fight after it was over. It will be many days before the memory of that day fades from the minds of Marlshire men, and over many a winter's fire the battle is fought again. Sometimes the speaker waxes indignant as he tells of the damage and plunder done on that wild night; sometimes he chuckles as he relates how glass flew and woodwork crashed in the houses of t'other side. In some cases there are scars to show in proof of what was done, and here and there a man may be pointed out who suffered imprisonment or fine for his share of the mad work. And for years one man would scowl and frown and mutter oaths under his breath as he passed a certain gate in South Street, where rumor said some of the fighting had

taken place. He was a tall, dark man with a coarse and vagabondish set of features, who, when he came before any magistrates in those parts, gave the name of Thomas Purcell. He had only one arm.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### LUCY'S PARTNER.

PROFOUNDLY grateful to the head of their family were Mrs. Bompas and her three daughters when the news reached them of the stirring transactions which had been taking place in Avonham during their absence. The country papers had been full of praise of Mr. Bompas and the mayor, both of whom, it was stated, had acted most courageously in the cause of order, and even the London papers had followed in the same strain, but with less diffuseness; the little Marlshire town had suddenly earned for itself a most unenviable reputation; really the quietest and most decorous of places, it had been likened to a volcano full of smoldering and dangerous atoms, and liable at any moment to burst forth in desolating riot and lay the country waste. The young ladies waxed not a little indignant over this comparison, and lamented the town's disgrace, whilst they rejoiced in the praise of their sire. When that worthy—who stuck valiantly to his post beside his friend the mayor till all the results of the row were investigated; till the prominent rioters had been punished, and the town freed from the military control which for two or three days was deemed necessary, and indeed until Avonham, but for the glaziers, was quiet again—when Mr. Bompas joined his family in London he was received with open arms, not only as one who had escaped a great danger, but as one who had comported himself right valiantly therein. He found an auditory eager to hear all the news of the fray, and encouraged, unchecked and uninterrupted, he poured out his warlike tale.

To do Mr. Bompas justice, he was not given to boasting of his own exploits; he really and truly had amply deserved the encomium which Bryceson had passed upon him of being a “brick,” and had acted like the stout-hearted old fellow he was; but he made no great account of what he had done, and rather slurred over those parts of the narrative relating to his own share in the affray. He was full of compliment toward his friend Sennett, and loud in praise of his two neighbors; he described the repulse of the first attack on the Coombes in glowing terms, and praised the coolness and courage of the young men to the skies; and when he mentioned with the awe which the recollection of the affair still imposed, the herculean feat which Galbraith had performed with the unfortunate quarryman, his vocabulary of commendatory phrases gave out, and he could only say with uplifted hands, “There, my dears, it was simply marvelous. I could hardly credit my own eyes.”

One matter the good old fellow did not mention to his daughters, and that was the ignoble part played in the disturbance by Adolphus Carter. He had been sorely exercised in mind about that unfortunate youth. He had ridden over, in company with his crony Millard (for he did not wish to let the mayor know of the matter whilst he

was engaged in his official capacity of punishing other rioters), to the father of the culprit, and the trio had returned and called on Galbraith, who had condoled with the father and promised to take no more notice of the matter, so that Adolphus was again seated in his employer's office, a very sad and subdued young man indeed. Mr. Bompas, considering that sufficient had been done to humble his pupil, did not attempt to lower him still further in the eyes of his daughters. But, alas! what human foresight can prevent a woman from imparting her ideas. Mr. Bompas, who concealed the story from his daughters, unfolded it to his wife, and that good woman and mother hit the scent at once. She poured into the astonished ears of Mr. Bompas her elucidation of the mystery, and he was forced to accept it. Jealousy, and not politics, was at the bottom of the attack on South Street.

"My dear Abel," she said, "of course it was nothing else; you needn't go fishing for motives when they're on the surface; he was jealous of those two young men coming to the house, though, to be sure, Mr. Bryceson has dropped in more often than Mr. Galbraith, and thought he could annoy them in that way: what a mischievous, ill-natured, spiteful little monkey he is."

Ah, luckless Adolphus! hitherto so eligible. It was an evil chance for you when this stranger came on your happy hunting-ground, it was worse when you conceived your scheme of revenge and failed so ignominiously, but it was the worst of all when Mrs. Bompas took up arms against you. Papa may forgive, papa may forget, but with mamma arrayed against you, farewell to your hopes.

Great was the surprise, and great the indignation among the young ladies next morning, when Mrs. Bompas, at the breakfast-table, told the tale of Carter's attack on the Coombes and his overthrow. Which predominated it would be difficult to say, probably the surprise. There was a feeling of pity as the father described to his daughters the shock which his conduct had given to his father; there was a comic side to the picture, as he told them of the prisoner sobbing and groveling on the floor between his stern captors, and a feeling of admiration for the forgiveness and leniency exhibited by Galbraith. When the girls were next together, in the absence of the old folks, they discussed the matter at length and with much spirit. Adelaide was specially warm on the unjustifiable attack on the Coombes, and declared that she would never speak to Carter again.

"A mean little rascal," she said, stamping her pretty foot and looking the essence of scorn; "what did he mean by it? Mr. Galbraith had done him no harm, and papa says he doesn't believe he had been in the town all day, so it couldn't have been connected with the election."

"And certainly," said Louisa, "he could have no cause for injuring Mr. Bryceson."

"Of course not," said Adelaide, "gracious only knows what the little monster *did* mean."

"Will papa keep him, do you think?" said Louisa.

"Not if I can persuade him to get rid of him," said Adelaide, "an odious thing. I always thought there was something monkeyish in the way he pranked himself up, and chattered and skipped about; I didn't give him credit for so much mischief though; I did

think he was harmless enough; these parsons' sons are always the worst, upon my word they are."

"Papa didn't say anything of Walter Rivers or Alfred Shelman in this matter. I wonder why these two heroes didn't distinguish themselves in putting down the riot?" said Louisa.

"I believe it was all the fault of those horrid Yellows," said Adelaide, "and Alfred Shelman didn't *want* to interfere." She slightly flushed as she mentioned the name.

"And what about Walter Rivers, dear?" said Lucy, demurely.

Adelaide flushed again. "Papa didn't say that either of them was in the riot. He certainly said, though, that the Yellows began it—why should the Blues have rioted? They hadn't lost the election—Mr. Rivers might have tried to stop the disturbance, but—"

"My dear," said Lucy, composedly, "Walter Rivers is not at all adapted for hurling people over the moon, and I should think was extremely averse to be made a missile of. I can't quite imagine him interfering in a row; no, I expect the pair of them stayed at home like good little men and took care of their uncles, leaving our interesting neighbors to do the fighting. Every one to his trade."

"I'm very glad at any rate that we were out of it," said Louisa. "It was an excellent idea of papa to bring us up here. I should like to take a peep at the place, though, and see the damage done."

"Yes," said Lucy, "and we missed the officers, too, not that it matters to you two spoons, but there might have been a chance for me?"

"What do you mean by spoons?"

"Whom are you calling spoons, Lucy?"

This from both the elder sisters. Not with any irritation—oh, dear, no—only the pretense of it. Lucy was "chaffing," but Lucy was the privileged satirist of the family, and it is not always unpleasant to be twitted in love matters.

"Oh, my dears," said Lucy, "do you think your little sister hasn't eyes? Mr. Galbraith meets you, Addie, going to Beytesbury and convoys you home, to use dear papa's phrase—well—what's the consequence ever since? Just let any one mention the man's name suddenly when you're sitting thinking—it's like dropping a half-crown in a beggar's hand—only the beggar doesn't blush and *does* thank you—"

"Lucy, you're a goose."

"And then there's Lou."

"Now you let me alone, Miss Lucy."

"Just ask some one to watch your face and report on it the next time that Mr. Bryceson walks in—to see mamma, of course—to get something for his lungs, his lungs, indeed. Louisa, my dear child, you're a much better doctor than mamma is. *You* know his lungs are all right, don't you? Of course you do! It's the heart that's affected, and you're looking after it very skillfully, my love."

"Addie, what shall we do with this girl? she's incorrigible."

"I don't know. Look at her now, Lou. Lucy, who ever taught you to wink? You'd better not practice in London."

Miss Lucy slowly opened the eye which she had really closed in a very knowing manner at the end of her speech, and nodded her head very slowly and sagely two or three times, then she rose and clasp-

ing Adelaide round the waist gave her a sisterly kiss, next turned to Louisa and did the same for her, all without speaking a word.

The two elder sisters turned very red, and—kissed each other. The sweet little secret was out; the thin veil was drawn aside by the hand of this laughing sister. That golden hour of life was begun which follows the first confession of love.

Then came papa, eager for sight-seeing, and with many plans for their holiday together. Papa was in the best of humors. Papa was not at all afraid of the Regent Street shops. Papa was eager to please his pretty daughters, and ready to pull his purse-strings wide. If the sisters did not describe their parent by the epithet applied to him by the absent Bryceson, yet surely they used the nearest feminine equivalent when they were surveying his purchases at the end of his first day in town. Nor was he content to visit shops alone. It was only necessary to mention a place of amusement or exhibition, and the cheery old fellow trotted off to secure the best places and the coziest conveyances to and from the show.

“My dear,” he said to his wife, as they sat in the back of the box at the opera, and watched their three girls entranced by the music and spectacle, “we do not visit the great metropolis every day, and it shall not be my fault if the girls, ay, and you, my dear, do not thoroughly enjoy yourselves. It is many years ago since we first beheld these scenes together.”

“More than I care to remember always, Abel.”

“Well, my dear, they have been very happy ones for me. If our girls only get on as well as we have, they will have but little to complain of. At present they are with us, and we must make the most of them. We must not look forward to many more years of their society.”

“I suppose not, Abel, not if every one is going to admire them as much abroad as at home. If I’ve seen one opera-glass pointed this way, I’ve seen fifty.”

“My dear,” said Mr. Bompas, gallantly, “I noticed the same thing with their mother more than five-and-twenty years ago, in this identical place.”

Mrs. Bompas laughed, but appeared pleased at her faithful spouse. The girls, engrossed in the opera, had not caught their parents’ conversation, and she felt safe in proceeding.

“Abel,” she said, “do you know I fancy Adelaide seems a good deal taken up with young Mr. Galbraith.”

“Well, my dear, I have observed symptoms of embarrassment when the gentleman’s name has been mentioned, which would seem to confirm your idea.”

“Well, Abel, what do you think of it?”

“Upon my word, my dear, I have not given the matter attention enough to say what I really *do* think of it.”

“I suppose Mr. Galbraith is well off?”

“That I suppose, but it is only a—ah—surmise. He is purchasing property, which—ah—looks like it, and he is also—a—paying for it, which again seems to hint at the possession of money. Of course, if such a matter as you seem to contemplate were to be brought before me, why then—of course—as a father, it would be my duty to—ah—de-li-cate ly investigate Mr. Galbraith’s position, but

at present, my dear, of course I can only guess at his means from his manner of living, which appears comfortable, and, even in some respects, lux-u-ri-ous."

The thoughts of the delicious draughts which Edward's deft hands had compounded rose up before him and compelled the last epithet. He seemed to scent the fragrant drink, and hear once more the ice tinkle on his goblet brim.

"Well, Abel," pursued the faithful mother, "our girls are very good girls, and ought to marry well, and they're getting very much admired here in London. Young Mr. Goldings was most attentive to Adelaide the other evening, and we go there to-morrow, you know. The dear girl won't want for strings to her bow, I can see. I'm very glad we've had this little trip. It'll show them a little of the world, and let them know there are other places besides Avonham, and other attractions outside their own home."

Just then the crash of applause broke in at the final chorus of the act, and conversation in the box became general.

Mr. Bompas had, of course, correspondents in London, and for the most part these were men whose acquaintance and connection with him were of many years standing. Many a cunning bottle of rare old wine made its appearance in his honor and for his delectation in Inn chambers, in old-fashioned taverns, and in the barn-like rooms of Bloomsbury houses, the coziest, handsomest and roomiest in London, but now sadly fallen from their high estate, and given up to lodgers, mysterious agencies and money-lending offices dignified with the titles of banks, and having an evil savor attached to most of their names. In those old houses twenty years ago were to be found dinners and cellars of irreproachable excellence, and hosts and diners hard to be equaled in these days of barrack hotels on the one hand and tardily repentant abstinence on the other. And the ladies were as hospitable as the men, as Mrs. Bompas well knew, and as her daughters were to experience now; and heartiest of the hearty was the welcome extended to Mr. and Mrs. Bompas and his family by old Mr. Goldings, the head of the firm of family solicitors, Goldings and West, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, who inhabited a mansion in Russell Square. A dinner was, of course, the mode which the solicitor adopted whereby to entertain his friends; and his women-folk talked him over into giving a dance afterward, and to both of these forms of entertainment our Avonham friends were bidden. Two of the daughters of the host were school-fellows of the girls, and five merrier, brighter lassies could nowhere be found.

At dinner-time Adelaide went down with young Goldings, a West-Central Adonis, marked as highly eligible by many a fond mother. This young man was, as Mrs. Bompas had observed, very much smitten by the charms of his pretty neighbor, to whom he paid great attention. Adelaide remembered him as a gawky boy of fifteen home from Charterhouse for his holidays; he was now a rather good-looking young fellow of twenty-six, the junior partner of the firm, and with very pretty tea-table manners, which became him extremely well. Louisa fell to the lot of his brother, an Oxonian, of mild countenance and gentlemanly manners, who was to all outward appearances likely to develop into a model curate of the non-muscular Christian school, and who consequently cherished in his

heart Republican and free-thinking principles and opinions that would have made Thelwall shudder; these were not produced at table, however. A father who is a family solicitor is touchy on the doctrine of equality, and Republicans are mild in the presence of a tureen.

Lucy's partner was the cheeriest of white-haired old bachelors, who apologized for the temporary absence of a favorite nephew, who would, he said, join the party after dinner, but who kept Miss Lucy quite as lively as her sisters seemed with their cavaliers. The dinner was of the florid English order, the company the reverse of dull, the host seemed really glad to see his friends, and took wine with his guests in the cheery old-fashioned manner of bygone days that ought not, I think, to have gone with them. Perhaps it survives somewhere, but it is drifting away on that sea of innovation which has washed away the country dance and the punch bowl—more's the pity. But here, in those days, the custom flourished, and no point of its jovial solemnity was omitted. The challenge, the stereotyped acceptance, the "taking in," the beaming smile contemporaneous with the courtly bow over the brimming glasses, and the simultaneous draughts, all was carried out that properly appertained to the good old rite. Mr. Markham, Lucy's partner, was especially selected as a mark for individual challenges and he never failed to respond. He was a source of great amusement to Lucy, who described him afterward as the dearest old beau she had ever met; Mr. Trumphy was nothing to him.

"How long do you stay in London, Miss Lucy?" said he; "I'm not going to call you Miss Bompas, for two reasons: first of all, you're not Miss Bompas yet, and next the name isn't pretty enough for you."

"Thank you for the compliment, Mr. Markham. We shall stop, I hope, for another three weeks; this is my first visit to London since I was at school here."

"Well, you must come out and see my place at Hampstead; I shall get your father to bring you."

"I'm sure papa will be most happy."

"Goldings was telling me about his pluck at that dreadful riotous place of yours. I wonder you're not afraid to live there."

"Indeed, it's the quietest place in the world," said Lucy, standing up bravely for her native town; "I can't make out how it happened; we've never had an election there, that I can remember, and I don't believe it was our townspeople who made the riot at all."

"Quite right to stick up for your own town, Miss Lucy; I've a nephew who has been there once, and he described it as a very quiet place."

"It's a very nice place."

"Many young gentlemen there?"

"Oh! I don't know; about the average number I believe. There is an average of male population in the country isn't there? I mean so many males to every female—two and a half or something of that sort."

Mr. Markham laughed.

"Oh, there is, I assure you; I learned something about it at

school; it's a horrid thing for the men, you know; they can't all get married, of course."

"Some of them don't want to, miss. I've kept away from it myself, and made room for some one else, you see."

"Haven't you ever been married, Mr. Markham? I should have thought you had been, you seem so nice."

"My turn to thank you for a compliment, now; but I think you've got your statistics wrong somehow."

"How?"

"Why, if I don't mistake, there are more women than men in this country."

"Good gracious, that's worse; why there isn't a man apiece for all of us; *we* can't all get married then?"

"Well, there are old maids as well as old bachelors, you know."

"Yes, but if there aren't any more of one than the other, that makes no difference to the rest you know."

"Some men marry twice."

"So do some women—we're no better off even then."

"Well, Miss Lucy, I venture to prophesy that you needn't trouble about the scarcity of husbands. Even if there aren't enough to go round for everybody, there'll be some one coming for you, I'm certain. Now, while you're thinking over the one that's coming—"

"There isn't one."

"How do you know?"

"Well—how you tease—I mean I don't know him, and he hasn't begun to come yet"—and Lucy looked the old gentleman saucily in the face, and laughed merrily at him.

"Ah! he'll come some day, perhaps to-night, who knows? I'm going to ask your father to take wine with me."

Mr. Markham caught the eye of Mr. Bompas without much difficulty, and the two handsome old fogies hob-nobbed with a courtly grace that would put to the blush scores of the youth of to-day—if youth blush nowadays, which is doubtful.

When the ladies retired, and the gentlemen closed up to their host's end of the table, Mr. Bompas found himself next to Mr. Markham, who complimented him first upon his daughters, and secondly upon his conduct at Avonham. Before they joined the party upstairs, which was now numerous and ready for the dance, Mr. Bompas had settled a visit to Hampstead, and appointed a day for that purpose.

On reaching the drawing-room, Mr. Markham made his way to Lucy, and laughingly asked her to pilot him through a quadrille.

"That is my only dance except 'Sir Roger,'" said he, "but I never like to admit that my dancing days are quite over."

The first quadrille is a stately and solemn affair which a Bench of Bishops might dance with their Diocesan Secretaries' Aunts, and Mr. Markham went through it as a matter not to be irreverently handled; at the conclusion of it he gallantly escorted Lucy to a seat, and thanked her for the dance. At that moment a good looking young fellow, who had just been shaking hands with Mr. Goldings, came up, and, addressing the old gentleman as "uncle," grasped his hand and shook it heartily.

"Ah, Fred, my boy, only just arrived?" said the old gentleman.

"Quite well? That's right. Here, sir, let me introduce you to my first partner. Miss Lucy Bompas, this is my nephew, Mr. Frederick Markham. Now, my dear, I can leave you in the hands of a partner who can dance; take care of Miss Bompas, Fred, and find her plenty of partners."

Lucy and the young fellow were soon whirling round the room, and much as she had liked the uncle, it must be owned that her new partner was more to her liking, so far as dancing went. He put his name down three times on her card, introduced her to fresh partners, danced with her sisters and the daughters of the house, but always returned to her as often as he got a chance.

"What capital dancers all you sisters are," said he, when, having maneuvered them all to the same seat and got ices for them, he lounged by them, much envied by the rest of the young men in the room.

"It must come by nature, then," said Louisa, "for we are terribly short of practice."

"Well, I must ask you to spare me another dance apiece after supper. Pray, are your cards all full?"

"You can have a polka, Mr. Markham," said Adelaide. "I have one here—number 16."

"Many thanks. Miss Louisa Bompas, have you anything to bestow in charity?"

"A schottische. Is that good enough for you?"

"Beggars mustn't be choosers. Number 18, isn't it? Please give me your card. Thank you very much. Miss Lucy Bompas, my uncle told me to take care of you, please give me the supper dance. I will forage for you like a Cossack."

"With pleasure, Mr. Markham. What are you doing with my card? You have put down another after supper."

"I asked for one after supper. Here comes some one to take you away. Don't forget the dance before supper."

"Lucy, my dear," said Adelaide, "how many dances have you given that young man to-night? Six, I believe. Lou, I think the next time this young woman ventures to read her sister's lessons about blushing we must ask to look at her programme."

Presently the supper dance arrived, and, that over, the supper itself, to which Lucy and her partner went down in high spirits. Fred was as good as his word, and provided most skillfully for Lucy's wants. When at last he had leisure for conversation he said:

"You are only on a visit to London then, Miss Bompas?"

"That is all. We live a good way down in the country in Marlshire."

"Marlshire? Oh, indeed. I was down there for a day not long ago, at Avonham."

"Oh, yes, I remember your uncle told me you were. Well, Avonham is where we live."

"Is it, indeed? how curious. Why, one of my dearest friends lives there."

"Who is that?"

"Harry Galbraith. Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes, he's a neighbor of ours—and do you really know him,

and is he a great friend of yours? How singular. Do you know the whole town is just dying to know all about him. We used to call him the hermit, and the recluse, and all sorts of names until we knew him and his friend Mr. Bryceson."

"Walter Bryceson is another of my friends."

"Fancy that now."

"And there aren't two finer or better fellows in the world. We were together for many years in America. It was to visit Harry that I went to Avonham. We all dined at the hotel there, and a capital time we had."

"I remember the time you came. Every one wondered who you all were, and where you all came from; that is," she added, "all the gossips of the town, at any rate. Papa knows Mr. Galbraith very well. He has done business with him: sold him a house and some land for a lady whose affairs papa manages. Papa says Mr. Galbraith and Mr. Bryceson behaved splendidly the other day in a riot at Avonham. Do you know Mr. Galbraith threw a man right over some people's heads? He must be very strong."

"He's the strongest man I ever met in my life, and as brave as a lion. It was not the first row Harry and Walter have been shoulder to shoulder in. We've seen some queer things together, Miss Lucy. Do you know, I'm so glad you live at Avonham. I shall have a chance of seeing you again."

"We shall be very glad, I'm sure," said Lucy, casting down her eyes.

"I shall make a great use of Harry now," said Markham, laughing, "now I've a real excuse for running down." He lowered his voice and, bending forward, added, "I can kill two birds with one stone."

The rest of the night was very sweet to Lucy. Her programme was, as Louisa told her afterward, "a terrible tell-tale;" and she unblushingly sat out a dance with Fred in the conservatory whilst the would-be partner whose name figured on the programme was wildly hunting for her. Old Mr. Markham, to whom she gave "Sir Roger," was very funny over her system of averages and her statistics; her sisters very facetious in the carriage going home; that last hand pressure was indeed sentimental, Adelaide declared; and even mamma had her little joke. But the two elder sisters were vastly surprised when Lucy told them of the old friendship existing between young Markham and their two Avonham neighbors. In due time, next day, arrived Mr. Markham and his nephew—

"The ball's fair partner to behold,  
And humbly hope she caught no cold."

As the old gentleman quoted. The two old fellows made friends very rapidly, and the young people were very merry. With a mischievous hint or two Lucy contrived to give Fred some inkling of the impression his two friends had made on the hearts of her sisters, and he discoursed in glowing terms of both of them. He gave some bright sketches of their life abroad, and from him the Bompas family learned many things of the two strangers who had pitched their tents in Avonham. Mrs. Bompas was gratified to learn that both Galbraith and Bryceson were wealthy; not really mercenary or

worldly, she was yet put greatly at her ease by learning that in addition to the fortune made in California, each had inherited family property; and Fred spoke so eloquently of the bravery, modesty and large-heartedness of Galbraith and of the unfailing good-humor and sterling good qualities of Bryceson, that Adelaide and Louisa were delighted. When the two took their leave of the country family, and the girls were again alone, Louisa said—

“Lucy, your new admirer is very nice; he’s a clever man, I’m sure, and I heard his uncle tell papa that he was the best of good fellows to his old father and to him, and he talks wonderfully well—doesn’t he, Addie?”

“Capitally,” said Adelaide. “I like him very much.”

“Well, his subject was interesting to you two turtle-doves,” said Lucy.

“Wait till he talks about you, my dear,” said Adelaide, “you’ll be more interested then. How curious it all seems. Whatever is going to happen to us three girls. At present we seem like one joint stock company falling in love with another one.”

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## CHAPTER XV.

### A MEETING, A TALK AND A LETTER.

“WHAT a one-horse place this is, Harry,” said Bryceson one morning at the breakfast table, as he laid down a letter which Edward had just brought him; “my man in town declares he sent off the guns four days ago, and they must be at Avonham Road. Now I’ve told that carrier to inquire always for anything for us, and I’ll go bail he’s never put himself out of the way to do it. What a place of this size wants to be five miles off a railway station for is more than I can make out.”

“Well, let us ride over this morning and see about them,” answered Galbraith. “Ned was at me this morning about some wine that ought to have turned up on Saturday when he was over there; we may as well go in that direction as another.”

“Very well.”

“I’m very anxious, too, to hear from the squire; we must be getting a letter in a few days; and there’s another thing—I’ve a letter here from Fred Markham.”

“Fred! how’s Fred?”

“Oh, all right, he has met the Bompas people in town and owns to being very much taken with one of ’em.”

“Which one?” said Bryceson very quickly.

“With the youngest,” said Galbraith laughing.

“Oh! Lucy, well, I’m very glad of it; they’re cut out for one another, those two.”

Galbraith laughed again: “You’re quite brotherly, old fellow, there was a real family air about that remark.”

“Pass me a weed, you old humbug, and look at home. By the way, where did Fred meet them first?”

“At the house of the Goldings—coincidence number two, about that. If we don’t hear from the squire this mail I vote for a run to

town; Fred will be glad to see us and we shall be none the worse for a night or two together."

"Seconded and carried."

"Well, let's have the horses and go off to Avonham Road. I want to go over to the builder's in High Street about the loose boxes, and he is sure to be half an hour before he understands what I want."

"Let Ned bring them round to the Bear."

"That house will close and Pinniffer will hang himself when you leave Avonham."

"Suppose I stop here, then, and avoid a catastrophe."

"Let us see how things turn out, old boy; it's kind enough of you, goodness knows, to be here with me now."

"I don't see it; I'm in deuced snug quarters; a good deal cozier than my barrack of a place in Essex. But just fancy old Fred running across the Bompas girls."

"The world's very small," said Galbraith sententiously; "come along to my bricks-and-mortar friend. Ned, bring the horses to the Bear in half an hour."

"Do you know anything of that man?" said Bryceson as they passed the Bank and saw Shelman standing at the door in conversation with a customer.

"Not any more than I want to," said Galbraith; "he's an ill-conditioned, surly fellow at the best. I had some communication with him when I first came here—he wanted the Coombes you know."

"Yes, you told me."

"Well, he wanted that chestnut horse, and didn't get it, and the other day he wanted that land and didn't get that either, and to tell you the truth, Walter, I've been putting two and two together, and I fancy I can trace the attack on the house the other night to him."

"Hallo!"

"I only want to get that ex-prisoner of ours in a corner one day and I shall get it out of him, I have no doubt."

"And then?"

"And then I'll give the young gentleman about as good a cow-hiding as he deserves. I'll make sure first though. He's a nasty-tempered brute I hear, and very fond of threatening people who offend him; Ned has heard some of his remarks about me at second-hand in this tattling, gossiping, mischief-making hole, and loves the fellow about as much as I do. Have you run across him much?"

"Once or twice—I'm not smitten with him myself. If you're away at any time and the cow-hiding seems needful, I sha'n't have any compunction in acting as your deputy."

"Thank you, old boy; it couldn't be left in better hands. Come in with me now, and help me make this architectural genius understand what a loose box is. I believe he has a sort of idea that it has hinges and a lid to it."

The local builder, however, was more enlightened as to the edifice he was expected to erect, and the friends, having interviewed Mr. Pinniffer, and tasted his cherry brandy, mounted and rode off toward Avonham Road Station. Neither the horses nor the riders at the Coombes were in the habit of being passed on the road, and all vehicles and horsemen going in the same direction were overtaken

and left behind as a general rule. About midway between the town and the station, the carriage of Mrs. Stanhope was seen ahead. It was rapidly overhauled, and as Bryceson dashed past in front of his friend, he saluted the three gentlemen seated by the side of the widow. The two friends had dismounted and handed their steeds to a brace of rustics who were hovering round the station on the look-out for a job, when the equipage they had passed drove up, and Mr. Walter Rivers alighting, gave his arm, in turn, to Mrs. Stanhope and to his uncle. As the two latter went into the station Walter Rivers came up to Bryceson and held out his hand.

"How do you do, Mr. Bryceson? I have been anxious to see you. I didn't notice who you were just now, until you had passed and my uncle told me."

"Let me introduce my friend and host, Mr. Galbraith," said Bryceson.

The two young men bowed.

"Mr. Galbraith, the town has to thank you greatly for your exertions in the cause of order the other night. I'm sorry to hear that your property suffered. Will you come inside and let me introduce you to my uncle, who is most anxious to know you?"

Galbraith and Bryceson followed Rivers into the waiting-room, where Sir Headingly and Mrs. Stanhope were standing. Sir Headingly shook hands with Bryceson, and was introduced to Galbraith, whom he greeted cordially. Rivers then approached Mrs. Stanhope and presented the two friends to her.

"Mr. Galbraith," said she, as she returned that gentleman's bow, "it seems remarkably strange that we have never met when such important transactions have taken place between us. It has really been through the fact of all my business being undertaken for me. I am very pleased to meet you, now, though; you and your friend are quite the heroes of the place. Did they damage your house much?"

"No, madam," said he.

"I hear that you requited your injuries on some of your opponents, Mr. Galbraith," said she, smiling.

"Oh, yes, madam, I generally manage to pay any little debt of that description in full."

"Are you going to town by any chance, gentlemen?" said Sir Headingly.

"No," answered Bryceson, "we are only looking after something which we have ordered from London; it is very awkward having no station at Avonham itself."

"I trust that that will be speedily remedied," said Sir Headingly, rather stiffly (the confounded railway had been dinned into his ears rather frequently lately).

"I see you have your horses, or I would place my carriage at your disposal," said Mrs. Stanhope graciously, as her footman approached Sir Headingly and handed him the tickets; "good-day, gentlemen."

The two friends bowed to the stately lady as she moved off on the arm of Sir Headingly, who shook hands with them, as also did Rivers; the party then crossed the line by the bridge and awaited the up-train.

Bryceson invaded the booking office and began stirring up the slow-going porter-clerk, who presided lumpily over the parcel department; having succeeded in identifying the gun cases and wine

cases, which the sleepy old local carrier had omitted to bring over to the Coombes, and having rapidly given the officials at the station his opinions on their method of conducting business, he rejoined his friend just as the up-train containing the party moved off.

"I wonder what that dear creature would say and do if she had the slightest idea of who and what I was, Walter?" said Galbraith, when they had ridden two or three hundred yards from the station on their homeward way.

"I can't say, old fellow; of course there will be a tremendous explosion when the exposure takes place."

"I don't know. I think, though, that matters are likely to be precipitated."

"How?"

"Why, I rather fancy—I've only taken the idea into my head just now—that the amiable lady intends to marry again."

"The deuce you do! Whom?"

"That young spark to whom you introduced me just now."

"What makes you think that, Harry?" said Bryceson, slightly checking his horse in his surprise, and looking extremely astonished at hearing his friend's opinion.

"Frankly, old fellow, I can hardly tell you. One of those impressions of mine, I think, that used so often to come right over yonder; though, of course, there is more foundation for this idea than there was for a good many of them. The young fellow is a very eligible match; so is t'other party, if it weren't for some circumstances which you and I know, or at any rate suspect very gravely; and there was a fatherly air toward the pair of them about that baronet friend of yours to-day which I didn't like at all."

"What would you do, Harry, if you knew—"

"That they were going to be married—humph! I was just asking myself that question, and be hanged if I sha'n't find some difficulty in fishing up a satisfactory answer to it. I'm in a quandary over it, I can tell you."

"As how?"

"This way. Squire says that he is certain Reginald will recover—recover entirely; and that time and his treatment have tended to work a complete cure. Well, now who's to know what his mind will be toward this woman, whom I believe, and you believe—and with precious good reason—to be the very woman who was his wife and drove him mad. When I followed her trail (and I never worked harder at anything), I was animated by a feeling that I was going to get level with a woman who had practically killed Reginald, and I felt like the Avenger of Blood. When I tracked her down to this quiet little English town, where no one would have dreamed of finding her unless they had traced her step by step as I did, I took the very best means of concealing from her any suspicion, any thought, of who I might be, by acting in what, when the matter is all over, people will say was the most idiotic and short-sighted manner possible."

"That was—?"

"Buying property of her—and just see how curiously things turn out. Why, since we know that Reginald is alive, if things are as we suspect, I have no title to the very house which I bought and paid

for, to the mere tables at which we eat, or the beds we lie upon. If I had set myself to do this thing deliberately as part of my plan, I could not have succeeded better. When I found out that the squire and Tom Reynolds and Ralph Derring were in England, and I had arranged with you and Fred to come and meet them at Avonham—you remember the letter—I went into your favorite shanty here (the Bear) to order a dinner.”

“Dev’lish good dinner, too, old Pinniffer gave us. Well?”

“Well, whilst I was there, that little prying, sharp-eyed fellow came in—Rapsey—and began talking mild scandal. The point turned upon your friend Rivers and that amiable youth Shelman, whom everybody seems to be afraid of except old Bompas, who really is a good old fellow, and, I should say, came of a good old stock.”

“Well, he’s got a very young stock come of *him* anyway.”

“Very true, Walter. However, to go on with my yarn; this little man dropped some hints about some rivalry existing between these two young men, apart from politics; that is to say, that there was a woman in the case; the little chatterbox was pulled up sharply by some of the people there, and particularly by Mrs. Pinniffer, for mentioning names or even hinting at them. I took an opportunity of having a chat with Mrs. Pinniffer over it afterward, and soon got at the facts. It had been supposed, she said, that Shelman and Mrs. Stanhope would have been married, but whether she rejected him or he didn’t feel confident enough to propose she couldn’t say. About Rivers she had, or professed to have, no idea in that connection; that, she said, was some nonsense of Rapsey’s imagination, though she admitted that the little beggar did at times get hold of some extraordinary information. It was the meeting to-day that put it into my head, and of course I may be wrong.”

“But if right?”

“Then comes in my difficulty”—his brow darkened a moment, and he bit his lip before going on. “If my original intention had been carried out in its entirety, the revenge I would have taken on that woman would have been untinged by a single scruple. I would have set my heart as a flint, and have served her as she served him, remorselessly and without pity; and to let her marry again, to let her enjoy her fancied triumph for a brief—a very brief—time, and then to dash it away from her, would have been a splendid return for her crime. I would, too, have been as pitiless toward the object of her love as toward her, and I would have flung justice to the winds. When a man doesn’t study mercy he’s bound to lose his grip of justice, I think. He should have been involved in her fall, and should have shared her fate.”

They rode on in silence for some time. Bryceson had seen the grief of his friend for his brother many times, and knew how his bright manner and natural cheeriness was often overclouded by this shadow of his life, and what a different being he was under its gloomy influence. Of the band of friends who had clung so faithfully together in many wanderings, and many wild scenes, no one had taken more hold of the affection and respect of them all than he. Strong amongst giants, brave amongst heroes, quick and fertile of resource among men of impulse who carried every day their lives

in their hands, Henry Galbraith had shown himself one of those born pioneers and leaders of men found in every new colony, ruling unconsciously by force of example, and looked up to in crisis and danger, as men of old looked to their gods for instant and personal aid. But ever and again would return the memory of the brother he had lost, and a paroxysm of rage or a tempest of grief would sweep across his mind and change his nature for awhile, so that he would leave friends and companions for a day together, and, withdrawing himself from the very sight and sound of men, meditate his wrong and brood over revenge, alone and unfit for companionship. Since the news of his brother's being alive, and the hopeful view taken by their old leader of his condition, these moods had disappeared, and he was now looking forward to their meeting with a keen joy scarcely concealed under the calm and imperturbable manner of his communication with the outward world. Sometimes, however, he would return to something of his old abstraction, though it lasted but for a short time, and at such times his faithful friend, who well knew its cause, was silent until the fit had passed off, as he was now for some minutes during which they covered a mile of the ground between them and Avonham.

"Those, you see, Walter," he went on presently, "were the feelings with which I came here, but since we had that meeting, and the squire told us how he had found Reginald, and how the dear old chap had tended him and got him better, all the while afraid to let me know in case his care was unavailing, somehow I feel different about it. I don't feel any different toward her," he said, with raised voice and clinching his right hand as if he caught something hostile and gripped it hard; "she deserves all the punishment she could ever have had at my hands, and, by Jove! if it rests with me to administer it, it will be short and sharp; but it won't entirely if Reginald has really recovered; and I've another thing to say about it—I've no wish to drag any one else in it who isn't in already. No, if I were to hear for certain that she were going to marry any decent fellow, I would bring matters to a head at once. It would be an installment of punishment for her, and, as you said just after we left her, there will be a tremendous explosion when the exposure *does* take place. Well, let it take place without hurting any one but her. I'll take care it reaches her, at any rate."

"Harry," said Bryceson, after a minute's silence, "do you know, there's one thing that just flashed across my mind when you mentioned the fact of your bad title to the house you have bought."

"What was that, Walter?"

"Of course the title would be bad on account of her not being legally married to Stanhope."

"Of course; her husband was living at the time."

"Harry, suppose that when she ran away from Reginald with that engineer scamp—suppose, I say, that she got a divorce over in the States?"

Galbraith checked his horse sharply, and pulled up, as though he had seen a dead body in the road. Walter stopped as well, and for a minute or two the two men looked at each other, Bryceson with a half-puzzled expression as though uncertain how his companion

would take the query, Galbraith with a wide stare of blank astonishment. Then Galbraith spoke slowly, and as if with difficulty—

“By heavens, Walter! I have never thought of that.”

“It is possible, though,” said Walter, walking his horse on.

“Yes,” said his friend, following his example, and ranging up to his side, “possible enough, and easily enough to be managed, as we know, but is it probable?”

“Why not?”

“Well, so far as Tom Reynolds always said, the chase was hot-foot after them. Reginald was supposed to have been killed by that engineer scoundrel, and they left the States—so Tom says—for Havana from New Orleans.”

“True, and the idea, as I tell you, never struck me before—of course it may be a false one—but consider this happened in '36; in '49 we went to the Pacific Slope as pioneers, and stayed there till '57; that's two years ago, and here we are in '59. Now, it's thirteen years ago since it happened. Mrs. Stanhope was married, according to the statement of our two old friends here, Bompas and Millard, about eight or nine years ago. She was married about four years, and has been a widow for about four years—say nine years for the two states—that leaves four years to account for between her flight to Havana and her appearance as a decorous married woman in Avonham. Now, Harry, I know you've taken all the pains possible to track this woman, but, of course, old fellow, you found here and there an interval for which you can't fully account. In one of those intervals she may have gone back to the States and sued out a divorce. By George! it's done there every day.”

“Well, the supposition is a staggerer, and of course when I go over, which I shall do soon whether I hear from the squire or not, I must try and find out. Of course there are records to be had in every state, though some of them must be very loosely kept and hard to get at. Anyhow, Walter, we don't entirely lose our hold of her. I'll not be balked of my long-expected reckoning. Her record won't bear repeating at any rate, and, by Jove, the task of proving her divorce shall be on her shoulders, and I'll make this side of the Atlantic warm for her till she does!”

They rode on without further conversation until they reached Avonham, which had resumed the quiet and sleepy appearance common to it. There were not a dozen people in the street, a few were listlessly standing at the doors of their shops, as if waiting for a wave of commerce to break on their silent shore. If that wave had come, it would have swept them away, their old ideas could never have stemmed it. John Rann, from the steps of the market place, nodded to Mr. Pollimoy forty yards lower down the street, who was standing at his door watching the two horsemen pass. The worthy host of the Bear also lounged in the gateway of his tenement, and from that commanding position raked the town with his glance. Him presently the two nodding friends espied, and with expressive signs one to the other, disappeared each for a moment, Rann to lock the inner gate, and Pollimoy to don his hat. Then they sauntered up the street together, like two cows who have for a moment pretermitted the absorbing interest in landscape possessed by their race, and wended slowly side by side, apparently without any common

object or interest, toward the drinking place. How often this had been done at nearly the same hour every day by these two would be hard to say. See them as they pass along; Timothy Rapsey comes across the church-yard about this time—there he is—Wolstenholme and Hoppener Pye leave their yard and should be at the Canal Wharf about the same time that the other three reach the steps of the Bear. Occasionally a rainy day, or snow lying deep in winter, will throw one of these old fellows back a minute, or goad him into an increase of speed, which lands him at the bar parlor door just that space of time ahead of his cronies; if this should happen he remarks it; explains the reason to his friends; makes an incident of it. Market day upsets these arrangements entirely; market day upsets everything; life on market day is passed under conditions other than normal, market day is a vortex drawing in other than Avonham atoms—you cannot be methodical in a whirlpool. But to-day all are punctual. All shake hands, all wait at the gateway till the party is complete (a rainy day alters this as well), and all tramp solidly in and greet Mrs. and Miss Pinniffer, who are at their posts and waiting. To them all presently enters Mr. Raraty, whip in hand, and conversation is general.

They have chatted for half an hour, when the far-seeing and sharp-eyed Timothy gives notice that Mr. Galbraith's black servant is coming up the street. Two or three of them stroll to the large bay window, glass in hand, and observe his movements. He crosses the market-place and disappears for a few minutes. The conversation turns upon his master, or masters, for he seems to have two; Mr. Rapsey, still observant of the street, suddenly gives a sharp "hush," and the negro walks in at the front door and puts his head into the room; he looks round and catches Mr. Raraty's eye—that worthy goes out to him and receives his message.

"Will you take anything this morning, Mr. Edward?" says Raraty, as he makes an entry in his note-book.

Mr. Edward is not proof against the invitation and stays. Mr. Rapsey, desirous of information, and guessing by Mr. Raraty's use of his pocket-book that some posting business is on hand, hazards the question,

"Mr. Galbraith going on a visit, Mr. Edward?"

"Yes, sah," replies the negro, shortly.

"London?" Mr. Rapsey ventures mildly, while the others interestedly listen.

"No, sah," replies the negro, "dat place what dey catch dem bloaters—whar's dat?"

"Yarmouth," says Pollimoy, the traveler.

"Yarmuf, dat's it, shuah 'nuf. Mass he gon' dah for to get some dey bloaters fo' de ribber at de back heah; he fink dey do fus' rate heah in that water. Mornin', Massa Ra'ty; mornin', gen'l'men."

That afternoon Galbraith and Bryceson drove in Mr. Raraty's dog-cart to Avonham Road, and Edward brought back the trap alone. After Mr. Rapsey's rebuff of the morning, that sable retainer was not over-burdened with any questions, it being felt that there was an elaboration of answer about him, which was apt to make the interrogator look and feel somewhat foolish.

The letter from the squire had arrived, and Galbraith had started in response to it. Avonham would not see him again for some time.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A TRIPLE ALLIANCE.

“HARRY, did you ever meet a man named Jones?”

“Yes, three or four; which one do you mean?”

“Oh, the man I mean was hanged.”

“The deuce he was! I don’t remember him, what was he hanged for?”

“For not passing the bottle, old fellow, and served him right, too.”

Galbraith roused himself with a laugh, and passed the wine to his friend Markham, who had “sold” him with this old joke, partly to obtain the desired wine, and partly to rouse him from the profound reverie into which he had fallen.

“I beg your pardon, old fellow. I was dreaming, I think; Walter’s yarn sent me to sleep, I suppose. Ring the bell, Walter; buzz that bottle and let us start a fresh one.”

The three young men were seated in a small private room of the “Star and Garter;” the dinner was over and from the lips of two of them light, curling, blue wreaths had for the past half hour ascended in graceful spirals toward the ceiling, fanning out as they reached the upper currents of air into slowly vanishing cloudlets; only from Galbraith came neither smoke nor sound; he sat facing the window, looking fixedly at that glorious landscape of leafy sheen and silver stream that is so familiar, yet so ever new, so hackneyed, yet so refreshing, to the smoke-dried, work-beaten Londoner; for a quarter of an hour, at least, Walter had been chatting with Fred upon various subjects, without the duologue being once interrupted by their silent friend, and as we have seen, the bottle had been neglected as well as the conversation, but he roused himself now at the cheery summons of his comrades, and shook off the gloom that had lately seemed to surround him.

