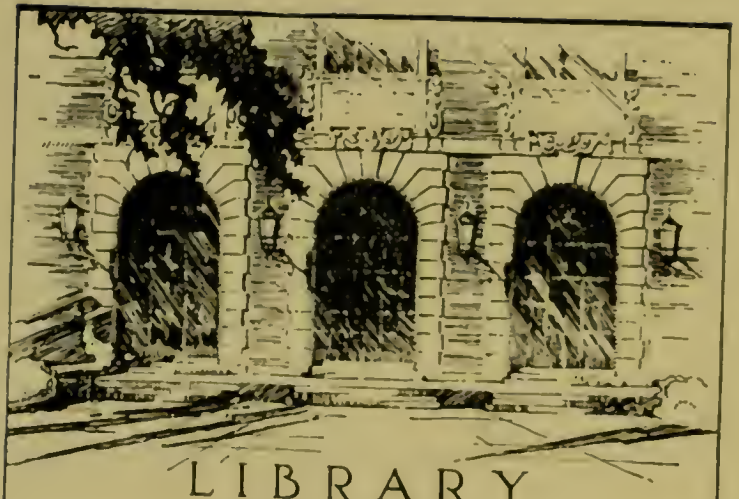

ONLY TO BE MARRIED.

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A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF "FREDERICK RIVERS."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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CONTENTS.

ONLY TO BE MARRIED.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW FRIENDS.

Oak Villa had been very much enlarged since Patty left it for the ease and comfort of the old Hall. Mr. Whitehouse and the Doctor, to say nothing of the inmates of that home of charity, had missed her dreadfully; but their regrets and their sense of loneliness and helplessness without her were as nothing compared to her sense of loneliness without them. Indeed, the best of us may always take it for granted that the world will get on very much better without us than we could get on without the world. Patty had no chance

whatever of finding another Oak Villa, whereas there is a little host of brave and loving women, any one of whom might have filled her place in that peaceful refuge.

Filled her place in that peaceful refuge very likely, but not so easily filled her place in the lonely, troubled heart of Mr. Leighton. He had left the house where he was living when Patty called to bid him good-bye, on her way to Manchester, "only to be married." What use could a separate house be to him any more? He should never marry now. Somehow or other, too, the house that Patty had so often visited became quite intolerable to him when she was separated from him by that great gulf of matrimony that nothing could bridge over—nothing, at any rate, but her husband's death; and as even that dark possibility would sometimes haunt the thoughts of the man whose whole heart and life were hers, he was only troubled the more as he

reflected how much more likely it was that his own darling would be murdered by the slow poison of a most cruel and incurable disappointment.

"She never will be able to live under it," he would say to himself; "the miserable wretch who is her husband has not in his whole heart and character one single sound spot; he's a mass of hypocrisy and conventionalism, and I know he'll treat her badly too. I shouldn't be the least surprised to find he'd beaten her before the honeymoon was over. Poor dear little Patty! And she's just the kind of gentle, clinging creature to like being petted, and to need it too. Of course she will need it, just as every other woman does, however strong she may think herself; and if they don't get fondness, in some reverent form or other, they just become disgusting female men—than which what can be more detestable? Well, well—God help us both, it's past my curing!"

When Leighton met Forester in Canonbury, when he had come to London to obtain for the first time the fatal help of Abrahams, he was more certain than ever that his worst suspicions were being justified. He was haunted for weeks by the wild haggard look of his too successful rival. With an instinct that seemed to amount almost to a power of divination, he read the whole dark history of the man in every line of his face and every movement of his body—read at any rate the general drift of the history. He could not guess what form of vice had gained the mastery over him—wine or women, or gambling, or all of them put together; but he could see, past all possibility of doubt, that Forester was ruined, and that he was ruined disgracefully.

"And where is *she* I wonder," he would say to himself. "What is he going to do with her? Perhaps she's in the workhouse, or perhaps begging about the road with a baby in

her arms, while that miserable scoundrel is idling away his time and wasting his money on his own trumpery enjoyments. Good God! I cannot bear it any longer; I must get down to Manchester and find the old Hall, and see for myself where she is and how she's treated."

But even our resolutions, like our dresses and our faces, are not quite the same at night and in the morning. So when Leighton would awake after his impetuous resolves to rescue Patty, he would remember how exceedingly difficult it is at the best to rescue a married woman from her own husband. Alas! nothing could be done. If the woman you love will really not see that you love her, but will marry a man not fit to black your shoes, all you can say is that England's a free country; and, on the other hand, not even a writ of *habeas corpus* can bring a woman out of the *matrimonial* dungeon. So Leighton waited; though he had lost his heart's wife, he wasn't a widower

with a large family for whom a second mother might be a sheer necessity. At Mr. Whitehouse's invitation, he moved to Oak Villa, where his professional services were very frequently required, and where his own apartments were everything that he could wish.

Mr. Whitehouse was a well-known visitor at almost all the London prisons. He tried to ascertain, as far as possible, before every sessions, whether there were any poor lost creatures whom he might be able to take home and save. It was quite a matter of course, therefore, that both he and Leighton should know who were waiting their trial, month after month, in the Old Bailey. Still, when Leighton saw the name of Edwin Marie Forester, a prisoner waiting his trial for theft and forgery, he was slow to believe that this man could be the same, the very one who had been a guest in his own house, the husband of the girl whom he had loved best in all the world. Somehow he

couldn't even summon courage to devise some means of seeing him. If it were indeed Patty's husband, he knew that he would see him only too soon. So he waited for the day of trial. Forester did not see *him;* there was only one face in all the court at which the wretched prisoner had cared to look, and that was Meggie's. Leighton had watched him all through the trial, and had watched her. He was sure there was some secret between them; but possibly it was a secret in which he might have no interest, and in any case Meggy's mystery might wait. He just paused a moment to speak to a detective officer who had often rendered him service—"Just find out for me," he said, "who that girl is and where she lives;"—and then he hurried away after Mr. Rodgers.

And now those two were sitting together in Leighton's parlour in Oak Villa.

"I knew he'd come to something of this

sort," said Leighton. "I knew he was an imbecile scoundrel the first time I saw him." This was not quite strictly true, but Leighton had almost forgotten the very first time he saw him.

"For my part," said Mr. Rodgers, "he made a very favourable impression upon me, when *I* first saw him."

"Oh, yes," said Leighton, "I know exactly how he'd do. He talked to you with a very soft, gentle voice, and was all humility and shine, and just distantly alluded to himself as if he were some totally indifferent person living at the North Pole. I know his manners exactly; and he has a sweet confiding stoop, as if he were at once so weak and trustful that he must needs lean on somebody. Miserable hypocrite! But really, Mr. Rodgers, I beg your pardon. I'm talking in this violent bouncing way to you as if I'd known you twenty years."

"Talk to me exactly as you like, sir," said Mr. Rodgers; "I dare say your estimate of my unhappy clerk's character is only too correct. But still his manner when he first came to me was exceedingly straightforward, and I even now believe he *was* straightforward until that Jew money-lender found him and frightened him."

"Yes, I dare say you are right, Mr. Rodgers," said Leighton. "I dare say he was sincere at the time. I've had to do with hundreds of bad people, of whom all the world despaired, and I never knew one of them yet without some good point, some lucid interval of virtue. If men like Forester would only be continually and completely bad, they would not be so dangerous. However, we can only deal with the case as we find it. Did you ever hear him say what he did with the money that he borrowed from the Jew?"

"He used it, I understood him to say, in

releasing his estate down in the country—Clayton's Hall, I think he called it—from obligations that had arisen from long legal transactions."

"Then, if that were so," said Leighton, "to whom does the estate belong now? It must surely have satisfied any claim that Abrahams could have had on it; and if so, his action upon Forester's last bill must have been neither more nor less than swindling. Surely that Jew knave ought to be hunted up, and we ought to find out how much he really did recover out of the spoils of Clayton's Hall. Had we not better see Forester and ask him all about it?"

"I don't think it would be any use," said Mr. Rodgers. "When I took his wife to the prison to see him he just condescended to show himself, and then turned on his heels and went away, and he has steadily refused to see her ever since."

"Yes, just like him," said Leighton, "just the

very thing a fellow like that would be sure to do. He would think her of no use; that an interview with her might perhaps be affecting and trouble his mind."