“I’m a pretty host, by Jove!” he said, rising after Walter had pulled the bell handle and the soft-footed waiter had appeared. “Another bottle of burgundy, waiter—what a jolly view from this window, boys—I don’t know anything prettier. Yes, I do though, by Jove! and when old Ganymede comes we’ll drink to their pretty eyes, bless ’em—Walter, if you weren’t beyond blushing years ago you ought to call some of Fred’s color to your cheeks. Did you ever see a fellow harder hit? Well, she is a pretty little lassie—they all are in fact, and I expect you’ve chosen to-morrow’s visit to your uncle’s for a declaration—isn’t that so? And Walter is just as bad. Why don’t we ask the old folks down here to dinner? I’ll play propriety and keep them in tow whilst you inveigle Miss Louisa and Miss Lucy into snug corners, and learn your fate.”

“Listen to me, Fred,” said Walter, holding out his hand toward him; “father Harry—who would think that civilization and Europe could have made such an old hypocrite of our old Downright Dunstable. He was just as solemn, I assure you, the night we sat under

the veranda at Avonham and he told me how much he admired Adelaide and directly—" here the speaker paused and laughed.

"Well," said Galbraith, laughing in his turn, "directly what?"

"Directly you suspect us of—"

"Suspect—oh my!"

"Hold your tongue and don't interrupt, Harry; directly you get it planted into your old head that Fred and I admire your—your—"

"Future sisters-in-law," said Fred.

"Thank you, Fred—directly you get that in your venerable poli we have to put up with fatherly counsel from a prospective brother. Fred, we'll rebel—we won't stand it."

"Well, here comes the wine," said Harry; "we won't let this bottle stand at any rate; shall we drink papa and mamma first, or our fairer Avonham friends—pity there isn't another for old Ralph Derring—Tom Reynolds is married and done for, so it's no use wishing for a fifth for him, and the squire is a confirmed old bachelor. Come, boys—bumpers—to their bright eyes all of 'em—and now for another cigar—I haven't much more time with you, old fellows."

"Nonsense," said Fred, "you'll be back in a couple of months and Reginald with you; don't think any more of your troubles and things will turn out all right yet, I'll warrant."

"Let's hope so," said Walter; "here's good luck to to-morrow, anyhow. How jolly that river looks with the sun on it, and that avenue of trees with the leaves just turning color—Harry, you'll just be in time for the Indian summer over yonder. We shall think of you down at Avonham, when we're ordering our first fires to be lit."

"Well, old man, you won't think of me more than I shall of you. I sha'n't get far enough west for the old places, but I think there will be something in the very soil that will remind me of old times."

"Ah! we had some ups and downs there," said Fred.

"Yes, but we had some rare luck, too."

"Ah, yes, we stuck to work and the gold stuck to us," answered Bryceson, "but we deserved all we got."

"I often wonder how it was we outstripped every other party wherever we had a claim," said Fred. "I suppose it was because we were always leal to each other and worked for the common good."

"That's so, and we didn't fool around the camps after work was done, card-playing and drinking," said Galbraith.

"Well, they were grand times after all," said Walter.

"They were," said Galbraith, "by Jove, it's the best way for a man to spend his young manhood! You've room to breathe, and you can breathe all you want to. You must be always on the look-out for the next thing that turns up, and have your eyes and ears open and your hand ready all day long; you're face to face with Nature in her wildest mood, and man in his roughest form. There's always something to conquer every day when you get up, and you've always done something tangible when you lie down at night. So much dirt washed, so much rock holed, so many feet of sluicing done, so many specimens assayed, so many little shining grains put away in the little leather bag the dear old Squire used to carry. And then the surroundings—who's forgotten the smell of the pine woods;

who doesn't remember the Cañon where we struck our first pocket, and how we used to sit snug when the pack trains passed, and how we lived at top and threw every one off the trail by pretending that fur and bear-meat was our little enterprise. Gad, it's something to look back upon, that struggle with Mother Earth herself to make her yield up the wealth that she has been hiding up for so many hundred years. She'll hide us at last, but we've had our good turn from her first. They won't come again; but they were glorious times. There have been giants on the earth in our time, boys, and we've done our share of their work!"

"Yes," said Fred, "and now we are going to settle down and live like good boys on the proceeds of our toils. We're like Jack of the Beanstalk legend; we have ventured into the stronghold of the giant, and brought away our treasure; now for the 'lived-happy-ever-after' portion, which always winds up the tale."

There was much more chat of the same nature between the friends before they returned to London. Galbraith was to sail that week, and this was a farewell dinner to his two old comrades; it was felt by all that the presence of a fourth person, unless, indeed, he had been one of the old band, would have been calculated to throw a damper over the conversation and party, and for this once the friends were alone. The Avonham ladies had been considerably fluttered during the past weeks by finding that two of their neighbors had followed them to town. Papa had gone to call on Mr. Goldings and had found them at his office—quite by accident of course—and they were invited to the house of old Mr. Markham on the same day as that fixed for their own visit there, and it would be hard to say whether pleasure or surprise predominated in the minds of the three sisters when they heard the news. Since then they were constantly meeting. Mrs. Bompas looked fidgettily happy, and the worthy head of the family was evidently burdened with thoughts too deep for colloquial expression; even the heavy artillery of his grave eloquence failed to carry the wordy missile of explanation along the whole range of cogitation.

It was, however, a very merry party that assembled at Fairlawn on the following day; needless to say that the ladies looked charming, that old Markham was boisterously hospitable, and that the affair was not suffered to drag for lack of light-heartedness. The day was one of those bright September ones that early autumn brings, as if to show how bright she can be, and that her first resplendent dress becomes her as much as the many tinted robe she will don when her longer life has brought the shortening days; and the evening had that calm, sweet influence that follows a rosy, flaming September sunset, as the sweet voice of the soprano follows the crashing chorus of the men. Somehow—insensibly of course—the couples had paired properly off, the old folks sat talking by the opened window, the young ones strolled or sat in the grounds. Not a very long time passed before Fred and Lucy began to speak in tones that were lower and lower, though no one was there to listen, and the pauses between the words were longer and longer, and the words sweeter and sweeter, till presently the dainty waist was incircled, the dainty fingers pressed, the pouting lips kissed, and the fair head drawn down till it rested close to the faithful heart. This

wild bird came to the lure as readily and willingly as the tamest of barn-door fowls. Then after a short, delicious silence, there was some pretty business with a ring, and a morsel—just a morsel—of golden hair, and Lucy had found fate and mate at once.

“I wonder,” said Fred, after awhile, “whether any more of this sort of thing is going on anywhere else in the grounds.”

“I think,” said Lucy, shyly, as if there were any doubt about the matter, “I think Mr. Bryceson and Louisa are in the conservatory; shall we go and join them?”

“Not for the world, dearest,” answered Fred; “I wouldn’t interrupt them on any account. I think we can guess what is taking place in there—eh, darling?”

This is what was taking place:

“Do you believe in the language of flowers, Mr. Bryceson?”

“Not a bit—do you?”

“I—I—don’t know.”

“I think it is great rubbish, don’t you?”

“Well—n-o-o—I can’t quite say I think it is rubbish; it may be—perhaps some people carry it—believe in it, I mean, too much, but it’s—oh, really, Mr. Bryceson, it’s too pretty an idea to be described as rubbish.”

“Well, perhaps it is. Maybe I don’t understand it enough, either to appreciate it or to do it justice. But, do you know, I think if I wanted to make love to anyone—I say *if* I wanted to make love to any one—”

“We-e-ll?” (a very long word).

“Well, I think I’d have sense enough to get through the business without bothering the gardener.”

“I’m afraid you’re not fond of flowers.”

“Oh, but I am—you should see the magnificent tropical fellows—have you ever seen a magnolia—no? what a pity. I don’t think anyone knows what floral beauty really is till he’s seen a magnolia.”

“Indeed?” (Not an overwhelming interest exhibited in magnolias.)

“Oh, yes; I always went in raptures over the tropical beauties—I mean of flowers, of course. Now, Harry would sooner have an English primrose or a violet than any exotic.”

“Really?” (with some further loss of interest) “Mr. Galbraith seems quite an important person with you and Mr. Markham.”

“Important! I should think he was—why, he’s the best and dearest fellow in the world. Important! I should just—why, do you know, Lou—I *beg* your pardon—Miss Louisa”—(both rather red here)—“neither Fred nor I would be here to-day if it hadn’t been for him.”

“What a dreadful life that must be abroad. Aren’t you very glad it’s all over?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” (*Oh!*) “It was a glorious life—Harry was saying so only yesterday at Richmond. We went down to the ‘Star and Garter’ yesterday, and had dinner with Harry.”

“On Sunday?—you abandoned men!”

“Well, you must eat on Sunday. Didn’t you eat yesterday?”

“Of course I did. We had dinner at home.”

“Well, but we haven’t any home to go to, you know.”

“No home?”

“In London, at least. Of course, we have homes, all three of us—Fred’s in chambers, but they’re awfully cozy and comfortable; my house is in Essex.”

“I have heard you say so. You don’t seem to care for it much.”

“I don’t—at least, the house is all right, and is a very pretty old place, but then, you see, I haven’t anybody to look after it, except a housekeeper and some old servants of my father. Now if I were married it would be different, wouldn’t it?”

“I—suppose—it—would.”

“Of course it would; it would alter things entirely. I say, Miss Louisa, talking of being married—” (*coming*)—“talking of being married, does your sister—your eldest sister, I mean—” (*Gracious goodness, whatever is coming?*)—“care at all for Harry, do you think?” (*Oh!*)

“Really, Mr. Bryceson, I can’t say. Suppose you ask Mr. Galbraith to ask her.”

“Oh, I expect he’s doing that now.”

“Do you?”

“Oh, yes. You see, he went down to the lake with your eldest sister, and Fred went into the shrubbery with your youngest, whilst we—came in here.”

The dark curls have touched the golden curls; the dark eyes are gazing very tenderly at the downcast blue ones; there is a silence that is too full of sweetness for speech.

“Yes, we came in here to talk of flowers. See, here is a meek little one—it is not very gaudy, not like my glorious magnolia, but it has a lovely scent; may I give you a piece?”

The little hand takes it silently, and the blue eyes look up, full of love.

“I said just now the language of flowers was rubbish, didn’t I? Well, this little one has converted me. Do you know what the heliotrope means?”

“Yes” (a very tiny yes—only just enough to part the rosy lips).

“It means ‘I love you’—take my spray, my darling, and put it near your heart—and give me a piece in return—and it will mean that you love me, dearest, as I love you.”

All tenderly the little hand plucks the blossom, and her face is hidden for awhile.

Down by the lake Galbraith and Adelaide strolled and talked in much the same manner as the other two couples. The heart of the frank girl went out to meet the great love of this man, so brave and so tender, so strong and so true. When the tender question had been asked and answered, when heart had beaten against heart, and lip pressed lip, then Adelaide had to begin to bear her burden.

“You know I am going away, dearest, don’t you?”

“Oh, Harry! so soon?”

“My darling, it must be so, and I must tell you why; come, now, let us try whether you can keep a secret.”

And then he told her all the tale.

To say that she was not astonished would be wrong, but he was surprised at the calmness with which she spoke of it, and of the part he wanted her to play.

"If there should be any rumor of her approaching marriage that reaches your ears, you must at once let Walter Bryceson know; he will know how to act if I am away," was his last advice before they returned to the house.

"Oh, yes, Harry. I'll send for Mr. Bryceson immediately, and—"

"Send for him? Ah, Adelaide my dear, I don't think there will be much need for that. My impression is that you are going to see a great deal more of Master Walter than you think for. Now, darling, let us join your father and mother."

"I shall see you before you go?"

"Every day till I leave London, that is if papa will have me."

"Oh, there is no fear of that. He is very fond of you. Oh, Harry, I am so happy. But I wish you weren't going away. Oh, here are Lou and Lucy."

Louisa and Lucy, looking most demure and unconscious, were standing at the open window talking to Mr. Markham as unconcernedly as if being engaged were a daily experience. Adelaide joined the group, looking as demure as either of her sisters. The old gentleman's eyes twinkled.

"Have you seen your mamma, my dear? I fancy she has gone out to look for you. Mr. Bompas, let us go and find some of these young men and smoke a cigar with them."

When the old boys had left the room there was a short silence, during which none of the sisters ventured to look at one another. At last Lucy spoke in a solemn tone.

"Sisters," she said in a mock-tragedy tone, "I have a confession to make."

"Well, dear," from the two others.

"I confess to—having wasted a great deal of time in church."

"What *are* you talking about, Lucy?"

"Silence, Addie. Yes, my dears, I used to wile away the forty minutes of sermon time by reading the service for the solemnization of holy matrimony—every Sunday regularly."

"Well, madcap, what then?"

"Louisa, you are not respectful. I am really the steady one of the family. Well, my dears, I read there—bless you, I know it by heart—that it is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly."

"Whatever is—"

"Come and kiss me, my dears, and then let us go and find mamma."

And as the sisters embraced a few tears fell, soon dried, but still they fell. You see marriage is an honorable estate and all that, but it wrenches out some good strong roots at times when it transplants young people.

When Mr. Markham and Mr. Bompas found their young friends they found them in a high state of spirits, shaking hands wildly all round, and evidently much excited about something. Said boisterous Walter—

"Boys, this makes me feel good. Oh! Fred; oh! Harry, let's get away somewhere quiet and holloa 'Jake Keyser' till something breaks!"

“Here’s uncle and Mr. Bompas,” said Fred. “Let’s go straight to papa and out with it.”

“Oh! my dears,” said Mrs. Bompas, coming in to her daughters half an hour after, “your papa has told me all about it—I’m so happy, my dearest girls—but *please* tell me once more—or write it down, Addie, to make sure—*who’s* going to marry *whom*. You really must sort yourselves out, my dears, or I shall make all sorts of blunders over it.”

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## CHAPTER XVII.

### NED’S HOSPITALITY AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

BEFORE Galbraith took up his abode in Avonham, the inhabitants of that quiet town had held somewhat singular opinions respecting the negro race, and, as opinions in Avonham became, by dint of long holding, elevated and exalted to the dignity of creeds, it was somewhat of a shock to find that the preconceived notions and beliefs which had passed current for so many years were exploded, or, even in the most conservative of minds, considerably modified after personal inspection and study of the specimen of the children of Ham now residing there.

Mr. Timothy Rapsey was wont to speak of himself as a student of human nature. With curiosity the mainspring of his actions, and its gratification the business of his life, simple and almost infantile in his manners, he resembled a child in nothing so much as in the employment of that characteristic of infancy, “taking a deal of notice.” He had the faculty of reception in no ordinary degree, had he possessed that of retention in the same ratio he would have been a Mar’shire Solon; as it was, although tolerated, and not refused the honor of posing as one of the worthies and authorities of the place, he was forced to admit to himself that he had missed the dignity, the importance, and the gravity which marked the fathers of the town, and distinguished them from the common herd. Yet the town could have better spared a better man than gossiping, inquisitive, prying but amusing Timothy Rapsey, who, just at this period of our tale, was seized with a burning desire to cultivate the acquaintance of Galbraith’s negro servant, ostensibly, as he tried to assure himself, with a view of increasing his ethnological knowledge, really, as his mind told him, to gratify his curiosity respecting the inmates of a house which he knew not how to honestly enter and which was now in the sole charge of Ned. And to know that Galbraith had temporarily vacated his house was not, in Timothy’s eyes at least, to know enough, he wished to acquaint himself why he had gone and where he had gone to.

Whilst he was casting about in his mind for the best means of arriving at this desired end, and indeed he was not the only Avonhamite who was curious on the subject, it happened that the opportunity of gaining a footing with Ned came about unexpectedly and with scarcely much of his own seeking. It chanced one morning, as he was passing the front gate of the Coombes, that its janitor, for so Timothy considered him, was standing at the top of the steps

engaged in paying the carrier who had just delivered a parcel. He greeted the negro with effusion and paused to have a chat with him, partly to further the great end he had in view, and partly to find out what had that morning been left at the house. To his great gratification Ned entered readily into conversation, and, the carrier having driven away, to his still greater glee, after remarking that the day was hot for the time of year, and that he felt very thirsty, the negro invited him to enter and refresh himself, promising him that he would provide him something grateful and cooling.

When Timothy found himself fairly inside the mysterious house—for the unknown is always the mysterious to little minds—he was fairly beside himself with joy. Everything was new to him, for he had never visited the house in Major Currie's time, and whilst Ned was concerned about the preparation of the drinks, he peered and pried into every corner of the room. Books, pictures, weapons, strange skins and savage trophies were all reviewed and commented on in turn, and a glittering mass of iron pyrites and mica which Ned produced from a drawer and gravely assured him was a nugget of pure gold fairly made him gasp. Such a cigar as the little man found between his lips in a few minutes had never come within his ken, certainly never found its way to his mouth, and the first sensation which came over him as he drew Ned's seductive mixed drink through the first hollow straw he had used since his school-days, when he had taken half-holiday draughts from Avon by means of a similar apparatus, was akin to his notions of paradise itself.

When the long tumbler was three parts empty and the white ash of the incomparable cigar half an inch long, Mr. Rapsey, according to his usual custom, began to ask questions, to all of which Ned, placidly smoking and sipping, affably replied.

He'd been a long time with Mr. Galbraith he said—yes, he had been a slave—no, not kidnapped from Africa—born in America—was born on a Southern plantation—run away? oh, no, never—his ole massa was too kind for that—did Mas'r Galbraiff buy him? oh, dear no, Mas'r Galbraiff didn't hold with slavery—no, he'd been a free man many years—been help in a big hotel—Mas'r Galbraiff's brother took a fancy to him and he left to go with him—dead the brother was—oh, yes, he was dead sure 'nut—yes, he was older than Mas'r Harry—was Mas'r Galbraiff good master? there wasn't such a master in the world. Mas'r Bryceson was a very nice gentleman—yes, the two were great friends—oh, yes, they'd been abroad together—they were both good men—Ned would chop off his right hand for either of them—would Mas'r Rapsey try this other glass? It was a different sort, but just the thing after the other.

Such was the nature of the first portion of the conversation between these new boon companions, and still the white ash grew, and still the drink was good. Mr. Rapsey became more particular and confidential in his inquiries, but still his ebony host answered him freely.

Was Mr. Galbraith rich? Oh, yes; as rich as any one in Avonham—richer indeed? Didn't know how rich Mrs. Stanhope was. If she were so very rich why did she sell her house and land? Why not let them? Had seen Mrs. Stanhope out driving. Mr. Bompas

was very nice man—didn't know much about the young ladies' looks—of course he preferred the black girls, or the yellow girls—where was Mr. Galbraith? Didn't he tell Mr. Rapsey only a little while ago he was gone to Yarmuf? Well, he expected he was in London now. What a brave man he was. Mas'r Harry one of the strongest men anywhere, and brave as a lion—Mas'r Bryceson brave too; had need to be, both of them, where they'd lived. The rioters hadn't hurt the house much—broken a few windows—he expected some of them had got hurt though—he himself had given one of them a punch in the nose that he wouldn't forget in a hurry—didn't know who set them on to the Coombes, wishes he did know—hoped it was the man whose nose he punched—didn't understand English politics himself—thought England was a very nice place, and liked Avonham very much—yes, Mas'r Galbraith rode very well, so did Mas'r Bryceson—there were three horses in the stable now; would Mr. Rapsey like to look at them? Mr. Pinniffer's man came round twice a day to help—why didn't Mr. Galbraith have more servants? Mas'r Harry trusted everything to ole Ned, and ole Ned didn't want a whole crowd of women folk around; "don' light dat ar cigar 'gain, Mas'r Rapsey, take 'nudder out'n dat box dar, 'n let me make nudder tum'ler 'Port Royal Sangaree.'"

Mr. Rapsey's eyes twinkled as he lit another famous cigar, after a mild protest, and watched Ned's deft concoction of the delicious draught. When had he had such a morning of delight? Both his palate and his curiosity gratified, his eyes delighted by the sight of a lump of gold as big as an ostrich egg, his ears regaled with more news than he had been able to extract from any one for a month, and his thirst slaked with some celestial liquor unknown, he told himself, to even the highest among the great ones of Avonham. Surely a day to be marked with the whitest and largest of all white stones.

And under the combined influence of good spirits, good cigars, and Ned's wonderful mixtures, the heart of the little man opened wide, and with it his mouth. He found as an additional pleasure that the negro made a most excellent listener, that he replied to his local wit with appreciative chuckles and grins, and even with occasional African cachinations, which not only gratified, but amused him very much. The questions, too, which Ned interpolated now and then proved to the happy little chatterer how much his companion was interested in his conversation, and he laid himself out to repay, with local intelligence and gossip, the sumptuous hospitality he had received at the hands of his host. He gave a description of the principal magnates of the town and their families, considerably heightened and full of local color. He was not deterred now, in his mention of Mrs. Stanhope, by the restraining presence of Mrs. Pinniffer, and he did not spare his opinion as to the presumed relations between her and the two individuals whom Avonham had set down as her admirers. As a Blue, he hoped Walter Rivers might win the lady, and succeed his uncle in the representation of the borough. Kept somewhat in a groove by the questions of the negro, he next touched upon the Bompas family, and presented the young ladies with prospective husbands according to his ideas or wishes. It was uncertain which of them Mr. Adolphus

Carter was about to be engaged to, he said. He had questioned Mr. Carter on the subject chaffingly only yesterday, and, strange to say, had met with something like a rebuff; the tempers of young men on those points, he said, knowingly, were uncertain, but from the young man's important manner he had reason to believe it would soon be a well-known matter.

Ned grinned hugely at the profound knowledge of human nature and local matters combined displayed in this remark, and paid Timothy a compliment on his shrewdness, which pleased him highly.

"Really," he thought to himself, "the negro race has been greatly underrated. This man appreciates me a great deal more than half the people in Avonham, who call themselves Christians."

At this juncture Ned changed the subject to the recent election, and asked Timothy whether Carter had had any connection with it.

Mr. Rapsey believed that Adolphus was very friendly with Alfred Shelman, and that possibly he might have rendered him some service in the matter, but that having regard to his position at Mr. Bompas's, and the fact that the latter had taken no part in it, he did not think it probable.

Ned proposed another nice cool Sangaree—or would Mas'r Rapsey like to taste some real Bourbon whisky; there was nothing like it anywhere else in England, he said.

Mr. Rapsey jovially assented, and added to his potations a Bourbon straight.

In about half an hour Timothy discovered that he was mixing up the names of a good many of the people of whom he had been talking, and he admired more than ever the great interest evinced in his conversation—shown chiefly by the gentle way in which he was every now and again led back into the right train of thought and coherent speech by the listener—he became confidential about the riot, and waxed deeply indignant about the attack on the Coombes. Soon, he found—with much the same sort of surprise with which Monk Schwartz or Roger Bacon discovered gunpowder—that Adolphus Carter's name was being connected with the affair, and that he was passing from a feeling of utter incredulity about his share in the matter to a state of virtuous wrath against him for injuring an inoffensive stranger. He next became conscious that he was, somehow, taking vast pains to connect Carter with Shelman and Shelman with the outbreak; and, finally, that whatever information he had, respecting either of the two young men, was being heartily and effusively placed at the disposal of his dear friend—Mr. Edward—who had, he averred, been most shamefully treated—but how, he was not quite sure.

The little man, having taken his leave of Ned as though he were parting from his oldest friend forever, made a bemused and rickety progress home, and after a heavy sleep, from which his amazed landlady in vain tried to rouse him for his dinner—Timothy was a bachelor—awoke with very little idea of the main events of the morning's amusement—save that his indignation had gained him the most thoroughly business-like headache he had ever experienced, and that his mouth was very dry with over-much conversation.

But still, there remained stored up in his anything but lofty mind one fact, that somehow or other, he scarcely knew how—having re-

gard to the deep affection for Ned that had suddenly seized him it was incumbent on him to consider himself greatly affronted with both Carter and Shelman, and when he had refreshed himself with cold water, eaten the late meal which had been saved for him, and slaked his thirst and steadied his nerves with a copious bowl of tea, he had fully settled in his mind that, without revealing the source of his knowledge, or betraying his new found friend, he would make it his special business to reprove and punish—directly or indirectly, or, indeed, both—the conduct of the pair. Having made this resolution in the interest of friendship and the preservation of public and private morality, Mr. Rapsey sallied forth to spend the evening in his accustomed manner.

The next morning, as Alfred Shelman was leisurely eating his breakfast, Adolphus Carter was announced and entered to him in a state of great agitation. He waited until Shelman's man had retired and then said, in a tone little more than a whisper,

“I say, Shelman, what on earth's to be done?”

“Done? what's the matter?”

“Last night,” said Carter, wiping the cold perspiration from his brow, “I was coming home when I met little Rapsey. I've never seen him so before, but he was about half tipsy.”

“Well?”

“He began to pitch into me about that—that row after the election. You know.”

“Hang the election, and the row after it, too,” said Shelman, angrily.

“Yes, yes, I know you must feel awfully worried over it—but I mean,” said Carter, looking round nervously and glancing at the door—as though to make doubly sure that they were alone—“I mean about the Coombes part of the business, you know.”

“Curse the Coombes and its owner, too,” said the amiable Shelman.

“With all my heart,” said Adolphus, his cheeks reddening; “I'm sure I bear him no good will. But do listen, for this concerns you.”

“Me?”

“Yes.”

“In what way?”

“Why in this: Rapsey's found out, somehow or other—not through me, for I swear I've never opened my mouth to a soul—that you and I planned that affair together.”

“Together,” said Shelman; “take care what you're talking about, young fellow. Don't you bring me into the affair, I warn you.”

“Not bring you in?” said Carter; “why, who proposed the whole thing?”

“You did. You came to me burning with rage against the pair of fellows who live there—goodness knows what for—and swearing you'd be revenged on them both. What had I to do with it?”

“What had you to do with it? Why just as much as I had. Didn't you say you hated Galbraith yourself, and would like to do him a turn for coming between you and Mrs. Stanhope about the house, and for buying the horse you wanted?”

“You fool; if the man bought the Coombes was that any reason for my smashing the windows of it, or was I going to wreck his

house for buying a horse I fancied? You'll accuse me next of getting up the riot?"

"And suppose I did," cried Carter in desperation, as he saw his former ally preparing to secure his retreat; "how far wrong should I be?"

Cornered cowards sometimes make bold strokes. This was a bolder one than Shelman had bargained for. He tried to parry it by bullying.

"By G—!" said he, starting up and advancing toward Carter, "if you dare to hint that I had anything to do with it I'll break every bone in your body."

"I don't care," said Adolphus, now fairly at bay; "I won't stand this sort of life any longer; you can't kill me anyhow, and I don't believe much in your thrashing me. You're not Galbraith, or that cursed nigger either, and if you put a hand on me I'll go straight to the mayor and tell him all I know, and I know more than you think, too; for one thing," he went on, seeing that the other made no attempt to approach him, "I know who keeps Mackerell's people now he's in jail at Ridgetown. Ay, and more than that. I know—"

"Hush, you great ass," said Shelman, peevishly, but with an abatement of his violent manner; "sit down and let us talk it over quietly. We don't want all the town to hear us. I was hasty, old man," he added, holding out his hand. "I know you're upset a bit, too, or you wouldn't talk like that, but you can't imagine how the whole affair has worried me. Here," he went on, ringing the bell, "let's have something in, and have a quiet chat over a pipe together. Bompas is away, I know, so your time's your own. And now tell me all about it."

When the servant had placed the desired fluids and tobacco, and cleared the breakfast things away, the two conspirators sat down together to smoke and to see how the land lay with them.

To tell the truth Alfred Shelman was supremely uncomfortable about the news his visitor had to give him. It was true that the riot had broken out in a great measure from an accidental circumstance, but there had been much in it that had been his doing, and it had been only by the employment of a good deal of tact and some considerable amount of money too that he had been able to close the mouths of two or three of the moving spirits among the rioters who had been committed to prison for their share in the work, and now, if the news was in Rapsey's mouth, he said to himself, it might as well be in the town crier's; so it was with more inward fear than he cared to acknowledge that he listened to Carter's narration of his interview with Timothy.

That drink-valiant little man, returning from the Bear, slightly the worse for his modest potations, taken on top of Edward's morning offerings, had encountered Carter, who was also homeward bound. Assuming an air which he intended to be dignified, he had, without mentioning the source of his intelligence, terrified Adolphus by the information that he knew all about the source of the riot and the attack on Galbraith's house. In his sober moments, Timothy would never have ventured to mention Shelman's name, nor had he any real knowledge that the latter had been concerned, but the two names were jingling together in his brain, and it became impossible

to separate them. In common with most chatterboxes possessed of scanty information, Mr. Rapsey drew liberally on his own imagination, and, partly aided by the ejaculations and exculpations of the astonished and terrified Carter, and partly by one or two lucky hits, he succeeded in endowing that nervous youth with a conviction that his crime and folly and that of his associate were thoroughly known to Timothy, who, in some vague and undefined manner, meant to exact a stern penalty from each of them for it. He had sufficient presence of mind to extract from the proposed avenger his promise that he would see him on the morrow, and that he would take no steps meanwhile.

Such was the story which he now related to Shelman, who seemed almost as disturbed as himself.

Various means of securing their safety were discussed at the sitting, but two alone seemed to remain for choice: either to bribe the little man to silence or to frighten him into retraction. It is needless to say that it was Carter who suggested the former method, but it met with Shelman's opposition.

"The little beggar's got plenty of money for himself," said he; "he banks with us, and I know his affairs to a penny. He's had about three hundred a year—of course I'm telling this to you as we're in the mud together—ever since he was twenty-one, and although he's never done a stroke of work since he sold his business, he has never been extravagant in anything, and hasn't lived up to more than half his income. He's not at all greedy for money, for he could get a good deal better interest in twenty safe things than we pay him on his deposit account, and a good many people would open their eyes if they knew how much that was; no, money in this case isn't any good, strange to say, and you're never safe in the hands of a man you bribe; we must ride the high horse, Carter, and frighten him."

"How do you propose to do it?"

"Send him a lawyer's letter, threatening an action for slander."

"That'll frighten him. Whom will you get to do it: not Sennett?"

"Sennett—nonsense! There are more lawyers in the world than Sennett. Leave that to me. If he broaches the matter again, defy him, dare him to prove his words, and before he has time to take any steps, we'll be down upon him with our threat of action."

"Yes," said Carter, doubtfully, "I'll see him at once."

"No, no," said Shelman, "don't go a yard out of your way: indeed, try if you can to postpone any interview, without, of course, appearing to wish to avoid him. Together with the lawyer's letter he'll get one from the bank calling on him to withdraw his account, and in two days we'll have him on his knees."

With this pleasing hope the two parted.

As frequently happens when persons give reproofs and assume indignation under spirituous influences, Mr. Timothy Rapsey had no intention, when he woke on the morning after he had poured out his wrath on Adolphus Carter, of carrying the matter any further; without having forgotten the occurrence, he had done with it and put it aside. On the third morning after his visit to Ned, on descending the street, he had just given the old postman his cus-

tomary morning salutation, when that worthy, to his surprise, stopped him as he was passing.

“Hold on a minute, Mr. Rapsey; I’ve got a two letters for ’ee.”

“For me?” said Timothy; “two letters! Why, dear me, whoever can they be from?”

“Ah, that’s moor than I do know,” said the postman, grinning, “but here they be.”

Mr. Rapsey took the letters, and, adjusting his spectacles to his nose, essayed to open them. He was awkward at it though, with one letter tucked under his arm, and the wind was too high for comfortable reading; so, placing both epistles in his pocket, he betook himself home to peruse them in comfort.

The first that presented itself to his astonished gaze was couched in these, to him, incomprehensible words:

“84 Lincoln Inn Fields,  
“London.

“SIR,—We are instructed by our client, Mr. Alfred Shelman, to enter an action against you for slander, in which our client lays his damages at one thousand pounds.

“The slander imputed consists in an accusation which you have thought fit to bring against Mr. Shelman, to the effect that he had conspired with another person to wreck and destroy, or cause to be so destroyed and wrecked, a certain dwelling-house, situate in Avonham, and called The Coombes.

“We shall be glad to be favored with the name of the solicitor who will act for you in this matter.

“We are, sir,

“Your obedient servants,

“BLACKWELL, RIDLEY AND GROVES.”

To say that Timothy Rapsey was scared by the letter would be insufficient; he was almost paralyzed with terror. He read the missive twice and groaned over it dismally for some minutes, with the cold sweat of fear pouring from him. After some time, he remembered that there was another. He opened this, and read as follows:

“Avonham Bank.

“SIR,—We have to request that you will have the goodness to withdraw both your current and deposit accounts from this bank, as we must decline any further transactions with you.

“We are, sir,

“Your obedient servants,

“BOLDHAM, HUMBERSTONE, BOLDHAM AND Co.”

“Goodness gracious me,” moaned poor Timothy; “whatever shall I do?”

He did the very last thing that his two would be persecutors could have imagined. He sat for a few minutes to collect himself, and then, with a beating heart and a pale face, betook himself to the Coombes.

It is a dangerous thing to over-terrify a weak man. Dangerous for the actor as well as the agent. The weak man is apt naturally to look for help, and he goes to the strongest help he knows of. In

place of seeking the advice of his friend Sennett, Rapsey determined to find Galbraith and lay his trouble before him. His house was the cause of the trouble, he argued, and in his house had he conceived the unlucky notion which had led him into this scrape.

Mr. Adolphus Carter looked at the poor terrified little man, as with trembling limbs and bloodless face he went past Mr. Bompas's office window in South Street. It was a welcome sight to him, for Bryceson had a few minutes before driven past with a stranger by his side, and Mr. Raraty seated at the back of the dog-cart. What a funk the little man looked in to be sure. Adolphus was doubled up with laughter; he went to the door to gaze after him down the street.

"Good gracious, what's he going in at the gate of the Coombes for?" said he to himself, and now it was his turn to grow pale.

Mr. Carter had not forgotten that Shelman knew absolutely nothing of his own capture, release, and pardon by Galbraith, and a horrible thought stole over him that Rapsey *did* know of it, and would use the fact as a weapon of defense against Shelman. And they had not counted on resistance either.

Adolphus went back to his desk, smiling no longer.

Meanwhile, Rapsey had entered the gate and was tottering along the path to the door which he had entered so joyfully and quitted so jovially on the occasion of his last visit. At the door was Bryceson, talking to a stranger.

"Good-morning, sir," said he timidly, and his voice sounded hollow and faint, and unlike his own in his ears.

"Good-morning, Mr. Rapsey," said Bryceson cheerily; "what brings you this way? What can we do for you?"

"I was wishful, if you please, sir," said poor Timothy, "to speak to Mr. Edward, if I might take the liberty."

The terrified little man was quite beaten down by his trouble.

"Ned has just gone over to Avonham Road for some luggage and things," said Bryceson. "Can I do anything for you till he returns?"

"I don't know, sir," said Timothy, with his eyes fixed and staring. "I'm in—in great trouble, sir—see Mr. Galbraith, sir—these letters—"

And with these wandering words, and with a vain effort to take the letters from his pocket, he fell forward into Bryceson's strong arms. That afternoon, as Adolphus Carter was preparing to leave the office, a note was handed to him by one of the ostlers at the Bear. He opened it and read:—

"Bear Hotel, A'ham.

"DEAR SIR,—As I fear Mr. Bompas is absent from home, may I request an interview with you here at your earliest convenience, on important business? Yours truly,

"FREDK. R. MARKHAM."

Greatly impressed with a sense of his importance, Carter at once proceeded to the Bear, and on asking for Mr. Markham was shown upstairs to a private room. He waited alone for a minute or two, and then, the door opening, the stranger whom he had seen that morning seated by Bryceson's side entered, followed by Bryceson himself.

For the second time that day Adolphus turned pale, and his pallor was not diminished when Bryceson locked the door, and, pointing to a chair, said sternly—

“Sit down, Mr. Carter. I thought we had done with you the other night, but it appears not.”

Adolphus Carter sat down and waited events in a state of agitation, almost as great as that of his victim Timothy Rapsey.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE MAKINGS OF A VERY PRETTY QUARREL.

IN very truth the present position of Mr. Adolphus Carter was an unenviable one, and he mentally cursed his fate for having led him a second time into a contest with the inmates of the “Coombes.” He sat white and shivering, and looking first at Bryceson, who was leisurely sorting over a few papers which he had taken from his pocket, and then at Markham, who stood looking down on him gravely and sternly. Adolphus almost wished himself back in the dining-room at the Coombes, with the negro’s strong grip on his arm.

There is a certain feeling which comes over the mind of a mean man when he is confronted with courage, integrity and rectitude of purpose, which is, perhaps, among the most painful of all the experiences that can happen to wrong-doers. That feeling is not one of hatred so much as of envy, not so much of malice as of admiration. Sitting there, awaiting his fate, eagerly expectant of the opening words of a speech and conversation the result of which he could not foresee, he was as sincere an admirer of the two young men who were about to apply the torture to him as though he had been their oldest friend. What would he not give to be able to stand in their position? How could he have been so mad—he a puny, weak-headed frivolous fool, as he told himself he was—as to engage in a contest with men who seemed to him, as he thought of his own unworthiness, like beings of a different sphere.

Bryceson sorted his papers for a couple of minutes, and selecting three from them, laid them on the table and placed the others in his pocket-book; he then turned to Carter and, speaking as though the matter in hand were an ordinary business one, said,

“Mr. Carter, you know, of course, something of legal matters—of ordinary everyday legal matters, I mean?”

“Yes,” said Carter, in a tone as brisk as he could assume; he would make what fight he could of it, he told himself.

“You know what a power of attorney is?”

“Oh, yes.”

“This,” said Bryceson, handing him the topmost of the three selected papers, “as you will see, is a power of attorney from my friend, Mr. Henry Galbraith, authorizing me to act in all matters for him during his absence.”

Carter took the document handed to him and glanced over it, principally because it *was* handed to him, and he had no other course.

“Thank you, Mr. Bryceson,” said he, returning it.

"I should have acted in this affair myself," said Bryceson, "even if I had not held this authority, but you will understand that as the matter stands I am now proceeding on behalf of my friend Mr. Galbraith; not from any wish to avoid any responsibility, but because I am sure it is what my friend would have wished."

Adolphus inclined his head, having no words with which to reply.

"So much for the first paper, which I showed you as a matter of form," said Bryceson, "now for the second. Do you know a firm of solicitors in London named Blackwell, Ridley and Groves?"

"No."

Bryceson and Markham exchanged glances.

"Do you know anything of this letter?" said Bryceson handing him the document which had so terrified Timothy Rapsey.

The letter trembled in Carter's hand as he read it. He felt strong indignation against Shelman for his utter want of tact in this action. This was a pretty way of bringing Timothy Rapsey to his knees in two days, wasn't it?"

The letter took a long time in reading, short as it was; the two friends remained silent, and Mr. Carter was uninterrupted; his eyes were on the words, but after his first reading of them he saw them not; he saw through them the angry face of Shelman, the stern features of Galbraith, the righteous wrath of Mr. Bompas, his father's grief-stricken face and his mother's anxious eyes. The silence grew painful to him, but he dared not break it. Faintly in the street he could hear old Prosser, the bellman and crier, calling out some announcement; he wondered what it was; the clock above his head he noticed had a loud tick and a slight irregularity in it; they had a clock at home something like it. Down-stairs somebody laughed in the bar-parlor; he felt angry with him for indulging in unseemly mirth; how could any one laugh at such a time?

At last he laid the letter down on the table.

"I have never seen it before," he said.

"You misunderstand my question," said Bryceson, quietly; "I asked you whether you know anything of it. Do you?"

For a moment or two Carter hesitated, but he felt the game was up; he had played cards badly, and the odds were all one way.

"I knew it was going to be sent," he said.

"Thank you," said Bryceson; "now we come to the last of the papers I have to show you just now."

He took the bank letter and handed it to Carter.

"Do you know anything of *that*?"

Hesitation was of no use now.

"I knew that was going to be sent, too," he said, and felt that he had indeed "burned his ships."

"It is a holograph letter, you will observe," said Bryceson. "May I inquire whether you know the handwriting?"

"I do," said Carter.

"Will you tell me whose handwriting it is?"

"Mr. Alfred Shelman's."

"This other letter, of course, was sent at Mr. Shelman's instigation."

"It was."

"It mentions an accusation of conspiracy with another person; did you notice that."

"Yes," said Carter, faintly, for he felt that the crisis was coming now.

"I wanted to draw your attention to that for a special reason," said Bryceson; "and now, Mr. Carter, I will tell you what you are perhaps a little curious to know, and that is how those last two papers came into my possession."

Carter murmured something inarticulate.

"Mr. Rapsey," said Bryceson, looking steadily at Carter, who quailed before his gaze, "of whom I know nothing whatever beyond what little I have seen of him about the town during my stay here, came to my friend's house, which I am at present occupying, this morning to see Mr. Galbraith's servant, whom I dare say you remember."

"Would he ever forget him?" Carter thought.

"Mr. Rapsey," Bryceson went on, "seemed in trouble, and proved to be very much upset by the receipt of these two letters. He could only account for them in one way, and that was this. He and Edward had been gossiping together a few days previously, and among other topics they hit upon a certain little episode of the night of the election day, which night I have no doubt you also remember. That evening Mr. Rapsey had a conversation with you upon the subject, I believe?"

"Yes."

"And to that conversation he attributes, whether correctly or incorrectly, these threatening documents. Naturally he is much alarmed at them. Mr. Rapsey does not appear to be what you and my friend here would call a business man, and he does not seem to be possessed of the necessary strength of mind which enables gentlemen like yourself to become leaders of men in dangerous and sometimes unsuccessful night attacks and riots."

"The 'leader of men' looked anything but strong-minded as he moved uneasily in his seat, as though Bryceson's speech had been the lash of a whip descending on his back.

"Mr. Rapsey's first visit," said Bryceson, "was to Edward. Now, Mr. Carter, Edward is not an ordinary servant in any sense of the word. Since Edward has been in Mr. Galbraith's service, he has had a good many masters, first and last. Ned has been servant, companion, and friend—yes *friend*, Mr. Carter—to Mr. Galbraith, to my friend here, Mr. Markham, to me, and to four or five friends of ours, of whom neither you nor any one else in Avonham knows, or is likely to know, anything. Mr. Rapsey, of course, was not aware of this; he went to Edward simply because the conversation to which, as I say, he attributes these letters, occurred between them. Very fortunately I happened to be in Avonham, having arrived here this morning, and have taken the matter in hand. This is the reason of this meeting this afternoon. You will excuse, under the circumstances, the little scheme by which I was able to insure your presence here, and now having given you an account of the matter so far, we will, if you please, proceed to real business."

Fred Markham, as if to mark that a point in the negotiations had

been reached, took a chair and seated himself astride of it, with his arms resting on the back.

“That business, Mr. Carter,” pursued Bryceson, still in the calm and quiet tone which he had preserved from the commencement of the interview, “may be very much simplified by you. No one knows so well as you the cause of the attack on Mr. Galbraith’s house. You were, according to your own confession to Mr. Bompas, the leader of the mob on that occasion. I cannot see that Mr. Galbraith has ever injured you in any way; and that it was a political matter is out of the question. It is perfectly evident to me that you were acting in concert with some one else, if not at his instigation. Now, Mr. Carter, we must know, if you please, who that person was.”

Adolphus turned even paler than he had been before; he was between the devil and the deep sea with a vengeance.

“Suppose,” he said, after a short silence, “that your surmise was wrong, and that it was entirely my own doings.”

“We will not waste time by supposing anything so foolish, if you please, Mr. Carter,” said Bryceson, quietly.

“But,” said Carter, hesitatingly, “you don’t know that I did not do it of my own accord.”

“We have our own common sense in the matter, Mr. Carter, besides one or two little pieces of evidence which would perhaps surprise you if we used them. Do not, I beg of you, waste our time, although it is not specially valuable just at present; let us know at once who inspired you with the idea of attacking Mr. Galbraith’s house?”

“It’s not fair—it’s not fair to ask me,” broke out Adolphus in sheer desperation, and momentarily rendered courageous by the sense of his position; “it’s not fair for two of you to get me in a room and lock the door and then torture me with questions; you’ll thrash me if I don’t answer, I suppose?” he said with a snarl; it’s cowardly!”