"Well, that's not unlikely," said Mr. Rodgers. "However, he never spoke about his wife to me, and I spoke about her to him as little as possible. But I did, in fact, ask him whether nothing could be done with Abrahams; whether, for the sake of his wife, something might not be recovered from him."

"Well, and what did he say?" said Leighton.

"Well, he spoke in just that straightforward, though rather offhand, way which impressed me so favourably when I saw him first; only this last time, I must confess, he seemed to me very hard, and at any rate without a particle of feeling for his wife."

"Well, but what did he say?"

"'Well,' he said, 'look here, Mr. Rodgers; I've been a dreadful fool, and I must take the

consequences with such patience as I may. As to getting money back from Mr. Abrahams, it would be easier to get butter out of a dog's throat. If I had stayed at the old Hall, and myself superintended the winding-up of my own affairs, it would no doubt have been very much the better for me; but I did not stay. Partly, I was a proud ass, Mr. Rodgers, and I couldn't bear to see a vulgar bailiff taking liberties with what used to be my own furniture, and walking about the house as if he were monarch of all he surveyed; and then, also, I was a coward. I thought, perhaps, my estimable creditors might take a fancy to myself instead of my goods, so I just left the old Hall to its fate. The time to remedy the evil is gone now, Mr. Rodgers; besides, Abrahams' bill is a new one, and it would be quite impossible for me to prove that no value had been received, or that my acceptance had been obtained fraudulently.

You are very kind to take so much trouble with my affairs; but I must assure you, Mr. Rodgers, that it's not of the slightest use. In a very few days now I shall know my fate; when I know it, of course I shall try to accommodate myself to it; and as to Abrahams, if I'm not transported for life—they can't hang me now, you know, Mr. Rodgers—well, then, if I'm not transported for life, I shall perhaps meet him again; meet him again at Philippi, as Cæsar's ghost said to Brutus, and I hope he'll enjoy the meeting.'"

"Ah! I could half hope they might meet," said Leighton. "If the Jew were murdered, the world would be well rid of a very mischievous scoundrel and even if Forester were hanged as well, there are very few people indeed who need go to the expense of mourning."

"Nay, nay, Mr. Leighton, you don't feel so hardly as that; very likely you know more about him than I do, and there is plainly

something that makes you more bitter than a good man ought to be."

Poor Leighton could only sigh. Of course there *was* a something that made him bitter, but it really was no crime in *Forester* that Patty had chosen to marry him.

"And where is Mrs. Forester all this time?" he asked.

"Most of this time, unfortunately," said Mr. Rodgers, "she was alone in their miserable lodgings, believing that her husband was travelling for me in France, living for nearly a fortnight on ten shillings. She is now at my house; and really, Mr. Leighton, what we can possibly do for her I clearly don't see."

"Oh! don't you?" said Leighton; "but I do. She'll just come back to her old home, Mr. Rodgers; at least I sincerely hope so. It's never been the same home since she left it."

Mr. Rodgers looked at him and began to

suspect that possibly there *was* a reason for Leighton's bitterness against Forester.

"Where was her old home, Mr. Leighton?" he asked.

"Why, it was here, sir; and you shall see in a minute whether she'll be welcomed back again."

With that he rang the bell.

"Go and tell Mr. Whitehouse," he said to the person who answered it, "that, if he can spare a few minutes, I very particularly wish to see him."

Mr. Whitehouse came at once. Of course the story was soon told; and it was plain enough that if it had been possible for so kind a man to rejoice in a great calamity, the master of Oak Villa would have been grateful that even the knavery of Forester had brought his favourite back.

There was, however, a great deal of preliminary business which, to the impatient Leighton,

seemed almost interminable. Perhaps she might be unwilling to return. It was perfectly certain that, in all her misfortunes, she had carefully abstained from all communications with her old friends. To meet them again in her changed circumstances would be far more painful than it had been even to part from them. She could not come back a widow, with the rest of her life at her own disposal for deeds of charity; she could only come back with the knowledge of the fact, that when her husband's punishment was over, he might come and claim her, rob her of her earnings, and take her away to a life of sordid misery. She had taken him for better for worse, and nothing but death could set her free from that bondage. There was need of the utmost gentleness in soothing her troubled heart, and in making her understand that her great sorrow had only made her dearer to those

who loved her than she had ever been before.

She was to remain, therefore, for a little while at Mr. Rodgers' house. He was to ascertain what plans, if any, she was herself forming for her future maintenance; he was to seize the first favourable opportunity of telling her that he had met with her old friends, and that they were most eager to receive her back again.

Meanwhile, she made one more attempt to see her husband. She fancied that, if she could only speak to him, he might take away into his captivity one happy memory of the past, one good hope for the future. She would tell him not to despair; to be sure, when the time of his release came, he would find a true wife waiting to welcome him home, and to bear with him any hardships, so long as they might work honestly together, studying to "show themselves approved of God, having

consciences void of offence, both towards God and towards man." She dreaded the interview; she knew how insensible he had been to every appeal she had ever made to what was noblest and best in him; but she hoped that his severe punishment might have softened his heart, and taught him at least the misery of sin, if not the blessedness of virtue. With beating heart, therefore, she went alone to see her husband. Alas! she could not see him; only a little note instead was the answer to her passionate desire to help and heal him.

"What is the use," so the note ran, "my dear Patty, of a scene? It will be very painful to you to see me. I am a convict, *dressed*, and treated in all respects like any other criminal. Don't attempt to visit me. I am sure I know almost everything you would be likely to say, and I will try and remember it just as well as if I heard you say it. Bear up patiently, my poor wife, as I will try to do;

it is a hard but needful lesson that I am compelled to learn; and when the time of my punishment is over, I hope and believe that I shall return to the ordinary duties of life, at any rate a far wiser man.

"Yours faithfully,

"EDWIN."

"No, Mrs. Rodgers," said Patty, "I have not even seen him, and I don't know what to do. And yet I have friends, even in this great wilderness, London; I think if they knew how miserable I am, and what a killing blight has fallen on my life, they would be very sorry; and when I was with them I was so happy, so happy."

CHAPTER II.

THE UNMARRIED WIFE.

Forester availed himself of the very first opportunity of writing to Meggy. She was a far better girl than he thought she was, and it is saying very little to add that she was immeasurably better than himself. Still there was a certain lawlessness in their friendship, which seemed to make Meggy the only fit companion for one who had resolved, as far as it should be possible, to become lawless altogether. Forester never asked himself whether Meggy would be likely to enter into a partnership which would probably enough become a partnership in crime, and which would certainly, at the very best, be a law unto itself.

Much less had he truly estimated the steadfastness of his own affection. Unquestionably he loved Meggy; but then she was not his wife. To live together is proverbially the hardest test of friendship. Not one man in twenty marries what is facetiously called his first love; and if divorce were as easy as marriage, it is quite certain that not one man in twenty would bury his first wife. Forester had been for a day or two passionately in love with Patty—if so languid a creature could be said to be passionately anything. Goodness is quiet, but Forester was constitutionally too quiet; and therefore, when in his moral lucid intervals he found it agreeable to be virtuous, his goodness was little better than a day dream. It needed the wild force of wickedness to stimulate him to genuine energy. He was tired of Patty, therefore, almost before he had married her; in fact, he half yawned over the letter in which she consented to become

his wife. Perhaps, if he could have married Meggy, he would have found poverty twice as hard to bear when there were two people to keep instead of one; and even little Freddy was a much more interesting child when Meggy, and not Forester, had to pay for his food and clothing. But Meggy was *not* his wife; and so Forester fancied that if she had been with him in all his trouble, she would have been worth ten thousand Pattys. She was, at any rate, the only human being outside his prison whom he cared even to remember. The only human being excepting one—and that one was Abrahams.

So he wrote to Meggy as soon as the prison regulations would permit:—

"My own dear Meggy,—It is very seldom that I have the chance of writing to you or anybody else, but I cannot bear to think that I am quite alone in the world, and

that not a single human being cares for me. I hear no kind of news for weeks together. I do not even know whether my nearest kindred are dead or alive; and it seems to me very dreadful when I remember that I was taken away from you so suddenly that I had scarcely heard from you what you were doing, or what help you might need. And now I can do nothing for you. I can only comfort myself with the thought that even seven years will wear away at last, and that when I come out of prison, I shall find you as kind and true as ever. Do not forget me, my dear Meggy. They will tell you at the prison when you can see me. I needn't tell you how glad I shall be if you will come, if at any rate you can bear to come, and will not hate me when you see me here. You heard all the hard things and the true things they said about me at the trial. I cannot explain them to you, shut up here, so I can only *trust* you. I have been

very much misguided; and I hope that even, in this grim school, I may learn much of the wisdom that I very much need. At any rate, believe that here, and everywhere, and always,

"I am, my dear Meggy,

"Your own most loving and faithful

"EDWIN MARIE FORESTER."

Poor wretch! his very fidelity was dishonour; and after all, there was only one human being in the world to whom Forester ever could be truly faithful, and that was himself.

But what was Meggy to do? She knew, as well as any human being could possibly know, how mean and cruel he had been. She knew how heartless he had been to his wife; she had heard at the trial with what base ingratitude he had rewarded the generosity of his master. She remembered all her own vows and

promises; how, when she came to London, she had resolved she would at most only know where her old lover was, but never see him. When she did see him, it was only to be terrified by the strength of her own passion, and to learn the secret of his shame; and yet —what are a woman's promises worth and all her grand purposes and resolutions ?

Meggy carried Forester's letter in her bosom all day, and slept with it under her pillow all night. She went to the prison, and ascertained when she might see him, and when the visiting day came she did see him.

Such meetings can never be happy. It needs much love, indeed, to recognise the beloved with the cropped hair and the dress of a convict, fresh from picking oakum, or the first few lessons in making shoes. But the love that can survive that trial will most surely "grow by what it feeds on." Forester could never seem to Meggy a mere criminal;

and therefore, being a sufferer, he shone out before her as in some degree a martyr. Love is blind, very blind indeed; and it is perhaps well for mankind, that its great utterance should be—"I cannot understand—I love." If women, before they threw away their hearts on men, were first to catechise them and ask them for sixteen separate reasons why they should be loved, courtship would become impossible. So Meggy loved blindly, foolishly, without one of the sixteen separate reasons. Through many sleepless nights, Forester would appear before her with his ashamed face and appealing helplessness; and she would vow a thousand times over to be true to him; and then she would remember that she could only be true to him by shameful treachery to the best and gentlest woman she had ever known.

But time rolled on; even years passed by. The first shock of seeing Forester as a convict was

long since over, and she was beginning to count the months, and almost the weeks, at the end of which he would be free. What she would gain by his freedom she could not clearly see; but he *would* be free; and at any rate *he* would be a gainer. Yet she had not forgotten Patty; over and over again she resolved to find her out and visit her, but somehow she felt as if she had renewed all her past wrong-doing, and had become too guilty a rival to be any longer a sympathising friend. So they went on their dreary ways for some time alone; so united by an evil destiny and yet so far apart.

Meanwhile, little Freddy was at school, at one of the London public day-schools for the lower middle-class; and the fees were moderate, though something above the average —a shilling a-week. But Meggy paid them cheerfully, remembering old Bob's earnest desire that the boy should have good schooling, and that the child himself was of gentle blood.

And very few of the schools in the neighbourhood could at all compete with Freddy's in real excellence; so they had to boast of the superior rank of their worse taught pupils, or the purity of the religious principles upon which their teaching was based. If, in some of them, the boys were never examined, and if even had they been examined they would have been certain to fail, yet it was some consolation to reflect that not a single child was the son of a shopkeeper, unless his father had retired from business. If a big dunce could subtract twenty-seven from nineteen, and get a remainder of four hundred and forty-six, there could at any rate be no shadow of a doubt that he had been well grounded in the church catechism. Was it not of far greater importance to know the geography of Palestine than the geography of the British Isles; or the history of the kings of Israel and Judah than the history of the kings of England? Besides,

how much easier it is for an incompetent teacher to dawdle through a chapter of the New Testament, than to explain the rule of three or recurring decimal fractions!

But, by great good fortune, Freddy had been placed in a school where all sorts of catechisms were avoided. If masters could not give their lessons without books they were dismissed, and other masters were appointed who could. The course of instruction was thorough, and yet by no means narrow. In addition to the ordinary school routine the children were taught the rudiments of chemistry, physiology, and social science. There was no pretence of exhausting such subjects, and such fine names as physiology were very seldom used, and when they were used were carefully explained. But Freddy's masters were anxious to base their instruction upon "facts;" and the natural sciences, and even the laws which regulate human intercourse, are always interesting

to children when a teacher knows how to bring them down to the level of a child's understanding. When every scholar knew some friend or neighbour who had emigrated for more work and better wages, when trades' unions were springing up in all directions, and strikes constantly threatening the greatest undertakings with ruinous interruption; when savings' banks, and insurance offices, and co-operative societies were pressing their claims on every side; it would have been simply ridiculous to let the children remain in utter ignorance of the plain facts and the simple laws which might guide their judgment, and conduct them to honourable prosperity. In the midst of cholera, and all manner of varying epidemics, it would have been a silly cruelty to say nothing about the necessary conditions of health, and the comparative nutritiousness of different kinds of food, the importance of cleanliness and temperance.

Doubtless the teaching would be very rudimentary, but it was immeasurably better than nothing; it was good as far as it went; it pleased and interested the children, and it gave them at least a peep into vast regions of knowledge and delight, the glories of which they would never wholly forget. At any rate the boys at Freddy's school could always get good situations, and the school was always full.

One continual source of prosperity was the opposition of the neighbouring clergy. The rector always gave them an annual sermon, and secured for them what was much better than a large collection. The sermon was *intended* for the benefit of *his own* schools, but somehow they would never succeed. The more plain it became that they were a failure, the more did the rector abuse their prosperous rival; and the more he abused, the more the people inquired, and the more certainly they

sent their children. The parson averred that Freddy's school was *godless*, and the master replied in a prospectus, that found its way into every house in the parish, "that it might or might not be godless to teach arithmetic and chemistry, but it most unquestionably *was* godless to lie, and the rector had been lying and knew it. Their teachers had as firm a belief in God as the parson himself; and in fact reverenced Him far too much to slander their neighbours for the sake of puffing themselves."

But neither slander, nor puffing, nor even bribes, could fill the rector's school. People didn't want what he had to give; and though they had a great respect for religion, they soon discovered that piety alone will not suffice for the common business of the world. Freddy's school was the pride of the neighbourhood, and among schools of its class almost the pride of London; kept prosperous by no government

grants, no charity sermons, but by the solid goodness of its teaching.

"That young woman you asked me to enquire about, sir, lives at Warwick Place, Peckham Rye," said the detective to Leighton. "She's in service, and her mistress met with her down in the country. Her father—that is, the mistress's father—bought a place about five miles from Stockport, called Clayton Hall. There seems to be a lot of property down in that neighbourhood belonging to people of that name—a factory and a lot of cottages, and a good bit of land, and this girl—her name's Margaret Vickers—was some kind of servant at the old Hall before Mr. Thornton —that's Mrs. Elliotson's (Vickers' mistress) father—took it. She's a sort of half-companion at the Elliotsons; they're newly married and Mrs. Elliotson hasn't any children,—leastwise not yet; and so she wanted a good trustworthy girl, to wait on her, and go shopping

for her, and dress her hair and all that kind of thing. And a very pretty girl, and an uncommonly clever girl, this Vickers is, too, I should say, from the look of her."

"Well, and who lived at Clayton's Hall before Mr. Thornton?" said Leighton.

"Why," said the detective, "there was some kind of Chancery muddle, and—I didn't care to push myself further than was necessary, but it's easy enough to find out. As far as I could see, it seemed pretty plain to me that it is exactly the same place that that Forester fellow came from. There's a child, too."

"Indeed, what sort of child?" said Leighton; "what about it?"

"Nay, sir, it's not for me to say much about it, only there's a child. The girl Vickers brought her mother up with her to town, and the child lives with her mother. It's the girl Vickers' nephew, I think they say; but Lord, what does it matter, sir, what they call it?"

"Well what do they call it?" said Leighton.

"Why they call it her nephew," said the man; "but for my part I think ——"

"No, no, what I mean is, what is its name—its surname and Christian name?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir. The child's name is Frederick, and as to its surname, it's entered in the school-books, Vickers; so I suppose, it must be the girl's brother's child."