Bryceson’s color slightly rose, and he bit his lips before replying.

“You are as safe from violence here, sir,” he said, “as though you were in your mother’s arms, and I think you know it,” he added pointedly. “Now let us distinctly understand each other. Do you refuse to give us, for our own satisfaction only—for we think we know it already—the name of the person who instigated the attack on the Coombes?”

Carter paused again.

“Suppose I refuse to answer any question you put me?” he said.

“We shall take very prompt measures to compel you to answer to some one else,” said Bryceson.

“How?” said Adolphus, in a hoarse whisper, his lips and cheeks ashy white.

“In this way, Mr. Carter,” said Markham, speaking for the first time. “We have strongly advised Mr. Rapsey to defend the action with which Mr. Shelman threatens him, and you will be a witness in that action on one side or the other, I venture to say, sir. In addition to that my friend Mr. Bryceson will at once apply to the mayor or the magistrates here for a warrant against you for attacking Mr. Galbraith’s house. It is extremely probable, Mr. Carter,

that you will give evidence in the slander case, attired in an unbecoming and not very honorable uniform. The whole of the questions my friend has asked to-day will be put to you then, and you will not be allowed the latitude that he has shown you in this room."

"But," said Carter, "what better shall I be off by telling you anything? If the action goes on I shall—so you say—be a witness, and obliged to tell."

"I fancy not," said Markham. "When my friend asked you just now not to waste our time, it was not merely our time in this room that he meant. You will distinctly understand that, as we shall have to deal with a second party, we cannot make any definite and binding promise about the matter, but if you supply us with the information we require—and really we only require it of you to confirm a suspicion so well founded as to be almost a certainty—I think that there will not be the slightest chance of the action being carried on, so that you need not dread your appearance in the witness box, nor need you fear any further proceeding against yourself on Mr. Galbraith's part, or on that of his representative? Am I right in that last remark, Walter?"

"Quite, Fred," said Bryceson.

Carter saw that at any rate there was a chance of safety from one of the dangers besetting him, and made up his mind to surrender.

"I must give way to you, Mr. Bryceson," he said, in a helpless tone, "I will give up the name on those conditions."

"We can only make conditions with you for ourselves," said Bryceson; "we cannot absolutely guarantee that the action for slander will not be pressed. Don't give us credit for anything but straightforwardness in the affair. You must take your chance so far as the slander is concerned."

"I must do that, I suppose. I am willing to give up the name of the person who got up the attack on Mr. Galbraith's house, and who set me on to do it."

"Who was it?" asked Bryceson.

"Mr. Alfred Shelman," said Carter.

"Thank you," said Bryceson; "he is just the person we suspected. Mr. Galbraith, whose judgment is about as keen as that of any man I have ever met, told me before he left Avonham that he imagined Mr. Shelman was at the bottom of it. Well, Mr. Carter, after your confession, I think it extremely improbable that you will be troubled to give any evidence in public. Of course," he added hesitatingly, "we may rely upon your—your information as being correct."

"Quite," said Carter, in a low voice, but with an evident sense of relief after his surrender.

"I don't want to ask you anything more compromising than the statement you have just made," said Markham, "but can you tell me what cause of quarrel this man Shelman had with Mr. Galbraith? So far as I can make out, they had never even spoken."

Carter had given up the name of his principal chiefly to place himself in a secure position with regard to the two friends; he was not wholly displeased at the turn things had taken; it was obvious to him that if Rapsey's cause were espoused by these young men it

would become a very strong one, and one that would terrify even Alfred Shelman; it was better, perhaps, on the whole for him to enlist at once on their side, at least so far as giving them all the information in his power went, so he replied,

“Mr. Shelman always had a feeling of irritation and jealousy against Mr. Galbraith ever since he bought the Coombes.”

“Because he wanted it himself, I suppose?” said Bryceson.

“Yes, and he was disappointed by Mrs. Stanhope’s refusal to let him have the house and land in preference to Mr. Galbraith,” said Carter, “and Mr. Galbraith bought a horse that Shelman wanted, and—”

“And these,” interrupted Bryceson, unconsciously using the very argument which Shelman had himself advanced to Carter at the meeting which had led to all this trouble, “these are reasons for attacking a man and making him the victim of an election riot! Well, for an old-fashioned town with a three-century-old charter, I must say you know how to play it down low on a tender foot. Old Squire Gulch wasn’t so very much ahead of this place in smartness, was it, Fred?”

“Well, we’ve Judge Lynch there for one thing,” said Markham, “and upon my word his court wouldn’t work badly here, I fancy. Pray, Mr. Carter, can you inform us, without very seriously compromising yourself, how *you* came to be selected as the instrument of this terrible man’s vengeance?”

If Markham had struck Carter he could not have roused him by the blow as he did by his question. Whether it was that he felt safe from bodily harm after Bryceson’s assurance, or whether the sense of his injuries took away his reason, and made him reckless of consequences, is not sure; certain it is, however, that he broke forthwith into a rage which, without alarming either of his hearers, surprised them extremely.

“How?” he screamed, “how? Because I hate your friend; haven’t I enough cause to?”

“To hate Galbraith,” said Bryceson, astonished, “why—”

“To hate him, yes, and you too,” shouted Carter, now quite beside himself.

“Me?” said Bryceson, opening his eyes to the fullest extent, and touching himself on the breast to make sure that it was really he whom Carter meant and no one else, “me! Why, you fool, until the night after the election I had never even spoken to you; what reason, in the devil’s name, had you to hate me?”

“Why did you come here at all?” cried Carter, foaming with impotent rage; “I never did a wrong thing in my life, till Mr. Galbraith came to Avonham; my employer liked me and trusted me, and would have taken me into his business in course of time; my father was proud of me—yes, proud of me for it. I haven’t your strength and your good looks, and if I *am* in your hands now I’m not a fool at my business, or anything like one—and I was popular and respected all over Avonham. What am I now? I’m in your power, and your friend has threatened me just now with a jail and a convict’s suit of clothes. What does Mr. Bombas think of me now—or my father? You’ll tell me that that change came since the election row, and so it did; but I’d plenty of cause to hate you

both before that. The very first words Mr. Galbraith spoke to me were insulting, and I have never forgotten them; but there's more than that. If you want the real cause I'll tell you, and I don't care what you do to me afterward, you may kill me if you like: since you came to this town, I've never had a kind word from one of Mr. Bompas's daughters."

Markham gave a low, soft whistle at this.

"I had plenty before, Mr. Bryceson! Which of the girls it is you are after, and which Mr. Galbraith wants, I don't know, but do know," he added, clinching his hands and tossing his arms with a gesture of supreme despair, "that you two have come between me and my love, and if my power had been equal to my will on election night you would have remembered it to the day of your death. *That* was the cause, if you want to know it; and the scheme failed, and I'm ruined over it, and I curse the day you came into the town."

He had risen to his feet to say all this, and stood facing the young man as a hunted beast turns for a last hopeless death-struggle. Bryceson and Markham had remained seated, the former evidently greatly astonished by what he had heard.

"That's the secret of it, then. Well, Mr. Carter, we're very much obliged for your frankness, and we have no wish to detain you any longer."

Carter seized his hat and turned to go.

"There is just one last word I want to say, Mr. Carter," said Bryceson, "don't you make any use of the names of those ladies in this town over this matter."

"No, I will not," said Carter, still hot, but with returning reason. "I'm not quite such a cad as that."

"I will take your word for it," said Bryceson, rising; "and hope one day we shall be able to agree to forget this affair. I can't defend your conduct in your attack on my friend and myself—for I suppose I must include myself now, though I hadn't the remotest idea of it till now—but I'm less angry with you and more sorry for you than you think. Good-day, Mr. Carter."

Carter opened the door and passed out, with a hardly audible reply to the salutation, and the friends were left alone.

"Well, Walter," said Fred, "that's the first step, I suppose. That's an interesting young man. It's a good job for human nature round here that that fellow hasn't an over-burden of pluck. He gives me the idea of a man whose malice is only bounded by his cowardice. If he'd as much courage as he has spite, he'd make it nasty for his enemies."

"Harry's right; the dear old fellow has often told us never to despise a fellow because he's mean and weak. But I am sorry for him too. He'll come an awful cropper over this business."

"What did you think of his excuse for hating you?" said Fred; "complimentary to us, wasn't it, to be told that he might have had his pick of our lady-loves if you and Harry hadn't turned up? Of course he knows nothing about me and Lucy, but the principle's the same."

"It don't quite bear thinking of," said Bryceson; "Well, I've shaped out my course with Shelman."

"He won't bring his action against that poor little man, will he?"

“I don't fancy he will, after I have done with him.”

“Ned worked the little fellow beautifully, didn't he?”

“Splendidly. I must write to Harry about it. I don't see yet any connection between this matter and the other, though.”

“Nor I; unless indeed this man Shelman has made it up with the widow, and she has set him on to Harry, suspecting who he is.”

“You forget she has never seen Harry, nor even heard his name; he always went by Reginald's until he came to us.”

“True; I wonder whether she will recognize me?—it may spoil all if she should. But I don't fancy she will. Ten years and more make a difference, and we weren't so *very* intimate after all. How carefully Harry followed her up.”

“Yes, he did; and if Reginald hadn't been discovered by the old squire, I wouldn't have cared to stand in her shoes. Let us go down-stairs.”

Mr. Pinniffer and Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt were in the room when they entered, and both looked somewhat curiously at them. They had seen Carter's abrupt departure, for he had gone straight out into the street, looking white and ill, and without exchanging any greeting with any one, and they wondered what was afloat. They got, however, no information out of the two friends, who drank a glass of wine together and left.

Carter left the house burning with a double rage—rage against both Bryceson and Shelman. By one he had been made a catspaw, by the other he had been treated as a cur. Carter felt that Bryceson must have been sure all along that he would divulge at once the name of his principal, and that he would betray him the moment pressure was put upon him. He *despised* himself for being a coward, but he did not *blame* himself. He even caught at the fact of his rage against Shelman as some sort of excuse for his having betrayed him to his enemies. But, over and over again, as he went on his way, he was vowing vengeance against all those whom he considered arrayed against him. Not only against Bryceson for having brought him to bay, and wrested his secret from him, but against Galbraith for having come to Avonham at all, against the Bompas family for having tolerated him, against Shelman for having attempted to interfere with him, against Edward for his suspicions, and Rapsey for his garrulity; he inveighed against them all. One thing he had made up his mind to do, and that was to have it out with Mr. Alfred Shelman as soon as possible.

He burst in upon that gentleman that evening as he was sitting at home, and broke into a storm of reproach and invective, which alarmed and surprised Shelman not a little. Incoherently he poured out upon him a disconnected account of how their scheme had failed, mixed with bitter lamentations for his own position, and warnings to him to avoid a like fate. Shelman's was not the temper to allow him to sit patiently under such an outbreak.

“Sit down, curse you!” he shouted, “have you gone mad, Carter? Will you give me a sensible account of what has happened, or will you stop your gibbering and get out?”

Thus checked, he partially recovered himself, and putting a strong restraint upon himself, was able to let Shelman know approximately how matters stood. It was Shelman's turn to get angry now; he

fairly boiled over with rage and chagrin. For the third time that day his cowardly associate was panic-stricken; he raved at him for his stupidity, his bungling and his cowardice; he cursed Rapsey for his tale-bearing, and the very existence of Galbraith, Bryceson, Mrs. Stanhope, and the opposite political party were sufficient ground for him to indulge in a torrent of vituperation against them. The way in which he vowed vengeance against them, almost persuaded Carter that he was on the strong side after all, and that this shouting, bullying, cursing friend of his was a match for his opponents yet.

But all his raving and raging, though it relieved him, could not conceal from Shelman the fact that he had been outwitted, and that his position was serious. He had compromised himself in several ways. He knew, though no one else did, the part he had taken after the election, and how much of the riot was due to him; that was bad enough by itself. In addition to that, he had, on his own responsibility, and without the knowledge of his uncle, who was away from the town, ordered the closing of the accounts of a very good bank customer, not anticipating for a moment that he said closing of account would ever be likely to occur, and he had threatened with an action for slander a man, who, instead of flinging himself at his feet and praying for mercy, had discovered, through his very weakness, friends who not only were prepared to resist him vigorously, but were in possession of a fact, which of itself justified the so-called slander. His political position in Avonham and his position as a partner in the bank seemed alike imperiled and threatened by those whom he most hated and despised.

It is probable that the dreams of both Carter and Shelman were troubled that night; but at any rate the night watches brought consideration, and Shelman had something like a plan in his head when morning came. He had reflected that it was most probable that Bryceson had obtained the information respecting the riot simply with a view to use it as a means of defending Timothy Rapsey from the consequences of an action. Well, the action would not be brought, of course, and the necessity for using the information having passed away, it was probable that it would not be used. He would see Rapsey himself at his house, and must make up his mind to eat a little humble pie before him; his influence surely had not all faded in the little man's eyes, and a little concession and condescension would work marvels with Timothy. He would put the action and the bank affair straight, and thus remove two great stumbling blocks out of his way; and with respect to other matters, he must take the risk. Only, he told himself, and his blustering of the night before had blinded his eyes to the fact, he must be careful how he went to work, either now or at any future time, with the young men at the Coombes. Great as was the opinion which he held of his own importance, and his great abilities, he was unable to shut his eyes to the fact that those gentlemen seemed to be armed at all points and to be men of no ordinary calibre whom it were better policy to leave entirely alone.

## CHAPTER XIX.

## QUITE AGAINST LAW AND ORDER.

THE morning commenced with a little game of cross purposes. Two persons were much disappointed, too. In a small town like Avonham, consisting, as we have seen, of one long main street, a market place, a church-yard, and two side streets, to meet a man whom you wanted was an easy matter, provided always that the man was in town. The general mode adopted was this. We will say, for example, that an Avonham Smith wishes to meet, for business purposes, an Avonham Jones. Smith walks out in the morning, and calls at Jones's house. Failing to find him at home he calls at the office of White, the shop of Black, and the hotel of Robinson. To each of these citizens he confides the fact that he wants to see Jones; meeting two more acquaintances in the street he delivers the same message "in case you might see 'em." Then he trusts to chance and his friends. Each of the latter tells a friend that Smith wants Jones, and in half an hour's time half the town knows the fact. Jones will hear that Smith wants him for hours after he has seen him, and, grown callous by long custom, will forty times reply to the question, "have 'ee seen Smith?"

Neither of the two seekers acted on the time-honored and well-nigh infallible plan to-day, each for reasons of his own, and each was disappointed.

The two were Alfred Shelman, whom, by this time, we know, and Mr. Jared Norton, cashier of the Avonham Bank, whom we have once seen.

Alfred Shelman's object was to see Timothy Rapsey; Jared Norton's object was to see Alfred Shelman, and each, that morning, failed.

After a breakfast eaten more hastily than usual, Shelman entered the dog-cart which was waiting for him at the door by his overnight order, and, driving past the just-opened bank, turned into the side street past the church-yard, pulled up at the door of the house in which Mr. Rapsey lived, and asked to see him.

"Mr. Rapsey ain't at home just now, sir," said the landlady, with many courtesies and bobbings.

"Dear me, that's very unfortunate," said Shelman; "will you tell Mr. Rapsey that I want to see him very particularly?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, sir," said the dame.

"Ask him, will you, whether he will step up to my house and have a bit of lunch with me at one o'clock. You won't forget, will you?"

"Oh, dear me, no, Mr. Shelman," said the landlady, highly gratified, for to lunch with Mr. Shelman was, in her eyes, to sit amongst great ones, and she felt that the honor done to her lodger reflected on herself.

Disappointment number one!

Shelman turned and drove back to the bank. He did not get

down, but one of the clerks, a junior, came out with a letter, which he handed to him. Shelman opened and read it.

"It is from Mr. Millard," he said. "I am just going out to Beytesbury to see him. - There is nothing else, is there?"

"No, sir."

"Is Mr. Norton in?"

"He has been, sir, and opened the letters, after which he went out immediately, saying he should not be long. He gave us out the letters. There is nothing special in them, sir."

"Tell him I called."

"Yes, sir."

Shelman gave the reins to the horse and bowled away, leaving behind him the man who was seeking for him in great uneasiness of mind.

The cause of Mr. Norton's perturbation was this: he was accustomed to open all letters received at the bank, with the exception of those addressed specially to Mr. Boldham or Shelman. The correspondence that morning had not been heavy; the local farmers and tradesmen, with whom the bulk of the business lay, were fonder of transacting their affairs by personal interview than by letter, but one of the missives had greatly astonished him. Had the spire of St. Hildegard's walked into the bank and requested him to discount its weather cock, he would have been scarcely more surprised than he was by the receipt of a letter from Timothy Rapsey, which stated that, in reply to their (the bank's) communication, he would present himself at their establishment that day for the purpose of withdrawing both his deposit and current accounts, as requested. As requested! Mr. Jared Norton called for the letter-book; there was no copy of any such letter! He himself had heard nothing of the matter, and it surpassed anything in his experience. Mr. Rapsey, he reasoned, had banked with them for years and years, and was just the sort of a customer with whom the country banker delights to do business, a man with an ever-growing rate of interest in lieu of investing elsewhere. It was incomprehensible to him; perhaps Mr. Shelman might know something of it. He would not even wait for him to visit the bank, but would go and see him at once.

Now, had Mr. Norton informed one of his clerks where he was going, he would have been told that the gentleman of whom he was in quest had just driven past, but he kept his own counsel and turned into the main street as Shelman turned into the side one where Rapsey lived. When he reached Shelman's house the door was opened by a maid-servant, ignorant that her master was out, for he had driven out the back way. He seated himself in the dining-room and waited fully ten minutes before the girl returned and informed him that she had discovered that Shelman had left home. Making his way back to the bank, Mr. Norton, to his great chagrin, was made acquainted with the young man's visit, and retired to the bank parlor lamenting his ill-luck in not catching him.

Disappointment number two!

Mr. Norton resumed his accustomed seat, and waited for the course of events.

At eleven o'clock Timothy Rapsey entered.

The double burden of business which he did not understand, and

a secret which he must not divulge, had changed the little gossip's cheery bird-like face into a countenance of a sphink-like mystery and direful potent. Jared Norton, who had known him for thirty years, stared at him in amazement.

"Will you step this way, Mr. Rapsey?" said he, not giving Timothy an opportunity of stating his business before the clerks.

He led the way to the bank parlor, where he gave the visitor a seat, and waited in great curiosity for his opening address.

"I suppose you got my letter, Mr. Norton?" said Timothy.

"Yes, Mr. Rapsey, I did, and I was never more surprised in—"

"Surprised, Mr. Norton! what; didn't you know of it, then?"

"Not one word, my dear sir, not one word, I assure you," answered the cashier.

"Well," said Timothy, taking a paper from his pocket, "there's the letter that brought me here, Mr. Norton; maybe you know who sent it."

Norton gravely perused the letter, which we have already seen, and handed it back to its owner.

"It is correct enough, Mr. Rapsey," said he, "although I knew nothing of it, and I'm very sorry to see it now."

"I've banked here a good many years, and never thought to be served this way," said Rapsey, ruefully; "but," he added, perking himself up like a bantam cock, "I ain't under no obligation to the bank so far as I can see, and 'tis your loss, not mine."

"But, dear heart alive, Mr. Rapsey," said Norton, "is it well to fall out with us like this? Why—"

"Now, Mr. Norton, I put it to you. Is it fair, after that letter, to say as I've fell out with you?"

"Well, well, perhaps not, Mr. Rapsey; but won't you see Mr. Shelman himself about it when he comes in?"

"Mr. Shelman was round to my place this morning, about an hour ago, and I was out."

"Why, that must have been whilst I was looking after him about this very matter, Mr. Rapsey."

"'Tis likely. Mr. Shelman leaved a message to my house for me to come up and have lunch with him at one o'clock, d'ye see, Mr. Norton?"

"Why, that's right," said Jared, much relieved, "that's right; you can talk it—"

"Ah, but look 'ee here—see, Mr. Norton," said Timothy, emphasizing his words with his forefinger on the palm of his other hand, "I won't go, y' know!"

Jared stared.

"Mr. Shelman," said Timothy, with the same finger and palm play, "have a-threatened me with an action—"

Jared started and stared yet more.

"And Mr. Shelman have written to me," pursued Timothy, "for me to draw all my money away. Now, Mr. Norton, I b'ain't going to be put upon by Mr. Shelman, n'yet no one else, and so, as it sims likely as I shall want my money to pay law expenses, I'm come for it now, according to this letter."

Mr. Norton shook his head regretfully, but saw no solution of the difficulty.

“ Will you take the money now, Mr. Rapsey?” said he.

“ If you please, Mr. Norton. You’ve got my pass-book, and I’ve brought my deposit note and check book, and if you’ll let me know what I’m to draw for, I’ll do’t at once and take all away together.”

Jared Norton gave up the business of persuasion in despair. The whole thing was, so far as he was concerned, wrapped in mystery, and quite outside his banking experience. He sent for the book, and carried out the calculations necessary for a final closing of the accounts. Having done this with the air of a martyr, he informed Timothy of the amount standing to his credit in their books under both heads.

Timothy produced his check book with an air of great dignity and proceeded to fill in the partly-written check which he had prepared for the occasion. It was a tolerably large sum, and, annoyed as he was, the little man could not resist a feeling of satisfaction as he wrote the three figures after the £. Not many men in Avonham, he thought, as he gazed complacently at them, would write such a check for one sum at once that year. But the amount on deposit, all of which Mr. Rapsey asked for in notes, was something to look complacent over. Shelman had not spoken lightly when he told his confederate to what state of comfort Mr. Rapsey’s frugality had brought him.

He left the room and went to the front office of the bank itself to receive the notes. As Norton finished counting the amount of the current account, Mr. Beadlemore Arto entered with a check. He shook hands with Timothy, gave “ good-day ” to the cashier and clerks, and stood waiting his turn.

Mr. Arto was not curious—oh, dear, no!—but he was not unwilling to notice, and Mr. Rapsey was not unwilling that he should notice, the amount which he received. Mr. Arto opened his eyes but said nothing.

Jared Norton then, with a face full of unutterable things, handed solemnly to Rapsey a second sheaf of notes, and held out his hand for Mr. Beadlemore Arto’s check. That worthy’s eyes were dilated to their fullest extent as he noted the sum that his crony was counting over. When he had counted them twice, Timothy put the notes carefully into a large envelope which he had brought with him, and, placing this in his breast pocket, carefully buttoned both his inner and outer coats, and bade Mr. Norton and the clerks good-day. Mr. Arto received the money for the check which he presented, and followed him out.

“ Where be goin’ to?” was his salutation.

“ Up to Chris Raraty’s,” replied Timothy. “ I want to see ’m.”

“ He’s over to Pinniffer’s,” said Arto. “ I see him goin’ in as I went into th’ bank just now.”

“ Ah, I do want him to let me have a trap to drive over to Ridgetown on a bit o’ business,” said Timothy.

“ Be ’ee goin’ to buy the place, Timothy Rapsey, that ye’re taking all that cash over there with ’ee. T’ood be worth any one’s while to foller and stop ye on the road,” said Mr. Beadlemore Arto, laughing at his own wit.

“ No, I’m not,” said Timothy, his face lowering in spite of the comfortable feeling of the notes in his pocket. “ I’ve been and

drawed all my money out o' Boldham's Bank, and I'm goin' over to Ridgetown to put it in the North Marlshire."

"Drawed all yer money out o' Boldham's!" said Beadlemore Arto, stopping in his surprise and staring hard at Timothy, as though he were demented; "why, what in the name o' sense and patience did 'ee do that for?"

"I were told to," said Timothy.

"Why, who upon earth told 'ee?" asked Beadlemore, still staring, if anything, wider than ever.

"I musn't tell 'ee," said Timothy, the sense of his secret again weighing on him. "Now, don't ask me; I really can't tell 'ee; 'tis a secret, and don't for pity's sake say anything about it!"

Mr. Beadlemore Arto resumed his progress, and the pair entered the familiar room together and found their cronies assembling pretty much as usual. Mr. Raraty was, as had been said, amongst the company, and Mr. Rapsey was not an hour older before, seated in a dog-cart behind a good-looking but steady-going mare, belonging to that gentleman, he was well on the way to Ridgetown. He left behind him in Avonham a very thoughtful and puzzled man in Mr. Arto.

That worthy pondered deeply over the words which Timothy had let fall. From whence he got his information (for he had no idea of the real state of the case, nor dreamed that the bank authorities, or one of them, at least, had told him to withdraw his account), he could not imagine; it was sufficient for him that it had been done under his eyes, and that there was a screw loose somewhere. Was it with the bank? Mr. Arto's transactions in corn, hay, oats, and straw were large and many, and his standing balance was not large in proportion to his trade; nevertheless, it was large enough to make him feel uneasy about it in the face of what he had seen. He went home, took out his check-book and drew a check which reduced his balance to a very small sum indeed. He took it into the bank with an excuse ready: a contemplated cash purchase on a large scale: he had sometimes had to do so before. Norton heard his explanation, made no comment, but paid him the money cheerfully enough. In half an hour, Mr. Follwell came in and drew five hundred pounds: this was not unusual. Following closely on his heels, came Wolstenholme Pye, who was going to Bristol market on the next day it appeared, and who, also, presented a heavy check. These were succeeded by ex-Mayor Killett, Mr. Pollimoy and Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt, who all appeared constrained in their manner, and were armed with checks for somewhat abnormal amounts, made payable to "Self." By one o'clock, Mr. Norton was getting a little fidgety. There was nothing like a run on the bank, and, knowing the resources he had at hand, he felt that even had that happened no real harm could come to such a steady and solvent establishment. But his experience told him that, setting Timothy's matter aside, this was the heaviest morning's draw he had ever had on a non-market day, and he shrewdly guessed that news of the transaction of the morning was circulating among the particular circle to which Mr. Rapsey was especially affiliated, that a mistaken idea of its nature had arisen, and that a wind of suspicion was beginning to blow on the credit of the bank. He dispatched an urgent note to Alfred

Shelman, begging him to come on to the bank at once on most important and pressing business.

Shelman's errand that morning had been to Beytesbury to complete with Mr. Millard the arrangements for the purchase of the land belonging to the latter, which Shelman wanted for his new house. All the points in question having been amicably discussed, and actual signature and transfer of deeds and payment of money being alone necessary to finish the business, Mr. Millard had returned to Avonham with Shelman, and had proceeded to the office of his friend Sennett to give him final instructions. Alfred had meanwhile gone to his house in the expectation of being shortly and punctually waited upon by Timothy Rapsey, whom a little condescension and a little champagne would reduce to a peaceable and forgiving condition. To his surprise, however, Timothy had not been seen, and, in the midst of his wonder at his absence, Norton's message came; he immediately proceeded to the bank, expecting nothing more important or pressing than that his signature was required for some special piece of business.

Old Norton met him, wearing an anxious appearance, which he noticed as he passed through the front office.

"What's the matter, Norton," he said, as he seated himself in a chair in the parlor, whither the cashier followed him.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. Alfred," said Norton; "I was getting rather anxious without you. I have had a very heavy morning."

Alfred Shelman did not answer, but awaited the business for which it had been deemed necessary to summon him.

The old cashier waited a moment for him to speak; but, receiving no reply, went on—

"Mr. Rapsey has been here this morning, sir."

"Ah!" said Shelman, suddenly evincing an interest in what was going forward.

"I tried to see you this morning," said Norton, "but we unfortunately missed each other. I got a letter from Mr. Rapsey, in answer to one from this office, informing us that he would call and remove his accounts, as requested in our communication. Mr. Alfred, there is no trace of that letter in the copying book, and, of course, I know nothing of it."

"No, no, I know," said Shelman, hastily. "I wrote it myself and did not copy it—well, what did Rapsey say? I invited him to lunch to-day, to talk the matter of over; I suppose he didn't get the message in time."

"He got the message, Mr. Alfred," said Norton, hesitatingly, "but—but he told me that he—he should decline to accept it."

"He did?" said Shelman, and his face assumed a disturbed appearance.

"He seemed very determined in the matter, and spoke of some action which you were bringing against him," said the old cashier, with a questioning look which Shelman did not regard, "and finally he drew a check for his current account, and withdrew his deposit as well."

Shelman sprung to his feet with an oath, as the consequences of

his folly flashed across him. He would have a pretty quarter of an hour with his uncle when he came to hear of it.

"Of course I had no alternative in the face of your letter but to give him what he demanded," said Norton, "and I paid him. I fear that is not the worst of it."

"What else is there?" said Shelman.

"Why, Mr. Alfred," said Norton, lowering his voice and approaching nearer to Shelman, "I fear that some mischief may follow. Mr. Arto was here when I was paying Mr. Rapsey, and they went out together. Not very long after Mr. Arto came back and drew a good round sum, and soon after that Mr. Follwell had five hundred pounds; since then we have had Mr. Pye, Mr. Killett, Mr. Chickelbolt and Mr. Pollimoy, all drawing, all checks to 'self,' and all almost down to the lowest possible balance. I don't like the look of it, sir. They're all friends of Mr. Rapsey and all in one clique, and it's hard to say what rumors may get about in this place. It's not a good town to keep a secret in is Avonham, and we may have a run upon us at a moment's notice."

The old fellow looked grave; Shelman alarmed.

"But we've nothing to fear from that," said the latter, after a moment's thought. "We could pay every current account five times over."

"If I didn't know that," said the elder man, smiling, "I should be worse upset than I am. But a run never did a bank any good yet, sir, and never will. People may say that the fact of standing against a run is a good advertisement, but I doubt it. There are always plenty of people who'll declare you only pulled through by the skin of your teeth; most of them are outsiders, it's true, who never had a banking account in their lives, but talk's talk, and it tells; and, then again, you'll always find you lose two classes of customers after a crisis; those who are afraid of you, and those who are ashamed of themselves for having doubted you, and don't like to come back to you again. No, Mr. Alfred, I'm not *afraid* of a run, but I don't want to see one, and whatever this matter is with Mr. Rapsey and you, I'm very sorry it ever occurred, and I hope it's not gone so far but it can be put right."

The old man spoke firmly and looked as if he were uncertain how his words would be taken. Shelman, however, was too keen not to see that he was talking sound common sense, and he received the counsel readily.

"You're right, Norton; the fact is I've been over hasty with Rapsey over an election matter, and I thought to give him a bit of a scare, that's all, upon my word, and he has taken the matter more seriously than I thought he would." And he explained to Norton the circumstances of the case.

"Law's a funny thing to play with," said the cashier, when he had heard the tale; "take my advice, Mr. Alfred, make the matter right with Rapsey, and get his accounts back here again. It'll be better for all parties, I'm sure."

"I will take your advice, Norton," said Alfred Shelman; "I'll see the little ass at once. You needn't fear," he added, laughing, "I won't treat him roughly. I'll smooth him down the right way."

"I hope you may, sir," said Norton; and he returned to his

duties whilst Shelman took his hat and quitted the bank in search of Timothy Rapsey.

Mr. Rapsey was not at home, for the second time that day; his landlady was quite concerned that Mr. Shelman had missed him again; perhaps, she added, Mr. Shelman, if he didn't mind going there, might find him at the Bear.

To the Bear then he directed his steps.

That famous hostel filled, as will doubtless have been observed, more functions than that of providing good cheer for the wayfarer; it was the Exchange of Avonham, the local Parliament House or talking-shop of the place, and half the business of the town was transacted under the vaulted roof its ancient gateway or in its spacious paneled rooms. Quarterly sessions, revising barrister's courts, tolzey and brewster sessions, leet juries; all had had, in past times, their head-quarters at the Bear, and down to our own day was held under its gateway, on Great Cheese market-day, one of the most curious remnants of bygone times, a court of *pie poudre*, which now, I believe, only survives, if indeed it survive there, in a yearly appearance in the Broadmead at Bristol. So that even so mighty an Avonham potentate as Mr. Alfred Shelman lost none of his dignity in repairing to the great meeting-place of the town in search of another citizen.

But, important as was his business, he little guessed what would be the termination of his visit there that day.

The first person whom he saw was Miss Pinniffer, seated at the window of the bar, brave in lilac poplin and cherry-colored ribbons. In answer to his queries, Miss Pinniffer informed him that Mr. Rapsey was not there—had gone out driving somewhere. Mr. Raraty was in the parlor and could tell him where, no doubt. Shelman opened the door of the apartment and walked in; as he did so he heard from the lips of Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt, who was gruffer than usual, the closing words of some oracular sentence that he had evidently been favoring his cronies with, about matters at the Avonham bank.

“—to look after his own interest, and, break or not break, I'm very glad as I'm on the right side of the hedge myself. They're welcome to what I've left them.”

Jack Rann took up his parable in a tone of some excitement.

“I believe—” he cried.

What Mr. Rann's creed on the point under discussion was, will, perhaps, never be known; at any rate, events crowded so thick on the enunciation of its first two words that it was never finished. Shelman entered the room, and Mr. Rann's mouth closed with a nervous snap.

Shelman took no notice of any of the words which he had heard, although he had some difficulty in restraining himself; he looked smilingly round the room and gave as near an approach to a cheery “Good-morning, gentlemen” as was possible from one of his unamiable temperament.

“Good-morning, sir,” replied the room, not without a sense of guilt upon those who had just been discussing the very man whom they were saluting.

“Can I have a word with you, Raraty?” said Shelman.

“Certainly, sir,” said the postmaster, rising from his seat with alacrity and advancing to the door.

“Do you know where Mr. Rapsey has gone to?”

“He’s taken one of my dog-carts, and gone to Ridgetown,” said Christopher Raraty.

“Ah,” said Shelman, “I wanted to see him before he went, but presently will do as well; would you be good enough if you should see him when he returns, to tell him I should like to have a word with him up at my house.”

Mr. Raraty promised to convey the message.

It was Shelman’s object to remain a few minutes in the room, quite at his ease, partly with a view of reassuring the minds of the assembled friends, all of whom he saw were customers of the bank, by his appearance of unconcern, and partly to offer any one of them an opportunity of speaking to him on the subject which he knew was uppermost in each man’s mind, in order that he might be able, without appearing to volunteer any information, to set at rest any doubts which might have arisen respecting the stability of his firm. He stood and sipped a glass of sherry and chatted with one or two, but his object was defeated; his questions were answered, but no more—a chill seemed to have fallen on the room and an uneasiness in his presence, coupled with an absolute disinclination to talk, totally foreign to the nature of the gathered cronies in the company of one of their local great ones. On an ordinary occasion he would have had every one to reply to; topics of all kinds would have been started for the sake of getting his opinion or his criticism, and little Timothy Rapsey would have been present as collector-in-chief of all his sayings, and snapper-up of all the trifles of his conversation which might appear likely to be of service at any future symposium. But now the little man whom he had barely tolerated, except at the bank, and whom he had looked upon merely as an animated little puppet who occasionally made him smile, was all in all to him, and his absence meant he knew not what evils and dangers to him, and the rest of the men sat silent and glum, with a silence and glumness that was almost threatening. He soon ceased the attempt to engage any one in connected conversation and stood moodily drinking a second glass of wine, for which he had called, in his usual sullen stand-off manner.

When he had finished this he laid down the glass and a shilling beside it on the half-door of the little glass bar which communicated with the parlor, and went out, bestowing a parting salutation on the company as gruff and ungracious as Mr. Barnabas Chickleholt could have feigned, and with an ill-temper very foreign to the nature of that grim personage, who, like another and more celebrated man, had nothing of the bear about him except the skin.

The conversation did not at once recommence. Shelman had left the room but not the hotel, as they could hear his voice in the passage in conversation. John Rann was the first to break the silence.

“Well, that don’t seem very much like anything being wrong with the bank, Mr. Chickleholt,” said he, in a low tone, however.

Rann, who had been one of the strongest partisans of Mr. Boldham at the election, had constituted himself the champion of the

bank at this juncture, and had, previous to Shelman's entry, been ridiculing the idea of any suspicion of its solvency and stability.

"No one have said in my hearin'," growled Barnabas, "as there was anything wrong with the bank."

"No, no," said Wolstenholme Pye.

"Oh, dear, no," chimed in Hoppener Pye."

"Well, you're mighty particular about terms, I think," said the market clerk.

"A man has to be keerful nowadays what 'a do say," chimed in the Nestor of Avonham, old "Mas'r Killett."

"'Bliged to be," said Hoppener Pye, turning to Rann, as though to apologize for Chickleholt.

"Forced to be," said Wolstenholme Pye.

Rann leisurely finished the loading of his pipe, struck a villainous sulphur match which made Hoppener Pye splutter and his brother cough, waited for the flame to brighten and applied it to his pipe before replying.

"If (*puff*) what we were (*puff*) saying about the bank just (*puff*) now wasn't talking (*puff*) against it," said he, "I'm no judge o' plain speakin', that's all. Look here, Mas'r Killett," added he, pointing the smoking end of the match at the old oracle; "how many years have this very bank been in this very town and in the hands of the same families? Tell me that, Mas'r Killett, will 'ee?"

"Whoy," said the old man, taking his pipe from his mouth, pulling down his waistcoat, rubbing his leg and pointing with his yard of clay in approved Marlshire-oracle fashion, "there ain't noo one alive as could mind the start of it. I'm the eldest man to Avonham, 'ceptin', p'raps, old Daddy Prosser's father, and he'm a dotin' even if 'a be as old as what I be, and I can't mind it. I'll tell 'ee what, tho'! Lookee you all here, now, and see what I do say, for it's true if I nevermore move out o' this here cheer. My granfer\* held hees money in't, that 'a did, an' 'a many yeers afore I were bore too, that 'twere. See that, now!"

"That's a very many years ago," said Wolstenholme Pye, reflectively.

"That goes back years and years," Hoppener assented.

"Ah, you're right there, both of you," said John Rann, with a half sneer, as though to imply that it was an unusual matter; "and do you mean to tell me—"

Rann's question shared the fate of the belief he was enunciating before Shelman's entry, and was never advanced a stage further than its commencement, for the sound of voices, loud in anger outside, broke in upon the low-toned conversation and checked it in a minute.

"Dear heart alive!" said Mr. Beadlemore Arto, looking round the room in amazement, "why, whatever's to do?"

The angry voices grew angrier and louder, and Miss Pinniffer who, within her bar, had risen to her feet in evident alarm, gave a frightened scream, called out some few words in an appealing tone, and rang violently at the bell which communicated with the back of the hotel. Wolstenholme Pye, who was sitting close to the window, got up and looked out with a loud, "Laws a daisy how!" and

\* Grandfather.

flung the sash up, thrusting out his head, and as much of his body as he could with safety get through. Rann dropped his pipe, which shivered to pieces on the floor, and Barnabas Chickleholt, who was nearest the door, threw it open and rushed out into the passage followed by all in the room, except the Pyes, who fraternally shared the window. The sight that met their eyes was enough to rouse all Avonham.

When Alfred Shelman had taken his ungracious farewell of the inmates of the parlor of the Bear, and closed the door behind him, the first person who met his view in the passage was our light-hearted friend Walter Bryceson, who was just mounting the stone steps, accompanied by Mr. Millard, with whom he was laughing and talking, and Fred Markham.

The fun went out of Bryceson's face the moment he saw Shelman; he had not expected to meet him just then, but his mind was made up with respect to him, and he determined to bring him to book at once. Shelman was not known to Markham by sight, and Mr. Millard was, of course, unconscious of anything wrong.

As Shelman was about to pass out at the front door with an ordinary greeting to Mr. Millard, whom he had not long ago left, Bryceson stepped right in his path, and brought him perforce to a standstill.

"A word with you, Mr. Shelman, if you please," said he, sternly, laying his left hand on Shelman's shoulder, and gripping a hunting crop with the other.

"On what subject, sir?" replied Shelman, haughtily, stepping back, and shaking himself free of the other's hold.

"On two, sir," said Bryceson; "on your plot to wreck my friend Galbraith's house the other night and on your threatened action for slander against Mr. Rapsey."

"And what the devil business is either the house or Rapsey of yours?" said Shelman, hotly, and endeavoring to pass out.

"Just this," said Bryceson, "as I happened to be in the house when your vagabonds attacked it—"

"My vagabonds!" cried Shelman. "How dare you speak to me in this way, sir?"

"I mean exactly what I say, sir," said Bryceson, "and it'll take a better man than you to stop me. As I was just as likely to suffer as my friend, that part of the affair is my business, and as I choose to interfere between you and Mr. Rapsey on account of a certain interest I have in the matter, that's my business too; at any rate, I choose to make it so. Now, sir, just explain your conduct in the first matter, will you?"

Mr. Millard had listened to the opening of this conversation with feelings which it would be hard to describe. He now interfered.

"Mr. Bryceson—Mr. Shelman, for goodness' sake, what does this mean? Gentlemen, I beg of you to be calm."

"I'll tell you what it means," said Bryceson, answering the question, but by no means acceding to the request. "You were over at our place a little while ago concerning a certain young captive whom we took on the night of the election—allow me to introduce you to his employer," and he indicated Shelman.

“Do you mean to insult me?” shouted Shelman, beside himself with rage. “Let me pass, or—”

“What will you do? Do you think you are dealing with little Rapsey, you bully? Do you know that we’ve your confederate’s confession? You scoundrel, I believe the whole of the work of that riot was your doing!”

“You are a liar!” yelled Shelman; “stand out of my way.”

“I won’t!” said Bryceson, as much aroused as the other.

“Take that, then,” shrieked Shelman, and dashed his fist at the other’s face.

Short but fierce was the fray that followed. Both were powerfully made young men, in the very prime of manhood, Shelman half mad with rage and Bryceson roused in an unusual degree. But the latter was the stronger and more skillful, and when the first half dozen hot, wild, uncalculated slogs had passed, Shelman, who, with all his faults, had not a particle of physical cowardice in his composition, found that he was face to face with a man who was his superior in every way. Trusting to the moral effect of a rush, he dashed in to drive his enemy before him, but was twice hit back again by Bryceson’s left, and, rushing in a third time with head down, hoping to be successful with the goat-like tactics of the late Edward Stockman, Esq., a distinguished and refined member of the prize ring, better known to fame as the “Lively Kid,” he was met with a fearful upper cut and a straight hit from his opponent’s right that knocked him down in a huddled-up mass at the bottom of the Bear steps.

The scene that followed was as exciting as any in the annals of the town. When the paralysis of surprise was over, a score of persons, headed by Pinniffer and ex-Mayor Killett, threw themselves between the combatants and prevented any further contest for the present. Bursting through the crowd that had speedily collected came the negro Edward, with a war-gleam in his rolling eyes and a display of teeth that was diabolical in the eyes of the terrified youths who flocked to the spot. In the midst of the hubbub, when Mr. Millard was endeavoring to make peace, the spectators all talking at the top of their voices, the negro assisting his present master, Markham threatening a friend of Shelman’s who had uttered some words derogatory to his friend, and the combatants themselves on the point of renewing the battle in spite of the well-wishers, who were respectfully but firmly endeavoring to prevent it, Mr. Sennett, the mayor, came upon the scene.

“What is the meaning of this, Millard?” he asked.

“God knows!” said the astonished Millard. “I don’t!”

“Gentlemen, have you taken leave of your senses?” cried the mayor.

Neither foe replied, but such obviously hostile preparations for renewing the fray went forward that the mayor’s temper was roused by the disregard of his authority.

“Mr. Shelman and Mr. Bryceson,” he cried, “if you do not instantly cease this disgraceful struggle and depart quietly, I will issue my warrant against each of you for a breach of the queen’s peace, and imprison you both! I call on all present to assist me in the queen’s name!”

The sturdy old fellow meant what he said, and a murmur of respect went up from the crowd. Bryceson and Shelman scowled at each other fiercely, and, if the truth must be told, a little melodramatically; then Markham, seizing Walter's arm, pushed through the crowd with him and entered the Bear; whilst Shelman, bleeding profusely from the face, and already sick and faint from the fearful blows he had received, was supported across the market place toward his home by Killett and one of the bank clerks who had been present at the row.