"Ah, very possibly," said Leighton.

"Oh yes, sir," said the detective, "uncommonly possible; and that would account for the child's name, too, wouldn't it, sir? Though I'm far from saying, you'll understand, sir, that I myself have happened to find out yet that there ever was a brother in the family of the name of Vickers. However, that doesn't matter; there's many ways of accounting for a name, sir, if one only thinks 'em over. And very often the easiest way turns out to be the right one."

"Well," said Leighton, "what do you think about this one, then?"

"Well, sir," he said, "if you put it in that way, though it's only a sort of guess, and I've scarcely half looked at it yet, I should say that the little nephew is a little son, and that the little son's father is at this moment being taken care of and provided for by a grateful country."

"Where is the child?" said Leighton.

"Why, he lives as I told you, sir, with his grandmother, and he goes to school at the big place over there; you know it quite well, sir, you've been there many a time."

"Yes, yes, I know," said Leighton. "Just take care to let me know if this girl, Margaret Vickers, should suddenly leave her place. It is not at all impossible of course, and it might be of great importance for us to know why she left and where she went. You didn't happen to notice her, did you, at the trial of that man Forester, for forgery?"

"No, sir, I can't say as I did."

"Very well; let me know if anything happens."

"Well," said Leighton to himself, when the man had gone, "that's as transparent as a glass window, at any rate. No amount of villany in that scoundrel Forester will ever surprise me. I know what sort of life he's been leading that poor girl ever since he married her. I knew quite well, before he did marry her, that if she'd employed him to black her shoes it would have been immeasurably too great an honour. However, women will have their own way, and if they smart for it they've nobody to blame but themselves. And yet, really I do think I could have done better for her than all this. I'd have done—I'd have ——"

And thereupon, Leighton got up and walked about in a violent manner, striking out every now and then into the empty air with his clenched fist, as if he were knocking down an

adversary. He grew cool, however, at last, and sat down again.

"Well, really, I'm a bigger fool than I thought I was. First of all, I take it for granted that I'm such a splendid young fellow, that a girl is perfectly certain to watch every expression of my countenance, and every tone of my voice, as if the happiness of her whole life depended upon my changes of mood. I flatter myself that, in fact, she is not altogether indifferent to me; and yet, though I'm half dying for her, and have vanity enough to think she's half dying for me, I haven't even common sense enough to put the question. Meanwhile, a languid humbug comes to my own house, lounges about in a well-bred, sentimental sort of way, finds out that years ago he happened to rescue from danger the girl I love, just as any big dog might have rescued her for that matter, and thereupon he makes a lot of pretty speeches, and discovers, in a mere accident, an

irreversible decree of Providence; and so he makes love and is accepted, and I haven't energy enough even then to try and undo the evil, but just relieve my mind by burning up my own letter into a mass of tinder, and in fact make an unutterable snivelling ass of myself. And then, when she's married, and the worst comes to the worst, I blame fate, or I blame her husband, or I blame even her. Well, well," he said, "I'm just an ass, and that's all I can say about it."

However, he thought he would go over to Peckham, and see little Freddy to begin with. It was easy enough to find him out at the school, for Leighton knew it quite well and had very often visited it. It was, in fact, the only kind of public school, for the permanent usefulness of which he had any hope. It was in education almost what Oak Villa was among reformatories. The head master was therefore in no ways surprised to see him, when one

morning he quietly took his seat on the platform in the chemistry class-room to hear the lesson and watch the children.

"Who is that sharp, pretty little fellow, with fair curly hair—the smallest in the class? I should have expected to find a boy like that almost among the infants."

"Yes, of course," said the master, "and he was brought at first to the infant school. His aunt brought him, and he lives with his grandmother, a very quiet, shrewd old woman from the country — Cheshire or Derbyshire. The aunt is an extraordinary girl, a sort of companion servant at a house in Peckham Rye, but singularly ladylike both in manner and speech. She was very earnest about the child's education. She would herself help the grandmother to pay for it, she said, and didn't grudge the money; but he was a bright boy, and her poor father, who was dead, had so often wished him to be well taught, that she

considered it a solemn duty to carry out his wish. And he *is* a bright boy; and there's something so winning and beautiful about him, that I feel, hundreds of times, scarcely able to resist going down from the platform to hug him. You know, Mr. Leighton, I'm a father myself."

"Yes," said Leighton; "but he's bright enough and pretty enough to please even an old bachelor."

"Come here, Freddy," he called out, speaking to the child. "What part of the country do you come from? Where did you live before you came to London?"

"From Leigh, sir, near Stockport," said Freddy.

"And did you like Leigh, Freddy; was it a pretty place?"

"Yes, sir, a very pretty place, much prettier than Peckham, with pine woods and hills."

"But you know, Freddy," said the master,

"though woods are very pretty, they're rather dull places to be lost in, are they not?"

"Yes, sir," said Freddy, "but I told you I was found, and taken care of."

"Who found you, Freddy?" said Leighton.

"It was the lady at the Hall," Freddy said, "Mrs. Patty. Auntie was her little boy's nurse; so I suppose that's the way she found out that I was lost."

"And does she live at the Hall still?" Leighton asked.

"No, sir; auntie says she's somewhere in London, but I never can find her."

"Well, perhaps you will find her some day. Be a very good boy, and do your work well."

So Leighton had found no very great difficulty in discovering the child he was in search of.

"I half think," he said to the master, "that

I know something about this case. But keep your eye on Freddy, and let me know how he gets on; especially, don't let him leave you without telling me."

CHAPTER III.

THE USE OF OLD FRIENDS.

The house in Canonbury Square was as cosy as ever—at least, as cosy as any house can be, into which a long expected Samuel suddenly makes his advent, to become that most absolute of despots, an only child. Old people are very fond of grandchildren; but only young women, in the strength and prime of life, can endure the constant anxieties of motherhood. *Grand*-mamma may let little Samuel do what he likes for a day; can forget his interesting naughtiness and pet him, and give way to him, even when the pretty darling sulks or snarls. But *mamma* must punish Samuel, and teach him not to sulk any more.

She cannot, even for a day, turn her drawing-room into a nursery, much less into a chaos; because, if she did it for a day, she knows the chances are that she would be compelled to do it for ever, and have no drawing-room at all. So the children of a large family, born in due time, while their parents have both strength and spirits to manage them, are always better behaved, and very much happier, than the only child of an aged couple. Moreover, they are a real pleasure to their parents, instead of a disguised torment.

Samuel, too, had been so long expected, so doted on in his mysterious absence, his ideal perfections so often contrasted with the commonplace merits, or actual faults, of every baby or boy Mrs. Carlisle knew, that when he really came he could not fail to be a disappointment. The Carlisles had arrived at an age when they wanted the companionship of their children, and not the mere trouble of

them. Samuel was not a bit better than any other baby, and his chances of being well brought up were very slender. Of course he had a nurse; but Mrs. Carlisle was, at the best, the sort of woman who always would meddle with the work herself, instead of simply superintending servants—and as to baby, for the first two years of his life she would have him with herself, day and night, as constantly as possible.

"You know, Johnny, that stupid nurse doesn't the least understand how to manage baby," she would say; "the poor dear cries whenever he goes to her."

"And he cries whenever he comes away from her," said Johnny; whose temper was, I regret to say, under the infliction of Samuel, becoming what, in the country, they call "short."

"Well, my dear, of course, he gets so worried, and put out, and neglected by that use-

less Rebecca, that I'm only surprised he's as good as he is, poor dear!"

"Then why on earth don't you get another nurse?" John would say; "there must be millions of nursemaids in the world. Advertise for one. Say you want a woman, with a good character, who can manage one small child, and that, if she'll do her work well, you'll give her any wage she has the conscience to ask. Offer her twenty, or five-and-twenty pounds a-year to begin with."

"What nonsense you do talk, Johnny," said Mrs. Carlisle, with some severity; and it must be confessed that Mr. Carlisle was verging on satire.

"Well, well, old woman, you needn't be cross," he said; "but the fact of the matter is just this. I dote on baby. But you see, enough is as good as a feast; and if we have Samuel in bed at night, and at breakfast in the morning, and then at dinner, and when I

get home from business, and want to sit quietly in the evening reading the paper, and if you will bathe him in the dining-room, because you think the nursery is draughty, and if he always wakes up at supper-time and screams, and if you will take him from Rebecca and bring him into the dining-room to scream *there*,—all I can say is, that I am afraid I shall begin to wish that Samuel had stopped where he was before he came. He was a splendid boy before he was born; we were quite proud of him, and I sometimes think we fancied he would be born about fifteen years old, but as it is——"

Here Mr. Carlisle was stopped by sobs and tears—a little tempest, in fact: wind and rain, weather squally.

"There you go again, old woman," said the half-crazed husband. "I'd better never speak a word, it always makes you cry or something. It's much more for your sake that I

speak than for mine. What's the use of our being in comfortable circumstances, able to afford a nurse, or half-a-dozen nurses, and yet you are a perfect slave to that child, and everybody else is a slave to him, too."

"Oh; Johnny," said Mrs. Carlisle, still sobbing and crying, "you're not a mother."

"No, thank God!" said Mr. Carlisle, adding somewhat inconsistently, "unfortunately, I'm only the master in this house. If I were the mistress, I'd take pretty good care that there should be at least one room, or say even one hour in the day, for peace and quietness. But women always think they know everything; whereas, they're the most muddling, worrying, distracting, bad managers, that even imagination could invent. There's that little Samuel, that doesn't anything like fill a little cot, and yet you manage to make him stuff and cram the whole house, from the chimney

to the cellar floor, till there is scarcely even breathing-room left for anybody."

"Well, Johnny," said his wife, "I think you're talking in a very unnatural and a very unchristian way. I can't help Samuel, bless him! And I—I—wish I'd—died before he was born."

Thereupon, with sobs and tears, and also thank heavens, with Samuel, she rushed out of the room.

"There she goes, bless her!" said Johnny, *solus*, "and really it's a most blessed lull when that dear babe retreats. I don't know how it is. I'm sure Rebecca isn't such a bad girl after all, if only the old woman would let her have her own way. But it's no good speaking; it only vexes her. The fact is, I'll just have a little room fitted up behind the shop, and I shall stop there in the evening until I've read my papers, and till there's some faint chance of Samuel being asleep. And then

she'll make a row about that, and say I'm deserting my home."

So poor Johnny relapsed into his habitual despair. Home was by no means what it once had been, but he, at any rate, didn't see how to mend it; and life was becoming for him that wretched, commonplace, purposeless thing, which it is for nine hundred and ninety-nine out of every thousand human beings.

Mrs. Carlisle was, as we know, a very well-meaning woman; but as to managing baby she was immeasurably inferior even to Rebecca. To begin with, she was decidedly stout, and decidedly past the prime of life. One effect of which was that she had no lap, and another that she had no breath. When she laid baby on what she facetiously called her lap, baby of course slipped off, and had to be painfully hauled on again. Naturally enough he always slipped off when he was going to sleep, and hauling him up again

always woke him. Then Mrs. Carlisle would take him in her arms and pace the room with him, until she panted and puffed and perspired, with a violence that seemed to threaten apoplexy. And all the while she would never give him up to Rebecca.

"No, no, my dear," she would say, "when a child's not quite right there's nothing like his mother."

Poor old lady! Samuel was too much for her; too much both for body and mind. He seemed to disturb the old comfort of their home; and besides that, Mrs. Carlisle could never quite forget, and Mr. Carlisle could never even in the smallest degree forget, that the child had, so to speak, turned Patty out of doors. Home had never been the same since she left. She was just the sort of companion that at their time of life a child of their own might have been, and Mrs. Carlisle felt that she had been shamefully unkind and unjust.

If anybody had told her so, she would no doubt have denied it. But what is the use of denying an accusation when you are yourself your own accuser. She had, indeed, sought for even a quarrel with Patty, but Patty had been far too wise to give any occasion for that. Anyhow she had sent her away. She knew at the time that it was a wrong to Patty; and, what was far worse for herself, that it was a cruel exaction from her husband. Good-natured men will do what their wives bid them, but only with a mental reservation, with the distinct understanding that they are being imposed upon, and that a woman is taking a mean advantage at once of her own position, and of a man's natural chivalry.

It must be confessed, that Mr. Carlisle had never been happy since Patty went away. He had really loved her better than anybody in the world, except his wife; and his wife

had been doing her silly best to destroy even that exception. There are some wives who never will understand the great height of their own advantages. It is most certain that that easiness of behaviour which, in an unmarried man, might easily enough become flirtation, may for the most part be regarded by a married man's wife with absolutely unruffled indifference. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred it becomes serious only when it is interfered with; when a wife will insist upon putting a meaning into it that it really does not possess. It is extremely doubtful, for instance, whether Mrs. Carlisle was not, in an ineffably stupid way, even jealous of Patty. If she had been accused of jealousy, of course she would have denied it, and in denying it she would have been perfectly honest. The gift of discerning spirits is still so rare, that it may almost be regarded as miraculous; and even people who can, with moderate shrewdness,

discern the spirits of others, are often lamentably and totally ignorant of what it is most necessary to know about their own.

"Of course I'm not jealous," Mrs. Carlisle would have said, "do you think I'm going to be jealous of a little bit of a chit like that? if I can't manage to make myself more valuable to my husband than a bit of a girl, all I can say is he's very welcome to leave me."

And of course if people's feelings depended upon common sense, jealousy would, for Mrs. Carlisle, have been utterly impossible. But people's feelings do not depend upon common sense, and what is more, the extreme properness of English matrimonial life is very often based not upon real principle, but only upon dense ignorance and blind prejudice. The respectable woman of the middle class is perfectly certain that the one comprehensive duty and privilege of her life is to become a wife. By becoming a wife she means getting fast hold

of a man and never letting him go. As the unhappy Bumble discovered, the law of this country, which takes it for granted that a man is not only his own master but his wife's master also, is simply absurd. The average British matron believes, that to have any sort of independence in the region of the affections is neither more nor less than a mitigated form of adultery. It is this theory which really has for years been destroying the sanctity of domestic life in England. So long as a divorce could be obtained only at a ruinous expense, by a special Act of Parliament, the mischief was hidden; now it stares everybody in the face.

Of course Mrs. Carlisle was not jealous; but nevertheless she often cried privately into her own pocket-handkerchief when Johnny, bidding his adopted daughter good-night, kissed her as a father should. Poor old lady! it was very silly of her; but there was something

good and genuine even at the bottom of the silliness. She had always tried to be, and most certainly had been, a very good wife. She would have died if she had believed that her own husband could think otherwise, and in her own heart she was perfectly sure that he never did think otherwise. And yet her affection, like everything else about her, was of a fussy, irritable, over-sensitive sort, tormenting herself, even when it did not torment other people. So there had been all manner of mixed motives in her conduct towards Patty. She was very sorry to lose her, and glad to get her away; and, at any rate, the girl would have been always, notwithstanding her gentle goodness, a root of bitterness to trouble them.

But now Mrs. Carlisle was becoming really feeble, ill, worn out by Samuel, and the innumerable cares of motherhood; and she sometimes in her own heart almost wished that dear elder daughter might have been still with

them, to lighten somewhat the burden of her own cares, and at any rate to leave her at liberty to make home more homelike to her dear old Johnny.

Meanwhile, as we know, Patty had been suffering as much—away at the dreary old Hall, and in the far lonelier bustle of London —as she would have deserved to suffer, if she had been one of the most artful and designing little villains under heaven; and now she had come to the end of one dark chapter in her history. She was absolutely penniless—no money, no work, she might have justly presented herself at the casual ward of the nearest workhouse for lodging and food. And why not? Does not British charity provide for the destitute, even as the divine master has bidden us? "*I* was hungry, and ye gave *me* meat; I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked and ye clothed me. Forasmuch as ye did it unto one

of the least of these, ye did it unto me." When Christ, in his poor, comes to the casual ward of a workhouse, we treat him—How ?

"Mr. Rodgers," said Patty, one day, about a month after the trial, "you are so very kind to me that I scarcely like to say what I am just going to say to you, but I must say it——"

"Well, Mrs. Forester, what is it ?" said her friend; "if I can do anything further for you I shall be most thankful."

"My dear sir," she answered, "what I want to say is that you are doing too much. I must work for myself. Could you tell me of anything to do ?"