How many venerable and respectable heads were shaken over the news, how many pipes were smoked over it, and from how many points the fight was discussed, would be hard to say. Two persons in Avonham, beside the principals, each of whom next morning was somewhat ashamed of the affair, were in a sad state of mind over the matter. One was Mr. Adolphus Carter, who could see nothing but harm to himself ensuing from the occurrence; the other, Mr. Timothy Rapsey, who paraded the town like a discontented bee, extracting from every possible source the countless descriptions of the combat that were flying about the town, and after every fresh piece of information exclaiming, with heartfelt and sincere regret.

"Oh, deary me, deary me, what a misfortune, to be sure! Oh, dear, oh, dear, why ever wasn't I there?"

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## CHAPTER XX.

### THE MURMUR OF THE HIVE.

NESTOR in his long and honored life must have met with novelty in the minds of men. We may fairly imagine that he would sometimes shake his venerable head over the changes that were taking place in his latter days. Certain it is that his representative in Avonham, Master Killett, was compelled to own that he had never known such all-absorbing interest shown in the town of which he was the Nestor as was displayed over the encounter between Bryceson and Shelman. There was no getting a word in on any other subject next market day. Every farmer who attended market had to be regaled with the news, fifteen different reasons were assigned for the quarrel, partisans were not wanting for both sides, and the town was in a ferment. Those highly favored individuals who had been fortunate enough to be actual eye-witnesses of the combat itself found their company more eagerly sought after than on any other market-day in their recollection. Generally speaking, they were to be found in a group together somewhere in the immediate neighborhood of the battle-field, for it was deemed almost indispensable to the proper telling of the tale that the listener should have pointed out to him the actual spot on which the meeting took place, the very steps down which Shelman had been propelled, the exact square of paving stone on which Bryceson had stood when he delivered his last and most effective blow, and the precise course which the mayor had taken when he bore down upon the combatants and prevented the affray from going any further. So that the gateway of the Bear, always the busiest spot in the town on market-day, was more

thronged than ever, and from early morning till late in the afternoon the battle was fought again.

Attached in some mysterious manner to the history, and floating through the air, was a rumor that there had been some suspicion in the minds of some of the best men in Avonham as to the Avonham bank. Newton had quite accurately foreseen that the quarrel of his irascible young principal with Mr. Rapsey was one which it would be well to adjust, and that no good would come of it. When the news of the meeting between Bryceson and Shelman reached his ears, the cashier was supplied with a reason for the conduct of Timothy earlier in the day. There was a gleam of comfort for him, however, for it gave him the opportunity of explaining the circumstances to other customers who might otherwise have been tempted by rumor to act in the same manner as our inquisitive little friend had done. Toward one or two of the townspeople who had drawn heavily, Mr. Newton was rather sharp in his manner when next he met them, and he had the satisfaction of seeing Messrs. Beadlemore Arto & Follwell presenting themselves at the bank to pay in again to their accounts, and of hearing from Mr. Barnabas Chickelholt that a knowledge of the real facts of the case would have prevented the heavy withdrawals that had alarmed Mr. Newton the day before.

From the fact that the occurrence was one for discussion in the bank itself, it may easily be supposed that public opinion was pretty well settled as to the merits of the case. Shelman had a minority of champions, actuated chiefly by the fact that his opponent was a stranger to the town, but on the whole the verdict of all the informal juries in the place was against him. There had been a rush made for Timothy Rapsey, at once, by the seekers for information, and to a knot of his cronies the little man had imparted all the story. It was received with amazement at first and then with indignation. Be it remembered that the glaziers had but newly finished the renovation of the shattered window-frames, that Avonham men—of the lower orders, it is true, but still Avonham men for all that—were yet in Ridgetown jail, eating the porridge of affliction for their share of the riot, and toiling painfully on the hated treadmill and picking ruefully at the loathsome oakum, for participation in a tumult which the town almost unanimously decided was brought about by the defeated one. It was useless to argue that the commencement of the disturbances, which had everywhere earned for Avonham such an unenviable reputation, a reputation most bitterly resented by its really peaceable inhabitants, was accidental—the scape-goat had been found, and, despite his exalted position in the place, he had many stones flung at him. It would have galled his fiery mind to have heard those who had been accustomed to fawn on him now loudest in their denunciations of his infamous conduct, and it was well for his peace of mind that the injuries inflicted on him by his stalwart conqueror were so severe as to necessitate a strict confinement to his bed, and even to demand medical aid.

During this period of excitement and universal thirst for news and gossip, there was one person in Avonham who was supremely uncomfortable. It was fortunate that the principal portion of Mr. Adolphus Carter's work was merely routine, or assuredly the interests of his employer would have suffered from the abstraction and

preoccupation of his artieled pupil, who, ordinarily, could be trusted with important affairs, and who had not in the least exaggerated his abilities when he had declared that he was not a fool in his business. The worst result of his folly that he had pictured to himself was that Shelman would have been compelled to eat a little humble-pie with Timothy Rapsey, and he had not counted, as indeed his friend had not, on the vigorous and forcible action of Walter Bryceson being the first outcome of his confession of his misdeeds and the share that Shelman had had in them. From a distance he had witnessed the discomfiture of his associate, and had not dared to move hand or foot in his service; and now seated at his desk he pondered ruefully over the probable consequences to himself. He found no comfort from his meditations; the more he thought the matter over the blacker looked the prospect to him. To add to his woes, too, every one of the callers at Mr. Bompas's office seemed to imagine that he took the liveliest interest in the affray, and plied him with awkward questions and distasteful chatter. Perhaps the one slender piece of consolation which came to him was the thought that Shelman had met the punishment with which he had threatened *him* in his irritation. He reflected that Shelman had used him for his own purposes, and had been excessively indignant at being reminded of the fact, even to the verge of violence. But it was scanty consolation after all, and there was no man in Avonham that day with thoughts more bitter, and prospects more gloomy, than Adolphus Carter.

It took him a long time to make up his mind to visit the defeated man, and it was more through fear of incurring his anger than from sympathy with him that he at last determined to do so. He quitted the office ostensibly for dinner, and made his way down the bustling and busy streets, giving the briefest returns to the various greetings he received compatible with courtesy. The man who opened the door to him, Shelman's own servant, looked doubtful when he asked to see his master.

"Master's very ill, sir," he said hesitatingly, adding after a pause, "I suppose you know, sir?"

Carter nodded.

"I'll take your name up, Mr. Carter, and see if master will see you," said the man.

Carter waited the man's return with some trepidation. In a minute he came down stairs and asked Carter to walk up.

"Is he in bed?" Adolphus asked, as he prepared to mount the stairs.

"No, sir," answered the man, "he's in his room, sir, but he is sitting up. Doctor Mompesson wanted him to remain in bed, but master was obstinate and would get up. We've had an awful time with him, sir," he added, lowering his voice to a confidential whisper, "there's no pleasing him or doing anything right for him. I hope you've brought no news to upset him, sir?"

This intelligence was the reverse of soothing to Adolphus's already agitated nerves, and he ascended to his friend's bedroom with a hearty inward wish that he had never thought of coming.

Alfred Shelman was not a pretty sight to look at, certainly. His forehead was swollen and discolored, his eyes were almost closed,

and there was a cut under one of them; his nose was as red as a beet-root, and his lips thrice their usual thickness; there was a long strip of plaster crossed with smaller slips, marking where the back of his head had come in contact with the stones; where no marks were visible his face was deadly pale, and his trembling hands proved that the shock to his system had been severe. No one would have doubted the physical courage with which he had faced his opponent after seeing the terrible results of the battle on his frame. Adolphus was seized with new terrors as he reflected on what might have been his lot on the night of the election, and what Fate might yet have in store for him.

"My dear fellow," he said, advancing and holding out his hand in token of sympathy, "I'm awfully sorry to see you like this."

"Are you?" said Shelman, without taking the proffered hand: "you ought to be. Now perhaps you will be satisfied, when you see the result of all your cursed folly."

He spoke with difficulty and indeed with pain, but even then his pallid face flushed with rage, and the distortion of his features gave him so evil an appearance that Carter felt inclined to flee.

He stood his ground, however, and commenced his exculpation.

"I can't really see," he began, "how I am to blame; I would have suffered anything, I am sure, to have prevented it."

"I wish you had to suffer this!" said Shelman fiercely, and striking his head, though he winced and groaned from the pain the hasty action caused him; "but I'll be revenged on the pair of you when I get about again. If there is any law in the land, that brawling bully shall suffer its penalties, and you may look to yourself, Adolphus Carter, for I will be even with you for your share in the affair, trust me!"

"I declare," said Adolphus, earnestly, "upon my most sacred word of honor—"

"Your sacred word of honor," said Shelman, with a sneer. "That will be a precious guarantee for any asseveration you may be going to make!"

"My word of honor," said Carter, reddening, "was as good as any man's in Avonham till you and your uncle upset the town with that cursed election, which has brought us both into trouble; and even that would not have caused us anything but the regret of defeat, if you hadn't acted as you did afterward. It's very generous of you to throw all the blame upon me. I have suffered quite as much as you have, though in a different way. You're not just, Shelman."

"It's your turn to triumph over me now," said Shelman, viciously, "but you wait for *my* turn! Whether I'm just or not, I'll let you know my power in this place, at any rate."

"I have not the least desire to triumph over you," said Carter; "you are very wrong in thinking so; and as for your revenge, your sentiments on that head are positively wicked."

"Are you going to preach me a sermon, you hypocrite!" snarled Shelman.

"No, I am not," answered Adolphus. "Perhaps you think that you are to be allowed to threaten and bully without meeting any retort or defense; do you expect that I shall permit you to injure me without my retaliating? Don't you drive to desperation a man who

has been already driven hard enough and far enough, and solely through carrying out your dirty plans."

Shelman's features became perfectly fiendish with passion. He rose from the arm-chair in which he was sitting, and made a half-step toward Carter, who prepared for an attack. The effort was, however, too much for him, and he sunk back with a groan of pain. For a minute or two he passed his hand over his forehead, whilst Adolphus stood watching him with a face full of alarm, and, to do him justice, of sympathy.

"You are ill," he said at last—"let me get you some brandy or something; can you tell me where it is?"

Shelman's physical pain conquered his rage for a time; he pointed to a cupboard, from which Carter took some brandy and gave him some, mixed with water.

"I won't agitate you by any more talk," said he, when he had rendered him this service; "I really did not come here to quarrel or to blame you; my only object was to see how you were."

"Well," said Shelman faintly, but with no abatement of his malice, "now you have seen—and feasted your eyes on my condition—you can go."

"I am going," said Carter, taking his hat from the table, "but before I do go I will say one thing—"

"Say it quickly and go then," said Shelman.

"You are very foolish to quarrel with me," said Carter impressively, and turning as he spoke, "for I declare to you that I verily believe that I am the only friend you have in Avonham at the present minute."

His hand was on the handle of the door, and he was going, when Shelman cried out hoarsely, "Stop! come here, come back, sit down and wait a minute while I recover a little." Adolphus turned back and sat down; Shelman struggled with himself, and drank a little more of the brandy and water.

"Tell me," he said, "what they are saying about this affair in the town. I suppose the whole place is full of it?"

Mr. Carter owned that it had been the chief topic of conversation that day.

"Curse the cackling fools! what are they saying about it?"

"No one seems to know really more than what actually happened," answered Carter.

"Of course not, but I know Avonham of old," said Shelman, "and I'll have my word to say to it, too, as soon as I am able to leave this confounded room. Do they know anything of what we know?"

"They put it down to the election and the attack on the Coombes," answered Carter; and he added, "of course, you know, Timothy Rapsey has been talking."

"Has he said anything against the bank?" said Shelman eagerly, "has he done that?"

"I don't know that he has," said Carter, "I haven't been near the little brute all day—I only know what has passed from conversations I have had with people in the office, you know."

"Find out, will you?" said Shelman; "get to know all that he has said, speak to him yourself; don't frighten him, but get out of

him all you can and let me know to-morrow. Hush! here is some one coming upstairs. Don't say a word of this before him, whoever he may be!"

The servant knocked at the door, and receiving permission to enter, announced Dr. Mompesson, who followed immediately on his heels.

The doctor gave a glance of displeasure at the visitor, and shook his finger reproachingly at the patient.

"This won't do, Shelman, you know; I must forbid you to see any visitors for a day or two."

"I was so confoundedly hipped here all alone, doctor," said Shelman, taking the excuse out of Carter's mouth, "that when Carter called I ordered him to be shown up."

"I haven't been here ten minutes, doctor," said Carter, and extending his hand to his unfortunate friend, who, this time, did not refuse it, he backed out of the room. Outside the house he waited for the coming forth of the doctor, who made his appearance in about a quarter of an hour. He was not driving, so Carter joined him, and they walked townward together.

"What do you think of him?" he asked.

"What do you?" said the doctor dryly.

"I think he looks very bad," said Carter.

"He *is* very bad," said Dr. Mompesson, "and your visit hasn't done him any good; I have given strict injunctions that no one is to be admitted to see him yet, not even his uncle."

"I didn't think I was doing any harm by calling," said Carter, penitently; "of course I was naturally anxious to know how he was getting on."

"Naturally," answered the doctor, "but he must be kept in perfect quietness."

"I suppose," said Adolphus, hesitatingly, "he has been—been soundly—I mean very severely injured?"

"He has been about as roughly handled as I remember to have seen a man served," answered Dr. Mompesson gravely. "Before you were born, Mr. Adolphus, and when I was a younger man, I attended a good many prize-fights; it was more the fashion then, and I don't think I can remember the case of a man receiving such an amount of punishment in so short a space of time. If you have any difference with Mr. Bryceson, don't attempt to settle it *that* way, young fellow, I advise you."

Adolphus, considering how narrowly he had escaped the same treatment, had the sensation quaintly described as that of "a person walking over his grave."

"Is he in any danger?" he asked, after walking on silently for half a minute.

"No immediate danger," said the doctor, "so long as he is kept perfectly quiet, as I told you, and that is why I have put the veto on any callers. *Encephalitis* is what I'm most afraid of," he added, half to himself and half to Carter, "but we can avoid that with care, I think."

Adolphus had not the slightest idea of what *encephalitis* might be, and was somewhat alarmed at the idea that his confederate was in danger of an ailment with so formidable a name.

"I hope he will soon recover," he said, and really meant it too.

"I hope so," answered the doctor, "for his own sake and yours too, and for other people's as well."

And with these parting words, which bore no grain of consolation to Adolphus, the doctor bade him good-day and crossed the road to call on an old friend who would be treated by no one else, although, as we have before said, Dr. Mompesson had practically retired from practice.

Adolphus turned moodily into South Street, but brightened up as he saw Timothy Rapsey on the other side of the way. For a moment he forgot Shelman's advice not to frighten him, and determined that he should share the unpleasant feelings from which he himself was suffering. He crossed the road and accosted the little man.

"This is a bad business about Shelman," he commenced, carefully watching Timothy's face.

"Ah!" said Timothy, looking wise, "perhaps it will teach Mr. Shelman a lesson, Mr. Carter."

"I'm afraid it will teach a good many of us a lesson," answered Carter, lugubriously. "I wouldn't be in your shoes if he were to die, Mr. Rapsey; you set Mr. Bryceson on to him, you know. It's your fault from beginning to end, and I only hope you won't have precious good cause to remember it."

"But," stammered Timothy, neglecting the charge implied in this speech, "Mr. Shelman isn't in any *danger*, is he?"

"*Isn't* he?" said Carter, nodding his head in the emphatic manner which generally accompanies this question when put sarcastically.

"No, but *is* he?" said Timothy, much alarmed, he scarcely knew at what; "you talked about his dying, you know, Mr. Carter—he's not going to *die*, you know."

"*Isn't* he?" said Adolphus, nodding again in the same manner. "I don't know anything about it; all I know is that he's got something I can't pronounce, and that Dr. Mompesson is very doubtful how the case will end, and I wish you joy of your interference, Mr. Rapsey!"

So saying, Adolphus Carter flung himself into his office, leaving Timothy much disturbed, to wend his way toward the market place, shaking his head very solemnly over the mysterious disease that Mr. Carter could not pronounce, and wondering how long it took to kill a patient suffering from it. Mr. Rapsey was so ill at ease that he did not, as usual, join the busy throng in the streets, but retired to his own quarters, where he passed the afternoon reading a large illustrated edition of the "Death of Abel." He met Edward in the evening, and confided to him what he had heard of Shelman's condition.

"It des sarves Mas'r Shelman right," said the negro. "In de fus' place dar warn't de leas' 'scuse for 'um int'ferin' wid our haouse or de people in it. An', in de secon' place, Mas'r Rapsey, a feller 'at's got a head like a bun ain't got no bizness goin' fightin'."

## CHAPTER XXI.

## FLOWING SMOOTHLY.

VERY demure looked the young ladies of the Bompas family on their return to Avonham, a week after the events last narrated. The only outward signs of their London visit were some sweet novelties in Regent Street dresses and Bond Street bonnets, which completely nullified any of the preaching of the good old vicar, on the first Sunday after their arrival, so far as the female portion of his congregation was concerned, and caused many Avonham young ladies to give way to many outbursts of semi-hysterical satire, and many matrons to (hypocritically) thank Heaven that their daughters were not as other men's were. The young ladies themselves were soon the object of feminine congratulations couched in various shades of envy, hatred, and malice, but to them, who could, as we have observed, take their own part in this phase of feminine warfare remarkably well, these gave but little concern. They were perfectly prepared for them, whereas the resident maidens had not counted on the bonnets.

Those who hastened to pour into the ear of the worthy father of our fair friends the thrilling history of the latest battle of Avonham were a little disappointed at finding their news was stale to him. They were met on the threshold of their story by the information that the whole facts of the case were well known to him. Never suspecting the source from which he had obtained his knowledge—for, like most inquisitive people, they were unable to perceive the facts that lay under their very noses—they imagined that Mr. Bompas had been made acquainted with all that had passed in Avonham during his absence from correspondence with his friends and his office. They were also disappointed at getting no opinion from him upon the subject, which promised to outrun the proverbial nine days, and to remain a topic of conversation and wonder for all time, beyond the broad statement that it was a pity for young men to quarrel, and that a personal encounter was at all times a matter for regret and a thing to be deplored by the friends of both parties.

Mr. Bompas oracularly delivered this opinion at the first meeting of the club which he attended after his return from London, and his ideas being warmly supported by Mr. Sennett, and by peace-loving Reuben Matley, who possessed that influence which a uniformly quiet man of parts always has in a country town, the matter, after a good deal of cogitation on the part of those who had made it the leading topic for a week, became unpopular and began to lose interest in Avonham.

During the period of Mr. Bompas's stay in London, the town had been deprived of the presence of three more of its shining lights. Mrs. Stanhope had also been absent, and, since the election, Sir Headingly Cann had been seeking relaxation from his labors. Mr. Boldham, his late rival in the good graces of the constituency, had likewise withdrawn the light of his countenance for awhile, and therefore the interest of the town was considerably whetted when,

within a few days of each other, all these notabilities returned to Avonham. Old inhabitants began to think that life in Marlshire was exciting for aged nerves, and the middle-aged and young natives would have, at this time, repudiated with scorn any insinuation that the place could, with any fairness, be described as dull.

None of the three, however, had returned to gratify the town, for each of them had private affairs to study.

Mrs. Stanhope wished to set her house in order before her second, or her third marriage. She was going also to give another of her receptions to the county magnates, and wished her last independent fixture to be a success. It had been agreed between the various parties interested in the forthcoming marriage, that no announcement of it should be permitted to tickle the ears of the Avonham folk just yet. There was no intention of concealing the ceremony when it did take place; on the contrary, it was determined that all Avonham should be gay that day, and that the affair should be as brilliant as possible.

Sir Headingly Cann had returned for the purpose of overhauling and tautening such portions of the political rigging of the good ship Britannia as were intrusted to his care. He had to meet his constituents, to congratulate them on the fact that the country, which had been in such deadly peril whilst the opposite party had been the Ins, was now saved by the fact that the opposite party were now the Outs. He also felt that, after the late contest, it behooved him to keep a careful watch over the town, so as to be able to hand over the political succession to his nephew, when the time came, unfettered by the unpleasant conditions of a hard-fought election.

Mr. Boldham came back to see how much mischief his nephew had done in his absence, and to endeavor to patch up matters as best he could. His was the least congenial task of the three, and by far the most difficult, for, setting aside the temporary scare about the bank, at which he could afford to laugh, the mismanagement of Shelman occurring just at the time when he was making his bow to the world as a politician was vastly annoying to the ambitious man whom it injured most of all.

Walter Rivers accompanied Sir Headingly, and was on the most excellent terms with himself and the whole world. His suit was prosperous, as it could not fail to be if there were any sense of gratitude in woman, for the young fellow left no stone unturned to please and gratify the mistress of his heart. Anything like youthful sentiment would have been thrown away on a woman of the strength of mind and force of character of Mrs. Stanhope, and Rivers was not so shallow or so short-sighted as to attempt it. But there are other forms of adoration, more suitable for the woman who confesses to having passed thirty-five, and confesses it calmly and without making any bones about it; and Walter Rivers was quite man of the world enough to know them. So it followed that the course of this particular true love commenced smoothly and fairly enough, however it might be destined to end.

Alfred Shelman, to Timothy Rapsey's great relief, did not die of the unpronounceable disease, and a few days after his uncle's arrival was again about in the town. What had passed between him and Mr. Boldham no one knew, but it was surmised that it was not a pleasant meeting for either of them. Those who knew anything

of the affairs of the bank were aware that it was impossible that Shelman's position could be assailed by his uncle, that he held too much influence and had too much capital in the concern to be treated even as an ordinary partner, and it was whispered among a chosen and select few that at the interview the younger man had more than held his own against the elder.

The inhabitants of the Coombes went on much as usual. It was a matter of great wonderment to some of the townspeople as to who was the real owner of the house, for Bryceson seemed as much at home in it as Galbraith had been, and Fred Markham speedily occupied in the place the position previously filled by Bryceson. There appeared to be a good deal of cordial intercourse between the two young men and Mr. Bompas's family, and Mr. Millard seemed to be on excellent terms at the house, which had been exalted into a veritable Aladdin's palace of wonders by the graphic descriptions given of the interior by Mr. Rapsey.

A fragmentary conversation which took place a few days after Mrs. Stanhope's return would perhaps have caused as much wonder if it had been heard, as the display of a roc's egg on the roof of the Coombes would have done. It was a fine morning, and Bryceson and Markham mounted their horses for a visit to Beytesbury, where old Millard had offered them some shooting. Crossing the market-place slowly, they came upon the carriage of Mrs. Stanhope standing, as on another occasion which we have noticed, at the door of Mr. Pollimoy's shop. Mrs. Stanhope had left the carriage and went in the shop, waited on as before by Traveler Pollimoy. Mr. Fred Markham dismounted and entered.

"I want a pocket-book, if you please," said he to Miss Ruth Pollimoy.

Miss Pollimoy went to the back of the shop to get the desired article. Fred stood with his back to the counter for the two minutes which she occupied in her search, and looked round the shop; Mrs. Stanhope, seated sideways at the opposite counter, looked across at him and noticed two things—one that he was an uncommonly handsome young man, the other that he was glancing at her in a manner which she construed to be one of admiration. She was not displeased, she was accustomed to being admired; there was nothing bold in the glance either, and the man was evidently a gentleman.

There was very little difficulty about the selection of the pocket-book; Markham handled two or three, chose one, paid for it, left the shop, and mounted his horse.

"Who is that?" asked the Queen of Avonham, as he rode away.

"I don't know the gentleman's name, madam," said Mr. Pollimoy, "but he is staying with Mr. Bryceson, the gentleman on the other horse, madam, at Mr. Galbraith's house, the one that he purchased of you, madam."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Stanhope, carelessly.

"Yes, madam," said Pollimoy, "he has not been here long, indeed he only arrived on the day"—here he gave a little cough—"of the—the unfortunate encounter between Mr. Shelman and Mr. Bryceson—of which I dare say, madam, you have heard."

"I have heard of it," said Mrs. Stanhope.

“A very deplorable circumstance,” ventured Mr. Pollimoy, quoting Mr. Bompas at the club.

“In one way, certainly,” said Mrs. Stanhope, rising and unclasping her purse to pay the bill, which Mr. Pollimoy had deferentially laid before her, “but as Mr. Shelman never loses an opportunity of making himself excessively disagreeable and obnoxious to every one around him, it is perhaps a very good thing that he has found some one in Avonham with spirit enough to refuse to submit to his arrogance, and ability to give him a punishment which he has thoroughly deserved for a long time past. I am only sorry it was not done before, and sincerely glad that it has been done now.”

Mr. Pollimoy’s astonishment fairly overcame his obsequiousness; he returned Mrs. Stanhope her change with a wild stare, and without a word of thanks, and completely forgot to execute his little run round his counter to the door, and thence to the carriage, as his patron went away. For the first time Mrs. Stanhope left the stationer’s shop unattended, and she left the proprietor staring at his daughter in a feeble and foolish manner, and with thoughts almost too deep for expression in words.

Indeed, it was not until the carriage had rolled away that he spoke.

“Ruth, my dear,” he said, solemnly, “did you hear what Mrs. Stanhope said?”

“Yes, papa.”

“Did you ever hear anything more astonishing in your life, Ruth?”

“Well, yes, papa, I have. I was not so much astonished at it as you seem to be.”

“You are not so much astonished as I seem to be,” repeated Mr. Pollimoy slowly; “and pray why are you not so much astonished as I seem to be? as I *am*, indeed?”

“Perhaps,” said Ruth Pollimoy, laughing—she was a merry girl, with more than the average Avonham sense of humor—“perhaps I could answer your question better if you told me what there is in Mrs. Stanhope’s last speech that causes you so much astonishment.”

“My dear,” said Mr. Pollimoy, “I don’t know what you have thought of it, but it has been my idea, and the idea, too, of a great many people who have more reason to know than I have, that if there was a likely match in Avonham, it was Mrs. Stanhope and Mr. Alfred Shelman. Do you wonder at my feeling astonished?”

“Not under those circumstances, papa,” answered Miss Ruth, “but you were completely wrong about Mrs. Stanhope and Mr. Shelman. I never thought that would come to anything.”

“Didn’t you, my dear?”

“Oh dear no,” said Ruth, laughing and shaking her pretty curls, “and I’m very glad for Mrs. Stanhope’s sake that it isn’t so, for my opinion of Mr. Shelman is precisely the same as hers is.”

“Well, my dear, perhaps you are right. It is not my place to say anything against Mr. Shelman, but I must say he has an unpopular manner with him. Nevertheless I must remark, with respect to Mrs. Stanhope’s words about him, that I have never been more astonished in all my life. No,” he added reflectively, out of the depths of his vast experience of the world, “not in the course of all my travels have I been more surprised.”

Perhaps Mrs. Stanhope had calculated on leaving some such

astonishment behind her, and had reckoned on the fact that her opinion of the man whose name had once been coupled with hers, and whom she had so decisively rejected, would, in gossiping Avonham, be brought to his ears, for the leader of Avonham society was not in the habit of taking her tradesmen into her confidence.

When Bryceson had emerged from the shop, and had mounted, the friends rode on together until they were clear of the town, and out of hearing of any one. Then Bryceson, checking his horse, said—

“Well?”

“Well, I never had the slightest doubt of the matter in my own mind, after Harry described to me the way he had followed on her track, but it’s some satisfaction to have seen her for myself,” said Markham.

“There is no doubt at all, I suppose?” asked Bryceson earnestly, and with emphasis.

“There is not the shadow of a doubt,” answered Markham, “I will swear it is the same woman.”

“Has she altered much?”

“Less than you would fancy; she is statelier and quieter, and on the whole has improved vastly in her appearance. Tom Reynolds knew her a good deal better than any of Reginald’s friends, for Tom was always round at Reggie’s house. Of course you and Harry were at college then; Tom used often to tell me that she would never rest easy unless she had every man in the room dancing attendance and making open love to her. It used to drive Reginald mad, poor fellow! and I expect there were words about it when they were alone, and that led to the other affair. I don’t know whether she meant any harm at first, but I suppose it’s confoundedly hard for a woman like that to pull up when once she commences to take the down-hill road.”

“How do you account,” said Bryceson, when they had ridden a little further, “for a wild bird like that settling down comfortably and contentedly in this sleepy old hencoop of a town?”

“Women are strange animals,” was the only solution to the problem that Fred Markham could find.

“I shall be glad to see Harry back,” said Bryceson, “for if anything should take place in his absence that made it necessary for matters to be brought to a head, I should find myself in the unpleasant position of setting the town on fire for the second time.”

“Yes, Avonham will have something to talk about if there is any exposure; you’ll make an heroic figure jumping up in church and forbidding the banns, if Harry’s surmise is correct and the dear creature thinks of venturing her neck in the matrimonial noose for the third time. Well, I’ll stand by you, old boy, and, mind you, we hold a very strong hand in the game.”

“And that, and the knowledge that I’m serving Harry and Reginald, are my only consolations, I assure you.”

With that the conversation dropped, and the two friends were soon busily engaged discussing the capital lunch which Mrs. Millard set before the young men, prior to their making havoc among her husband’s partridges.

Mr. Pollimoy was not chary of imparting the news of Mrs. Stanhope’s comments on the late affray to his cronies; and her opinion

was not long in reaching Mr. Alfred Shelman's ears. The lines of this young man were not, just now, cast in pleasant places. Balked of obtaining the widow's hand, made the object of her open satire and scorn, thrashed like a dog in the open market-place, terrified by the probability of being made an accessory to the riot in a court of justice, and conscious that, without possessing the power of retaliation, he was the theme of all the idle chatter of the town, it is certain that for whomsoever the current of life was flowing smoothly, it was the reverse of placid for him.

To Walter Rivers, on the other hand, everything seemed to be going well for him. A handsome and wealthy bride, a parliamentary career, which he felt would be an honorable one, riches and influence, and possibly a title, were all at his feet. He regarded both his past and his future with complacency, regretting little in the former, fearing nothing in the latter; and yet both he and his affianced wife, whilst dreaming that they were simply floating down a limpid stream, that led with easy gliding to happiness and fame, were being imperceptibly swept along on a treacherous river that had hidden rocks and deadly depths, and led from peaceful scenes and tranquil places to the roaring and destroying ocean, very much as Avon flows.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### UNDER THE KINDLY MOON.

THE storm had blown itself out. There were no long scudding clouds driving across the disk of the peaceful moon, and hiding her cheery, inquisitive, mischief-seeing face. She had come up in all her glory and thrown a shining streak across the broad bosom of the long-waved Atlantic, like a baldrick of gold on the breast-plate of Thor; the night was beautiful with stars, and the wind was singing softly its wondrous song of the sea.

The good ship "Scotia" plowed her swift way over the waves with flogging paddles and straining sails. Her course for an hour had led her right along the golden moon-track, and, lured by the tales of the soft beauty of the night, her passengers, storm-rolled and wind-whipped for three days, were leaving cabin, saloon, and berth, to bask in the glorious light that brightened all the deck, save where it threw dark shadow of mast, or spar, or sail. In couples, in knots, and in rings, they grouped themselves, and some with song or merry tale, and some with graver talk, passed the hour before turning in.

Among the quieter passengers, who talked unheedful of the gayety and melody of the larger groups, were two with whom we have especially to deal.

They sat on deck-chairs at a part of the vessel not favored by the more jovial companies, Galbraith smoking, and both for a long time silent. Yet they were not sad. In the heart of one of them was bounding a wild joy and sense of gratified desire and fulfilled hope that made it surely one of the lightest in the ship, and the other was happy in recovered freedom, in regained manhood, in emancipated mind and unrestrained limbs. But silence is the luxury of joy, and their very happiness kept them mute.

Harry Galbraith was bearing back to England, to light, to life, the brother whom he had mourned as dead.

Reginald Wilding was leaving behind him the horrid gloom of insanity, the lonely room, the unsympathetic faces of his attendants, the despair of his lucid moments, the nameless horrors of a brain uncurbed by reason; leaving them behind him as we leave behind us a bad dream, at the very unreality of which we shudder when we wake. Every turn of the mighty engines bore one further away from all that was most dreadful in his life, and carried the other nearer and nearer to love, to friends, to home.

Reginald Wilding was the first to break the silence.

"I think I have found my sea legs at last, Harry," he said; "I shall get used to it, and be as good a sailor as ever; will you give me one of your cigars? I can venture on one safely now."

Galbraith handed him his case, and the half-brothers sat smoking and talking.

"What a glorious night!" said Reginald Wilding, and added in a lower tone, "and how sweet it is to be free. I never thought I should see the Atlantic again. I have been buried for twelve years."

"Forget them," said Galbraith, laying his hand on that of his brother; "there is a new life opening out to you now, Reggie; you must think no more of the old one; please God, that will never return, the old squire says."

"Tell me about Adelaide," said Reginald; "you see, I am using her Christian name already."

Galbraith laughed.

"I haven't much knack of description, old fellow," he said, "it will not be so very long before you see her for yourself. She is tall and fair, and has deep earnest blue eyes and a sweet face that I know you will like. She and her sisters are very much alike. I little thought, when I went down to the quiet little town I am living in, that I was going there to fall in love and find a wife in it."

"Tell me about *her*," said Reginald, after a pause.

"Can you bear to hear much about her, dear old fellow?" answered Galbraith. "I should never forgive myself if I excited you again. And I doubt whether I can bring myself to speak very calmly of her. When I think what her crime led to, and the long years that we have both suffered, and the way in which twelve years of your life have been, as it were, blotted out, do you wonder at it?"

"No; but I can hear about her quite calmly," said Reginald, quietly. "Ever since I came to myself and knew the old squire again, and heard from him of you, and woke more and more every day to my new life, I have been preparing myself to hear of her. At first I thought she might be dead, and I reasoned with myself whether that would be well for me or ill; then I pictured her as living somewhere where I should never hear of her or see her; at other times I fancied that we might meet by chance, and then I scarcely dared to think of what might happen. When I had shaped all these things out in my mind in fifty different ways, I asked the old squire about her just before he started for Europe. He told me that he should see you there; told me that you considered me dead, and put new life in me by telling me that he should tell you of me, and that in due time you would come to me. I suppose that I was not quite

right in his eyes just then. It needed the great joy of hearing of you and looking forward to seeing you to complete my cure. He said nothing of her. It was from you, dear old fellow, that I heard of the woman who wrecked my happiness and spoiled my life. How did you trace her to the quiet English town which you have described to me?"

"Ah, Reggie," said Galbraith, "that's a long story; it took me some years on and off and here and there. I got the first clew by accident years and years after I believed you dead. Bit by bit and time after time I got scraps of information, but it was not until I had left America, and after father's death, that I could settle down to anything like systematic and determined investigation. Then I went backward over the whole ground. The scraps I had heard before all related to her life in the States; and when I had followed up that trail—with immense difficulty, of course, owing to the lapse of years and the space I had to cover—it suddenly branched off at a tangent and landed her in England."

The speaker paused and smoked in silence for a minute.

"When I again struck the trail," he went on, "I found to my great astonishment the evidences, not only of a change of scene, which was puzzling enough, but of a sudden and complete alteration of her mode of life. As you knew the worst of her years ago, and before your illness, my poor fellow, you may guess, of course, that her life had been, for years after your supposed death from that duel, what it would be charitable to characterize as a Bohemian one. I am really using a mild conventional word to describe the checkered existence she led for some three or four years after that event."

"Ay, ay, my dear brother, I can thoroughly understand what you imply by the word."

"From the moment of her landing in the old country," Galbraith went on, "there was a complete change of front in the woman. She had thrown off the scoundrel with whom she went away."

"What became of that hound?" said Reginald, in a low voice. "I should like to know."

"It was his name that gave me the first clew," said Galbraith.

"Have you ever met him?" said Reginald, leaning forward and laying his hand on his brother's arm.

"I have," said Galbraith. "It was at Chagres, where Ralph Derring and I were knocking about one time. He was down with Chagres fever at an hotel there, and the landlord, little thinking how much I was interested in the matter, told us his story. She had left him suddenly, much as—" he stopped.

"As she did me, you would say, Harry," said Reginald Wilding, quietly; "go on, my dear old boy—I have told you that I can hear quite calmly anything you have to tell me about her. Say everything that has to be said; I assure you you will not excite or injure me."

"Well, she left him, as she had left you," said Galbraith; "and the disappointment, and an attempt to swamp it out with some fine new Santa Cruz rum, had laid him on his back with Chagres fever, as I said."

"Did he recover?"

"Of the fever?"

"Yes."

"Oh, yes, he got well of the *fever*," said Galbraith, knocking the ash off the end of his cigar.

"Was anything else ailing him then?" asked Reginald.

"Yes, my dear fellow," said Galbraith, a little sternly, and with the clinching of the right hand which was the usual sign of his being under any strong feeling, "there was. I waited until he was quite well, got his tale out of him to confirm what the hotel-keeper had told me, and when I was thoroughly certain of my man, I told him one fine morning who and what I was."

"There was a fight, of course," said Reginald.

"There was a fight, of course," echoed his brother, "and it was a perfectly square one. I left him at Chagres as I thought he had left you three years before at Baton Rouge—and he's there now."

Again there was a period of silent smoking.

"The history of that event has led us into a little digression from the main subject," said Galbraith, after awhile. "I was saying that from the time she landed in England a complete change came over her life."

"How?"

"From a type of the United States female Bohemian she became almost at once, so far as I can trace, an embodiment of all the British female virtues. I have schemed in twenty different ways to get at the people with whom she took up on her arrival in England. After a great deal of trouble I succeeded. It was difficult, of course, to get the subject dragged into conversation without betraying the deep interest I had in the matter, but I managed it somehow. She began to put her shoulder to the wheel and earn her living quietly and respectably as soon as she touched English soil. She was a governess and companion in a very good family, when she attracted the notice of a wealthy merchant, who was a native of the town where I am now living, and he married her."

"That man was Stanhope, I suppose?" said Reginald Wilding.

"Under what name did she marry?"

"Under her proper name, Laura Constance Wilding; under *your* name, that is."

"That does not look as though Walter Bryceson's theory of her having obtained a divorce were correct."

"No, it does not."

"A marriage under a wrong name would be invalid in England, would it not?"

"Undoubtedly, but this was not her wrong name. She never married the vagabond with whom she ran away, and, divorced or not divorced, Wilding was her proper name. So far she is on the right side."

"And she lives now at this quiet little town, Avonham, where you yourself are?" asked Reginald.

"Yes; her husband was a native of the town, which is a pretty little place enough, with just enough fun going on at election time to make existence endurable to a forty-niner."

"And living, you say, as becomes her?"

"Living in all good report and conversation. Her husband died some four years ago, and she has, as yet, made no change in her

position. She is the leader of what is called fashion in those parts, and entertains bishops. She is vastly rich, and I bought the house I live in from her. I have an idea in my head that there is an understanding between her and a young fellow who lives there, and who is the nephew of the member of parliament for the town, and, if report speaks truly, likely to succeed him in his seat. I say that I have an idea of this, and it is an idea only, for I have no facts to go upon, but I have left behind me instructions that will put an effectual stop to that project if my notion should prove correct. That then is the way in which the whole matter stands at present, failing one thing."

"And that is?"

"That we do not know, and I have, as yet, been entirely unable to discover whether she, after leaving you, obtained a divorce from you or not."

"Have we any means of ascertaining that?" asked Reginald.

"I propose to find it out from herself and her own lips. That is to say, I shall, or rather—forgive me, old fellow—we will together throw the *onus* of proof on her, and if she claims to have obtained a divorce we will make her prove her statement by documentary evidence from the court."

"And suppose," said Reginald Wilding, "that she has never been divorced in the States?"

"Then," said Galbraith, slowly and deliberately, "in that case she is your wife still, and her future is in your hands."

Reginald rose from his seat and stood leaning against the bulwark, and watching the flashing sea; after awhile he said—

"Thank you, my dear Harry, for telling me all that you have to-night. It is very likely, now that I know all, that I shall not ask you any more about it, and I must think over what I have heard. It won't upset me, brother," he added, with a smile, "and it has done me good to have heard all to-night."

"Let us go into the saloon then, if you have finished your cigar," said Harry. And they left the deck.

The passengers, the ladies especially, took a great interest in the close association of these two young men. They were not aware of the relationship existing between them, and considered them merely as friends. It was very touching, said the sentimental young ladies, to see how the younger of the two looked after the elder, who was only just recovering from a long and painful illness. And their interest was vastly increased by the fact that the self-elected committee of management, which on every ocean-going ship regulates the morals and the relaxations of the passengers had voted that the restored invalid was a "d'cid'ly hahnsum mahn," and that the younger was "a 'cute hand at the ship's games, and not a kad-lookin' fellah."

Reginald Wilding was taller and darker than his half-brother, and his pale, classical, and delicately-cut face contrasted with the bronzed countenance and the firm-set features of the other. In the lineaments of the elder there was the beauty of form which is pleasing to the eye, but a judge of character would have had no hesitation in choosing which of the two would better bear the buffets of the world.

So the "Scotia" plowed merrily and steadily across the deep, bearing her load of hopes and fears and sorrows and joys, and in quiet Marlshire the leader of Avonham's great ones smiled, and talked and walked among them like a queen, never dreaming that far away a mighty vessel was beating the waves, and mocking the winds, and bringing Nemesis nearer and nearer to her with every revolution of her paddle-wheels.

For the patient, unwearying search of the injured brother had hunted her down. She had sat unsuspectingly in Mr. Pollimoy's shop while the keen gaze of the stranger had rent the veil from her secret, and before long the grace of her presence, the lavish hospitality of her house, the devotion of her admirers, and the gratitude for her bounty, would all be unavailing in shielding from the eyes of the world the faithless wife, the degraded woman.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE HARVESTING OF THE WHIRLWIND.

BEFORE the "Scotia" had put out from port freighted with so many important matters, a well-known face had disappeared from its accustomed place in Avonham.

When Mr. Adolphus Carter had left the room after his memorable interview with Bryceson and Markham, the former had remarked that he would come an awtul cropper over the business. The picturesquely worded prophecy had come true not very long after Mr. Bompas's return from his visit to London.

When that worthy man on the night of the riot had pleaded with Galbraith on behalf of his captive, it was well understood that regard for the father of the culprit had inspired his request for the forbearance of those who had him in their power. When the Reverend Mr. Carter had driven over with Mr. Millard and had interviewed Galbraith on behalf of his graceless son, the freedom with which the latter had forgiven the offense committed against him had prevented Mr. Bompas from taking any action with respect to his clerk beyond the bestowal on him of a carefully studied and elegantly rounded oration of the Georgian Era order, couched in the most swelling of periods and pregnant with ponderous advice. Having done this, and being convinced that the young man's escapade was not a matter of public notoriety, and being, moreover, willing to give him a chance of recuperating his loss of character, Mr. Bompas had allowed him to retain his position in his office, and had departed for London, trusting that the whole matter would only be remembered, as time went on, by Mr. Adolphus Carter himself, and that no one who was not actually in the secret of the night attack and the capture would be allowed to become acquainted with any of its details.

In the settlement of this question so generous had been the conduct of Galbraith, moved by Mr. Bompas's eloquent appeal and touched by the evident distress shown by the father, who came over to intercede for his son, that his frank and free forgiveness, delivered in the brusque but not unkindly manner which was the

peculiarity of his address to strangers, prevented any very searching inquiries being put to the rioter as to the influences which had been at work to induce him to act in so outrageous a manner, and he escaped being cross-examined to any great extent from the fact that when Galbraith made an end of the matter by pardoning him, the two old friends who were concerned in bringing that result about had refrained from seeking for motives, and had been more industrious in endeavoring to discover excuses for his conduct.

Mr. Bompas urged that probably the "most unfortunate occurrence," in which terms he never ceased to describe the election, and the concomitant surroundings, had exercised a deleterious influence on a youth, hitherto faultless in moral conduct, and estimable in the discharge of the ordinary duties of his avocation in life.

Mr. Millard said that he must have been drunk.

So Adolphus Carter, as we have already seen, escaped for that time.

But the latter affair was more serious.

In placing his trust on Shelman, and in relying upon his influence to screen him from the terrifying threats of Timothy Rapsey, Adolphus had leaned upon a rotten reed. No man in Avonham was less likely to protect a man at his own expense than Alfred Shelman. When Carter had brought him the news of Rapsey's vague threats, he had entered upon the matter of aggression with a sole view to the screening of his own name and the protection of his own interests. When the joint scheme of attack had failed, and Carter's ungenerous ally found that a vigorous war was being carried on against his own territory, he was the first to turn savagely on his humbler and weaker associate, and to visit on him his own sins and their punishment.