"Don't at all trouble yourself, Mrs. Forester, at least till you are quite strong, recovered from the awful anxiety and want you must have experienced; you are sure to find friends," said Rodgers.

"Yes," said Patty, "I have friends even in London; *old* friends, the dearest in all the world."

She could not say more; all the past seemed to rise before her: what had been, what *might have been.*

"Mrs. Forester," said Rodgers, "I might have told you before—but I thought you had better rest, stay here, and think and plan for yourself as you might feel able—but I have seen some of your friends here in London—friends you may well call them, true as steel."

"Where—who?" said Patty.

"Well, I don't know that I had better tell you just now," Mr. Rodgers said. "I must get away to the City; and meanwhile, till I come back in the evening, just you be thinking which of your friends you would most like to see again. Think which of them are most likely to have known something of your circumstances. Some of them perhaps were so

connected with all manner of benevolent movements that they would be most certain to see the account of your husband's misfortunes, to recognise his name, and to make every search they could for yourself. But good-bye, good-bye, Mrs. Forester, for the present; perhaps I may bring some old friend of yours back with me in the evening."

"Oh no, no, sir," said Patty, "not yet; I'm not ready yet; give a few days longer."

But Mr. Rodgers didn't hear what she said. Seeing the growing intelligence in her face, the sure tokens that she understood what he meant, and whom he meant, he hurried away—to the City, of course, but then as soon as possible to Islington. Meanwhile Patty went to her own room to think and to prepare herself. Her whole life seemed to pass before her, almost as people say it does to drowning men. Above all she remembered the old days at Oak Villa, and her good-bye to Leighton. She remem-

bered his passionate words when they were parting, how wildly he had promised that, in the deep need which he fondly hoped would never come, she should always find him near at hand, a faithful, helpful friend. Had he not said that he would hear even her faintest whisper, wherever she might be, and come to her, were it even from the very ends of the earth. And so now, out of the depth of her heart she called to him, and cast herself upon his generous love, his wisdom, his self-restrained manliness. She wanted him—all the old thoughts and half-formed wishes that might have been once in her heart were gone now, but she wanted him as a friend, as an elder brother, a master, a law-giver, to tell her what to do, and make her do it. She had been so dreadfully alone that she began to be utterly terrified of herself. She had scarcely known what loneliness was till she married Forester. It was so dreadful to

feel, not only that he was hiding his worst secrets from her, but that she also was compelled to hide her best secrets from him. When he was merry his mirth was like the crackling of thorns under a pot, and the end of his mirth was heaviness. And for such companionship he had taken her away from noble friends and a noble work, where in her own life many others lived also. Now she was altogether alone. If only Leighton would come to her, *he* would give her something to do. He would know what she *could* do, and he would give to her a work which would be a blessing both to the helper and the helped. And so with all the might of her heart she called to him.

Of course he was coming; but why is it that we so often prefer the romance of life to its common-sense? Patty was thinking only of old promises, and the affection of better days, and when Leighton came to her she

would think that by some weird and mystic power she herself had brought him. In fact, the common newspapers had brought him, and the prison calendar, and such common-place influences as were within the reach of everybody. But life is more romantic than we sometimes think, and the extremity of our distress is sure to become far more widely known than we expected; and so it comes to pass that the eyes to which our names are dearest are almost sure to see some news of us.

"Well, I'm very glad you had the opportunity of breaking the matter to her, even so briefly as that," said Leighton; "but I almost think we'd better just call together on an old friend of hers and ask his advice. He'll be delighted to see you—to do anything he can for his old favourite."

"Oh, with pleasure," said Rodgers; "who is it?"

"Well, it is a gentleman at whose house she used to live. His name is Carlisle. He had, in fact, adopted her, but they had a child of their own about a year after she came, and that seemed to make some little difference. At any rate, Patty—I mean Mrs. Forester—felt that sooner or later she might possibly be in the way; and so hearing that there was a kind of place for her at Oak Villa, she offered herself, and was accepted, as you know. Mrs. Carlisle is a very good old lady; but women are always just a little harder to deal with than men, and perhaps Mrs. Forester—she was Miss Wilson then—was quite right in seeking a more independent position than that of an adopted child."

"Well, then, you propose that we should call upon Mr. and Mrs. Carlisle, Mr. Leighton?" said Rodgers.

"Well, yes, I almost think it would be better; and yet—I'm not hesitating, Mr.

Rodgers, because I think there's any doubt about the kindness of these good people, but perhaps they might be too kind, rush upon Mrs. Forester in a body, and almost, in her present weak state, overwhelm her with their well-meant affection."

"Well, and what do you propose?" said Mr. Rodgers.

"Well, I think we'll call on Mr. Carlisle, at his shop in Oxford Street, and let him break the matter to his wife as he thinks best," Leighton said.

So they went to Oxford Street, and found Mr. Carlisle in the midst of his wares. The shop looked just as it had looked for many a year, crammed with goods—indeed, overflowing, for the very footpath round the windows was almost illegally encumbered. The prices were still marked on every article, and every article was still worth its price. There's an immense amount of advertising

humbug in the world, of course, but surely that is no reason why there may not be a certain amount of advertising sincerity. If a thing is really worth a shilling, the most honest tradesman in the world would be a mere fool to say that it was only worth sixpence. So in the midst of his overflowing stock of ticketed goods there was John Carlisle, short, stout, puffy, perspiring, with the honest good-natured face of an unrefined but most genuine benevolence.

"I'm delighted to see you, Mr. Leighton," he said; "and you're quite a stranger, considering how good a friend you are. But, really it's very——"

"This is Mr. Rodgers, Mr. Carlisle," said Leighton, "a friend of mine, that I'm sure you'll be glad to see."

"Oh, indeed! Mr. Rodgers, I'm sure I'm very glad indeed to see you, sir. But just step upstairs, gentlemen," said the worthy shop-

keeper, stumbling as best he could through kettles and pans, and fenders, and all manner of ironmongery, and constantly stopping and turning round to finish a half-completed sentence.

"It's really a most remarkable circumstance, Mr. Leighton—dear me, I beg your pardon, gentlemen, I'm afraid you've hurt your feet against those things, our place is so small. Here, Thomas, just clear some of these things away. I was just observing, Mr. Leighton—but step upstairs, gentlemen, step upstairs."

And so they went stumbling on through a dark passage and a dim staircase.

"If you will just kindly mind the turning, gentlemen," said Mr. Carlisle, "and there's just one step more, when you think you've got quite to the top—a wide step, almost like a little landing, and then another step. Yes, that's right—this way, gentlemen."

And so he led them into a front room on the first floor, over the shop, which used to be the drawing-room when they lived at their place of business, before the house at Canonbury Square was bought.

"I was just remarking, Mr. Leighton," said Mr. Carlisle, who not having many things to remark, very seldom forgot the particular thing that he meant to notice, "that it's a very remarkable circumstance that we were talking about you only last night, thinking over old times, before Miss Wilson left us to be married. Ah! Mr. Leighton, that business ought to have ended very differently if some people had known how to manage matters."

"Ah! do you think so, Mr. Carlisle?" said Leighton.

"Well, Mr. Leighton," he said, laughing, "if *you* don't think so, very likely I'm mistaken; but me and my old woman have often had our little quiet joke about it, and she's as good an

eye in her head as most women, I can tell you, doctor."

"Now, how funny, that you should mention Miss Wilson just now," said Leighton. "It's about Miss Wilson—at least, Mrs. Forester—that we've called to see you this morning."

"No bad news?" he said, as he looked at Mr. Rodgers' face.

"Well, it's not good news, Mr. Carlisle," said Leighton. "I don't know whether you read the papers at all carefully, or saw anything in them about Mr. Forester."

"Well, I read my paper pretty regularly," he said, "but I don't remember noticing anything about Mr. Forester."

"It was a trial for forgery."

"About a month ago?" said Mr. Carlisle. "Why, now you mention it, I do remember seeing the name of Forester, but I couldn't quite make it out. The fact is, as far as I could understand it, he seemed to be called

Marie, and I thought perhaps it might be a woman, and I couldn't tell what it was. But you surely don't mean to say that that was Patty's husband ?"

"Unfortunately it was, Mr. Carlisle," Leighton said, "and Mr. Rodgers here is the gentleman he robbed."

"Dear me," said Mr. Carlisle, "what a very remarkable thing. Then what has become of him ? I really didn't read the account in the paper at all carefully."

"Unfortunately," said Leighton, "he is sentenced to seven years' penal servitude, and meanwhile his poor wife is left to her own resources, and we are just thinking what we could best do for her ; and we've called to ask your advice on the matter, Mr. Carlisle."

"Poor dear girl," he said ; "but gentlemen, won't you——?" And then he got up, and fumbled for some time at the chiffonier. "Won't you have a glass of wine ? Good

wholesome sherry, Mr. Rodgers. Nothing extraordinary, but no worse than it pretends to be. I don't know, Mr. Leighton, I don't know what to say," he went on ; " where is she now, Mr. Leighton ? "

And then he got up and paced the room.

" I've never had a happy hour since she left our house. I did it for the best, God knows ! but it *wasn't* the best, for all that ; and meaning well is a very different thing from doing well, isn't it, Mr. Leighton ? "

" Very different indeed, Mr. Carlisle ; but I don't think you've anything to reproach yourself for. As far as I understood the case, you did nothing at all. Miss Wilson acted for herself, and on her own responsibility."

" Oh, yes, of course she acted for herself," he said ; " but that doesn't alter the matter. She wasn't the girl to need thrusting out of a house ; she knew well enough when it was time to go. I don't know how I could have

helped it, but I would rather have lost my right hand. I would rather have lost everything I have," he said, still pacing the room, "except the wife and child, than let her go. Where is she now, Mr. Leighton?"

"Well, well, Mr. Carlisle," said Mr. Rodgers, "I'm quite sure you can have nothing to reproach yourself with; but since her husband's conviction, Mrs. Forester has been at my house, and is there still. And if you and Mr. Leighton will go home with me this evening, it will give me great pleasure, and I am sure it will be of the utmost service to Mrs. Forester."

"At the same time," said Leighton, "I think it would be decidedly better that we should make up our minds as to what we should propose to her. Of course she will want something to do. She won't live on charity; and though she has none of that false pride which would refuse help from real friends, yet, if

some plan could be arranged to secure both her comfort and her feeling of independence, it would certainly be most desirable."

"Well," said Mr. Carlisle, "I don't know what to say; it isn't that I hesitate about Patty; of course you know that, Mr. Leighton. It will not be my fault if any harm or want comes to her while I'm alive; but really I think, Mr. Rodgers, if you'll excuse me this evening, I'll just go home and talk it over with my old woman first. She's very ailing, doctor; very much aged the last year or two, and I really think if she would like to have Patty at our house again, it would be the very best thing she could do. But I must just break it to her, Mr. Leighton."

"Well, do so," he said; "I'm quite sure that if she could come to live with you, it would be the very best thing that could happen for her; that is to say, of course if the arrangement met with Mrs. Carlisle's entire

approval. And, in fact, Mr. Rodgers, I almost think that I'll defer my visit for a day or two, and meanwhile, you know where to find me, and that you may command my services at a moment's notice."

"Well, gentlemen, you know best," Mr. Rodgers said; "but I half promised to bring an old friend of hers back with me this evening, and she will perhaps be disappointed."

"Oh, I don't think so," said Leighton; "but tell her who the old friends are, and so prepare her; and meanwhile, I have a round of patients yet to finish, and I'll just call at the Square, Mr. Carlisle, about supper-time, and have, as you say, a knife and fork with you, if it won't be inconvenient."

And so they separated.

CHAPTER IV.

HOME AGAIN.

Poor Mrs. Carlisle was dreadfully distressed when she heard of Patty's trouble. She could not help feeling—and yet her self-reproach was needlessly cruel—that she had herself been somehow the cause of the poor child's misery. Besides, when people are ill, and especially when the veil that hides the next world from them is getting so thin that the light almost shines through, they can see much more clearly, and judge much more truly. Poor Mrs. Carlisle began to understand how much better it would have been if Patty had stayed with them; how the old home would never have lost its coziness, and how even little Samuel

would have been better cared for, and more wisely brought up. At any rate, she was most anxious to have her back again.

"Tell her, Johnny," she said, "tell her to come back to me. Tell her I'm very ill. She wants to work for her own living, I dare say; but you must tell her I won't give her any wages at all. Put it any way you like, Johnny. Tell her how we took care of her when she was a child, and now we want her to take care of me. Tell her it will be a great kindness to come."

The poor old lady cried, for mercifully her tears were always near the surface, and a good cry always did her good. She was, indeed, really ill; and if only Patty would come and take care of her there could be no doubt at all it would be the best thing for both of them. There is no need to tell, and indeed it would be very hard to tell, with what joyful sorrow and happy love these three were once

more united, and Patty at home again. It was some time, of course, before even Mrs. Carlisle, whose kindness was often a little rough in form, found courage to ask as much as a tenth part of the questions she was eager to have answered. But by degrees, sitting by the fireside in the dim twilight, with just too much of day to shut out and too little to work by, she contrived to satisfy some part, at any rate, of her good-natured curiosity.

"Really, my dear, you must have passed through a world of trouble," she would say, "and so aggravating to lose all you had—even all the pretty things that were given you as wedding presents. I suppose they went too, didn't they?"

"Indeed," said Patty, "they were the only things I really cared to lose, for I just felt that none of the rest really belonged to us."

"Well, well, my dear, it's been a sad business for you; but they had a very pretty picking,

even out of those few things we gave you, whoever got them—and all real, too. I've wished they'd been plated many a time since I heard of it."

"Nay, don't grieve about that, Mrs. Carlisle; it has been a very sad business, and no words can tell how thankful I am to be here again."

"And I am very thankful to have you here again, dear," said the old lady. "I am sorry you ever went away, Patty; but I thought it was all for the best."

"And so it was," Patty said; "I've no doubt I shall feel the benefit of it some time or other, and at any rate you acted rightly enough; indeed, I can't see how you could have acted otherwise."

"No, I dare say not," said Mrs. Carlisle; "you are a good, forgiving girl; and there's no need to say any more about that now, at any rate. But it always vexes me to think that

you might have done so much better. There was the young doctor, for instance——"

"Nay, nay, Mrs. Carlisle, don't say anything about him. I dare say you are quite mistaken in what you think; and it was quite certain that that was not to be."

And poor Patty sighed as she thought what a very different lot had been provided for her.

"Yes, yes, my dear," said Mrs. Carlisle, "I don't wonder at your feeling it, but we can never bring the chance back again by sighing, can we? And so it's no use talking about it."

Very soon, indeed, after Patty's return, Mrs. Carlisle began to wonder what she could possibly have done, if so attentive a nurse, so affectionate a child, had not come home to her. She insisted upon having the management of Samuel before she had been in the house a day. He was to sleep in her room instead of Rebecca's; and moreover, she would

superintend all the nursery arrangements, and see that Rebecca did her work. As Rebecca's only hindrance hitherto had been Mrs. Carlisle herself, the burden of this responsibility was much lighter than it seemed. One good effect of the new arrangement, and which followed almost immediately upon Patty's return, was that master Samuel was put to bed at about seven o'clock, and very seldom woke before six at the earliest the next morning. If he ever did wake about supper time, he was not brought down into the lighted dining-room to see all the spoons and forks and glasses, and to have a little taste of everything eatable upon the table; but he was just lulled to sleep again in the dimness of his own little chamber. So good old Johnny had his suppers in peace; and when he was tired of an old man's romp with his little son, he could just send him away, and go on reading his paper, and find Samuel as little trouble as he had been for all

those long years when in fact he was somewhere else. Many a night did old Johnny kiss his adopted daughter with a fervent love that almost startled her.

"Good-night, my pet, good-night! God bless you! You can't think how happy I am now, and how comfortable we all are again. God bless you!"

But his poor wife was manifestly breaking down. She could very seldom get out, not often even to church; and she sometimes rather surprised her spiritual adviser, the Reverend Jonas Faithful,—his hair had somehow turned grey quite rapidly, and he had let his beard grow now to protect him, he said, from sore throat—by her apparent indifference to those means of grace of which she was so frequently deprived.

"I'm very sorry," her minister would say, "that you have again been unable to meet with us in the house of prayer, Mrs. Carlisle;

but when the Lord himself detains us, He always has His comforts for us."