The first time that Mr. Bompas and Shelman met, the natural delicacy of the pompous old gentleman precluded his touching upon a subject which, he was aware, would necessarily give pain to the other.

But Shelman was not so reticent. In a violent manner and with many expletives he assailed Adolphus Carter, attributing the whole occurrence directly to his jealousy and wounded dignity. After turning the tables on his quondam ally, he proceeded to abuse Biyceson in no measured terms. At this Mr. Bompas, who was as free from double-dealing as the other was accomplished at it, interfered.

"Mr. Shelman," he said, "I can listen to no language derogatory of a gentleman who is frequently my guest, who is frequently my host, whom I am glad to welcome into my house, and whose house I am glad to visit. If there be any—ah—irritation remaining in your mind—and to have suffered castigation in public may, perhaps, justify you in—ah—allowing it to—ah—RANKLE, as I may say, in your injured breast—let me rather act as the—ah—pacificator and mediator between two persons for whom, believe me, I have the sincerest regard, than become the depository of any violent expressions which one person may think fit, I think, unadvisedly, to—ah—employ toward the other."

"I will answer for it," said Shelman, roughly—for it was a curious trait of this young man that there was no interval of time appre-

ciable between his attempts to conciliate and his attempts to bully—  
 “I will answer for it that when you are either Mr. Bryceson’s host or guest you have to listen to some pretty language about me.”

“I must deprecate any such insinuation,” said Mr. Bompas, turning a little red; “if Mr. Bryceson ventured, in my presence, to employ toward you, in your absence, the language which you have applied toward him in *his* absence, I should administer the same—ah—reprimand to him as I have just administered to you.”

“You talk pretty glibly about reprimanding,” said Shelman, his color also rising. “Pray, who are you that you take such a liberty?”

“I am one,” said Mr. Bompas, very firmly, and with a dignity that the stout-hearted old boy’s handsome form and kindling face set off very well, “who will never—ah—hesitate to reprove any man, no matter what his position, who dares to employ language in my hearing concerning any friend of mine, which is not only indecently vituperative, but utterly unjustifiable and positively untrue.”

This was possibly the heaviest rhetorical shot that Mr. Bompas had ever fired in his life, and its effect was immediately apparent on the person against whom it had been discharged.

“I think,” said he, after a minute’s silence, “it is a very hard thing that I, a native and a resident of this place, can get no sympathy over this affair from one of the most prominent citizens of the town, and yet he is ready to take by the hand a man who hasn’t been here any appreciable time, who drops from the clouds, who is not even living in his own house, and who may be, for all he knows an adventurer.”

“Mr. Shelman,” said Mr. Bompas, “I have made no comment on your encounter with Mr. Bryceson, beyond the very natural one that it was a most unfortunate and regrettable circumstance, but since you accuse me of—ah—undue partisanship, I feel constrained to tell you that, however much I deplore the method in which Mr. Bryceson—ah—acted, whatever happened was due entirely to your own—ah—imprudence, to call it by no harsher term, and that no peaceable citizen can sympathize with you on the return that you met for your lawless attack on Mr. Galbraith’s house and on other houses in the town.”

Mr. Shelman was puzzled how to answer this.

“I am distressed beyond measure that that unhappy boy”—so Mr. Bompas designated Adolphus Carter—“had a share in the work, for, in face of recent events, it will be necessary for me to acquaint his father, who is an old friend of mine, that a removal of his son will be desirable.”

This was one stumbling-block out of Alfred Shelman’s way, and he was glad to hear it.”

“Well, Mr. Bompas,” he said, “I am sorry I get no more sympathy from you.”

“I regret very much,” said Mr. Bompas, “that I have none to extend to you.”

“You will find,” pursued Shelman, “that you are excessively mistaken in Mr. Bryceson’s character.”

“I trust not,” said Mr. Bompas.

"You may be sure of one thing, I can see," said Shelman, who thought he saw a chance of wounding Mr. Bompas in his dignity, "that Mr. Bryceson will not be long a visitor at your house and your host in the house of that other precious friend of his, before he will be asking you for one of your daughters. I should extremely like to see in what light you will look upon the fellow then!"

"What you suggest," said Mr. Bompas with a smile, "is not—ah—beyond the bounds of probability, and since you are curious on the subject, I will—though I—ah—recognize no right that you have to make the inquiry—I will inform you how, in that case, I shall answer Mr. Bryceson. I shall—ah—thank him for the honor he is doing my family and my house, and shall—accede to his request with most especial gratification. I wish you a very good-morning, Mr. Shelman."

And Mr. Bompas, favoring the discomfited young man with a stiff bow, left him to his thoughts.

Let us hope they were pleasant ones.

A few days after this conversation Mrs. Stanhope issued her invitations for her last garden-party of the season, and did *not* include Alfred Shelman's name in her list of expected guests.

"Are you going to Mrs. Stanhope's *fête*?" his uncle, Mr. Boldham, asked him the day before that event.

"No," said he rather surlily, and then, thinking it best to assume a careless, if not a don't-care air, he added, "I'm not in the fair lady's good graces just now, and she hasn't done me the honor to invite me. I must endeavor to bear up against the disappointment as well as I can."

This conversation was taking place in the bank parlor, where they were seated alone.

Mr. Boldham sat tapping his blotting-pad with an ivory letter-opener for a minute or two after receiving this unexpected answer to his question.

Presently he broke silence.

"Why don't you take a couple or three months' run abroad somewhere?" he asked.

Shelman looked up sharply from the paper on which he was writing.

"Take a couple or three months' run abroad somewhere, did you say?" said he.

"Yes," replied his uncle, "why don't you do it?"

"Why on earth do you want me to go abroad at this time of the year?" asked Shelman.

His uncle coughed dryly.

"I fancy," he said, "that you would find it greatly to your own interest to do so."

"What do you mean?" he said, laying down his pen and staring at his uncle.

"I think that, if I were you, I should get away from the town for a little time and let things blow over," said Boldham.

"Do you?"

"Yes," said his uncle, "I do. You look at the matter in the right light, Alfred, and you will see that my advice is good."

"I shall be glad," said Shelman, after a pause, "if you can show me how."

“I think,” said Mr. Boldham, “that you must find things in Avonham rather unpleasant just now.”

“They are not very cheerful, I admit,” answered Shelman, “but I will go my own way about them.”

“Well,” said Mr. Boldham, “I think, if you do, you will be very foolish.”

“Pray,” said Shelman, with a frown, “will you show me why you think so?”

“Everything that you have touched or attempted during the last few months,” said his uncle, rising and planting himself on the hearth-rug in the attitude usual with him when addressing any of the bank clients, “has been a failure.”

“Aren’t you speaking a little without book there, sir?” interrupted Shelman.

“Not in the least,” said Boldham. “I may be generalizing things a little too much, that is all.”

“I fancy you are,” muttered the other.

“You were speaking early in the year of taking the Coombes,—why did you not do that?”

“You know very well why I did not,” hotly returned Shelman, who saw that he was going to be attacked from a carefully prepared catalogue, and resented the notion; “would you make me responsible for a woman’s caprices?”

“Yes,” answered Mr. Boldham emphatically, “when you fail to turn those caprices to your own advantage.”

“Go on,” said Shelman, “let me hear what more you have to advance, uncle.”

“Failure number one,” said Mr. Boldham imperturbably. “You failed, I believe, in much the same manner over some land which you wished to purchase as an adjunct to your new house.”

“From the same foolishness of a frivolous and vacillating woman, be it remembered,” said Shelman.

“Failure number two,” said Mr. Boldham. “Those two are, however, minor matters; number three is of a more important character.”

“Pray what is that?” said Shelman, and there was a flush in his cheek as he said it.

“Alfred,” said Mr. Boldham, “if I hadn’t known you for a good many years as a good man of business and a clever hand at finance, I should have put you down over this particular failure as a born fool.”

Alfred replied neither to the praise nor the blame, but shifted uneasily in his arm-chair.

“There has been scarcely a week,” pursued his uncle, “from the beginning of this year, in which I have not expected you to come to me—as a matter of courtesy only, of course, for you are independent of me—and announce your engagement to Mrs. Stanhope. If I polled Avonham I could bring fifty men, and goodness only knows how many women, who have always had the same idea in their heads. Why, in the name of Fate, haven’t you asked that woman to be your wife long ago?”

Shelman looked up with a short hard laugh, not very pleasant to hear.

"I have not been quite so neglectful as you imagine," he said.  
 "I have asked her."

"And she refused you?"

"Most emphatically."

"Humph!" said Mr. Boldham reflectively, "I did not know *that*. Failure number three."

"Which," said Shelman, "if you consider properly, will account for failures number one and two."

"That is true," replied Boldham. "Well, I should have thought, Altered, that you had been a match for that dandified young puppy, Mr. Walter Rivers, in anything, even with the ladies."

"Walter Rivers!" cried Shelman; "why, what has he to do with Mrs. Stanhope's rejection of me?"

"Probably everything," answered Mr. Boldham, with irritating calmness, "since he is going to marry her."

Shelman sprung to his feet with a great oath. "It can't be true!" he cried excitedly, "who told you?"

"Sit down," said his uncle petulantly, "and do not proclaim your feelings to all the clerks in the office; it is perfectly true. I repeat, how came you to let him walk off with this prize from under your very nose?"

"How did you learn that Walter Rivers was going to marry her?" asked Shelman, in a low tone.

"From Sir Headingly Cann."

"He told you it as an assuredly settled fact?"

"Certainly; he spoke of it to me as partly a matter of business. We are friendly enough: I am not so foolish as to have quarreled with Sir Headingly because he beat me in the election, or rather because I failed to beat him; no, our opposition to each other ceased at the declaration of the result of the poll, and our relations have been uninterruptedly friendly ever since. How have you acted? You made the election a stick to beat a particular dog with and the dog has bitten you. Failure number four. Next, to wind everything up, you threaten a man with an action you dare not sustain; you lose a bank customer in the most ridiculous way that has ever been brought to my notice since I have been a banker, and finally you receive, in the face of all Avonham, a most tremendous thrashing through meddling in a matter that should have been beneath a man of your position, and attacking a man who from Dr. Mompesson's account must be possessed of the skill and strength of a prize fighter. Failures five, six, and seven, and if you do not consider that your best plan will be to try change of air for awhile—I do."

So saying, Mr. Boldham, not waiting for his nephew's reply, took his hat and left the room and the bank, leaving Shelman sitting at his table, consumed with the same rage that he had felt at his rejection. This time his passion was subdued a little by fear. He had chafed under his uncle's methodical enumeration of his failures, but he could not help feeling that luck had been against him, and that he had brought his present position on himself. But the sense of consecutive defeats, and the remembrance of his personal chastisements, were nothing in comparison with the acute mental pain which he felt as he thought of who had been his successful rival in the widow's affection. He had almost made up his mind to take his uncle's

advice, and for a time at least absent himself from Avonham; had his temper been less obstinate he might have done so, and saved himself a worse fate than any that had yet overtaken him, but his stubborn heart refused.

“I’ll wait and see the end of it,” he said; “there is many a slip between cup and lip, and if I can yet put a spoke in Master Walter Rivers’ wheel, he may depend on my doing it.”

Thus he mused, and heedless of the fact of his recent defeats, planned yet again how he might pay off a fancied injury; while Adolphus Carter, his catspaw, and the man on whom he had basely turned, having been released from any further attendance at Mr. Bompas’s office, was by no means pleased with his holiday, but sat moodily alone, or walked by himself over his father’s estate, gun in hand, but indifferent to his sport, and scheming only how to satisfy his revenge on Alfred Shelman, who had brought him into all this trouble; and getting every day more and more incensed against his enemy and less and less master of himself.

It is a dangerous thing when a man goes about internally craving vengeance on another man, and carrying a gun in his hand.

The gun talks to him.

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A BOMBSHELL IN MR. BOMPAS’S PEW.

WALTER BRYCESON and Fred Markham, having given a good account of a vast number of Mr. Millard’s birds; having also accepted one or two invitations from neighboring landowners, having the same or a similar end in view; and having basked for a month in the smiles of their lady-loves, declared one day to each other that this sort of thing was all very well, you know, but really they must, just for a week or two, turn their attention for a little while to their private affairs. Having said which, they went on in their usual fashion for a week, reviving the subject at breakfast-time regularly every morning, and blowing it away altogether with the smoke of their first pipes. At the expiration of this period, having been rather more solemn than usual one morning over the matter, they broached the subject at the Bompas mansion that evening at supper, which meal very often found them at the well-filled board of that hospitable house.

Bryceson’s plea of having to set in order his house and domestic affairs in Essex was confided to Miss Louisa privately, and doubtless met with her approval; Markham’s determination to look after his business concerns and get them into proper shape in anticipation of a certain event was cordially approved both by Miss Lucy and her revered progenitor, with whom the possession of business-like habits formed a virtue.

Adelaide laughed at her sisters and their swains, and threw out hints concerning the amusements and attractions of London, which proved that the young lady had used both her eyes and ears to the best advantage during her recent residence there.

Howbeit, Bryceson and Markham departed for awhile from

Avonham, leaving their lady-loves in the parent nest, and the faithful Edward in charge of the Coombes.

The final adieus were paid the evening before their departure, when Mr. Bompas gathered some of his friends to his house—"not, I assure you, to make merry because you are leaving us for a time," he told the friends; a merry old-fashioned country-town meeting, with substantial viands, a hearty welcome, a gay company, and a carpet dance. Such gatherings were not at all infrequent in Avonham during the winter, and although Mr. Bompas and his womenkind issued their invitations for an evening party rather early in the season, so that the recipients wondered, and blamed the Bompases for anticipating the winter, the unanimous acceptance of the invitations proved how the Avonham folk hailed the commencement of the homely festivities with which they enlivened that season.

The behavior of the young ladies who, for the first time, found themselves within hail of our two lively friends Bryceson and Markham, was amusing in the extreme to the Misses Bompas, who had, as we have seen, keen eyes for the idiosyncrasies of the young females of their circle, and no less so to the young men themselves. *Carte blanche* for the evening having been accorded them by Miss Louisa and Miss Lucy, they took advantage of it to the fullest extent. Two such masters of the art of dancing had not been met before in these festive gatherings, and the prettiest girls and the best partners were at their service the whole of the evening; indeed, Fred remarked to his friend, as they wiped their heated foreheads and cooled their thirsty throats in one of the intervals between the dances, it was rather a good thing they *were* going away for a bit, for matters otherwise might become somewhat complicated. At any rate, he added, however safe they were with the girls, it was pretty certain they were not going to increase the number of their male friends in Avonham, either by their Terpsichorean feats or the charms of their conversation to the other sex.

"You have been flirting disgracefully all the evening," said Adelaide, as she came up to where they were standing; "Lucy and Lou were very foolish to have sanctioned such a graceless proceeding."

"It's not unmingled pleasure, Adelaide," said Bryceson—they used one another's Christian names in the two houses now—"that has to come in the next dance, which you have promised me."

"You shall do penance for your sins, sir," said Adelaide, "and sit it out with me."

"My dear Adelaide, I wish all my sins required no heavier penance," answered Bryceson.

"You won't mind it though, will you?" said Adelaide, "for really I want to speak to you seriously."

He gave her his arm, and they were soon seated in one of the comfortable window-embrasures which are common in the good old-fashioned country houses such as was Mr. Bompas's.

"You know," said she, when the next dance was proceeding, and they were secure from listeners, "that when Harry went away he told me the matter that originally brought him to Avonham. Did you?"

“Oh, yes; he told me that on our way down to Liverpool.”

“Then of course you know that he told me to inform you, in case of anything happening here, such as an announcement of her approaching marriage. I don't know what put into his head that she was going to be married at all, but he had the idea and seemed to cling strongly to it.”

“Harry's ideas,” said Bryceson, “have a habit of turning out rather more true than other people's facts; he has confided his opinion to me, and I own that he has good reason for it.”

“Do you know what it was that made him think she was going to marry Walter Rivers?”

“Seeing them together one day at Avonham Road railway station. We had ridden over together—it was whilst you were in London; Sir Headingly Cann was there. Young Rivers, whom I must say I like, in spite of an effeminate manner which he assumes, and which I fancy he will grow out of—introduced us both to the lady. It was on our way back that Harry told me of the opinion he held, which was that there was something fatherly in the old man's air, and that there was matrimony in the wind.”

“It never struck either of you, I suppose,” said Adelaide laughing, “that it might be Sir Headingly Cann who was to be the lucky man?”

“Certainly not, Adelaide,” said Bryceson, looking at her in great surprise; “of the two ideas yours is by far the more astonishing, and I must say I think it the more unlikely.”

“Nothing is so likely to happen as the improbable,” said Adelaide; “I was taught that at school.”

“H'm?” said Bryceson; “do you know, Adelaide, I think your ‘young idea’ is ‘shooting’ beyond the mark in this case. What has put this new notion into your wise head?”

“The common failing of our sex, Walter—that is, according to you superior creatures—curiosity.”

“Most charming of feminine attributes—for women, that is—but how did curiosity put it there?”

“Yesterday morning, you and Fred—look at him hauling Mrs. Follwell round the room—*doesn't* he look happy?”

Fred, with a seventeen-stone partner, whose ideas of dancing were coeval with Mr. Bompas's ideas of oratorical examples, looked anything but blissful.

“Fred looks like a tug hauling a liner out into the Mersey,” said Bryceson; “but go on with your tale.”

“Curiosity, apparently, is not confined to one sex; well then, yesterday, while you and Fred were cooped up here with Lou and Lucy, I took advantage of a fine day and rode out with papa.”

“Harry not being here,” said Bryceson, leaning back and surveying the ceiling; “just so.”

“As you say,” said Adelaide, with a merry laugh and a pretty little blush; “my future lord and master not being here, and I being anxious to enjoy the sweets of freedom for a brief space, I had Brunetta saddled, and rode out with papa, who had to go to Dunstalne on business. On the way we met Sir Headingly Cann, riding, with a groom following him. He pulled up when he saw us, and turned to ride with us, saying that he wanted to speak to papa.

Now if you will consider the matter for a moment you will perceive that there were only two courses open to me to choose from."

"Spare me the pain of consideration, Adelaide; what were the two courses?"

"Cannot you see? Either to ride side by side with papa and Sir Headingly, or to fall back and jog along in the rear with Sir Headingly's groom. Have you any idea which I adopted?"

"I fancy I could give a guess that would be tolerably near the mark," answered Bryceson.

"No doubt," said Adelaide; "a sense of my own dignity, of which I have a great deal more than you imagine, Master Walter, combined with my share of the most charming of feminine attributes, the possession of which I confessed just now, kept me in the front rank of the cavalcade."

"So that you heard the conversation that passed between Sir Headingly and your father?"

"Yes, and as of course they both saw me and knew that I could hear, and as, moreover, there did not seem to be any desire on Sir Headingly's part to make a secret of the matter, there was no great harm in my doing so, I hope. I often transact small matters of business for papa."

"What was the nature of the conversation you overheard in your business capacity?"

"This, Walter," said Adelaide; "now, let us talk seriously for a little while; papa is to survey some property for Sir Headingly, which property is to be settled on Mrs. Stanhope on their marriage. I heard papa say that it would be a most suitable and proper arrangement, considering the respective ages of the parties; I heard him congratulate him upon the matter, and then Sir Headingly turned to me and said that he did not want the matter spoken of, as neither he nor Mrs. Stanhope cared to have the good people of Avonham talking over their affairs; he added that in good time the arrangement would be announced, and that until that time he relied on my keeping the secret. Walter Rivers' name was never mentioned once during the conversation."

Bryceson pondered a minute before replying—

"Well, Adelaide, your surmise seems not unlikely to be a correct one; it may be the old man and not the young one who is destined for the sacrifice; so far as we are concerned we are left in the same position. Until there is some public announcement of her marrying some one we can scarcely act. The one thing I was afraid of was that a mine might be sprung upon us all by a marriage taking place away from here, and without our knowledge; since the matter has been mentioned to your father, there seems now no danger of that, and I think we will leave things as they are. Of course, if any definite intelligence reaches you, you know what to do—acquaint me at once."

"I will; ah! the dance is over; we shall have to stop now for fear of being overheard."

"Tell me one thing. Have you ever mentioned anything to your sisters?"

"Not a word; they are quite in the dark about it; it is the only secret we have ever had from one another."

They spoke no more of that secret, for Adelaide's hand was claimed by the fortunate youth who had engaged it, and Bryceson himself was obliged to go and look after his own partner for that dance.

The next morning the two friends left Avonham, being driven over to Avonham Road by Mr. Christopher Raraty, who had found the inhabitants of the Coombes among the best of his customers during their stay.

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As was natural in a town so respectable and decorous as Avonham, Sunday was one of the great institutions of the place. If old Mas'r Killett allowed his memory to stray as far backward on the path of life as it could go, it is likely that he would find that the most vivid of all his earliest recollections were the facts that Saturday night was "tub night," and that he wore his best clothes on the following day. Since his early days indeed there had been one great change; when he was young all flocked to the parish church, and such dissenters as existed in those times were a feeble folk who preached in holes and corners, and were greatly despised and hated, except where they were pitied as lunatics. Now, though St. Hildegarde's was the noblest, it was not the only place of worship in Avonham. Three chapels of as many different sects attracted congregations of their own, and though in so old-fashioned a town the church held the pride of place, the chapel folk, under which title all classes of dissent were grouped by the orthodox, were a power in the place, as Sir Headingly Cann had found at the last election. However, the adherents to the Church of England plumed themselves when they considered that the fine old abbey held on Sunday most of what was prominent and wealthy of the commonwealth of the town.

The church itself was a fine one. In its crypt antiquarians gravely passed their hands over the surface of the moldings of three or four rounded arches, and murmured with gratification, "Hatchet-work—Saxon;" the remainder of the crypt arches were Norman, and early Norman too—in the nave there was never caviling at the genuineness and beauty of the Norman work; there was good Transitional work in the choir; the west door was the pride of the country round, and the workmanship of the whole was so solid that the hand of that Goth of Goths, the Gothic "restorer," had found no occasion for disfiguring the whole pile by utilitarian windows or nondescript strengthenings; and generation after generation of churchwardens had eschewed whitewash. And this, too, was a part of the country in which there was not the all-satisfying legend of "Oliver Cromwell" to account for any sad traces of iconoclastic barbarity. So that the church of St. Hildegarde remained, as its pious builders had intended it, a grand monument of men of whom it has been said—

"They dreamed not of a perishable hom  
Who thus could build."

Let me pause 'n my tale for a moment solemnly to call down the whole of the curse of Slawkenburgius upon the whole tribe of ignorant church defacers who under the title of "restorers," have done

their best, are doing their best, and will do their best to mutilate, destroy, and ruin the noble shrines of our common faith all over this land, so rich in them, and so proud of them. *Pace* "my uncle Toby," so mote it be!

The services at St. Hildegarde's were distinctly Evangelical. The "doctrines and practice" of the vicar had not been influenced by the Tractarians. The worthy man had puzzled over "Primitive Episcopacy," frowned a good deal over "Rites and Customs of the Church," and refused to be moved from his beaten path by "Via Media"; he put back the tracts on his shelf, where they accumulated much dust, refreshed himself with a course of Barrow, and went his old way, much to the content of his congregation. Between the services which the subjects of Good Queen Anne heard and those attended by the lieges of Good Queen Victoria, there were but two points of difference—one the change of words necessitated by the deaths of the rulers of the land, the other the substitution of an organ for the time-honored band of rustic instrumentalists who formerly led the singing. Mas'r Killett had played the fiddle—

"For French of Paris was to him unknown,"

and he would have rejected the word violin—in the choir in his youth, and was years before he could be reconciled to the change; but the feeling died out as one by one his fellow musicians died off; and he could listen, with gratification now, to the tones of the instrument which Reuben Matley handled with exquisite skill.

For the congregation, it was appreciative, easily pleased, and liked its religion soothing. Its elders were gifted in slumber, its youth decorous in behavior. It had its signs and portents, and the amatory contemporary history of its members might be easily read by the experienced. If a young member of the male sex was observed to be gazing intently at a fair worshiper during the singing or the reading of the Psalms (he couldn't see her at lesson or sermon times, the pews were too high), the congregation knew that his hitherto private admiration was now publicly declared. If at a subsequent service the maiden bashfully returned the gaze, it was taken as a token that she had been informed of the homage paid to her and approved of the same. Then the good folk waited for the engagement and wedding to follow. They had begun courting the same way themselves, in the same place, years before.

This rule did not hold good with or apply to the Pariahs. Those graceless youths—when they came to church, which was seldom—stared at every comely damsel in St. Hildegarde's, and had been known to wink. There were dark and time-obscured legends that the ecclesiastical powers that be in Avonham (no one rightly knows whether it was the vicar, the curates, or the churchwardens, or all five combined) once threatened open and public reproof in church, and that menacing hints were thrown out respecting penance before the congregation; a ceremony which a Somersetshire divine revived in this present year of grace, bless his archaic heart!

Mr. Bompas had been vicar's churchwarden for years, and took a justifiable pride in his position; in the years when he had occupied the two posts of mayor and churchwarden he had felt indeed that he was a pillar both of Church and State. The office, which he filled

with all the zeal and integrity that marked the whole of the transactions of this worthy man, was in his eyes a vastly honorable one, and the churchwarden's pew which he occupied with his family was the most comfortable in the church, and admirably suited for that calm meditation and profound repose of mind which should distinguish a churchwarden. Mr. Bompas always reposed—his mind—from the middle of the sermon to the benediction.

It was a fine November morning about a fortnight after the party. Bryceson and Markham, let us hope, were at service at the parish church next to the residence of the former in Essex, they had been slaying pheasants the day before, and, I say, I hope they were at church, and that the parson came home to dine with them, though I have my doubts about it; Galbraith being in a different longitude was most probably asleep in his berth; in Avonham the church and chapels were full, and the pew occupied by the Bompas family held its full complement.

Sir Headingly Cann made a point of attending church. It was a public profession not only of faith, but of politics; usually he was accompanied by his nephew when that gentleman was in the town, but this morning he was alone. His quondam rival, Mr. Boldham, was in a pew not far from him, he was in one corner, and Alfred Shelman in another. It was not often that the latter was seen in St. Hildegarde's; he was not very constant in his Sunday duties, but on this particular day he had decided to be present, public scandal was dying out about him now, and there was a kind of policy in his presence. He voted the thing a bore, but it was judicious to undergo the fatigue, and he was here, little thinking, as people remarked afterward, that it was the last time he would see the inside of St. Hildegarde's.

Mrs. Stanhope was absent, and her pew empty. That Sunday morning had its results for her also, though she little dreamed of them.

The bell ceased its summons, Mr. Reuben Matley played a voluntary, the clergy took their places, and the service began. There were one or two persons in that church who would remember that service all their lives long.

It opened uneventfully enough. The latest engaged young lady came in late in the middle of the *Venite*, followed by her blushing swain carrying her books, and internally execrating the whole affair; the Psalms were duly got through; the inevitable boy dropped the customary marble in the middle of the first lesson, and was poked by the beadle; the congregation sung the *Te Deum* lustily, Jackson in F, and the younger of the two curates read the second lesson.

Part of that lesson was the story of the woman taken in adultery, and how she was not condemned.

It was a peculiar fancy of the good old vicar that he should always read the bans of marriage himself. This custom was well understood in Avonham, and the slight pause between the completion of the lesson and the vicar's walking to the reading-desk from his seat at the communion table, which would have appeared to a stranger like a hitch in the service, was familiar to them. The reading of the bans was always interesting. Some people could tell you of bans put up once or twice and then withdrawn; there were

one or two sad cases where death had caused this, and in one or two cases there was scandal; so that every one always listened with great attention to the announcements. This Sunday there were a good many names on the list. People who have been

“ Courting in the summer weather ”

get married toward the close of autumn, and thus have time to settle down a bit and face the winter together. First came the “ third time ” people, two couples whose names had grown familiar, and who no longer blushed as they heard them read out; then followed the “ second time ” parties, three couples who smiled at each other and blushed, but did not tremble; then the neophytes, who blushed and trembled, and thought how very curious their own names sounded in church.

Last of all, and with some special emphasis, the vicar read:—

“ Also between Walter Cann Rivers, bachelor, and Laura Constance Stanhope, widow, both of this parish; these are for the first time of asking.”

There was a sensible movement of astonishment throughout the whole building, a rustle as of every woman's dress and the scrape of every man's collar against his cheek; the sharp crash of a falling book was heard in the orderly pew of Mr. Bompas, and that worthy felt his wrist gripped hard and convulsively; turning sharply he saw his daughter Adelaide staring with wide-opened eyes at the vicar; every vestige of color had left her cheeks, but now rushed back in a tide that turned her fair face crimson; with her left hand still tightly clasping her father's wrist she half rose from her seat, her mouth opened to speak:

“ I— ”

Mr. Reuben Matley struck the first chord of the *Benedictus* and the congregation stood up.

Adelaide remained seated, and only shook her head at the whispered inquiry of her mother as to whether she was ill. When a few verses had been sung—feebly, for the people were brimful of wonder at the announcement of the approaching marriage of their Queen of Society—Adelaide passed before her father, opened the door of the pew, and walking down the aisle, to the increased wonderment of the already astounded church-goers, left the edifice, followed by her father, whose face, from the combination of anxiety, wonder, excitement, and the results of a dangerous dive for his hat, presented a compound of expression and color which would have taxed the skill of a Rubens to depict.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### A MAID OF THE WEST SAXONS.

ADELAIDE had almost reached the gate of the church-yard which was at the side of the market-place, when she heard the voice of her father. There was no one about; the devout were in the church,

the "careless" and the domestic indoors, so that the churchwarden who had lost a good deal of ground at the start and was not so agile as his daughter, called to her. She turned at the sound, for she had no idea that her father was following her, and waited for him to come up.

"My dear girl," said he, trotting to her like an anxious elephant, "whatever *is* the matter? Are you well, my child?"

"No, papa."

"My dear Adelaide, what can have possessed you to leave the church in this—ah—extraordinary manner? Whatever *will* the people think?"

Adelaide made no direct answer to the question. "Papa," she said, "I must go home and write a letter at once; it must be taken over to Avonham Road and sent by train to London, where it must be posted to-night. It will be safer than telegraphing," she murmured to herself.

Mr. Bompas began to wonder whether he had really got up that morning, dressed, shaved, breakfasted, and gone to church, or whether he would not presently wake up in his bed at home.

"Has anything happened?" he stammered. "Was it about—about the marriage?"

There was only one marriage in Avonham's mind that morning, he knew very well.

"Yes, papa," said Adelaide firmly; "you will have to know it sooner or later. The next time those bans are published they must be forbidden. If Harry or Walter or Fred had been here to-day they would have *been* forbidden; but it was too hard a task for me. I must send to Walter Bryceson at once. Oh, that Harry were here!"

"Mr. Rivers' bans forbidden!" said Mr. Bompas, never giving a thought to Mrs. Stanhope. "My dear Addie, what new scandal is this?"

"It has no connection with Mr. Rivers that he knows of, poor dupe!" said Adelaide, in a tone half pity, half scorn. "Papa, that marriage can never take place. Mrs. Stanhope's first husband is alive!"

Mr. Bompas sat plump down on the flat stone of a low family vault and stared at his eldest daughter in a helpless and utterly crushed manner. For a minute he was literally stricken dumb with surprise. Then Adelaide turned to the gate, and he mechanically rose and followed her. They were halfway across the market-place before he spoke, and then it was almost in a whisper.

"What are you telling me?" he said. "Mrs. Stanhope's husband alive! Something has turned your brain, Addie! He was my schoolfellow and my friend. I was in his house at his death; I saw him in his coffin on the day of his funeral; I followed him to his grave. Alive! There are five hundred people in this town who know him to be dead."

"I am not speaking of Mr. Stanhope, father," answered Adelaide, walking on and speaking in a tone as low as that which her father had used. "It will be a great shock to you when you know all the truth. Let us get indoors, where no one may hear us, and I will tell you everything. I have known of it ever since my engage-

ment to Harry, and it has been almost too hard a burden to-day for me to bear."

The wondering servant who opened the door to them had her curiosity appeased by Adelaide's quiet remark, "I am not very well, Jane, and had to come out of church," and retired to the kitchen sympathizing. Father and daughter went upstairs to the drawing-room, where, in spite of the cool air, Adelaide opened one of the large windows. She seated herself on the sofa, took off her bonnet and gloves, and gave a sigh of relief.

"I should have choked in church," she said; "the whole affair seemed to rush on my brain at once, and I felt beside myself for a minute or two. Give me a glass of wine, papa."

Her voice was calm and steady now, and the trembling that had seized her in the church had ceased. She drank the wine, and opened a blotting case containing writing materials.

"Now, papa," she said, "I must write to Walter Bryceson, and the letter must be sent as I said. First I will tell you my secret. The woman whom you and I, and every one in Avonham has known for years as Mrs. Stanhope, the woman who married your old friend Mrs. Stanhope, has no more claim to the name she bears, or the property she holds, than—than you have. She is the wife of Mr. Galbraith's—of Harry's—brother."

Mr. Bompas gasped. He was so moved that he was obliged to sit down on the nearest chair, into which he dropped much as he had dropped on to the flat tombstone in the church-yard just before. He passed his hand feebly over his forehead and head, as if the communication had hit him and hurt him—which it had.

"Mr. Galbraith's brother!" he said at last; "I have never heard—"

"It is only since Harry came to Avonham that he knew he was alive. She thought him dead as well, years ago. Harry told me this the night we became engaged," she said, and blushed as she said it. "The secret is known to Walter Bryceson and Fred Markham as well, and Walter Bryceson must be sent for at once. Dear papa, I can't help what scandal it makes, or what people say; I must do as I have been told to do, and you must keep the secret too, as I have kept it, until Walter Bryceson comes, and then you shall know all. Forgive me, my dearest father, for having had a secret from you all so long; it is the only one that has ever been between us."

Then she kissed him, and a few tears dropped, which in a weaker woman would have been expanded into a fit of hysterics, and then, drying them, she set about her task like the stout-hearted girl she was.

Adelaide had inherited her bravery. Her father, pompous and stilted as he was, had Nelson's knowledge of fear—which was just none at all—and plenty of decision and action. The news really was a blow to him, but the sight of his daughter doing her duty roused him to action, in which no man could be prompter or swifter. He rang the bell, drank a glass of wine to steady himself, and said to the servant, as though he were giving the most ordinary order—

"Jane, tell Watts to put the brown mare in the dog-cart at once; it must be at the door in ten minutes."

Jane stared. Such an order had not been given in Mr. Bompas's

house since she had been in it. She was too well trained, however, to hesitate, and withdrew. All Avonham was destined to be surprised that day apparently; certainly Watts, who had been in his present post for twenty five years, was when he received the order.

"Drat the fussy wench!" he said, putting down "Zadkiel's Almanac," which he was reading in the harness-room—Watts preferred that place to St. Hildegarde's on Sunday mornings—"what do 'ee mean? Don't 'ee play none of yer kitchen oonderments on me, s'naa. Master be to church."

"He've a comed home, tell 'ee," said Jane, "an' the dog-cart's got to be at door in ten minutes. What's use o' flyin' at I? Goo'n ask him yerself!" and she slammed the harness-room door hard and brought down the bin-dust on the harness, which always pleases a groom.

"Dal the young hussy!" said Watts, taking down the harness however; "whatever new game's this to play of a Sunday in church time? Happen some one's ill, and master sent for thoo."

And muttering and grumbling, he proceeded to harness the mare, and had the dog-cart round in the prescribed time. He was somewhat disappointed too to find that it *was* wanted, and that he was not the victim of a hoax. He went to the kitchen, made the *amende honorable* to Jane, and got a mug of beer, over which he gossiped with the maids, and made eleven guesses at the errand of his master and young mistress, discussion on which subject was carried on until the cook's mind got confused with gossip and gravy combined, and she cleared the kitchen.

The various congregations were streaming homeward when Mr. Bompas and Adelaide drove back from Avonham Road, but the mind of the churchwarden was too much taken up by his daughter's communication to notice the looks of wonder that greeted them along the street. Adelaide had told him all, and he had emphatically declared that, after that, he was never going to be surprised again. Adelaide sat defiant of all the glances. She had need of firmness now, she said to herself, and if people were talking about her to-day, as she was perfectly well aware they were, they would soon have such a theme as Avonham had never enjoyed, and a scandal with a vengeance.

Arrived at home she ran upstairs to her own room, avoiding the drawing-room, where she heard the voices of her mother and sisters. Mr. Bompas entered the latter apartment.

"Mercy on us, Abel!" said Mrs. Bompas, as her lord and master came in; "whatever is afoot? what made Addie rush out of church like that, and where *have* you been?"

"My dears," said Mr. Bompas to his family, uplifting a deprecatory hand, "Adelaide has just told me the most astounding piece of news I have ever heard. It is a matter confided to her by Mr. Galbraith, and one that she has been bound to keep from us all till now, when she has told me. Louisa, my dear, your sister has sent an urgent message to Mr. Bryceson, and he will doubtless be here with all speed; he is also concerned in the matter. My dear," he gravely concluded, addressing his wife, "I have never had a secret from you, nor shall this be one; but at present the matter is one of such extraordinary moment, and deals with such vast interest, that

until Mr. Bryceson arrives we will, if you please, have no discussion about it; and remember, girls, you are not to question Adelaide. The matter concerns us only indirectly, and you will know all in due time."

So Adelaide was not asked any questions, and the dinner being announced and served was eaten, though it was a very quiet meal.

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"My dear Laura—you see I am taking the uncle's privilege already,"—laughed Sir Headingly Cann the next afternoon, "you mustn't be angry with Walter, or I shall be angry with myself for having told you. I remember very well speaking to him on that very subject—ah—some time ago, and he assured me that beyond paying the natural tribute of admiration to the young lady's good looks—as one would admire a picture, you know—he had never thought in any serious way of Miss Bompas."

"So that it is a case of wounded vanity, and not of blighted affections, Sir Headingly? Well, I'll promise you that Walter sha'n't be scolded. I am just going to call on Mr. Bompas; will you give me your arm so far? how soon it gets dark now! we shall have Christmas on us before we dream of it."

Sir Headingly had been regaling Mrs. Stanhope with an account of the surprise with which the publication of the bans had been received, and had informed her of the abrupt departure of Adelaide from the church. In common with many people, he had assigned a reason for this, very wide of the truth. Pride in his nephew, belief in his powers of fascination, and a remembrance of some idle tales that he had once heard coupling Walter Rivers's name with Adelaide Bompas's, had led him to imagine that the announcement of Walter's intended marriage had shattered some illusions and given her a shock, the force of which she had been injudicious enough to confess to the world by her action of the day before. This opinion he had confided to Mrs. Stanhope, after an interview with his nephew, who, strange to say, did not enter into his feelings, and vehemently combated the idea he had formed. Sir Headingly had laughingly put aside the question, but had diplomatically determined that he would smooth the way for his nephew by being himself Mrs. Stanhope's informant. He was delighted with his success. Pre-matrimonial squabbles, the old bachelor knew, were often very awkward things to adjust; when the couple were made fast in wedlock, they might squabble on ordinary topics as much as they chose without any of his interference, but things had better be kept agreeable until then. It was the simple philosophy of a man who had never himself ventured into the arena, but who had looked from a safe height on many connubial battles and lovers' wars, and, if we are to believe that lookers-on see most of the battle, then we must venerate the judgment of this old spectator.

Sir Headingly left Mrs. Stanhope at Mrs. Bompas's door, and took a courtly leave of her.

It was very rarely that Mrs. Stanhope visited her agent in South Street. She was received at the door by Jane, with respect akin to veneration and was ushered into the drawing-room.

Mrs. Stanhope looked round the apartment with some interest. It was as handsome in its proportions, she observed, as any in her

own house; and everywhere were evidences of tastes more artistic, and accomplishments more varied, than she had expected to find in any family of the town. She gave up a few minutes to a careful survey of her surroundings, and was disagreeably impressed with the fact that they gave unmistakable tokens of taste and education, as well as of wealth. Taste as correct as her own too. There were one or two pieces of music on the open piano; she took them up and examined them—Chopin, Schumann, Gluck; she put them down. She read the titles of some of the books on the center table—Ruskin (this is not a tale of the present year) Tennyson, Keble, Carlyle, Emerson, Lyell. She looked around at the pictures; she was not a bad judge. Everyone was a water color, and at that time the “lot” would have “fetched” eight hundred pounds; now-a-days, fifteen hundred. She resumed her seat, and, for the first time since her husband’s death had made her the leader of Avonham, forgot that she had been kept waiting more than ten minutes.

O foolish woman, consider! were you ever kept waiting ten minutes before? Is the sign nothing to you? away, away, fly and hide yourself, for evil is coming on you!

No, the delay is nothing; the sign is hidden; she waits quietly and unsuspectingly in the drawing-room of her house and estate agent, and thinks of no evil, only waits for the door to open.

She will see that door open and shut, once—twice—thrice, and after the third shutting there will be little peace or quietness for her in this world. In the next maybe—for God is merciful—but in this world—No!

The door opens. It is Mr. Bompas who enters.

O foolish woman! did your servant ever look so grave, so solemn, so sad, before? Up and away, for evil is coming on you! Can you not read portents, you so clever, so guilty, so skilled in noting the looks and reading the hearts of men?

No; he is a servant of other people; he looks grave over other men’s business; he has a pompous air with him always—overdoes it sometimes—he is a faithful, honest upright man, with many affairs on his hands, enough to make him look important; this is no sign to the Queen of Avonham. She greets him laughingly, not heeding that he does not smile.

“You did not expect to see me here, Mr. Bompas.”

“No, madam, I did not. It is quite an unexpected—ah—’um—visit.”

Not a *pleasure*, you see, you foolish woman! not the stereotyped phrase you hear so often, in all sorts of country houses, where people brighten up at the sight of you; no, this is an unexpected *visit*. And the honest man who uses the word does not look as though it were a pleasure at all. Can you not see that he is strange in his manner? that mixed with his customary assumption of dignity—not so much of an assumption either, for he is an honored and an honorable man, and his manner is not so skin-deep as you think—there is an under-current of pity struggling to come to the surface? No, this clever woman sees nothing!

“I will not detain you long, Mr. Bompas; you got the papers from Goldings and West?”

Mr. Bompas bowed in his stateliest manner, but did not trust himself to speak.

"The plans, of course, are accepted as being quite correct," she said, in her queenly manner; "you are always so correct in all that you do, Mr. Bompas."

"I trust, Mrs.—ah—Stanhope, that, whatever, may happen, you will always have the—ah—opinion that I have at all times acted—ah—conscientiously and straightforwardly to you."

"My dear Mr. Bompas," she said, with a merry laugh, "what an asseveration. Any one would think that my second marriage was to be the signal for my dispensing with your very valuable services. It is nothing of the sort, my dear sir; neither myself nor Mr. Rivers will ever forget the patience and skill with which you have watched over my affairs: and the upshot of our marriage, for you, will be, that you will have to manage two estates instead of one."

Mr. Bompas bowed again, and, for the first time in his life wished that he hadn't a conscience.

"By the bye," said Mrs. Stanhope, "I was sorry to hear that Miss Bompas was taken ill in church yesterday. I trust she is better."

"She is perfectly well, Mrs. Stanhope, I thank you," said Mr. Bompas gravely.

"A passing attack only," said she; "I am very glad to hear it. I have not seen her for some time. Is she at home, Mr. Bompas? I should like to see her. Of course you understand what to do with the papers now that you have the lawyer's letter. That was the only business I came about. Let me see Adelaide if she is really well enough."

"I will send for her," said Mr. Bompas, and rang the bell. "Will you tell Miss Adelaide that Mrs. Stanhope wishes to see her," he said to the servant who answered it.

Adelaide was close to the door, and on being spoken to by Jane entered. Mr. Bompas bowed to Mrs. Stanhope again, and went out of the room. Adelaide closed the door carefully, and advanced toward the chair in which Mrs. Stanhope was seated.

The two women looked very firmly at each other. Mrs. Stanhope had not intended that it should be so. She had meant to kill Miss Bompas's presumptuous mind with a stern gaze, to trample on its slain body with a few stinging sentences, and, having received a tearful submission, to magnanimously forgive her her audacity in daring to love. But she was met by a look as proud and high as her own; and a thought flashed across her, that whereas she had hitherto looked upon Adelaide as a merely pretty girl, she was in reality a beautiful one; as stately and commanding as herself, and, she added mentally as she took a second glance at the stern look and the set face, as strong and as insensible to fear.

"You wished to see me, Mrs. Stanhope?" said Adelaide.

"Yes, Adelaide," said Mrs. Stanhope; "I heard that you were ill in church yesterday, and as I was calling on your father on business I thought I should like to know how you are to-day."

"I was not ill in church yesterday, Mrs. Stanhope," said Adelaide, "and I am quite well to-day. But it is very kind of you to take so much interest in me as to inquire."

Mrs. Stanhope laughed.

“When young ladies leave church in a violent hurry,” she said, “neighbors naturally imagine that they are ill; or,” she added, “that they have some other cause for their departure.”

Adelaide laughed in her turn.

“Yours is a beautiful system of generalization,” said she; “it takes very little wit and very little wisdom to divide mankind into two parts; for instance, your two branches of young ladies, who leave church because they are ill, and young ladies who leave for some other cause, would include all young ladies who go to church. In which of the two classes does it please you to place me?”

Mrs. Stanhope, although in a great rage at this flippant answer, had sense enough not to show temper. The tone of the girl showed that there was something behind her speech.

“My dear Miss Bompas,” said she—she dropped the familiar “Adelaide,” which the other did not fail to notice—“do you know what people are saying about your conduct yesterday?”

“You mean people in Avonham, of course, Mrs. Stanhope?” said Adelaide calmly.

“Yes, people in Avonham,” said Mrs. Stanhope, rather sharply; “and with Sir Headingly Cann at the head of them.”

Now Mrs. Stanhope had no right to bring the affable baronet into the conversation at all, and she soon regretted that she had done so.

“Poor dear Sir Headingly!” said Adelaide, actually laughing at the revered man’s name; “he is always on the wrong track. Yes, Mrs. Stanhope, I *can* tell you what people in Avonham are saying of me because I left church hurriedly yesterday. I will not allow you the gratification of informing me. They are saying that I was overcome by the notice of your approaching marriage to Mr. Rivers; that is true—mark me, that is true!”

Mrs. Stanhope smiled in scorn, but the uplifted hand of the young girl and the air of determination in her attitude stayed her speech.

“They are saying also that Walter Rivers has jilted me, and that that is the real cause of my agitation. That is not true! Mrs. Stanhope—Mr. Walter Rivers has twice asked me to become his wife, and twice I have refused him.”

Mrs. Stanhope half rose to her feet, but Adelaide’s gesture again stopped her.

“I foresaw your coming here to-day; I was ready for you, Mrs. Stanhope; you have been accustomed in the sphere in which you move to have many people at your feet. In Avonham especially, during the last eight or nine years, that has been so; it may be that you have been led to believe that you will always exist in that imperial capacity. Do not let that idea possess you at all in your intercourse with me to-day. Remember that this meeting is of your seeking, not mine.”

“You are quite melodramatic, Miss Bompas,” said Mrs. Stanhope, but she did not say it easily; this girl had given her two sharp blows, be it remembered. “Your visit to London has improved you immensely. Pray, since Mr. Walter Rivers is not good enough for your husband, may I inquire whether you expect to get married at all—to a *gentleman*.”

“I am engaged to be married, Mrs. Stanhope, to a man whom I

believe to be a gentleman in all that is gentle and all that is manly—Mr. Henry Galbraith.”

“I must congratulate you, Miss Bompas,” said Mrs. Stanhope. “Mr. Galbraith must be a well-to-do man. Well, Miss Bompas, we have had quite a delightful little quarrel; but although I have enjoyed it—you are really very graceful when you are roused, my dear—I am rather tired of it. Mr. Galbraith is away, I believe. I must write and congratulate him; you know we have had some dealings together. You must keep your temper with him though, for I have heard that he— What is it? what is it?”

For Adelaide had suddenly clasped her in her arms, and held her as though shielding her from some enemy.

“Oh, Mrs. Stanhope! don’t talk like that. Oh, do trust in me, and I will save you yet; we have quarreled to-day, but I swear to you that my woman’s heart bleeds for you. Oh, Mrs. Stanhope, go to London and leave me to meet them. You have been so good here—so kind to the poor—so different from—oh! do listen to me and do as I ask you!”

“You are mad!” said Mrs. Stanhope, striving to free herself.

“No, not mad!” said Adelaide, “but a traitor to my husband that is to be. But I will intercede for you—indeed I will.”

“For me!—intercede!” said the elder woman, no longer struggling with the girl.

“Yes, for you! Oh, Mrs. Stanhope! Harry—Mr. Galbraith—is now on his way home from America.”

“America!” and she shrunk back to the girl’s arms, and the sound of the word was as a cry.

“Yes, America! and do you know who is coming with him?”

“No, girl, no; what should I know of him or his affairs? Who is it who is coming?”

“His brother!”

“Brother! What is he to me? What is his name?”

“Reginald Wilding!”

“Reginald—Reginald Wilding?” She tore herself from Adelaide’s clasp and flung one arm back, as seeking for something; at last her hand reached a chair, which she grasped and held, warning Adelaide away with the other hand. Not a movement escaped Adelaide’s eye, not a sign of fear did she show as the woman raved.

“Wilding! ha, ha! A fool! a fool! François shot him! Don’t bullets kill fools then? *François, mon cher, tu l’as tué n’est ce pas?* Yes, yes, at Bâton Rouge, and I crept out one night to try if I could see his dead face for the last— You lie, girl, he never loved you; you have told me lies. François! he is alive! *gare à toi, mon cher.* I am a governess, Mr. Stanhope, and should only disgrace—ah, my God! have I not striven to make amends? Walter, we will ride them down and live them down, and you shall—God have mercy on me!”

Adelaide laid her on the sofa, and restrained the struggling hands; then she rang the bell.

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When Mrs. Stanhope had been restored she was calm. The first effects of the blow having passed away, she became again the haughty proud woman she had always been. She looked keenly at Adelaide’s face as if to see whether she had betrayed her secret, but

there were no signs there. Mrs. Bompas was lost in wonder, and voluble in sympathetic phrases; if she had been silent and embarrassed, there would have been danger. Mrs. Stanhope felt that she had still time left for thought and action. She drank some wine, and would have sent for one of her servants but that Mr. Bompas insisted on being allowed to see her safely to the Priory House. She would walk, she told Mrs. Bompas, it would do her good; she had not had one of these attacks for years, and could not account for this one. So, resisting all offers of being driven home, she left with Mr. Bompas, giving Adelaide a parting glance, half-terrified, half-defiant, as she went out of the door.

They walked to the end of South Street, and were about to cross the market-place, when the din and murmur of a crowd broke on their ears. A body of men, followed by shouting boys and excited women, were bearing something on a rough stretcher formed of two hurdles lashed together. Every minute the group increased in size, until when it reached where they stood it had attained the proportions of a crowd. And floating in the air from the lips of half the awe-stricken throng, came a word that none could remember to have heard in such a manner in the streets of Avonham—"Murder!"

"What is it, Mr. Bompas?" said Mrs. Stanhope, clinging to his arm; "what are they saying?"

"My dear madam," said Mr. Bompas, "I really do not know, but we will let them pass by."

But as he said it and the ghastly burden came opposite where they stood, they heard a name. Mrs. Stanhope broke from his arm with a wild cry and rushed forward. The bearers stopped as she did so.

"What is it?" she cried; "whose name did you say? Let me pass!"

Her own coachman stood before her, and by the pale light of the lanterns carried by some of the men, she could see that his face was white, and that the tears were streaming down his cheeks.

"For the love o' God, my dear lady," said he, gently restraining her, "don't 'ee look! it b'ain't no sight for 'ee, my poor dear soul. Mr. Bompas, sir, for marcy's sake get her away home!"

"Let me pass, Weedon! Pinniffer, stand on one side, I will see it! O my God!"

And a great sob broke from the breast of every man there as she knelt beside the figure and drew back the coarse piece of sacking that covered the head.

The bloodless, waxen face, with the hair hanging about the forehead, and wet and foul with the water and weed of Avon, was beautiful in death. The face of Walter Rivers.

She gave no cry as she rose to her feet. Only those who caught her in their strong arms as she fell thought they heard her whisper something. They did not know the words; they were the words of Cain—"My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Such of her own people as were there took her away, and the dead body was borne off. Mr. Bompas remained stunned at the sight and news. Mechanically he made his way to where Pinniffer stood and laid his hand on his arm.

"Pinniffer, in the name of heaven what is this dreadful thing? What has happened?"

“Dreadful indeed, Mr. Bompas,” replied the landlord of the Bear. “A cheerful, kindly gentleman like Mr. Rivers shot down by a jealous beast—I don’t care who hears me say so—it is dreadful!”

“But,” said Mr. Bompas, “is it known who did it?”

“Known? Yes, Mr. Bompas, and I wish I’d the hanging of him; but he’s locked up safe enough, and it’s only a job for Calcraft.”

“Who is it?”

“Who is it, Mr. Bompas? Why, that vicious, sulky, ill-tempered, domineering hound, Mr. Alfred Shelman—d—n him! and I wish I’d my hands on his throat this minute!”

And the stalwart ex-soldier shouldered his way aggressively through the crowd and entered his own house.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### CROWNER’S QUEST LAW.

HAPPY the man who, either by making interest with Mr. Pinniffer or in virtue of his position in the town, obtained admission next day to the large upper room at the Bear, where the market ordinary was usually held, and which was now transformed into a coroner’s court. Every available foot of the room was occupied. It was a large apartment, running along the whole front of the house, was built partly over the old gateway, and had, no doubt, in bygone days served as the great guest-chamber of the *hospitium* of the abbey. Its windows looked out on the market-place, and the long table, at which sat the coroner and the jury, was placed so that the coroner was immediately beneath the center one. This was of great advantage to the crowd who were unable to obtain admission, as they could see the back of his head, and that was something. Besides, they had had the opportunity of accompanying the jury as they walked down the length of the town to Sir Headingly Cann’s house to view the body, and also of marching back with them.

The jury was composed of fourteen of the worthiest burgesses of Avonham. The mayor, Mr. Sennett, was intrusted with the task of watching the case of Alfred Shelman, who was in the room in custody. Many acquaintances of ours were members—Raraty, Chickleholt, Follwell, the brothers Pye, Pollimoy, Timothy Rapsey (who had specially entreated the inspector of police to select him), Killett, and six others with whom our tale has had nothing to do. Mr. Bompas was present, but was a spectator only, and to judge by his face a deeply grieved one. When the coroner bade the jury choose their foreman, there was a pause; if Timothy Rapsey had been elected he would have died happy, but no mention was made of his name. At last ex-Mayor Killett said, “Mr. Follwell’s the agedest of us—Mr. Follwell, will you act, sir?” and Mr. Follwell consenting, the others said, “Ah, yes, Mr. Follwell, do you act, sir,” and the thing was done. Mr. Follwell and his brother jury-men were duly sworn, and the inquiry opened.

The coroner briefly remarked that they had assembled there on an inquiry of more than usual interest, and one of the most painful nature. He then called the first witness, Sir Headingly Cann,

It did not need a second look at the old baronet's face to learn the terrible grief that had overtaken him. He had steeled himself, however, and controlled his sorrow to give evidence.

He identified the body as that of his nephew, Walter Cann Rivers, aged thirty. He last saw the deceased alive at lunch on the preceding day; he was then in his usual health; he next saw him when his dead body was brought home. He knew of no enmity existing between the deceased and any other person likely to have led to the murder.

Shelman stood up here, and in a firm voice said, "Sir Headingly, your nephew and I had quarreled, but before God I swear that I never shot him!"

The coroner begged him to be silent. He was represented, and had better trust himself to his legal adviser. Any statement he made might be used against him.

The next witness was a laboring man named Jacob Starer, who was much impressed by the surroundings, and called the coroner "my lord." His story was extracted from him with some difficulty, owing to his confusion, but finally turned out to be this: He was returning from work, and was making for a foot-bridge across the river, over which he had to pass to get to his home; about five minutes before he reached this, the time being about three o'clock, he heard two shots fired in quick succession. He thought it curious, as they came from the banks of the stream, and the afternoon was misty and it was foggy near the river, but concluded that someone was after water-rats. A few yards before he reached the bridge his foot struck something which proved to be a hat. Naturally surprised, he hunted about to see if he could explain its presence there, and looking over the bridge saw a dark object in the water. He climbed down the high bank and found the deceased, who was lying head downward in the river, his face and head being under water; he dragged him out and got him on to the bank, and, being greatly alarmed, shouted for help. Some persons came from a neighboring mill, and having helped him to take the body indoors, sent for the police. He thought deceased was quite dead when he found him. So much from Jacob, got with vast trouble, but evidently true.

The next witness was a more important one. He was assistant to a grocer in Avonham, and was named Lightfoot. He stated that on the preceding afternoon he was out collecting accounts for his master, and had to call at the mill. On the bridge over which he crossed were the deceased and Mr. Shelman; they were quarreling violently. Mr. Shelman had a double-barreled gun with him. It was not in his hand, but leaning against the railing of the bridge. As he came up he heard Mr. Shelman say, "Curse you! if I thought you had any hand in that I would put a bullet into you!" He was quite sure of the words, and would swear to them.

The silence in the room was almost painful. It was broken only by the voices of the coroner and witness, a fresh-colored young man of good reputation, well known in the town. He gave his evidence clearly enough but with evident distaste for the task.

Mr. Rivers had replied, he said further, "Haven't you had enough of fighting lately?" Mr. Shelman at that flew into a great rage,

and he thought would have struck Mr. Rivers if he (witness) had not come up. He spoke to the gentlemen; he said, "Dear me, gentlemen!" He knew them both. Mr. Rivers laughed at him, but Mr. Shelman told him to go (somewhere) and mind his own business. Mr. Rivers then said, "See what an exhibition you are making of yourself; the fellow is quite right to speak, and you are a fool with all your threats and bluster!" Mr. Shelman had flown into a violent passion, and had threatened to kick him if he did not go on. Being afraid to meddle with any one of Mr. Shelman's standing, he left them and went on to the mill. Before he got there he heard two shots. They came from the bridge. The afternoon was foggy, and it was very thick near the river; you could only see a few yards ahead, say twenty—about a cricket-pitch—but he could tell from the sound. When he had been to the mill, and the miller's wife had paid him her bill for a month's groceries, he was coming away, when he heard shouting. He and one of the mill-hands ran to the bridge, and found the last witness holding the deceased. The gun produced was the one he saw on the bridge; he knew it to be Mr. Shelman's; he had once brought it from Avonham Road, at the request of Mr. Shelman.

Next a policeman proved finding the gun in the bed of the river close to the scene of the murder; he had recovered it that morning; it was in the center of the stream, which there was shallow, and he could see it from the bank.

Then the doctor described the state of the body and the fatal wounds. Death must have ensued directly, and was caused by the shots, not by drowning.

The inspector of police proved arresting Mr. Shelman the night before. He was at home; he was highly indignant, and violent in manner. He had cautioned him in the usual manner, and he had strongly protested his innocence.

The case looked very black, in spite of this protestation. The coroner asked Mr. Sennett if he or his client wished to make any statement, and Mr. Sennett shook his head. Shelman, however, rose again to his feet, and spoke loudly and clearly, but with visible passion.

"I claim my right to speak."

"What you say may be used against you, Mr. Shelman," said the coroner. "You had better be guided by your solicitor; you are in very good hands."

Mr. Boldham and Mr. Sennett both endeavored to persuade him to be still, but in vain.

"I will speak," he exclaimed; "I am perfectly innocent of this crime. It is quite true that we quarreled upon the bridge; but I swear before God I had no hand in his death. I left him on the bank of the river by the bridge. I came away hurriedly, being very angry, and left my gun behind. I do not know how it came in the water. I swear I did not kill Walter Rivers, nor have I any knowledge of how he met his death!"

Fifty heads were shaken over this statement, and not a man in the room believed it. The coroner turned to Mr. Sennett, and asked if he had any desire to address the court. Mr. Sennett had none; he would reserve all defense at present, he said.

The summing up was short, and the jury withdrew, really more

for form than because their minds were not made up; when they returned in five minutes' time it could be seen by their faces what their verdict was. It was soon made known—"Willful murder against Alfred Shelman."

A larger crowd than Avonham had seen since the election waited outside the police-station to see the prisoner driven off to Ridgetown Jail in a closed carriage, and in strong custody. There were no harsh words or strong expressions used by the crowd, and there was almost complete silence when the carriage, driven by a police officer, set out; but when the townsfolk had watched it out of sight there broke out on every hand words of pity for the victim and the woman who was to have been his wife, now, as her servants reported, stricken down by uncontrollable grief, and fierce execrations against Shelman.

In all that town, where he had been so powerful and so masterful; among all those people who six months ago would have been proud to have a word thrown to them in the market-place, there was not one to stand forward and say one good word for him. They recalled his overbearing manners, they told of his bursts of temper, they spoke with fierce glee of the thrashing he had received but the other day in the face of the town, and they cursed him loudly and deeply as a cowardly and brutal murderer for whom hanging was too good.

And the man was innocent after all!

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### "THE AVONHAM MURDER."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" said old Mas'r Killett, laying down the London paper, which, in virtue of his patriarchal position in the town, was always placed at his elbow before other eyes (except perhaps Pinniffer's) had seen it; "all the years I've a-lived in Avonham, I've never bin ashamed of it afore; an' now look what't has come to. Drat it if it ain't a hard thing for the oldest man in the place—'ceptin' p'rhaps old Daddy Prosser's father, and nobody don't count much o' how old *he* says a be—if he can't pick up the paper for a bit o' quiet read-like but what he must have 'Th' Avonham Murder' stuck right afore his eyes. Oh, dear! what a disgrace for my poor old native place! Do 'ee take the paper now, Mas'r Matley; I can't abide 'un."

And the old fellow took off his heavy silver-rimmed spectacles, wiped them carefully, and then performed the like office for his eyes, filled his pipe, and puffed away to get a light from the burning spill which his dutiful son held for him according to custom. Then he leaned back in his seat and sighed heavily. He was not the only old inhabitant of Avonham who felt keenly the disgrace that had so suddenly come on the town.

The murder which had roused such a sense of horror and indignation in the quiet Marlshire town had been committed on the afternoon of Monday; the inquest, from the fact of the coroner for North Marlshire residing just outside Avonham and thus being close at hand, had been held on the following day, Tuesday; it was now

Friday, but only a "little market day," and the funeral was fixed for the morrow. From the time that the body of Walter Rivers had been brought into the town until now, the place had worn a somber and funereal aspect. With the great bulk of people the unfortunate victim had been extremely popular. Especially during the last two or three years he had laid himself out to be pleasing and well thought of; and that he had succeeded was fully shown now: on all sides nothing but good was said of this dead man. To-morrow there would be such a concourse at the funeral as the town had never seen; there was more than ordinary attraction; in addition to the sorrow and respect which would have been shown if the young man had died the ordinary death of men, there were the surroundings which would draw the spectator into the region of the horrible. Meanwhile the wiser heads of the town grieved themselves sorely over the scandal that had befallen it, and Master Killett's desponding words found an echo in many hearts.

The cronies had not met for two or three nights, but gregariousness is strong, and they had come together again, naturally and because the doings of the morrow must be debated with all solemnity, and also because it was not usual for them to be separated at a time when the air was full of events and the very walls had rumors in them. So they were sitting to-night, not in the club room, for it was not club night, but, much as they were wont to sit on ordinary nights, in the smoking room. One or two farmers from the neighborhood were there, in addition to the usual townsfathers; they had an excellent excuse ready for such of their wives as had not themselves come in to learn all the news. A good many *had*, and Mrs. Pinniffer's teapots and toasting-forks had had a busy time of it.

Every man who came in did so with a subdued and gloomy air; the customary greetings were given *sotto voce*; no mention was made of the weather or the land; the price of beasts was ignored, and yet no one approached the subject which every one had at heart. Some one was wanted to fire the train, and the Nestor of Avonham did it.

Reuben Matley took the paper handed to him by the old man, and, himself, shook his head sympathetically.

It may be noticed here that there were some absentees. Notwithstanding that the Bear was very often the settling-place for him and his clients on market day, Mr. Bompas was not present to-day. Mr. Sennett, as every one knew, was in London, and all knew the business that took him there. Raraty would send to meet him to the last train calling at Avonham Road that night. Dr. Mompesson, who often smoked a pipe there after market day, was also absent. It was understood that the state of Mrs. Stanhope gave him much anxiety and that he had almost taken up his abode at the Priory House. All Avonham was filled with sympathy for his patient, and those of her household who came out into the town were eagerly questioned as to her progress.

Mr. Timothy Rapsey was in his element, but not quite at his ease. There was only one point on which he was troubled, but that one point was enough to cause him some mental discomfort. He feared that his revelations respecting the riot had reached Rivers' ears and had led to the murder. However, public opinion had not pointed

that way, and he was somewhat relieved. He took up Mas'r Killett's parable as the latter put away his paper.

" 'Tis a great disgrace to us all, for sure," said he; " Mr. Matley, read us out a bit of it; what do the London folk think about it? Do they think there's any cause for it? What do they think was the reason of 't? Be they goin' to have it tried at Ridgetown, or be they goin' to take it up to London? Lor'! I'll go if they do; that I will!"

" What need for 'em to take it up to London, Timothy?" said Killett the younger, and his voice had a shade of aggressiveness in it; " 'tain't come to such a pass yet but what a Marlishire jury can try a Marlishire murder, I *do* hope!"

" There have been cases where it has been done, Killett," said Timothy, " on account of prejudice, you know."

" What do 'ee mean by prejudice now, Timothy?" said Killett; " agenst the prisoner?"

" Yes, I do: I've read o' cases where it have been said as a man couldn't get a fair trial in 's own county, and they've took it into another. Why wouldn't they do it with Mr. Shelman?"

" He can get all the fair trial as he do want without goin' out o' Marlishire, I reckon," said Killett.

" No one seems to know the cause of the quarrel," said Wolstenholme Pye.

" No," said Hoppenner Pye, chiming in as usual, " no one don't seem to know that."

Timothy Rapsey laid down his pipe solemnly on the table, then took a moderate pull at his glass, and leaning forward, raised his finger impressively, and sat wagging it backwards and forwards in the face of the company. This was a well-known sign in Avonham, and betokened, even in Timothy, the possession of information peculiarly valuable, or the intention of delivering something unusually weighty or oracular. So, when the assembled party saw this portent, they preserved decorous and attentive silence and listened eagerly. No one thought very much of Timothy's opinions, but there was no doubt as to his ability and industry in collecting facts and rumors.

" I remember," he said, " ah, just so well as if it were yesterday, in this very room, just when the election doin's first come up, being took very much to task for that very thing. Now, Pinniffer, I can mind you of it for this very reason, if for no other; there was a party sitting in this room, just where you're a-sitting now, Mr. Pye—"

Mr. Pye looked grave—it was Wolstenholme—as though he were suddenly made personally responsible for the doings and sayings of a person unknown, but of whom it was possible he might not approve. His brother looked grave too.

" That party," pursued Mr. Rapsey, greatly gratified by the attention which was being paid to his remarks, " was no less and no more, no other and no one else but—who do you think?"

The company had been so impressed by Mr. Rapsey's affidavit-like form of speech, that when he wound up with a question, not to say a conundrum, instead of a statement, they were incensed; in particular, old Mas'r Killett, who had followed the speaker with all

the care that both the gravity of the occasion, and what Mrs. Thrale would describe as a "warning," in the shape of a little deafness in company demanded, turned snappishly on him.

"Od rot the caddlesome man!" he cried; "why ever don't a say what a've got to say, 'stead o' messin' about wi' a lot o' cross-questions an' crooked answers? Who, in the name o' patience, were it?"

"Lor'! bless me, Mas'r Killett!" said Timothy, greatly startled, "don't 'ee be angry, sir; 'twas Mr. Galbraith, sir; that's who 'twas."

"Coming home to-morrow," said Christopher Raraty, taking his pipe out of his mouth and casting the sentence to the company, not with any reference to the subject in hand, but as a morsel of general and interesting news.

Timothy Rapsey, in his eagerness for information, quite forgot old Mas'r Killett's crossness, and almost the topic on which he had been speaking.

"Lor'!" he said, "comin' home to-morrow, is he? if it's a fair question, who told 'ee, Mr. Raraty?"

"Mr. Bryceson," answered Christopher; "I've got to send a carriage to meet him and a cart for his big luggage."

"Comin' home to-morrow, is he?" said Rapsey again; "he's been away a power of a time, hasn't he? I wonder, now, where on earth an' all he's been to?"

"You were going to tell us some tale or other about him just now," growled Barnabas Chickleholt, from behind his pipe, "but I doubt it's all fled out of your head—if 'twere ever in there."

"'Tis true tnat, Mas'r Rapsey," said a burly farmer, laughing at the very sound of his own jesting voice; "you do want more bring-gwain \* in a tale than any man I ever seed; for sure you do!"

Timothy looked rather abashed, and laughed a little dry, nervous, single knock kind of laugh.

"'Twas your fault, Raraty," he said; "you interrupted me, right in the middle."

"I didn't," said Raraty; "'twas you skipped away; but, lor' sakes, go on now, man."

Thus adjured, Timothy, resuming his former important attitude and gesture, proceeded.

"'Twas one mornin' when Mr. Galbraith was sitting where Mr. Pye is now; we were all on to the 'lection news, and it was said in this very room that what folk looked to see was Sir Headingly giving up his seat to poor Mr. Rivers. 'Then,' says Mr. Raraty, 'you'd 'a' seen Mr. Shelman putting up against *him*.' What was it I said then? Now, Mrs. Pinniffer, you *must* remember it, an' how sharp you was on me for saying of it. I said as there was one thing as young men 'ud quarrel over sooner than anything, and—"

"I know ye did, Mr. Rapsey," said Mrs. Pinniffer, advancing from the shadow of the little bar, and standing in its doorway. "I remember it very well, and I mind what I said, and, come to look at it all round, perhaps I might go so far as to say, now, as you were right and I was wrong over it. I only say perhaps, mind, for

\* Helping, or accompanying on the road. Literally, *bringing-going*.

I think, as Mr. Chickleholt said that day, you were too fast in your talk, Mr. Rapsey, an' I think you are too fast now."

Mr. Rapsey stared.

"Why, Mrs. Pinniffer?" he said in an injured tone; "wasn't I right?"

"Right or wrong, Mr. Rapsey, I don't say," replied Mrs. Pinniffer resolutely; "but fast you were, and fast you are."

Pinniffer, whose face had expressed much gratification when his wife had admitted the possibility of her having been in the wrong for once, now shook his head and chuckled.

"Well," said Rapsey, a little crest-fallen, but not much, for his belief in himself was great, "whatever you may think, I'll maintain and stick to it as I named that day—at least, not named, because I mind saying I hadn't named no names, but I pointed out that day the cause of the quarrel between those two young men."

No one openly supported Timothy, but those who had been present when the little man had been "put down" by Mrs. Pinniffer felt in their hearts that he was right. Perhaps even Mrs. Pinniffer felt so too, and would not have made any reply; indeed, a storm might have been averted from Timothy Rapsey's head but for the presence in the smoking room of an inquisitive farmer to whom this conversation was all Greek.

This man lured the little chatterbox to his fate by the simplest and most natural question possible.

"An' what were that, Mr. Rapsey," said he cheerily and loudly, and felt that he had done society a service.

Timothy rushed on his fate by degrees.

"What's the cause o' half the quarrels in the world?" he said, with a grin.

"Well," said the farmer, still cheerily, and looking round for approbation, "'tis a woman, nine times out o' ten they do say! Ha! ha! ha!" So old and crushed a joke demanded his own laughter, but he was unaccompanied.

"Yes," said Timothy, "you're right, and that was so in this case. Both in love with the same woman."

Pinniffer looked somewhat anxiously at his wife. That good lady had friends at the Priory House, and was a known partisan of that mansion; but this time she was silent. She may have given a spiteful glance at Timothy, and her tongue may have been very close to her lips, but she did not speak. It was not at her hands that Timothy was to receive his reproof. John Rann had been fidgetting about in his chair for the last few minutes, evidently with something on his mind, and he now broke forth.

"What a mischievous, mischief-making man you are, Rapsey!" he said in a tone of great wrath. "Drat it all, ye might leave the poor woman alone in her trouble for a bit, mightn't ye? I never saw such a man."

"I'm not saying anything against her, John Rann," cried Timothy; "I'm sure I'm as sorry for her as a man can be! I didn't say it was her *fault*, did I?"

"Her *fault*!" repeated Rann in a tone of great scorn, "her *fault*! no, you didn't say it was, and I hope you've got too much sense for it. *Fault*! If you come to fault-finding, and want to lay faults on

people's shoulders, I'll join ye. You've had your say, Timothy Rapsey, and now I'll have mine. I'll tell ye one or two things as 'll perhaps astonish ye. First and foremost," said the sturdy little partisan, bringing down his hand on the table with a slap that made Timothy jump, "I don't believe, and I *won't* believe till he confesses it, that Mr. Shelman did the murder at all—"

To say that the company *stared* would be to use a feeble word, and one entirely useless for describing the expression of features that every one in the room put on.

"—and secondly, I'll say to your face, Timothy Rapsey—and I don't make no bones about it neither—that, whether Mr. Shelman did it or not, it was as much your fault as any one's!"

*Whack!* came Mr. John Rann's hand down again on the table, and he stared triumphantly round on the most astounded set of faces he had ever seen.

It is a mercy that Wolstenholme Pye did not put into effect a wild notion which flew through his astonished brain, and that was to hang Timothy Rapsey at once and without any trial but a Lydford one, which had its advantages, although criminals were prejudiced against it, for if he had formulated his idea, he would, most certainly, have been backed up by his brother, and the execution once moved and seconded, it is a matter of considerable question whether public feeling at that moment would not have been strong enough to have insured its being carried out. Pinniffer's military instincts might have induced him to suggest a drum-head court-martial, but it is doubtful.

Fortunately, Wolstenholme Pye, whatever his ideas were, was too much paralyzed to enunciate them, and the moment passed.

But the shock on the assembled cronies was a great one. Old Mas'r Killett couldn't jump as well as he used, but he jumped a good deal; Barnabas Chickleholt, who was given to breaking pipes in moments of excitement, accomplished a "best on record," and broke his churchwarden into more pieces than he could have counted; ex-Mayor Killett, who would not have harmed a hornet, kicked the cat half-way across the room—spasmodically, of course. Mr. Beadlemore Arto poured the whole of his gin-and-water over his legs, and Pinniffer rang the bell sharply, and without the least occasion. The rest of the company were affected in divers ways, and Timothy Rapsey's face could not have turned more ashy-white if he had known of Wolstenholme Pye's wild thought and feared immediate action on it.

The first one in the room to recover was the cat. That sagacious beast went out and sat in the bar.

Then the nobler animals gradually came to.

There is no portrait extant which represents the Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte menacing the Allied Powers with a minatory long clay pipe; but Rann, had he been painted sitting as he sat during this period of amazement, would have approached the presentment of that majestic figure as nearly as possible. The Powers in his case were represented by the person of Mr. Timothy Rapsey, who quailed before the stern gaze. Certainly no foreign potentate could have terrified him more than did the market-clerk of Avonham. Some reply was, however, indispensable; and as soon as he was able to

articulate, he gasped out his remonstrance in the form of supplication and question.

“Good Lor’ ’a’ mercy on us all, Mr. John Rann!” said he; “what ever in the world do ’ee mean?”

“Mercy on us!” said Beadlemore Arto, wiping his legs; “what a dreadful thing to say, Mr. Rann!”

“I mean it,” said Rann. “Now look here, Rapsey; who was it stirred up all the strife and mischief when that gentleman at the Coombes and Mr. Shelman had that row outside? Why, you!”

Mr. Rann whacked the table again.

“Now, as it happens,” he resumed, “I know the rights o’ that. You took your money out o’ the bank—”

“I was told to,” interrupted Rapsey; “that weren’t my fault at all.”

“It weren’t your fault at all?” said Mr. Rann excitedly; “yes, it *were* your fault at all, and no one else’s; you go a-talking to Mr. Galbraith’s servant about Mr. Galbraith’s windows being broke, as if his windows were more than any one else’s; next thing you seem to make up your mind as that affair, and indeed all the whole riot was got up by our side, with Mr. Shelman at the head of it. Pretty charge to bring! Then comes what you call being told to take your money out of the bank. Of course you were told. Do you think a bank’s going to stand your scandalizing one of its chief partners? Do you think the bank wants your dirty money?”

Mr. John Rann banged his open hand on the table again, and made the glasses dance; the company looked as though Mr. Rapsey’s money were really a disgrace to him, and its possession a species of crime.

“What’s the cause of Parson Carter’s son leaving Bompas?” resumed the peppery market-clerk; “you and nobody else! Oh, you needn’t trouble yourself to deny it; I know all about it, never mind how. You’re going to say that Carter was attacking Mr. Galbraith’s house, aren’t you? Hadn’t that blown over? I don’t know much of Mr. Galbraith, nor of Mr. Bryceson either; but I do know this, that they wouldn’t have said another word about the matter more than they said to Bompas and Mr. Millard if’t hadn’t been for you. You’ve stirred up bad blood all round with your nasty, inquisitive, prying, tattling ways, and now, you’re not satisfied!”

“Tut, tut! dear heart alive, Mr. Rann!” muttered ex-Mayor Killett, “don’t ’ee now go on so at ’un.”

“Let him deny it if ’taint true!” urged the sturdy and solitary partisan of the unfortunate Shelman; “look at that row wi’ Mr. Shelman and Mr. Bryceson. I don’t say who were right, I don’t say who were wrong; but ’twere all his fault. I’ve always stood by Mr. Shelman, and I always shall. I don’t believe as he’ve a done this murder no more than I believe old Daddy Prosser’s father done it; but whoever done it, it was through bad blood stirred up in Avonham such as never was stirred up afore, and all through you, Timothy Rapsey. You’m an old neighbor o’ mine, and I’ve allus wished you well; and if this here affair don’t forever stop you from meddlin’ wi’ other folks’ affairs, and don’t keep that tongue o’ yours quiet behind your teeth, you take a neighbor’s friendly advice and goo home and cut ’un off!”

"Old Daddy Prosser's father couldn't do noo murder," said old Mas'r Killett scornfully, as the orator stopped to drink; "can't scarcely hobble to's front door of a sunny day, a can't."

"And now," said Rann, as he laid down his empty glass and rose from his seat, "now 'tis all to be put down to a lady as can't help herself, and ain't here to answer to it. Well, I'll leave all my neighbors here to judge if I haven't answered for her. Them as live in glass houses shouldn't throw no stones, Mas'r Rapsey!" and giving the little man no opportunity to reply, even if he had had the inclination, which he hadn't, the champion of the absent left the room without exchanging greetings with any one.

Mr. Timothy Rapsey did not remain long after him. Although it was felt that Mr. Rann's partisanship and excitement were more the cause of his outbreak than any facts he had accumulated, yet the situation was decidedly uncomfortable for Timothy, and the flavor seemed to have gone out of his tobacco all at once. He stood his ground for a little while, however, but soon departed, leaving his character behind him.

Mr. Rann's speech, and the subject of the murder generally, had been pretty well threshed out, and two or three of the outlying farmers had driven away, when the lessening circle was increased by Doctor Mompesson, who had not been seen for a day or two. When he was seated, Mr. Beadlemore Arto, after a little meditative puffing at his pipe, asked:

"How's Mrs. Stanhope, Doctor? Poor thing, I suppose she's terribly upset over this horrid affair."

Doctor Mompesson seemed unusually grave; he shook his head.

"Very bad, very bad," he said; "very difficult case;" and he continued shaking his head as he lit his cigar.

"I'm sorry for that, doctor," said Pinniffer, speaking amidst a general murmur of regret; "I thought the poor lady seemed to have been driven half wild by the shock on Monday night. Dear heart, I don't wonder at it. I'm sure we all feel it keen enough, and what must her state of mind be, poor thing!"

The doctor made no verbal reply; he nodded his head in appreciation of Pinniffer's sympathy with his patient, and went on gravely pulling at his cigar; usually he would chat cheerily enough to any one, but to-night there was evidently something on his mind, and nothing could make him speak except in monosyllables. Soon the conversation dried up altogether. John Rann's outbreak on the one hand, and the serious condition of Mrs. Stanhope on the other, acted as a damper on the spirits of every one in the room. The rest of the farmers wended their way homeward. Old Mas'r Killett and his dutiful son went home together, and still the doctor sat quietly smoking until at last he was left alone with Pinniffer. That worthy was not naturally garrulous; he was all things to all men in the talking line, as every good host should be, and would chat and gossip with a talking customer, or placidly smoke with a thinking one, just as the case might be, and put it all down in the day's work. He sat puffing away opposite the doctor for some time, until that worthy, who had sat with an empty glass before him for some time, and had been apparently oblivious of the fact that he had emptied it, stretched out his hand, groped for it a moment or two, raised it

toward his lips, stayed his hand before the glass reached his mouth, looked into the tumbler as though it were a vessel of surpassing interest which he had never seen before, say a Druidical punch bowl, kept his eyes fixed on it for a minute, and then gave a short sigh and woke to a sense of the surroundings. He looked over at Pinniffer and laughed.

“Going off to sleep, I think,” he said; “some more sherry and cold water, Pinniffer.”

This being supplied him, he sipped it once or twice, nodded approval, and settled himself for a quiet chat. Pinniffer told him the news of Rann’s attack on Rapsey, to which he listened attentively, as though waiting to hear some statement that would clear up a doubt in his mind. Not finding one in the landlord’s narrative, he shook his head again.

“Bad job,” he said, “bad job all round. Rann may be right; Rann may be wrong. Rapsey is a chattering little magpie, as every one knows, but I never knew any harm of him, and I think the matter is rather exaggerated. But I’ll tell you one thing, Pinniffer,” said the doctor as he threw away the end of his cigar: “when we have buried that poor young fellow to-morrow, ay, and when the law has exacted its penalty from—whomsoever *did* kill him, when all that is past and done with, we shall hear something in this place that’ll make the ears of every man that hears it tingle. Take the advice of an old friend, Pinniffer, my boy; don’t encourage any scandal of that sort; put it down quietly—you know how, but put it down. I don’t know what it is, and if I did, I am not at liberty to say, but I’m sure as I can be that something is coming on people in this town that we shall all be very sorry to see and hear of; good-night, Pinniffer, and remember what I have said.”

And the good old man, whose voice betokened the pain of his mind, went away, leaving behind him a very much puzzled host and hostess. For Mrs. Pinniffer had heard every word.

“What does doctor mean, Pinniffer?” said she to her husband when the doctor had gone.

“I don’t know,” said the ex-fusilier, “and what’s more, my dear,” he added firmly, “I’m not going to try to find out. There never was any good came of meddling with great folk for either soldier or publican. So I’m just going to keep my house open and my mouth shut, and let them as likes it caddle over other people’s affairs.”

“And the best way too,” decided his trusty helpmeet.

Doctor Mompesson walked home revolving many things in his mind.

What parson or priest hears what the doctor hears? Mrs. Stanhope had been in delirium; and though Dr. Mompesson did not understand the whole of them, and could not place them together in proper order, he had heard some terrible things as he sat by her bedside.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

## THE FOOTFALL OF NEMESIS.

As if to mock the sorrow of the town, the sun rose glorious next morning, and made merry all the day. His first business was to dispel the hoar-frost that had gathered thickly on every twig and spray and blade, and to drive away the fog that Avon threw up. This he did patiently, devoting an hour to it and finishing his task completely and in a workman-like manner. After that, he gave up his mind to being a bright jolly winter sun, and seemed inclined to assert that if he did not often shine on Avonham in winter, yet he could do so if he chose, and could make a November morning as bright and brilliant as any summer day of them all. What if he shone on a sad and mourning town? He took no heed of that, but gilded the streets and darted a ray of light through every crevice in shutter or blind that he could discover, and entered everywhere he could, preaching of a life that takes no heed of death, to those who could read the sermon.

At this time Avonham buried her dead in her church-yard; they lay grouped together neighbor by neighbor, family near family. In many cases the father had lain for a generation undisturbed till the earth was taken from his coffin for a short time in order that his son might join him in that long sleep of which no man knows aught save that, whatever may be its waking, it is hard to see our loved ones lie down to it. They laid Walter Rivers with his mother, who had died when he was a child.

Such an array of people had not been before seen in the Marlshire town. It was a general day of mourning; closed shutters, drawn blinds, and suspended trade were universal. From the country-side, hundreds came in to swell the throng of townfolk. What respect or esteem might not have been able to effect curiosity did, and the great grief of the two great houses of Avonham was shared, so far as outward demonstration went, by all who from town or country-side could reach St. Hildegarde's that day.

The funeral itself was simple in the extreme. True that the mournful procession passed from the house of Sir Headingly Cann to the church yard through lines of bareheaded men and weeping women; true that the hands of the most honored men in Avonham received it at the lych-gate, and bore the coffin first into the church and next to the grave; true that the whole of the church-yard was one mass of silent and sympathizing humanity, but the outward trappings of woe were plain and unostentatious, and the rigid simplicity of the accessories, combined with the solemn demonstration which a silent crowd always makes, were fitting and touching evidences that those assembled were seeing the last of a young life which was not, but might have been, a great one.

The chief figure among the mourners was, of course, Sir Headingly Cann.

The old man had borne up bravely under the loss of him whom

he loved as his own son, but it was evident that the blow had fallen heavily. He carried himself right nobly under his grief, though, as became a high-minded man, as he was. There was no faltering in speech as he followed the splendid service for the dead, no halting in his gait as he walked behind the coffin that held his nephew; he had no tears in his eyes at the grave, and he thanked, with a firm voice, those whose position gave them the right of personally offering sympathy to him after the last rites were over. Perhaps he came nearest to showing open emotion when, seeing Mr. Boldham, looking, if possible, more grief stricken than he, he made his way to him and held out his hand, which the other grasped in silence. An intuitive feeling that this was a meeting whose words and incidents were sacred things to all but those two kept every one aloof, but it was seen that Sir Headingly was the one who spoke, and that the banker, overwhelmed with grief and horror at the whole of the fearful affair, was totally unable to stem the current of his sorrow.

Slowly the concourse filed out of the church-yard, and dispersed among the streets of the town.

Among those who had joined in the general expression of respect had of course been Mr. Bompas, and those who took note of such things observed that he stood between his neighbors at the Coombes, Messrs. Bryceson and Markham. People who saw them, after the funeral, crossing the market-place together, observed to each other that Mr. Bompas seemed a good deal taken up with Mr. Galbraith's two friends, that the Coombes appeared to have a good many owners, and that Mr. Galbraith had been away a longish while.

The group of three was a silent one. They walked past Mr. Bompas's house and entered the gate of the Coombes. Arrived in the drawing-room of that establishment, a room which showed by its outward and visible signs, by its pipe-racks, fishing-rods, boxing-gloves, whips, guns, and other sporting paraphernalia, that it was a room devoted to the use of bachelors, Bryceson poked the fire into a blaze, and drew up the blind at the back French window, to admit light.

"No one can see it," he said apologetically, "and the house has been so desperately gloomy all day I really can't stand it any longer. For goodness's sake, Fred, ring for Edward or that sweet nymph, Mrs. Hackett."

Fred did as he was requested, and the negro appeared in answer to the summons. He had apparently understood it, for he brought wine and other cordials on a tray.

"Edward," said Bryceson, "we are both going over to Avonham Road to meet Harry; get a carriage and pair from Raraty's, and you will drive us yourself."

"Berry good, Mas'r Wal'r; Mr. Bompas comin' 'long too?" asked Edward.

"No, Edward," said Mr. Bompas: "I conceive that these gentlemen would prefer to welcome Mr. Galbraith and his—ah—brother by themselves. I will—ah—postpone the great pleasure which I shall feel at seeing Mr. Galbraith return safe and sound to his—ah—to the—ah—place of his adoption and choice."

"Dear old Harry," said Fred Markham, "we shall all be glad to see him again, and fancy having poor old Reginald among us once

more! Ah, but I'm afraid," he added, "it will be with a broken heart, and only to spend the fag-end of a ruined life. Mr. Bompas, you will have no idea what he was from seeing him as, I fear, he is."

"Sir," said Mr. Bompas, "let us hope that a brighter close to his life will be granted to him."

"I say amen to that," said Bryceson, "but what will happen, and how Harry will act, or what Reginald will do, I don't know."

"Does he know of the—of the terrible occurrence of last Monday?" asked Mr. Bompas.

"Not a word," answered Markham; "we consulted together and came to the decision that we would leave all explanation till their return. This sudden affair of the murder must of course make such a difference in many ways, that it is impossible for us to foretell how the matter will be conducted, or how it will turn out in the end. Besides, we may want to consult other people—yourself, for instance; and again a letter might miscarry and be opened. It is a chance whether they get any information from the papers, and we can easily explain why we were silent. Also it will be necessary that Harry shall know before Reginald, and oh, there are many good reasons besides, which I need not recapitulate."

Mr. Bompas sipped his wine in silence for a minute or two, and then, laying down his glass, said very gravely:

"I have known Mrs. Stanhope—as from—ah—old associations I must continue to call her—for so long; I have been so great an admirer of her goodness, her charity, her whole manner of life, and have been so long her—I trust—faithful servant, that these things have come upon me with a great shock. From what you have told me, and from the result of her interview with my daughter Adelaide last Monday, I feel that I must accept these facts that are—ah—*forced* upon me by belief and even by—ah—conviction; but I assure you, gentlemen, that I would fain disbelieve them. Is there no doubt, no misapprehension, no mistake?"

The good old fellow's broken voice seemed to plead for his old friend's wife as he put his question.

Bryceson shook his head.

"There is no mistake, believe me, Mr. Bompas," he said; "she is Reginald Wilding's wife, beyond a doubt."

"Then," said Mr. Bompas, "there must be mercy shown. Being strong in your position, you must be pitiful."

Very firm and clear was Mr. Bompas's voice now; it sounded to himself almost threatening; he was uncertain how his remarks would be taken and his appeal received; but, like the stout-hearted man that he was, he was without care on that point. His duty lay clear before him, to stand between the wrath of an injured husband and the person of a woman whom he respected from custom, guilty though she might be.

"Whatever were this lady's faults, or, if you like it, crimes," pursued he, "you must, in all justice, remember two things first, that she considered her first husband dead; secondly, her blameless life of late years."

"Years," said Markham, quietly but firmly, "which our poor friend has passed—how?"

The question was not answered. Mr. Bompas remained silent. Bryceson slowly cut and lit a cigar.

"You may depend," said Markham, "upon all justice being done. It may be that Mrs. Stanhope *is* Mrs. Stanhope, and that her worldly position is unassailable. It may be that Reginald will himself take views of the position different from ours. But in any case," he concluded, with a slight flush, "you may be sure of this one fact, and be comforted by it, that Harry is a humane man and a large-hearted one, and also that there is some one else now who has a claim on him, and who, if I do not greatly mistake, will endeavor to divert, and doubtless will succeed in diverting, much of his anger from a woman who is undoubtedly suffering terribly just now."

Mr. Bompas nodded his head gravely, but with a gratified look. The last words greatly reassured him.

He was about to express himself as being willing to trust to his young friends, and to his daughter's influence, when Edward appeared at the door, interrupting him in his speech.

"What is it, Ned?" asked Bryceson, who was standing in front of the fire, looking moodily at his friend, for the subject was a painful one to all in the room, and puffing slowly at his cigar.

"Dr. Momp'son want to see you, sah," said the negro.

Bryceson looked from Mr. Bompas to Markham inquiringly. They stared at him in return.

"Show Dr. Mompesson in, Ned," said he, then, turning to Mr. Bompas, said, "Do you know why he has called?"

Mr. Bompas shook his head.

Dr. Mompesson being ushered in, looked anything but at his ease. He shook hands with Mr. Bompas, bowed to the two friends, and took the seat handed to him by Ned, who then left the room.

Dr. Mompesson coughed slightly, and glanced at Mr. Bompas with a constrained air.

That gentleman at once perceived his embarrassment, and rose from his seat.

"You wish to speak to Mr. Bryceson privately, do you not, Mompesson?" said he.

"Well, yes," said the doctor, hesitatingly, "I did; but if I am interrupting any—"

"Not at all," said Bompas, taking his hat. "I shall see you all to-night, shall I not, Walter?"

Markham also rose from his seat as though to leave the room, when Bryceson spoke:

"One moment, Mr. Bompas; wait a bit, Fred. If I do not mistake the cause of Doctor Mompesson's visit, I should prefer that you remained. Unless I am greatly in error, doctor, your visit relates to Mrs. Stanhope."

"It does," said the doctor, very much surprised at being thus anticipated in his communication.

"In that case, Doctor Mompesson, my old friend Mr. Fred Markham here—"

He indicated Fred, and the doctor rose and bowed to him.

"— is concerned in the matter equally with yourself. We are acting for our absent friend Mr. Galbraith."

The doctor, who had resumed his seat, nodded.

"It was partly to question you respecting Mr. Galbraith that I came here to-day," he said.

"Just so," said Bryceson. "Mr. Bompas," he resumed, "is in our confidence upon a certain matter very much concerning Mrs. Stanhope, and you may speak freely before him. Indeed, in a matter so delicate, and in the absence of my friend, I should prefer the presence of a gentleman my senior, and one in whom I have every confidence and trust."

The two old friends exchanged inquiring glances.

"I have no hesitation," said the doctor, after a short pause, "in speaking before my old friend Mr. Bompas, though the matter is, as you say, Mr. Bryceson, one of extreme delicacy. Indeed, it is the most painful one I have had during the whole of my medical experience and practice."

Mr. Bompas shook his head sadly. "It is a sad one for me, my dear Mompesson, I assure you," said he.

"Let me ask you a question first, gentlemen," said the doctor, turning to Bryceson and Markham. "Are you, or were you personally acquainted with a man named Walter Wilding?"

"For many years," answered Fred Markham. "We were comrades together in America."

"Is he not dead?" asked the doctor, looking earnestly at the faces of all in the room.

"He is not," said Markham.

"But he was shot, was he not?" asked the doctor, who evinced much surprise at Fred's answer.

"He was shot," said Markham, "and was believed to be dead for many years, but he is alive."

"Is he any connection of Mr. Galbraith?" asked Doctor Mompesson.

"He is his half-brother," answered Fred, while Bryceson still stood before the fire smoking slowly; "they are children of the same mother."

"I am asking these questions from having received some instructions from Mrs. Stanhope, whom I am attending; those instructions are very incoherent, and almost amount to ravings. As I told you just now, my position is most painful. Tell me, gentlemen, how is Mr. Wilding connected with Mrs. Stanhope?"

There was a short pause. Then Mr. Bompas spoke. He could not bear the silence that followed the question.

"He is her first husband, Doctor Mompesson, and he will arrive in Avonham this evening."

"Good God!" said the doctor, and his hat and Malacca cane fell with a crash on the floor.

The feverish ravings of the sick-bed, hitherto almost unintelligible to him, were now explained.

"Did you know of this before, Bompas?" he asked when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"On Sunday last, for the first time," answered Mr. Bompas; "my daughter Adelaide told me."

"Adelaide?" said Doctor Mompesson, in intense surprise; "how ever came she to know anything of it?"

“She was informed of it by my friend Mr. Galbraith,” said Bryceson, taking the answer out of Mr. Bompas’s mouth.

The doctor stared at him as though this was more astonishing than anything he had yet heard. He turned to Mr. Bompas.

“It is so,” said that worthy in reply to his friend’s mute inquiry; “Mr. Galbraith and Adelaide are engaged to be married.”

There was a twinge of self-reproach felt as he said it. All his old friends had been kept in the dark. Fred Markham noticed his discomfort and came to his rescue, to the greater edification of the puzzled doctor.

“We are astonishing Doctor Mompesson in detail,” said he; “Mr. Bompas, will you give your friend an account of what we all know? As Doctor Mompesson has been let into our secret, he may as well make one at our council. The matter has gone further, by a series of accidental occurrences, than we had anticipated, and, as it seems likely that it will all gradually leak out, and will perhaps get a great deal of embellishment from rumor, it is far better that Doctor Mompesson should learn the truth from us.”

Thus requested, Mr. Bompas informed the doctor of all the events which we have learned of late.

Mr. Bompas did not fail, at the close of his narration, to reiterate and strongly impress on the young men—whose relationship to his family was explained to the doctor and astonished him very much—the principles of leniency and mercy which he had been inculcating just previous to Doctor Mompesson’s arrival. With them the doctor heartily and cordially agreed. It was a sad tale to which he had to listen, told fairly and with moderation by Mr. Bompas, and not interrupted by a word from either of the young men, but the doctor had the natural partisanship of a Marlshire man for Marlshire things, and, whatever were the faults of this woman, she was the widow of his old friend, and he was prepared to defend her from oppression, though he could not justify her life.

“And there is one thing,” he added as he was going away with his old crony Bompas, “about which you must not misunderstand me. Your friends arrive to-night. They will not be able to see Mrs. Stanhope yet.”

“I do not think my friends are likely to ask such a thing,” answered Markham, who, though he had kept strict silence whilst the old fellow urged his plea, was somewhat ruffled by one or two of his remarks, for the doctor, in his eagerness to support his crony’s appeal for leniency, had persuaded himself that injustice and inhumanity were the characteristics of the young men, and had spoken accordingly once or twice.

“Even if they did,” said the doctor, “it would be denied them. I am Mrs. Stanhope’s medical attendant; she is in no condition to be disturbed; I shall allow no one to see her, on any business whatever.”

Bryceson bowed. “That shall be faithfully reported to my friend Mr. Galbraith,” said he.

“Yes,” said the doctor, gruffly enough, “do, if you please, and tell Mr. Galbraith, moreover, that this town is full of Mrs. Stanhope’s friends, friends who have known her for some years, and her husband for many; we shall require proof of what you allege, Mr.

Bryceson and Mr. Markham. A mere general statement such as has been made to me to-day, and such as you made to Mr. Bompas, will not satisfy us, I assure you."

For a moment Markham made as though he would have spoken, but he remained silent, and the doctor, without any attempt at bidding any one farewell, trotted out into the hall and let himself out, leaving Mr. Bompas with his hosts.

Mr. Bompas looked as though he feared that the heightened color of the two friends betokened a coming explosion; but he was mistaken. As the door slammed emphatically behind the doctor, Bryceson smiled. He threw away his cigar, which had gone out, chose another, and passed his cigar-case to Markham.

"Your friend is a warm-hearted man apparently, Mr. Bompas," he said, "and very much in earnest."

Mr. Bompas muttered a few words, eulogistic of the doctor, but deprecatory of his last remark.

"Warm-hearted he may be," said Markham, pausing before striking a match, "but, if you have any influence with him, Mr. Bompas, and wish his patient well—which I believe you sincerely do—I would advise you to recommend him not to take that ground with Harry Galbraith when he arrives. It will not do with him, I can assure you. Nor would much more of it have gone down very well with me, or with Walter here. It must not be forgotten that we three men, and three more, stand shoulder to shoulder in this matter, as we have stood shoulder to shoulder in even graver ones; nor must this be allowed to be overlooked: that for many weary years the man whom all of us love as a brother has been passing his life in a living tomb, whilst the woman for whom Doctor Mompesson has been pleading has lived in luxury and ease. Is it our fault that retribution has come upon her at last? No, Mr. Bompas, it is not.

Not so many years ago but that some of your old men could remember it, your Law would have doomed her to Death. Whatever it can do now, there is only one chance between her and it, if we choose to invoke its aid. For, trust me, we have proof and evidence enough of her guilt to convince a townful of pig-headed doctors; and if we are set at defiance, we shall bring it forward!"

Mr. Bompas, who was wise in his generation, did not reply to the young man, whose flushed cheeks and flashing eyes showed that he was speaking under a measure of excitement which, to judge by the look on the face of Bryceson, who stood by in silence, was unfamiliar even to his familiar friend.

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"Now I have told you all there is to tell, Harry; and you will see why we dine here and drive home afterward; don't let us have another word about it to-night. Reginald looks wonderfully well, considering all things, and a few days of quiet will do wonders with him. But of all the good things, meeting the old squire in Liverpool was the best. Let us go in to dinner and be as merry as we can to-night, at any rate."

Despite the darkness of some of their thoughts, it was a hearty party that sat down to dinner at the Railway Hotel at Avonham Road. At the top of the table was the old squire, on his left hand

Bryceson and Markham, at his right sat Galbraith, and next to him the lost one found, the old comrade one more among them, the dead restored to life.

“Boys!” said the old squire, raising his glass solemnly, “it is thirteen years since we met like this. I thank God for our meeting here now!”

It was not an ordinary “sentiment,” and they drank in silence to it; but none of them had ever known a moment of greater joy, or drunk with more relish of the wine.

Ah, there is never Joy like that great heart-rush that sweeps away the memory of Pain.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### FOR WANT OF AN ABSENT WITNESS.

“I CAN add no more to what I have said. That you, uncle, do not believe my words, I know; that you, Mr. Sennett, and you, Mr. Sinclair, see in them no hopeful signs and no materials for my defense, I am aware; but I am helpless in this fearful position; I am as innocent of the murder of poor Rivers as you are yourselves, but I can advance no theory to account for his death, and I swear that I have consistently spoken the truth.”

The scene was a cell in Ridgetown Jail, a cell plainly furnished, but not without some comfort; Alfred Shelman was the speaker. He was seated at a table on which were writing materials and books; his three visitors were also seated: his uncle on a bed in the room, Mr. Sennett and the third person on two chairs. The Mr. Sinclair, whom he now addressed, was his counsel. Interested in more than an ordinary degree, he had sought and obtained permission to visit the man whom he was that day to defend against the heaviest charge which can be brought against man or woman—the taking of human life.\*

At every visit which either Mr. Sennett, in his character of solicitor, or Mr. Boldham, as the nearest relative to the prisoner, had paid him, he had strenuously asserted his innocence. He could, he declared, throw no light on the unhappy affair; there was no one whom he suspected; nothing could be gained from him but reiterated protests that his hands were free from blood-guiltiness, that he fully recognized the perilous position in which he stood, but that if the jury found him guilty, and the law exacted her last stern penalty, he should die an innocent victim to circumstantial evidence.

Mr. Sennett had not at first believed his asseverations; but the young man had told him the tale of his movements on that fatal afternoon, so clearly, so unswervingly, and so consistently that, at last, and against his own better judgment, he had fastened on his words as being true. For his own further satisfaction, he had begged the counsel whom he had engaged—one of the most eminent

\* For an example of a *counsel* visiting a client charged with murder, the reader is referred to Mr. Serjeant Ballantine's book, “Serjeant Ballantine's Experiences,” SEASIDE LIBRARY No. 1293.

men on the Western Circuit—to hear, from the prisoner's own lips, what he had himself stated to him in his brief, and the counsel, impressed with the pertinacity with which a hopeless line of defense was adhered to, and assured that there was more in the case than senseless obstinacy, had himself come to see him and hear him for himself.

“Will you repeat to me,” said he, “what you have already told your solicitor and your uncle?”

“Willingly,” answered Shelman; “this is my statement, and I declare that every word of it is true.”

The barrister leaned a little forward, and, carefully observant of his face, listened attentively to his words.

“I went out from my own house at about one o'clock to shoot pheasants in my wood at Downholmes, which I have recently purchased from Mr. Millard, of Beytesbury. It took me about half an hour to get there, and I was either in or on the outskirts of the wood for about an hour. I say ‘about’—I kept no reckoning—I did not even look at my watch. I had poor sport, and the mist rose very rapidly; I was disgusted at my want of success and knocked off, leaving the few birds I had shot at the lodge, where Mr. Millard's gardener and his wife were still living. I had allowed them, at Mr. Millard's request, to occupy the house until Christmas. I left the birds there. I wish,” he added, with a sad smile and a shake of the head, “that I had taken them home by the road, or that I had left my gun as well.”

“I wish you had, with all my heart, my poor boy,” said Mr. Boldham, with a sigh.

“Well,” said Shelman, with the same smile, and speaking in a resigned tone of voice—a tone that his uncle had seldom heard him use of late years—“I did not; I left the birds, intending to send my man for them the next day; I took my gun, and went toward Avonham across the meadows. On the foot bridge across the Avon I met Walter Rivers. Up to that time I had had no open quarrel with him; indeed, I had scarcely met him since the election; but I was greatly incensed at finding that he had forestalled me with Mrs. Stanhope. Do you know about that, sir? I would rather not repeat it if you do—”

Mr. Sinclair referred to a slip of paper. “There is no need to go into it now,” said he gently.

“Thank you, sir! Well, I was incensed, as I said, about that, and I was altogether in a bad temper—my temper has been a curse to me all my life—and I passed him without speaking. I had gone a foot or two on the bridge when he spoke to me, and asked what was the matter? did I mean to cut him? I turned and answered him roughly that I chose my own acquaintance and had no longer any desire for his. He laughed and said the arrangement would suit him very well, and then I got into a great rage with him, and accused him of circulating a false report about me in the town concerning the election riot. I was half mad with rage, and scarcely know what I said. He answered me, but was much cooler, whilst I was boiling with rage. I put my gun down against the railings, and we quarreled violently, though he kept his head. He taunted me with having lost my chance of marrying Mrs. Stanhope, and I

retorted that if I thought he had had any hand in maligning me to her, I would put a bullet into him. I only meant that I would have called him out."

"You mean that you would have challenged him to a duel?" said Mr Sinclair.

"Yes, that was my meaning," answered Shelman.

"That, and no more?" asked the lawyer.

"That, and no more," said Shelman; "I had no other thought in my mind at the time."

"What happened next?" asked Mr. Sinclair, again referring to a paper in his hand.

"The young fellow, Lightfoot, the grocer's assistant, came up suddenly. He came out of the mist, which was getting very thick, and neither of us, I think, heard his footsteps; at any rate, I did not. His voice startled me, and it was that, as much as the rage I was in, that made me give him the answer I did. What he said of my words and of Rivers's, at the inquest, was perfectly true. He was frightened at my threat, and went away pretty quickly. After he had gone I think I was worse than before. I called Rivers a cur, and a scoundrel, and vowed to be even with him; I rushed away from the place more like a madman than anything else, quite forgetting my gun until I was a good way on the high-road. I walked to Berry Hill to walk off my temper and the state of agitation into which it had thrown me, for I was fearfully upset. I then turned and returned home by the way at the back of the church-yard. I had not been at home half an hour, and had just settled myself down for the evening, when Inspector Grane came, and, after some rigmare, which I swear I could make nothing of, arrested me for Rivers's murder. I declare that my first feeling was one of such indignation that I had almost knocked him down. When I learned that the dreadful news of Rivers's death was true, I was horrified. I paid no attention to Grane's threats of taking down anything that I said, but protested my innocence as I do now. Before Heaven, I swear that I had no hand in that fearful crime. The rest that happened you all know."

"Do you know any one," said the lawyer, "who had any grudge against Walter Rivers?"

"No, I do not," said Shelman; "he was generally popular, I believe, all over the place."

"In the whole course of this violent quarrel, no blow was struck?" asked Mr. Sinclair.

"No, no blow was struck, though it would have come to that if I had not gone away," answered Shelman.

"I have nothing more to ask, Mr. Sennett," said Mr. Sinclair, and he folded his papers and prepared to go.

When they were outside the jail and the two lawyers had shaken hands with Mr. Boldham, the Mayor of Avonham said to the counsel:

"I wanted you to hear him yourself for my own sake; what do you think of his tale?"

"If I am any judge of character, it is true. He may be, and I think is, a young man of violent temper, indeed he has admitted it to us, but I believe his tale is true. There is a mystery about the

whole case. On the evidence I should say that there was not a doubt of his guilt—any lawyer would say the same, and I very much fear—” and he shook his head.

“What?”

“That the jury will think so too!”

\* \* \* \* \*

There had been an emigration of Avonham folk to Ridgetown that morning. Nowadays there is a railway service between the places, though the trains go a roundabout way, and cover twenty miles in bringing together the inhabitants of two towns only ten miles apart by road, but at the time of our tale the highway was the only means of intercommunication, and, on the morning of the trial, a string of vehicles left the smaller town for the larger. A few persons of county position had managed to secure seats in the court, but the majority, if they could not manage to crowd in with the general public would have only the solace of getting the news of the result a little earlier than those who stayed behind. Beadlemore Arto drove Timothy Rapsey, Mr. Follwell, and Mr. Pollimoy in his high dog-cart, and Wolstenholme and Hoppener Pye went fraternally in a gig which only held two; Raraty took a party in a wagonette, and the three vehicles kept pretty close together and stayed at the same half-way house. In the street of Ridgetown which fronted the Guildhall, there were constant recognitions passing between Avonham men, and many were the tricks, shifts, and maneuvers employed by those who wanted places.

Timothy Rapsey was delighted with a seat in the very first row of the gallery, and exactly in front of the dock. From this coign of vantage he scanned the whole court, and gave his less fortunate companions information concerning any notable whom he saw.

“Mr. Sennett’s a-talkin’ to a tall l’yer in a wig; I reckon that’s him as is goin’ to defend.”

“Killett ain’t got no seat; a’ll have to stand; oh, no, a won’t; a’ve found one at last.”

“Look ’ee there now; there’s Mr. Bompas up behind, and Mr. Galbraith wi’ ’un.”

“That’s that old gen’lman stayin’ wi’ Mr. Galbraith o’ t’other side o’ Mr. Bompas.”

“Lor’, what a voice that crier ’a’ got, to be sure! Old Daddy Prosser ought to be here to hear ’un.”

“Mr. Galbraith’s other friend’s just come in and set next to ’un. I don’t see Mr. Bryceson nowheres.”

“Poor Mr. Boldham! they’ve give him a pplace next to Mr. Sennett; a looks main flurried.”

Thus the little man chirped and chattered, and peered about the court like an observant magpie.

When the judge had taken his seat, and the jury had been sworn, there was a stir in the court as the prisoner appeared. He bore himself well under the fire of eyes turned upon him, and his color went and came. His plea of “Not Guilty” was given in a clear and firm voice; but he seemed to pay little attention to the speech of the counsel for the Crown, occupying himself in looking round the court and occasionally flushing as he caught the familiar countenance of

some Avonham man among the spectators. Among them he saw the face of Galbraith, and sought eagerly for that of Bryceson near him; not finding it, for Bryceson had too much manhood to be present, he turned again and scanned Galbraith's face. There was no hostility in it; turning again he caught a friendly visage, that of John Rann, who smiled and nodded to him as though to bid him be of good heart; he answered him with a smile. He heeded the trial very little at first.

Would that prosy man, heaping fact on fact against him, never be done?

There was Adolphus Carter sitting with his father, and close to Mr. Bompas. Pleasant for him!

Half Avonham was here to see him tried. How many would come to see him when—

That would be in the open air, too, and there would be more room for them than in the court.

Thank God! there were no Avonham women there to gloat over him in his misfortune.

Had Galbraith ridden over on the horse that he bought in spite of him?

He had seen him once riding with—; ah, thank goodness the speech was finished at last!

Such were his thoughts after that first survey of the court and the faces familiar to him.

They were succeeded by a kind of dull interest in the evidence. It was so great a nuisance having to stand there before all those common vulgar people, that he might as well try to get some amusement from the witnesses. He took notice of them as of the actors in a slow play, the end of which he was anxious for, but the plot of which had little attraction for him. Those busy men, writing just in front of him, would describe him as being quite calm and cool during the progress of the trial; they would praise his command of feature and his courage. In reality he felt as unconcerned as any spectator in court.

\* \* \* \* \*

The end was near now. The witnesses had been examined and cross-examined, the counsel for the defense had made what every one to-night and to-morrow would describe as a grand speech, and the judge was calmly and dispassionately going over the evidence and summing up to the jury. The examination both of Jacob Starer, who was terribly nervous, and, even in his simple tale, contradicted himself once or twice, and of Lightfoot, who had given some vague evidence as to the time of his hearing the shots, had roused great interest, and had not been so unfavorable to the prisoner at the trial as it had been at the inquest. The wisdom of a reserved defense was seen, and Mr. Sennett was praised for his tactical skill by all his Avonham townsfolk during the interval for luncheon. Lightfoot, too, could not swear whether or not the gun was capped or cocked when he saw it on the bridge. Jacob Starer admitted that he had been more anxious to get the body of Walter Rivers out of the water than to notice its position as it lay. These were all points in favor of the prisoner. The doctor's evidence and opinion as to the cause

of death had not, however, been shaken. He did not believe that the deceased in handling the gun, perhaps with an idea of causing it to be restored to its owner, had accidentally shot himself; the wounds, he thought, could not have been self-inflicted. But the supposition had been well handled in the defending counsel's speech, and Mr. Sinclair had made the most of it, and of each of the other points; there was much doubt now in the minds of the spectators, and John Rann's face was radiant.

But there was that violent quarrel on the bridge to be disposed of, the wiser heads thought.

The judge finished a masterly summing up, the conclusion of which was solemn in its mention of the issues involved, and of the duty of the jury to their country and their fellow-men alike, and the jury withdrew.

There was the usual buzz of subdued conversation in the court during their absence; the judge left the bench, the prisoner was removed from the dock.

A quarter of an hour—half an hour—an hour passed, and the jury had not returned. Lights were set in the court as the winter day waned, and still they waited.

The issue of what was passing in the jury-room we shall see presently. Let us look at something which is going on in the court. The actors are two, and their action is quite silent and unobserved. It consists simply of one man watching another. Candles have just been brought, and the court is well lighted where they sit.

The man who is watched holds a handkerchief in his hands, and is twisting and wringing it till its threads are giving way, and it is full of holes, and shredded and torn in twenty places; from time to time he wipes from his brow great cold drops of sweat, which stand there in pearl-like beads. His lips are white, and he rubs them furtively now and then, as though he knew their pallor and sought to give them color. He has been taking notes of the trial, but has torn them into shreds and thrown them on the floor. When the lights were brought he made a movement of impatience, and, for some minutes, shaded his eyes with his hand as though they were affected by the glare. From time to time he looks about him, but furtively, and as if to see whether people are observing him, more than to notice them or their doings. Surely the prisoner himself cannot be under stronger emotion, as he waits for the verdict, than this man.

The man watching can only see one side of his face except when he turns, but he never takes his gaze from him and watches with eyes well used to watch, and notes every twitch and gesture.

There is a stir in the court, for the judge has been sent for, and the prisoner is again in the dock.

The jury enter, and their names are called amid a silence deep and great, broken only by the voices of the clerk and the jurymen. All ears are opened for the verdict, all eyes turned to the jury-box.

All save two; the watcher never takes his eyes from the face of the man whom he is watching.

"How say you, gentlemen? Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty of willful murder?"

"GUILTY!"

A flush comes into the face of the man watched; then it dies out;

he half turns to the one who sits by his side, then his eyes close, his head bends forward, and he falls with a loud crash on the floor.

There is a little confusion as he is removed, and a county magistrate whispers to the sheriff, who whispers to the judge, that it is a great friend of the prisoner, overcome by the verdict.

“Prisoner at the bar! Have you anything to say why sentence of death should not be passed upon you?”

The prisoner lifts his eyes toward the judge, and there is not a tremor in his voice as he says:

“My lord! One witness has been wanting at this trial, the man who fired the shot that killed Walter Rivers! That man will be found one day, and the jury will live to see that their verdict was wrong. Before my Maker, I swear that I am innocent!”

In a broken voice, and with great emotion, the judge passes sentence of death. He feels bound to say that the jury have done their duty and that their verdict is according to the evidence. He entreats the prisoner to use the time remaining to him in repentance. His own violent passions have brought him to this position, a fearful one for a man of his station in the world. He can hold out no hope; nothing remains but to pass the sentence of the law. And the dread words are said in a hushed and awe-stricken court.

Then the prisoner is removed and goes out of sight, and the crowd file out into the street.

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“I do not want to see another man sentenced to death,” says Mr. Bompas, as the four friends are waiting for their horses at the hotel after the trial.

“Nor I,” said Markham. “Pah! this sherry tastes of the gallows and the hemp!”

“Nor I,” says the old squire. “I shall dream of his face all night, poor fellow!”

“Nor I,” says Galbraith, last of all, “particularly when he is not guilty!”

The three others stare at him. “Not guilty!”

“Yes; I say I do not believe that young man is guilty!”

“Do you believe what he said about that missing witness?” says Fred Markham.

“I do; I believe he will be found, and very shortly too.”

“How will he be found? Who will find him?” asks Mr. Bompas, astounded.

“I will!”

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### A PERIOD OF SUSPENSE.

IN total ignorance of the far heavier cloud that hung over her, the good folks of Avonham received with quiet joy the news of the restoration to health of their chief lady. Doctor Mompesson's praises were sounded at every tea-table in the place and the good doctor was openly congratulated by every one who met him. To him, who, as we know, had his secret to carry about with him, these demonstra-

tions were awkward, and he went about the streets looking so very grave that folks wondered at it and said to one another that the anxiety of the case had told upon the old man. That it was anxiety which made him so glum was true, but it was caused by the downfall of an idol, the shattering of an illusion. Doctor Mompesson had lost no time in seeing Galbraith. The day after the arrival of the latter in Avonham, the doctor had waited upon him, and what Markham had prophesied to Mr. Bompas had come true. No graver mistake could have been made than to attempt to assist Mrs. Stanhope by attacking Galbraith. This is what the doctor had done. He had *demande*d rather than asked for proof; he posed as the self-constituted champion of a lady whom he alleged to be lying under a false accusation, and he had started the war by what he considered a justifiable raid on the enemy's country. Now to stir up strife is always dangerous, and to attack a man who has a grievance, using as a weapon a derision of and disbelief in that grievance, is something like arousing a rattlesnake. You *may* be able to get safely away, but it is most certain that you will have to *move*. Doctor Mompesson had to abandon his first position precipitately.

"I have listened patiently to you, sir," said Galbraith, "from respect for your age, and your honored and honorable position in this town, but you are exceeding the privileges both of your years and your station."

"I have taken upon me," answered the doctor, "to speak on behalf of a lady whom all Avonham loves and admires, and who, I consider, is being most unjustifiably slandered and abused."

Galbraith's color rose and his temper with it. This was hard for any man to have to hear.

"You are speaking on behalf of a woman," he said, "whom I and my friends know to be an adulteress, and have good reason for supposing to be a bigamist. You are the champion of a worthy cause, I must say!"

"Sir," said the doctor in a great heat, "I do not believe one word of your accusation against my friend and patient. From beginning to end it's a cock and bull story—"

"Which you shall have speedy opportunity of testing," said Galbraith. "I will at once apply for a warrant against your friend and patient for having committed bigamy. I wish you good-morning, sir."

And he rose from his seat and rang the bell so sharply that Edward answered it at the double.

Now, the doctor, though an obstinate, was not an utterly pig-headed man, and he, at once, saw that he had gone too far with this young man.

"Stay one moment, Mr. Galbraith," said he, swallowing his irritation and speaking more calmly, "I am wrong to be hasty with you; I am sorry I was so; let me have a little more conversation with you."

Galbraith signed to Edward, who stood in the doorway, and the negro withdrew.

"Doctor Mompesson," said Galbraith when they were alone again, "I cannot blame you for your championship of your friend's—widow— When this news was first conveyed to Mr. Bompas he

was as much astounded as you can be, though"—he said with a smile—"he received the story with more equanimity. I can assure you that he has been as zealous in—Mrs.—in *her* cause as you could be. My friends have done him every justice in reporting that. The surroundings of the case are very much altered from when I first came to Avonham. My brother has been restored to me as though from the dead, I have found love in a town to which I came with hatred and revenge in my heart; and, another hand has dealt to this woman a blow so heavy that even I pity her. You would, I am sure, give me credit for every disposition to do right if you knew the state of embarrassment into which these things have thrown me since my return home. Without promising anything, I assure you, in all sincerity, that the best thing will be to wait. Wait only for the issue of this trial, wait only for your patient's recovery. The secret is in good hands. Trust me to respect your motives and your partisanship, and forgive any little angry speech that I may have made in this interview, a painful one, I know, to both of us."

"It is for me to ask your pardon, Mr. Galbraith," said the doctor, "I will take your advice and will trust to you to do what is right. Let us wait."

So they parted excellent friends, each with a hearty admiration for the other.

For three weeks Mrs. Stanhope lay between life and death, but at last the doctor was able to pronounce her out of danger, and, as we have seen, there was universal joy in Avonham over the fact. During those weeks no whisper of anything beyond the fact of her illness had leaked out in the town.

Avonham had plenty to interest it meanwhile, in the trial the result of which we saw in our last chapter, and also in the fact of the household at the Coombes having increased in numbers. Mrs. Hackett was reinforced by a second charwoman selected by herself. Raraty had to put up three more horses for Galbraith, who had purchased them of Hart. Mr. Pinniffer's face brightened when he mentioned casually the transactions which the gentlemen in South Street had with him, and the gossips of the Avonham tea-tables began to throw out dark hints of the relations between the three young men and the Misses Bompas. The oldest member of the band was speedily high in favor in the town, and Doctor Mompesson and Mr. Millard when they heard his name, received it with all the honor due to it. It was not long before the county paper informed its readers that the guest of the proprietor of the Coombes was an American *savant* whose fame had spread over two continents, and so the house and its occupiers became more important than ever. The minds of the small fry were somewhat exercised by the squire's presence, as they looked on him somewhat in the light of a new kind of bogey, respectable but not the less dangerous. The negro had been at first somewhat uncanny in their eyes, and now that he was supplemented by one whom they considered as a superior wizard, their courtesy increased with their fear, and no one was more respectfully received in the streets by the schoolboys than Galbraith and his friends.

So time went on and Mrs. Stanhope recovered, and Shelman was tried; with what result we have seen.

The time of Christmas was approaching fast. The town had had its Agricultural Show, at which local fat oxen had been punched and pinched and criticised, and root crops weighed and poultry shown; and after it meritorious farm laborers had received sides of bacon or silver medals, apparently as a reward for having been content to cling to the same acres of soil for their existence during five-sixths of their slow, hard, dead-level lives, scarcely higher than those of the horses they drove or the bounds their masters walked; farmers round had got their orders for Christmas turkeys, and Killett's mind was weighed down by the fact that oxen, even at Christmas, are not entirely composed of sirloin; Pinniffer's spirit bottles had burst out with seasonable labels representing a white-headed, snowy-bearded Silenus, crowned with holly, and discussing a bowl of punch; the grocers' windows were filled with raisins and candied peel and all the other signs of the festive season were at hand.

"I doubt very much, Walter," said Galbraith to Bryceson, one afternoon, as they walked up the town together, "whether, with all this confounded worry over our heads, I shall be able to offer you fellows a very merry Christmas; I wish with all my heart that whatever is to happen would happen soon, and that we knew the end of everything."

"And so do I, my dear fellow; what is this especial errand you have to-morrow?"

"I will tell you of it when I return," said Galbraith; "goodness knows whether I am wrong or no, but I cannot get out of my head that that man Shelman is not guilty, and it is concerning that. Don't ask me any more about it now. You shall know all in good time."

"I am quite contented with that, old fellow; come, let us be as cheerful as we can until we know the worst or the best of our troubles. Thank God, we have Reggie with us, and the squire says he sees marked improvement in him already. Then we're all going to be married in the spring, so you see we are better off in some respects than we ever thought to be. Come! throw away your cares for the time, Harry, and let us be gay. Look at old Pinniffer standing at his door, and bidding that old fellow on the cob farewell. He looks positively mediæval. John Gilbert ought to paint him; I vow no one else could do him justice."

"Isn't that Millard? the parting guest I mean? yes, it is, I thought so."

"Let us go over and see, I can't make out in this dusk; I think you are right, however."

The horseman proved to be our old acquaintance, who had ridden in to execute some Christmas commissions. He was easily persuaded to dismount, and the two mounted the steps of the hotel together. There was no one in the parlor when they entered, and they were soon making merry over a small bowl of punch of Mrs. Pinniffer's own brewing.

"When do any of you mean to pay me a visit at Beytesbury," asked Mr. Millard. "Mrs. Millard is saving some cherry-brandy for you, Mr. Bryceson, which, she declares, shall beat anything you ever tasted. Come and sample it before Christmas comes, and bring

your friends to lunch. Mr. Galbraith, you have not been our way once since your return. How is your brother?"

Mr. Millard, be it observed, was not the possessor of the secret of Reginald Wilding's illness. To his mind, he was a young man just returned from America and just recovering from a continued sickness. The young men made suitable replies to the old fellow's invitation and inquiries, and Mr. Millard resumed.

"And so you were over at Ridgetown on Tuesday at the trial, I hear," he went on.

"I was not," answered Bryceson, "I could hardly have gone after what happened here."

"To be sure," said Mr. Millard, "well, well, a sad thing, a sad thing; I was very much upset over it."

"You knew both men, of course, intimately?" asked Galbraith, as he sipped his punch.

"Since they were boys, and boys together," answered Mr. Millard; "to my mind that is the saddest part of the whole affair. It is as horrible to think of as though they had been actually brothers."

"I suppose you have heard all kinds of rumors as to the real cause of the quarrel between them?" asked Galbraith.

"All kinds," answered Mr. Millard, "and don't believe one of them; the whole affair is a mystery to me."

Bryceson was just about to inform Mr. Millard that his friend had a theory on the subject, when he caught Galbraith's eye, and from the look in it he remained silent. Galbraith did not speak himself, but taking out his cigar-case handed it to his friends. Both accepted the proffered weeds, and during the process of cutting, lighting, and starting, his Cabana, Mr. Millard did not resume. When he had seen the first portion of white ash appear and was satisfied that all was well, he continued his remarks on the murder.

"I have always known," said he, "that Shelman was a young fellow of imperious habits and overbearing manners. What we call a masterful man down in these parts. Added to that, his temper was hasty, not to say nasty, and he lost it very soon and sometimes over very trifling matters. I happen to know, Mr. Galbraith, for one thing, that from the first day you came into Avonham, he bore *you* no good will."

Galbraith nodded, but made no other comment on the information.

"As for yourself, Mr. Bryceson, why, you know, you two—well, you haven't forgotten, I dare say."

"No," said Bryceson, laughing, but changing color a little, "we upset the whole respectability of the place I know. Gad! I thought your friend, Mr. Sennett, would have locked us both up."

"Well," said Mr. Millard, dryly, "I have known Sennett for a good many years, and I am extremely glad that the matter went no further than it did. It was sufficiently deplorable without anything worse being imported into the matter. I have always regretted that *fracas*, Mr. Galbraith."

"It would most likely have fallen to my lot to be engaged in it, had I been at home, Mr. Millard," said Galbraith—a little stiffly perhaps—"and although viewed in the light of recent events—with which however it has very little to do—it does seem regrettable, yet

I have too much gratitude for my friend making my quarrel his own to find any fault with him for it."

"Well," said Mr. Millard, "every one looks at these things from his own standpoint, and, from yours, you are undoubtedly right. Let us say no more on that head then. I was saying that this affair of the murder is a complete mystery to me. I will tell you why that is so."

Galbraith nodded again, and settled himself to listen, with every outward mark of attention to the speaker.

"I told you just now," said Mr. Millard, leaning back in his seat and puffing slowly at his cigar, "that I did not believe any of the many rumors flying about as to the cause of any very desperate quarrel between young Shelman and poor Rivers. I know, of course, that they were quarreling violently just at the time the affair happened, but I cannot for the life of me see any cause for matters having gone so far as that Shelman should shoot Rivers, either in hot blood or cold blood, no matter what was the subject of their dispute."

"But, what theory have you formed upon the matter?" asked Bryceson in a tone which showed that he was not much impressed by the depth or sagacity of Mr. Millard's remarks up to the present.

"I believe," said Mr. Millard, "that there was a struggle between the two young men and that, in that struggle, the gun went off and shot Walter Rivers. I wonder that that was not the defense set up."

"I don't quite see how they could set up that defense," said Bryceson. "I understand that, not only at the inquest but at all times, Shelman has strenuously denied shooting or struggling with Rivers at all."

"Well," said Mr. Millard, shrugging his shoulders and apparently giving up the thing as a bad job, "as I said before, the whole thing is a mystery to me, although the facts seem plain and on the surface; if the theory of a struggle and an accidental discharge of the gun be not correct, I give up all hopes of ever being able to explain the affair. Unless indeed," he added, "Shelman should confess to the murder."

Men who have been together in wilder scenes than the smoking of cigars, and the sipping of West Country punch, have little ways unknown to the natives of those regions where these peaceful pursuits are indigenous to the soil. Not a man in Avonham could have seen that Galbraith gave Bryceson a sign that he was to pursue his inquiry no further; but the sign was given and understood, for all that. There was a pause in the chat for a couple of minutes, during which Bryceson and Mr. Millard smoked, and Galbraith seemed intent on nothing more important than deciphering the inscription on the William and Mary guinea which was let into the bottom of the rare old punch ladle.

"By the bye," said he after he had replaced the much cherished antique in his proper place, "I saw that interesting young gentleman Carter in the court at Ridgetown last Tuesday. What is he doing now that he has left Mr. Bompas?"

"Ah!" said Mr. Millard, "I heard that he fainted in court when the verdict was returned: is that true?"

“Perfectly,” answered Galbraith, “I was sitting not very far from him at the time.”

“He was very friendly with Shelman,” said Mr. Millard, “the shock must have been too much for him.”

“Ye-e-e-s,” said Galbraith very slowly and in a tone at which his friend looked somewhat amazed: “that must have been it, I suppose; he seemed more upset than the prisoner.”

“He’s not overburdened with courage, I fancy,” said Bryceson.

“What is he doing just now?” asked Galbraith again of Mr. Millard.

“He is at home with his father,” answered Mr. Millard; “that is another young fellow who has made a fool of himself. But you know more about his misdeeds, Mr. Bryceson, than I can tell you, of course. Ah, he lost a good chance when he got out of Bompas’s good books.”

“For that I really can’t blame myself,” said Bryceson; “at any rate not entirely.”

“No,” said Mr. Millard, “I think he must thank his friend Shelman for that in a great measure.”

“You think so?” asked Galbraith.

“Oh, yes, I am sure of it,” answered Mr. Millard, “I had that from Bompas himself.”

Galbraith nodded two or three times as though the answer, in some way, were satisfactory to him, and it had been what he had been expecting.

“But I must be getting homeward,” said Mr. Millard, jumping up and shaking hands cordially with the two friends; “no, thank you, Mr. Galbraith, this cigar will last me nearly home; good-by to you both: now remember, we expect you to call as soon as you can, and you can trust my wife, Mr. Bryceson, for having some cherry brandy worth tasting, I can assure you. Pinniffer, send my cob round.”

The two young men stood at the front door, as the good old fellow mounted and rode away, giving him a cheery farewell as he turned the corner. As they stood a minute hesitatingly on the steps of the Bear, the obsequious and observant Timothy Rapsey entered the doorway and gave them an effusive “good-evening.” Galbraith immediately turned back and followed Timothy to the room they had just left.

Timothy’s nature was elastic. Dashed as he had been by John Rann’s vigorous denunciation of his inquisitiveness, he had recovered his perky manner and was just as eager for any information as ever; one circumstance had indeed conduced a good deal to his comfort. Rann had met him a few days after their encounter, and had disclaimed any desire to give him pain by his remarks. Now he thought he saw another chance of adding to his store of knowledge of his neighbors.

“Nice seasonable weather, gentlemen,” said he as the friends entered the room.

“Very,” said Galbraith.

“I am glad to see Mrs. Stanhope out driving again,” said Timothy.

“Oh, is she sufficiently recovered to be about?” asked Bryceson.

“ Oh, yes,” said Timothy, “ indeed I think she has been paying you a visit, Mr. Galbraith, this afternoon.”

“ Paying me a visit!” said Galbraith, looking at his friend in surprise, “ how do you know that?”

“ I was coming along South Street about an hour ago,” said little Chatterbox, “ and Mrs. Stanhope’s carriage stopped at your gate. The footman went in and came out again, by which I presume you was out, sir: indeed I may say as I asked ’un and he said you was.”

Bryceson kicked a stool over and then apologized for it; his friend laughed.

“ Mrs. Stanhope drove on, sir, and I see she’s returned to South Street, and is over at Mr. Bompas’s now; her carriage is a-standin’ at his door. You can see it come out o’ South Street if you watches through this winder.”

“ You seem to take a great deal of notice of what goes on about here, Mr. Rapsey,” said Galbraith.

“ Yes, Mr. Galbraith, I do,” answered Timothy, “ you see it’s my only occupation nowadays. I suppose it was summat about the ’ouse as Mrs. Stanhope wanted to see you about, sir?”

For a moment Bryceson looked curiously at the pair; but Galbraith gave no sign of annoyance.

“ About the river, Mr. Rapsey,” said he, “ Mrs. Stanhope is going to give me the right of fishing in it. But I must be going now. Come along, Walter. Good-afternoon Mr. Rapsey ”

Mr. Rapsey watched the two friends crossing the market-place, and then gave his mind to tobacco and ale.

“ Been to see me this afternoon, eh?” said Galbraith to Bryceson as they walked along: “ what does that mean?”

“ Clear the decks for action, perhaps,” answered Bryceson.

“ Very likely. Well, she will find us all at our stations when she comes.”

They passed the carriage standing outside Mr. Bompas’s door, and entered at their own gate. At the door they met Edward, who looked grave.

“ Dat ar woman been here askin’ for you, Master Harry,” said he.

“ So we hear, Ned; if she comes again show her right in. Any one at home?”

“ No, sah, dar ain’t none of ’em come back, but dey won’t be long now.”

The three other occupants of the Coombes had gone for a day’s trip to Bath.

Galbraith and Bryceson entered the room and the negro brought them lamps. By their light Bryceson noticed that his friend’s face was very set and stern.

When they had sat for about five minutes quite silent and each occupied with his own thoughts, there came a knock at the front door. Galbraith turned and pitched his cigar into the fire. Then he looked at Walter and laughed.

“ Stand by to repel boarders,” he said, “ I want you to stay here with me, old fellow. We are all brothers in this.”

The door opened, and Adelaide Bompas entered the room, followed by Mrs. Stanhope.

Both men rose. Bryceson handed a chair to Adelaide, who took

it without speaking. There was no need of explanation. It wanted but one glance at each of the other two to realize the fact that they had met for strife.

And Adelaide, brave as she was, felt her heart grow cold as she saw the two hard faces: her's full of majestic, stately beauty, his lit up with the light of battle and calm as the face of a statue; while Bryceson waited for the first words with strained attention, as he had sometimes listened for the word "fire!" as he looked on at some wild Western duel.

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### AT THE SOUND OF A WELL-KNOWN VOICE.

THERE was a difference in the manner of each of these duelists. Whilst Galbraith was really calm, Mrs. Stanhope was only apparently so. She had nerved herself for the encounter, and the effort had been a great one. She had been forced to confess to herself that her enterprise was desperate, and one thought troubled her more than all. She had an hundred-fold more at stake than the man with whom she was fighting.

In the old wild days of her Bohemian existence there would have been for her no such thing as loss of station to dread. Her rare beauty and her gift of song had been the weapons wherewith she had faced the world, and faced it successfully too. The surroundings of such a life have a tendency to harden the nerves and strengthen the heart of a woman, though very often quite the reverse is the result of their influence on a man. When she had exchanged this life for the hum-drum existence of a married woman, she had found respectability and regularity intolerable. An indulgent and fond husband had no attractions for her. To a man who was stern, and even harsh to her, she would have clung with all the strength of her heart; but she despised the good-natured and easy-going Reginald, and fled from him with one unworthy either to be compared with him or to be associated with her. The first rush of love for her deserted husband had come over her after the deadly injury she had done him, for she then first knew that under his quiet nature lay high courage and firm resolve. She remembered now how her terrified paramour, with face ever white and hand ever trembling, had carried her from place to place, from town to town, and how the injured husband had followed like a sleuth-hound, till, in spite of every device, they had found no rest for the soles of their feet, and a month's consecutive residence in one place had been a matter of impossibility. Then it had been that, amidst this wild scurrying here and there, this constant flight, those starts and horrid awakenings in the night; those terror-born glances right and left and up and down before venturing out by day, she discovered that, after all, she loved the pursuing and hated the pursued.

She remembered how, when at last news was brought her that all was over and that they need fear no more, the tide of revulsion which had set in in her heart, now filled it with loathing for the partner of her crime and pity and affection for the dead. François Grènier had but little cause to triumph after he had told her the story.

In a whirlwind of wild regrets she had torn herself from his embrace and loaded him with reproaches so bitter and scorn so scathing that they rang in his ears till he died; till the morning when he faced Galbraith on the low-lying sand where the lazy waves of the Mosquito Gulf were plashing on the shore, when he felt the blue eyes, stern and pitiless, conquer his own, when he gripped his knife and *tried* to feel that he could win the fight; when the face in which he could see the likeness to the man whom he had left at Bâton Rouge, shot by treachery, drew nearer and nearer, and he could mark the breadth of those shoulders, and guess at the strength of that terrible right arm. The words of his dupe, and the cry of his victim were in the ears of François Grènier till his last despairing stroke was stricken, till his delicate wrist broke in the iron grip of the avenger, and the requiting steel went down into his black heart as he took the Wages of Sin in full.

She knew nothing of his fate. She had dreaded his reappearance at one time, but the feeling had worn off since her husband's death, and even had he appeared, she would have felt secure in her knowledge of the man's character and the easy manner in which she could have silenced him. But this man was different.

How inexpressibly dear was her social position to her now! It had been but a little kingdom over which she had reigned, but her sway had been undisputed and she had been very happy there. Now there was this one struggle to come, and then she must lay down scepter and robe and turn her back on her subjects. Oh, for one hour of her old wild courage! Civilization had spoiled her for a desperate moment like this. She went into the contest with much of the same hopelessness with which François Grènier had faced the very man before whom she stood now. And she could not quit her realm without a sigh. The thought of having to leave it had nerved her to make one fight against fate and she was here to day to make it.

"You are perhaps surprised to see me here, Mr. Galbraith," she said, for she felt that she must open the business, as he gave no sign of doing so.

"I am not surprised, madam," said he gravely, "will you be seated?"

She took no heed of the invitation, but remained standing by Adelaide's side.

"Empty courtesies, Mr. Galbraith, will be thrown away between us," said she, "let us come to the root of the matter."

"I must decline to pledge myself to any particular course of action, madam," said Galbraith, "but since you are here and seem to wish to speak, I will listen to anything you have to say."

"You are kind," she said with a sneer, "I could at all times have insured your doing *that*."

"I do not think so," replied he, "do not assume too much. If we are to talk let us have facts."

"What do you mean?"

"Several things, madam," he said, sternly, "for one thing that I can cut short your power of speech in one moment, by calling in the aid of the law: for another that no amount of sophistry or rhetoric shall move me from the fixed purpose of my life, or destroy the

fruits of my patient labor in tracking you for years as I have done. We are not on equal terms here, madam, and you know it. Cease your acting; it will not serve you now!"

"Tell me," she said, "what it is you allege against me. Bring your accusations! I dare you to shake me from my position, and I warn you against the consequences of such an attempt. It will ruin you!"

"I thank you for your warning. I do not think you will be able to ruin me. Adelaide, I do not quite understand your presence here. Do you come by your own wish?"

"Yes, Harry," said Adelaide, "I promised I would come over. Do you not wish me to remain?"

"Remain," said Galbraith, after a moment's pause, "yes, since you know the history, it may be as well. You may hear some things that I should not have told you otherwise, and it is a dark business for you to be mixed up in."

"And now, Mr. Galbraith," said Mrs. Stanhope, "will you deign me an answer to my question?"

"Yes, madam," said he, turning to her sharply, "by asking you another. *What is your name?*"

She knew the import of the demand, and, steel herself as she might, she shrunk from it. She even fenced a little in order to put it by, though for a minute only.

"What is my name? Well, that I suppose is the orthodox commencement. Shall we have the rest of the catechism to follow? Mr. Bryceson, do you know your catechism?"

Of all foolish speeches this was the most foolish she could have made. But the question and its gravity had unnerved her and the words dropped from her lips half hysterically. Her enemy was stronger than she.

Bryceson's face was as grave as that of his friend. He was in no mood for trifling, but he answered,

"I know sufficient of it to be able to prompt you, madam, in case your memory should fail."

She looked from one to the other and read the significance of their faces. She must flee or fight. Let her fight.

"Such a question is absurd; every one in the town will answer it for you."

"Madam," said Galbraith, "I will ask the question in the town to-morrow morning, for it is all important that I should know the answer to it. I will set at rest a doubt which has puzzled me a good deal lately. Indeed, ever since the morning on which I was introduced to you at Avonham Road Station. And, trust me, that when you learn the method in which I shall pursue my inquiry, you will regret that you did not answer me yourself."

She stood a few moments without speaking. His eyes never left her face; he rang the bell.

"Stop!" she cried, moving a step toward him, "what are you going to do?"

"Madam," answered he, "our interview is at an end; without a reply to that question I can hold no further communication with you. I will not be defied and I will have that answer!"

The door opened and Edward appeared. Bryceson gave a glance at her face, and then motioned him away.

"I will answer you that question," she said, when Edward had retired, "and you will see then that you have nothing to say concerning my position. I am Laura Constance Stanhope. You are at fault at once!"

"That is the answer I expected to receive; I warn you that you will have to substantiate it by evidence."

"I am able to do so, Mr. Galbraith, I can bid defiance to you all. You are defied now!"

"I accept your defiance. You were married in the name of Wilding?"

"That is true."

"Laura Constance Wilding, widow, I read in the register."

"That is also true."

"You believed Wilding, your first husband, to be dead?"

"I still believe him to be dead," said she, but her voice shook as she said it.

"Oh, the wind sits in that quarter, does it? Well, you shall see him and satisfy yourself on the point!"

"It is false. I had complete evidence of his death in America."

"I will furnish you with satisfactory evidence of his being alive, and in Avonham."

Her cheeks turned paler and her arm trembled as she laid her hand on the back of the chair which she had at first refused to take. She sat down now and took a long breath before she slowly said,

"Even if that were true, it would not alter the circumstances. He has no claim on me."

"No claim to be your husband, do you mean?" asked Galbraith.

"Yes, no claim to consider himself as my husband," she answered.

"You wish then to lead us to infer that you obtained a divorce in America?"

"I will not leave you in any doubt upon the subject," answered she in a low voice.

There was a pause of silence in the room, and then Gabriel spoke.

"We will then, if you please, leave the matter where it is until we receive that proof. When that is furnished we can consider what to do. And, understand me, madam, I am not pledged that the matter shall rest there. You say you believe in Reginald Wilding's death. Go home, and thank God that he is alive and that you are in his hands as well as in mine."

She rose from her seat and looked steadily at him without speaking. Bryceson stepped to the door to open it for her to pass.

At that moment the front door was opened and the joyous laugh of Fred Markham sounded in the hall. In answer to some merry remark the soft, half-sad voice of Reginald Wilding was heard. Mrs. Stanhope started back, with a low cry, and clung to Adelaide.

"Whose voice is that?" she said in a hoarse whisper.

Bryceson opened the door and beckoned to the party. At the entrance appeared the clear calm features of the restored man, and he came forward, while the guilty woman started further away in dread.

He saw her; and over his face rushed such a cloud and such a

surge of blood seemed to sweep his cheeks, and such a deadly pallor followed, that his brother started forward in alarm and seized his arm. But he steadied himself, and drew from his side, and stepped in front of her.

“Constance!” he said.

And at the word the proud heart was smitten, the lofty spirit was humbled, and the imperious beauty flung herself at his feet with a great cry.

“Oh, Reginald, my darling! I have sinned, but I have suffered! When I lost you I loved you first. I thought you dead, and dead through me, and my wicked heart broke and my new heart was born! Oh, my old love, come to my new heart, and do not send me away!”

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## CHAPTER XXXII.

### AFTER MANY YEARS.

MORE persons were witnesses of Mrs. Stanhope's humiliation than the party of the house. Mr. Bompas and Dr. Mompesson had accompanied the young men and the squire across the road, and were thus present at the scene. It was a strange one to all, but to two members of the company it was little short of marvelous. All doubts were cleared up now: there was confession in every wailed word that fell from the lips of the woman up to whom they had looked as up to a being from another sphere. All in the room were affected by the sight, each in his own way. The laugh had died from Markham's lips; Bryceson looked sympathetic; the tears stood in Adelaide's eyes, and she turned and laid her hand on Galbraith's arm, and drew close to his side as if pleading for mercy. The doctor and Mr. Bompas looked on with white and sorrow-stricken faces, whilst the old squire seemed anxious chiefly for Reginald Wilding's sake. Reginald, after his first great heart-leap, was calm, his handsome face was lit by a strange light, and once more he appeared to his old comrades as he was before the dark cloud came down over his life. In his eyes his brother could read more love than reproof, but so great was Galbraith's command of feature that by looking at him nothing could be learned of his inner thoughts, save that the business on hand was grave and serious to a degree.

After the wild outburst of the woman brought to bay, there was a silence which no one seemed inclined to break; at last Reginald Wilding spoke, and his voice was singularly calm and sweet.

“Rise, Constance! come, I will not talk to you unless you get up from the ground.”

He raised her and she sat again in the chair she had just quitted. Galbraith looked over to the doctor, who came across the room and took his stand next to his patient and spoke a few words to her in a low tone, but she shook her head and motioned him away. He did not go, however, but remained beside her.

“Do you know, Constance,” said Reginald, “where I have been for the last twelve years?”

She shook her head and raised her eyes to his face, but made no answer in words.

“Listen, and I will tell you, and then let my friends and yours judge between us.”

She cast down her eyes again, and waited for his words without a sign.

“I married you and loved you dearly; how dearly I think you will never know. How you requited me you do know. God knows I never made boast of myself, but I would have held my own against François Grènier, in aught but his treachery and vice. You left me for a low gambler, a coward and a murderer; left all my great love and threw away your beauty and your soul on him.”

She crouched in her seat as though his words were physical blows and she were shrinking from them.

“Did you think that I would sit down with my wrong? or were you persuaded that I would? The race from which I spring has not begun to produce cowards yet. I think you found that my pursuit of you, during one year, was as unremitting a chase as even southern blood could have carried out. At last I came up with the man who had wrecked my happiness and broke up my home. I should have known that he who was a traitor in one thing would be a traitor in all, but I gave the man a meeting as though he had been an honorable man. Did you hear from him that he shot me as I turned to walk to my place, and that he came and kicked my body, as I lay there, as he thought, dead? Did your cavalier tell you that?”

Again no answer; only she raised her head as though about to speak, and then settled back to her old position.

“When I came to myself I was in an hospital. That was not for long. I was to suffer far worse than that for having loved too well. For twelve years, twelve long terrible years I have been in the tomb of a living death; I have been a madman amongst madmen, an out-cast from the world, I have dragged on for eleven years in a mad-house, and it is thanks to an accidental recognition, a circumstance so wonderful in its bringing about, that I fear to speak of it; to the matchless skill of my dear old friend here, and to the joy I felt at the sight of my beloved brother, that I am here to-day. My brother himself, who would have given his life for me, and who, mark me, did in requital of my wrongs risk it; my brother who is by my side now, has mourned for me as one dead until a few months ago. This has been my penalty for marrying you; this is the fate you dealt out to one whose only crime was that he loved you. Do you ask him to love you again? He has no second life for you to mar.”

For the first time, she answered him, “I did not know; I thought you dead; I even tried to see you but I could not find you. When—that man—told me of your death, the words in which he told of it were the last he spoke to me. I cursed him for killing you, Reginald, and I cast myself free from him forever!”

The deep voice of Galbraith broke in here, and the contrast with his brother's tones was so great that it made her start.

“Were you married to François Grènier at that time?” said he.

“No.”

She crimsoned as she spoke, and as she saw Adelaide involuntarily shrink from her.

“Yet you were divorced from Reginald?” said the stern voice again.

“Yes.”

He was silent.

“I do not know,” she said, “and I will swear it by all that is sacred; I do not know what became of François Grènier after we parted in Bâton Rouge. I have never seen him since.”

“Well, I will do you the justice to say in the presence of these gentlemen;” he pointed to Dr. Mompesson and Mr. Bompas, “that your asseveration tallies with his own story of the matter.”

“You have seen him?” said she, with a startled look at him, “you have seen François Grènier?”

“I have seen François Grènier,” said he, with a look at her before which she quailed.

“Where did you see him?” this in a whisper such as a woman speaks in when she names a ghost.

“It is enough for you that I have seen him,” said Galbraith, with a glance toward Adelaide.

“Is he—?” she did not complete the question, for she saw his glance and understood it.

“He is dead,” he answered, “he died some time ago; when I meet you again I will tell you particulars of his end. Do not ask me any more concerning him now.”

She shivered at the sound of the cold grave words, for she knew their import well. This man would not shock the ears of the woman he loved by mention of the wild deed, but *she* knew, as well as though she had seen the affray, that he had done execution on the man who had wronged his brother. Her helplessness against these men struck her for the first time. The man who had not spared her partner in guilt had told her that, left to himself, he would not have spared her. In utter despair she rose from her seat.

“I will go,” said she, “I can struggle no longer against you; I yield myself to your hands; what do you require of me? Tell me and I will do it.”

For the first time she caught sight of the face of the old squire, who stood with his hands clasped behind him, a silent spectator of the scene.

“I remember you,” she said, “you are Reginald’s old friend. Is it you who restored him to health?”

“Under God’s hand, madam,” he said, “I have been the humble means of his being free.”

“You are a good man,” she said, “you always were. Are you so good that you cannot feel any pity for me?”

“Madam,” replied the old squire, “I were not a good man if I denied to any what I daily need myself.”

“Have a little pity on me then,” she adds with a weary sigh, “for indeed I need it sorely.”

She was quite broken now; her face looked changed and drawn and haggard, and the light had gone out of her glorious eyes; she was pleading now, and Adelaide, touched as she was by the scene of the woman’s humbled pride, felt a quiet joy springing up in her heart, as she saw the faces of her lover and his friends soften and

fill with commiseration for her; she was standing alone against them all. They were noble toes, she thought.

"These men are just," Mrs. Stanhope went on, addressing the old squire, "but they are very hard. They do not consider the years of suffering, they do not reckon the pain of penitence."

She spoke as one whose sense was partly deadened by some heavy blow, and her voice was strange and hollow.

"I think I must have been mad when I ran away with François Grènier, for Reginald had been very kind to me. I have often thought of him and of the old days. Now I could be happy in that quiet life; but I was a wild bird then, and my home was a cage in which I did not care to stay. I was not all bad. I was only weary, intensely weary of my life. He was not a good man with whom I went away. Not so good as he whom I left. When he told me that he had been challenged by Reginald, and that in a duel he had shot and killed him, I drove him from me as I told you. I never saw him again. I think he went to New Orleans. He was a bad man, he tempted me from my home. He got the divorce from a court in Louisiana. A lawyer got it for him. Then he wanted me to marry him but I would not. Now you tell me he is dead."

She turned her eyes for a moment to Galbraith, who silently bowed his head in sign of acquiescence.

"Bad as he was," she resumed, "he was the only protector I had then, and when I turned him away I was alone in the world. I had three years of weary wandering and tiring toil, until I had made and put by a little money, and then I came to England to turn my back on the old life and lead a new one here."

She spoke now in a firmer tone and with some show of her accustomed haughty air.

"I have done so. I have led a new life. There is no man who can point finger at me or carp at the actions of one hour that I have spent in England. I call to witness for me, sir, the two gentlemen who stand by you now. I think if you went into the streets of this town the poor would speak for me. I think that when it is known here how I have fallen, many hearts will be sorry for me. That is why I ask you for pity, and this is the thing I ask. I will not resist you. But let me go away quietly before you proclaim my shame. Remember what a blow I have just received; though perhaps it was better for the poor boy to die, than to live to marry such an one as I. And the memory of my last husband is dear in this place. And one thing more; it will harden the hearts of those who would do good, and the hearts of those who need help. They will say that all charity is bad, and that it was only my cloak. God knows I tried to be good. God knows I have repented. Have a little pity on me as you hope He will have pity on you."

And with bowed head and clasped hands she left them, her faithful friend Dr. Mompesson going out with her.

When the party in the room had heard the door close behind them without the silence having been broken, Adelaide went across to where Reginald Wilding was standing. All in the room were under the influence of the emotions which the statements of Reginald and the appeal of Mrs. Stanhope had excited.

"You will have mercy on her, brother," said Adelaide, laying

her hand gently on Reginald's own. "I know how much you have suffered, but, remember! she has suffered too; and we have seen her here so good to all around her, that any harm to her would be a great blow to us all. You have been mercifully restored to us all, and out of gratitude for that I would ask you to show forgiveness. Do not refuse me, Reginald! Harry will not stand between me and my request, I am sure."

"No, Adelaide," said Galbraith, "I will even support you in your plea, and love you the more for pleading."

Reginald took Adelaide's hands in his, and kissed her on the forehead.

"It shall be as you wish, dear sister," said he in a low voice. "I will forgive her. She shall never receive any harm at my hands. We have, both of us, suffered enough!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### A SEVERE TEST OF MR. TIMOTHY RAPSEY'S NERVES.

"HE has lain for two days in a state of utter senselessness, and now that he is conscious, he seems so weak and prostrated, that the doctor is very anxious concerning him. It is very good of you, Millard, to have come over, and especially kind of you, Mr. Galbraith, after what has happened. The result of the trial was a great blow to him; much greater than I can quite comprehend, for, although they were certainly friendly, yet I was not aware that Adolphus and Mr. Shelman were on closer terms of intimacy than that of companions. Indeed I think I have heard Adolphus say that Shelman held himself somewhat above him."

The speaker was the Reverend Mr. Carter, the father of Adolphus, and his auditors, somewhat to his astonishment, had ridden over together to see his son, whom we last saw swooning in the courthouse at Ridgetown.

Mr. Millard seemed constrained in his manner, and replied vaguely on the account of Adolphus Carter's illness. He glanced at Galbraith as though to seek for instructions from him. Galbraith turned to the father and said:

"I regret very much to hear that your son is so ill. It is a matter of the very highest importance that I should see him. I hope he is not so bad that I cannot do so."

"No, Mr. Galbraith, you can see him," said Mr. Carter, "I trust however you have no agitating news for him."

Galbraith did not answer; he rose to his feet and waited to be shown to the patient.

"He is in the room behind this," said Mr. Carter, ringing the bell, "show this gentleman in to Mr. Adolphus," said he to a servant, who appeared in answer to his summons.

Galbraith bowed and left the room with the servant, whilst Mr. Carter turning to Mr. Millard, said in an agitated voice, "Do you know what Mr. Galbraith's business is?"

"Only partly," answered Millard, in a hesitating manner, "he wants, I know, to question him concerning this unhappy affair, but

what his intention in doing so is I do not know. He particularly requested me to ride over with him and I did so."

Mr. Carter turned pale, and laid an unsteady hand on his friend's shoulder.

"I trust, in Heaven's name, that no heavier blow is going to fall on us through my unhappy boy's misdeeds."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Millard, "I hope things will turn to better all round."

"What unhappy affair do you allude to, about which Mr. Galbraith wishes to question Adolphus?"

"The attack on his house; and your boy having lost his place at Bompas's of course!" answered Mr. Millard.

Mr. Carter laughed nervously.

"I am a little upset, I think, Millard; I was afraid you might mean something else."

"No, certainly not," said Mr. Millard in some astonishment, "what else should I mean?"

Mr. Carter made no answer to this, but pressed refreshments on his friend and entered into ordinary conversation on country-side topics, seeming somewhat relieved by Mr. Millard's answer, meanwhile Galbraith had entered the room in which Adolphus Carter was.

He was seated in a chair, the back of which was turned toward the window, so that the light did not strike his face, but was full in that of any one entering the room. Galbraith noted, however, with those keen calm eyes of his, how he started at his entrance, and how a look of dread of danger came over his face, which was so white and haggard that it could not be said to turn pale; he noted, too, the immense change that had come over the once dapper, sprightly, fascinating articed pupil. He seemed to have shrunk physically and mentally. Never commanding or striking in appearance, he now looked abject, and the only sign about him of mental activity was a look of terror in his eyes which his visitor had often seen in those of a hunted animal.

"Do not rise from your seat," said Galbraith, as Carter made some movement as though about to do so.

"Thank you," said Carter, with a feeble attempt at a smile. "I am not at all well."

"So I see," said Galbraith, gravely, "but well or ill, I must have some important talk with you."

The wild hunted look changed to one of deeper alarm, and a sniver seized the frame of Carter. During the whole of the rest of the interview this never left him; he sat trembling and shaking in terror and with every sign upon him of the most intense dread of his interlocutor.

"I have been away in America," said Galbraith; "you know what has happened in Avonham since I went away?"

"Yes," said Carter, in a hollow voice, scarcely raised above a whisper.

"I saw you in the court the other day, when your friend Shelman was being tried. Did you see me?"

"Yes, once." Still in the same tone and with the same sense of horror on him.

“ I watched you very attentively during the time that the jury were absent; and, I know not what put it into my head, but I determined to ride over here and ask you a certain question.”

The look of dread changed to one of sheer despair, and the unhappy young man made a deprecatory gesture with his hands, as though he feebly strove to ward off a blow that he knew was beyond his strength to endure.

“ I do not wish to agitate you unduly, or to take advantage of your state, but the life of a man is at stake; the life of a man who is no friend of mine, but whose affairs, through you, have been interwoven with mine. A man, too, whom I believe to be innocent of the crime laid to his charge.”

No change in the face—still despair; the hunted animal would not turn to bay.

“ This is the question I wish to ask you; listen to it! For, as God is my judge, I believe that you, and you only can answer it. *Who killed Walter Rivers?*”

Then into the terror-stricken face and into the wild-looking eyes came a great calm; came a sense of laying down a heavy burden; came the sign of resignation to a fate against which the man had been struggling in a fight in which he had been sorely beaten, and it was with a softened face, the face of a child who confesses to a mother, that he answered, with a firmer voice, “ I DID.”

Then he sunk back in his seat, and the weight of his secret rolled from him and he smiled. A sad smile. A smile that was ill to see.

“ Do not move from your seat,” said Galbraith, as he stepped backward and opened the door of the room. “ Mr. Millard! come here.”

In a twinkling Mr. Millard and the father of the self-acknowledged murderer ran into the room. The sharp tones of Galbraith’s voice had startled them both, and each had feared that some alarming change in the sick man’s state had been the cause of the summons. But when they entered, they saw the patient and his visitor parted by almost the whole breadth of the apartment; they knew that no physical matter had called them there. The heart of the father first felt what had occurred. Mr. Carter looked at Galbraith with much of the same light in his eyes that had been in those of his son, and said:

“ What is it, Mr. Galbraith? for mercy’s sake tell me what has happened?”

Galbraith turned to him and laid his hand upon his shoulder: there was a look of infinite pity in his eyes.

“ God knows,” he said, “ I would have spared you this. I call Him to witness I have not brought this upon you willingly!”

“ Sit down, father,” said Carter, with an effort, “ I must have told you this, I think, to-day, even if Mr. Galbraith had not come.”

“ My boy!” said Mr. Carter, seating himself by his son’s side, “ what is it that you have to tell?”

“ Mr. Millard,” said Carter, “ you are a magistrate; take down what I have to say; for I think I have not long to live. I am stricken with death, and I must do right before I die.”

With a look of much amazement, Mr. Millard seated himself at the table, on which there were writing materials; Galbraith remained

standing at his side; Mr. Carter sat by his son, looking at him with terrible earnestness. At the first words his boy spoke he gave a sharp low cry, and covered his face with his hands, as though to shut out from his sight the guilty one whom he had loved.

“I killed Walter Rivers. I shot him—I shot him by mistake—”

“Do you mean ‘by accident,’” said Galbraith, “when you say ‘by mistake?’”

Carter shook his head.

“No,” said he, “I do not mean by accident—I mean by mistake. I—I thought he was Shelman.”

“Good God!” muttered Mr. Millard below his breath.

“I will tell you all about it,” said Carter, nerving himself for the task, and speaking in a firmer voice. “I was Shelman’s tool in that matter of the election riot. It was he, as I have already told Mr. Bryceson and your other friends, who planned, with me, the attack on your house, Mr. Galbraith. It was really his fault that any riot took place at all. He started the idea of giving drink away for nothing to our side, and refusing it to the Blues. That caused the riot. Then I took the men down South Street, and led them to the Coombes. You know what took place there. You have heard also what passed between Mr. Bryceson and me at the Bear Hotel.”

“Yes, I have heard all that,” said Galbraith, to whom Adolphus had addressed himself.

“Then came the quarrel between Mr. Bryceson and Shelman, and through what came out about that afterward Mr. Bompas sent me away. I had lost more than a mere chance, and had more than a commercial position at stake at Mr. Bompas’s, and I think the knowledge of what I had really lost drove me mad. At any rate, I swore to be revenged on Alfred Shelman for my wrongs. I used to go about here brooding over the injury he had done me, till my brain was turned, I think.”

He paused for breath. Galbraith lifted a glass containing wine to his lips, but he put it away with his hand.

“On the afternoon of the—of the day when—when Rivers was shot—I was up at Downholmes. I had my gun with me. I had walked round the hills. It was getting foggy and I met no one. I was out trying for rabbits, just to amuse myself, but I did not see one. I heard some one shooting in Downholmes. I knew it must be Shelman and I watched for him. I saw him go to your keeper’s cottage, and when he went across the fields I waited for at least ten minutes and then followed him. When I came up to the bridge I saw him, as I thought—standing there with his gun in his hand. I could not control myself, and, as I came up and he turned round at the sound of my footsteps, I raised my gun to my shoulder and fired both barrels at him.

Great beads of perspiration stood out on his forehead as he told his horrible tale.

“He threw his arms up and fell headlong down the bank without a cry: I saw the gun fall from his hands into the river. I turned and went back toward Downholmes. When I got to the path by the wood I heard some one shouting from the river bank. Then I knew the body was found. I got on to the Bath road and walked home as quietly as I could, and even spoke to one or two people

whom I met near the village. I had not much fear of being discovered; I can hardly describe how I felt after I had done it. I felt as if a weight were off my mind and yet I felt that I must go and look at the place where I had seen him fall. I made up my mind to do so next morning. I went to bed. I hope I am going to die, for I would not live with the fearful nights I have had ever since."

He raised his hand to wipe his brow and waited a little before resuming.

"The next morning I went into Avonham. Then I heard the news. I never had any idea that it was not Shelman whom I had shot, and I was going to pretend that I knew nothing of what had happened, and that I was going to call upon him. When I got into Avonham I could not make out at first what people were talking over. I heard them talk about Shelman being arrested and Rivers shot, and I did not believe my own ears. Then my horror began. I have had that dead man with me ever since. But you know the truth now and he may leave me for the little while I have to live, for this has killed me. I was a coward not to speak, but I tried to persuade myself that this was the revenge I wanted, that I had meant to kill him and that I could kill him by keeping silent; and I did so. But the other man has been a dreadful companion, and if they hang Alfred Shelman there will be two of them. They must not do that though; even though I should get well and they should hang me, I must do him right. May God forgive me for what I have done! Father, try to forgive me, for my punishment has been very severe."

\* \* \* \* \*

In a few days he had gone before a higher tribunal than we have here. But not before right had been done. Working with secrecy but with energy they caused the confession of the murderer to be repeated to men high in authority, and the facts to be laid before the Home Secretary. Before death claimed Adolphus Carter he had, in the most solemn manner, reiterated to his representative the statement he had made to Galbraith, Mr. Millard and his father. He died without having fallen into the hands of the law. A weak young man, made bad through circumstances. That his secret would have been safe is without doubt, and the best proof of the truth of that is the unbounded surprise with which the officials concerned in the case saw the strong chain of circumstantial evidence break, and the fabric of proof which had been raised, tumble about their ears. Even they, however, did not doubt the truth of the confession, and Alfred Shelman "received a free pardon," which, considering that he was not guilty of the crime with which he was charged, showed great consideration on the part of the advisers and law-officers of the Crown.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the afternoon of the day preceding that which had been fixed for Alfred Shelman's execution, Mr. Timothy Rapsey, Mr. John Rann, to whom he was now reconciled, the brothers Pye, Mr. Polli-moy, and ex-Mayor Killett, were assembled at the Bear smoking-room, where also sat the landlord. There was but one topic of conversation, and that was the event which was to take place on the following day; for so well had the secret been kept by Mr. Sennett,

who had been at once consulted by Mr. Millard, that no one in Avonham knew what had taken place. Twenty-five years ago Avonham had no railway station; much less therefore had she a newspaper train; nor was the correspondent so ubiquitous as at present; so, as yet, none but the officials concerned knew anything of the efforts that had been made to secure the release of Shelman.

It had been generally agreed, much to the secret dissatisfaction of Timothy Rapsey, that the presence of any of the reputable denizens of Avonham at the execution would be an outrage on the feelings of the town. And, now that the fatal hour was approaching, public feeling—the edge of its indignation having been dulled by the lapse of time—had begun to express itself in terms of pity for the culprit. All admitted the justice of the sentence,—with the solitary exception of John Rann, who still stoutly clung to his belief in Shelman's innocence—all had sympathy with the victim and with Mrs. Stanhope, and the general sense of abhorrence for the crime was undiminished; but they had begun—now that they could count the remaining hours of the culprit's life—to show pity, and to speak of him as “poor fellow.” And, assuredly, had any of the old cronies expressed his intention of going to witness the last scene in the “Avonham murder,” he would have had to face the remonstrances of his fellows, and, if he had gone, their indignation at such callous conduct.

“What time do 'em hang at Ridgetown, in general, Mr. Rann?” asked Timothy Rapsey.

“I 'ain't never bin hung there,” said John Rann snappishly, “ask some one as knows.”

“I was told in London,” said the wanderer Pollimoy, “that there their time was eight o'clock in the morning.”

“And it'll most likely be the same hour at Ridgetown,” said Wolstenholme Pye, “ah, the very same hour.”

“The same hour, and no other'll be the time at Ridgetown,” said Hoppenner Pye, “no other and no else.”

“Tell me, Mr. Rann,” said Killett, “for if there be a man in Avonham as do know it'll surely be you; what do become of all Mr. Shelman's money, and land, and houses? Can 'a leave it to whoever 'ave a mind to?”

Smoking-room law is generally very bad law, it must be borne in mind.

John Rann was greatly pleased at the compliment paid him by the ex-mayor; he took his pipe out of his mouth, laid it down on the table, and set himself to answer the question right willingly.

“Whoy!” he began. “You'm right, Mr. Killett, about my bein' able to tell 'ee; and tell 'ee I will. Mr. Alfred Shelman—poor fellow—ain't got no more of the doin's of his money than what you and me have, sir. It do all goo to the Queen, every penny of it, as sure as you set there.”

“'Od rot it all,” said Killett, “that do seem purely hard for sure. How be that, Mr. Rann?”

“Because,” said Mr. Rann impressively and slowly, and emphasizing every word with a little tap of his forefinger on the table, “because, Mr. Shelman, in the eyes o' the law, sir, is a dead man!”

At the word "man," Mr. Rann gave a slap of his hand that made Timothy Rapsey start.

"Lord sakes, is 'a?" said he, "fancy a sittin' an' a talkin' about a dead man as is alive. Lor! it do almost make 'ee feel as ef his ghost 'ud walk in at the door."

"Nonsense about ghosts," said Mr. Pollimoy, "in all my travels did I ever see one? No!"

"Ah," said Timothy, looking wondrous wise, "I wouldn't like to say as there wasn't such things, mind 'ee. I've never seen one myself, 'tis true, but there's never any knowin' what might happen. 'Tis queer times about for quiet folk hereaway. Pinniffer, whatever do make that door swing open?"

"The wind, I reckon," said Pinniffer, getting up to shut it, "the lock do want seein' to as well."

"Ghosts!" resumed Mr. Pollimoy, "there may 'a bin such things in times byegone, but if there were, they were ghosts o' dead men, I reckon. Now this 'ere man ain't dead."

"In the eyes o' the law he is," said Timothy quickly, anxious to propitiate his old antagonist; "didn't 'ee hear Mr. Rann say so? If 'a 's dead in the eyes o' the law, why can't 'a ha' a ghost in the eyes o' the law?" Mr. John Rann, far from being pleased by this speech, regarded Timothy Rapsey with a look of great and lofty scorn, and was, apparently, about to utter some scathing remark, when Pinniffer took up the conversation.

"I'll teil 'ee something about ghosts," said the ex-fusileer, "as perhaps 'll astonish 'ee, be it who it may; it happened to a man as was a great friend o' mine, and sergeant-major in the eighty-first foot—"

The evening was drawing in. The lamps were not lit. The mind of every man in the company was full of thoughts of death; each man in the room had been brought up in a country full of ghost stories, and each was as superstitious as could be. These were the conditions under which Mr. Pinniffer commenced a legend which he was destined never to finish.

"This man was serving in India at the time," said he, "and one of the men under him was a wild, fiery, bad-tempered fellow as never had hardly a civil word for any one—"

The brothers Pye got a little closer together and laid their pipes down.

"This ill-conditioned man one day was punished by the captain of his company for some offense, and confined to barracks. He made as much fuss over it as if he had been ordered out for fifty lashes, and one day when the captain was a-crossing the barrack compound, he went in and got hold of a loaded musket and let drive at him. My friend, Tom Floyd, was standing close by, and just as he pulled trigger, Tom jumps forward and catches him a crack o' the side o' the head with his fist and spoils his aim, so that he misses his captain; then of course Tom took him and called for help, and the man was put in the clink. Of course he was tried by court martial, and equally, of course, the sentence was death."

"Of course," said Rann, wiith the air of a deputy judge advocate general.

"Well," pursued Pinniffer, "the thing that preyed on this man's

mind was that Tom had prevented him from shooting his officer, and when the sentence was given, and Tom was taking the man to the cells to wait his execution, he said to Tom, 'You've balked me o' my revenge, Sergeant-Major,' he said, 'and it shall be the worse for you. I'll haunt you living, and I'll haunt you dead.' "

"Lor!" said the brothers Pye simultaneously, in an awe-stricken undertone.

"The very night before the man's execution," resumed Pinniffer, "which was to take place the following morning at six o'clock, Tom Floyd and some of his mates were sitting together and talking over the affair the same as we have been doing now. All of a sudden the door—"

"Ho-oh!" suddenly shrieked Timothy Rapsey, springing to his feet and pointing wildly to the door, "OH LORD! LOOK THERE!"

The comrades sprung to their feet as Timothy fell back in his chair, and not a man of them but thought he felt his heart stand still as they saw the door open and Alfred Shelman standing on the threshold. He was followed into the room by Galbraith, who laughed as he gazed at the startled group.

"I cannot wonder at your surprise," said Shelman, "for I am almost as much astonished at my own deliverance as you can be. Pinniffer, I must ask you to put me up to-night, and let me have a private room. My own house is closed, and my uncle is out of Avonham. Rann, I hear that you have been the only one in the place to stand up for me, give me your hand. Thanks to this gentleman," turning and laying his hand on Galbraith's shoulder, "I can stand before you a free man. An innocent one I always was, but my innocence has been proved and I am free once more, thank God!"

When Pinniffer came down stairs from showing Alfred Shelman his rooms, he found that it had been absolutely necessary to give Timothy Rapsey a glass of neat brandy to steady his nerves. And in order that he might not feel awkward, his cronies each had one as well.

When he found this, Mr. Pinniffer murmured that they had all been in the same boat for the matter of that, and filled himself one for his own use.

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## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### OLD MAS'R KILLETT SUMS UP.

FIVE years had passed away since the incidents of our tale, now drawing to a close. It was a fine spring morning, and, on the bridge which was the pride of Avonham, a little group of townstolk was gathered. There had been a freshet, which for two or three days had swollen the Avon till it had left its bed, and wandered into the low town, to the great discomfort of the inhabitants of the quarter. Mr. Follwell, who was mayor this year, had, with what Avonham considered great public spirit, consulted an engineer, who had given his opinion that the errant river could easily be restrained. He had

finished a short tour of inspection, and was now standing on the bridge with the mayor, Mr. Timothy Rapsey (who had been seeking practical information), Wolstenholme and Hoppenner Pye, old Mas'r Killett and his son, and Mr. Pollimoy. Business having been disposed of, the visitor had been asking questions in his turn. A lady and gentleman rode across the bridge and received a general salutation from the cronies.

"Who is that?" asked the engineer.

"That's Mr. Galbraith," answered Timothy, who looked a little older, but whose tongue seemed as active as ever, "he's the richest man about here anyhow. He lives in that house by the river, The Coombes; come from America about six years ago. Married Mr. Bompas's eldest daughter. There was three friends—him and Mr. Bryceson and Mr. Markham—and they married three sisters. Married here at St. Hildegard's—all on one day, they was. Never was such a weddin' known in Avonham, was there, Mas'r Killett?"

"Never in all my days," said the old man, still hale enough to walk about supported by his son's strong arm.

"Do they all live here?" asked the stranger.

"They've all got houses here, and up to London, too; main rich they be all of 'em."

"Ay, but Mr. Galbraith 'll sure be the richest; look at what Mr. Shelman left 'un," said Timothy.

"Who was he?"

"Well," said Killett the younger, "he was the nephew of our banker here, and he had a narrow escape of bein' hung for murder, an' this Mr. Galbraith he found out the one as had done it, and got Mr. Shelman off. It made a great stir at the time here."

"I remember it," said the visitor.

"Lor', Timothy," said Wolstenholme Pye, "you was frightened that afternoon Mr. Shelman come into the Bear, after he was let out."

"Timothy," said Hoppenner Pye, "you was real terrified that afternoon."

"Ah, don't 'ee bring up that now," said Timothy, "you was pretty nigh as bad."

"Then," resumed Killett, "Mr. Shelman, he left the place and went abroad; but he was a good deal shook by what had happened, and he died about two years ago. He left his property mostly to this Mr. Galbraith, out o' gratitude for him 'a savin' his life; and he couldn't 'a left it to a better man, for if ever a man made a good use o' money, 'tis Mr. Galbraith."

"'Tis for sure," said old Mas'r Killett, "he've quite took Mrs. Stanhope's place since she lived away. Poor thing, 'a could never bide in the place after poor Mr. Rivers was shot, as was goin' to marry her. They don't come here often. Mrs. Stanhope I called her, but 'twas from usin' her name when she lived here."

"Mrs. Wilding she is now," said the mayor, "she married a half-brother o' Mr. Galbraith about a year ago. Old friends they was, so Dr. Mompesson said."

"Mr. Galbraith 'll be our member, I reckon, when Sir Headingly Cann gives up," said Mr. Pollimoy. "Well, in all my traveling I

never met a better man, an' he shall have my vote, whichever side he's on."

"No, no," said young Killett, Mr. Galbraith's none for politics, 'twill be Mr. Bryceson, and a nice, merry, affable gentleman he is too."

"Things have altered since them gentlemen came here first," said Wolstenholme Pye.

"Since they came first there's been some alterations here," said Hoppenner.

"Ay, there has," said Timothy; "lawk, there's Mr. Galbraith's black gentleman gone into the chemist's. Now I wonder if any of the children are ill?"

"Ay," said old Mas'r Killett, "there's always changes goin' on in life, and always will be. Life's somethin' like this 'ere river of ourn, my friends. Even that don't allus run alike. Sometimes it's clear, smooth, and sparkling as can be, and sometimes it's all of a moil and fret. Us old men can see it, and I can tell 'ee I've often stood on this bridge and thought it out. I b'ain't a quick thinker, an' my ideas is a morsel old-fashioned; but I'll pound it as the wisest 'll agree wi' me when I tell him that life goos on pretty much as Avon flows."

THE END.

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