"Yes, to be sure, sir," said his spiritual patient, with an almost too cheerful acquiescence. "I know it all well, Mr. Faithful. I'm getting an old woman now; it's not like a young girl."

"Well, you may be right, Mrs. Carlisle," said the clergyman. "A long Christian experience brings with it a real blessing."

"Yes, to be sure, Mr. Faithful. When I'm sitting in my easy chair in front of the fire on a Sunday morning, I can tell almost to a word whereabouts you are. I know the prayers all off by heart nearly, and I just take my little Bible and read the lessons to myself. I can find them you know, Mr. Faithful, by that table at the beginning of the Prayer-book. And then when it comes to sermon-time you see, sir, I've heard you so many years, that I know almost exactly what you are going to

say; and so I should really think it a sin to run the risk of a cold or anything of that sort at my time of life for the sake of going out."

There was a sort of quaintness about Mrs. Carlisle that made poor Mr. Faithful just the least bit fidgety. Was it the strength of his influence over her, or the poverty of his invention and the extreme narrowness of his circle of thought which made this good old lady so certain that she knew beforehand everything that her minister would say?

"By the way," he said one day, "I hear that the young lady who used to live with you, who married away into the country, has come back again. I hope it is no trouble that has brought her back."

"Well, Mr. Faithful, she has come back again, *thank God!* and when a married woman comes home without her husband, it is pretty certain that there must be trouble somewhere. But

she's a good girl; and if she doesn't get to Heaven, I just feel as if I don't care about going there myself."

"Nay, my dear madam," said the minister, "our own souls we are bound to save, *first of all.* My only fear about Miss Patty—I forget her married name——"

"Forester," said the old lady.

"About Mrs. Forester was, that she had been beguiled and led away by these new-fangled doctrines, that seem to give so much honour and liberty to the carnal mind. We all like our own way, Mrs. Carlisle."

"Yes, sir, indeed we do; and I don't quite see how to help it. And really, Mr. Faithful, I've often noticed that what some people call God's will, is only *their* own way. But Patty hasn't had much of *her* own way, poor dear."

And then there was need of some further explanation, and Mr. Faithful was really sorry

for Patty, and felt sure she would be humbled and softened—and, at any rate, determined to speak to her.

The opportunity for converting Patty did not come so soon as Mr. Faithful expected, nor quite in the same way. Poor Mrs. Carlisle was really sinking—often just as bright and shrewd and chatty as ever, and then almost prostrate. She was very drowsy, getting dropsical too. Her old doctor, the father of many children, was dead, and Mr. Leighton now attended her; but she was getting past cure even by the most skilful physician. She was, however, always glad to see her clergyman; not that she specially needed him, but he reminded her, and was even a part of so many sacred associations. He was the man of God, the preacher of the Gospel, marrying, baptising, burying, as God bade him. He would most likely bury her.

"I hope you are happy and at rest, Mrs.

Carlisle," the good pastor would say, "resting on the sure foundation?"

"Oh yes, thank you, sir! I'm quite happy; I'm in the hands of a very good God—always very good to me."

"It's a glorious exchange, my dear friend, when God calls us to a better world from this world of sin and sorrow."

"Yes, Mr. Faithful," the old lady would answer, "though I've not much fault to find with this world. It seems to me that it would be a very good world if we would only let it."

Mrs. Carlisle was neither quite anxious enough to go to heaven, nor quite repentant enough for her sins upon earth, to satisfy all the requirements of Mr. Faithful's theology, and yet he could scarcely help thinking that she was right. The old lady knew well enough that she was a sinner, but she cared nothing whatever about those artificial sins which are not so much offences against God, as depar-

tures from ecclesiastical conventionalities. As she lay on her sick-bed, what grieved her most was the occasional harshness of temper into which she fancied she had been betrayed. Patty herself was a perpetual reproach to her, and through her, as the Bible says, the *Comforter* kept convincing her of sin. There was nobody in the world to whom she had done more wrong, and at the same time there was nobody in the world who loved her better, or who was more anxious to make her happy. She remembered quite distinctly Mr. Faithful's solemn warnings—how he had cautioned her against her young friend's too reckless freedom in the handling of sacred things. But Mrs. Carlisle didn't care a bit. Jew, Turk, infidel, or heretic, Patty might have been what she liked in outward form; her foster-mother knew quite well that she was a good, true woman, one that feared God and eschewed evil.

Even Mr. Faithful began to be very much

of the same opinion, and he would even talk to her about Mrs. Carlisle's own spiritual condition.

"She's wonderfully happy, Mrs. Forester."

"Wonderfully! Are you surprised, Mr. Faithful. Why should she not be happy?"

"Well, Mrs. Forester, our dear friend cannot be long for this world now, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

"Then David must have been a very ignorant absurd person, Mr. Faithful; for he thought just the opposite. For 'David said unto God, Let me fall into the hands of God, for very great are his mercies. But let me not fall into the hand of man.'"

"Yes, yes, Mrs. Forester," said the clergyman. "God is very merciful if we come to Him in his own way."

"Well, sir," said Patty, "I don't know any way of coming to God except the one you

are constantly preaching about, and that is faith."

"Most certainly, my dear friend. I'm very much delighted to hear you say so."

"And by faith," Patty went on, "I mean simply trusting in God. We have all had to trust each other so often, Mr. Faithful, that anybody may know what trust means. But when I hear you trying to explain in your sermons—you don't mind my saying so, do you, Mr. Faithful?—when I hear you trying to explain the atonement, and how it is that God can honourably forgive men, without injustice or foolishness, I must confess that I don't understand you a bit, and have not the least interest in the subject. All I care to know is, Mr. Faithful, that God *does* love us and forgive us, and I can very safely say that I never for a single instant doubted that God was quite able to take care of his own attributes."

"Well, well," Mr. Faithful would say, "take care to keep the faith you have, and if it be necessary for you to have a fuller knowledge, or to be in any respect otherwise minded, God will reveal even that to you."

So Mr. Faithful was not quite so near to converting Patty as he had expected to be. Partly because she didn't need converting, and partly because, if they had really come to a hand-and-hand tussle for one another's souls, it is by no means certain that Patty would not have converted the clergyman. So they went on their several ways—Mr. Faithful in his parish preaching, baptising, marrying, burying; Patty in the nursery and in the sick-chamber, and in all manner of kitchen and fireside duties; and Mrs. Carlisle quickly, but without hurry or alarm, to her grave.

It was very sudden at last. Mr. Carlisle had just gone to town, to the shop in Oxford Street, and his wife unusually restless was

anxious to be up and dressed. She was sitting in an easy chair by her bedroom fire, just recovering from the fatigue, almost the exhaustion of getting out of bed, the bed where she had to sit rather than lie, propped up with many pillows. She seemed even more tired than usual, and Patty felt sure that another of her drowsy days was beginning, one of those days of heavy sleep that she had been warned were always so full of danger. Indeed she fell asleep almost as soon as she was in her chair, and nothing could rouse her. Patty was almost frightened as she watched her face, and fancied that the expression was changing to something she had never seen there before. She sent the servant at once for Mr. Leighton while she herself watched, and had in readiness all such appliances as her experience suggested. But there could be no doubt that the end was now come. While she still watched, her patient's breathing grew more

and more difficult and then strangely quiet; and a full half-hour before Mr. Leighton could arrive, she was alone with the dead.

And now more than ever did good old Johnny feel how wonderful was the mercy that had brought his daughter back again. His home was for a while very desolate, but his old woman had been failing so long that he seemed scarcely to know when he really had lost her; but Patty, who had been managing all things, was still spared to him; and when she was no longer needed to watch over her foster-mother, she was able also to resume by far the larger part of her old happy work. She spent many hours each day at Oak Villa. Some of the girls whom she had known before her marriage were still there, and might likely enough be there for years longer; for Mr. Whitehouse's home, without pretending to be a cure for the worst of social evils, did really endeavour to heal the sicknesses of those

who came there for shelter. Mr. Whitehouse knew full well that new patients would be continually coming to his own house, and that thousands more would go elsewhere or be left uncared for to die; but he wished, at any rate, perfectly to cure anybody entrusted to his own care. No doubt the best cases were much the hardest to deal with. Girls who had been in prison, or on the streets, if they had been brought up to work for their living, and could be placed in situations as domestic servants, were without much difficulty disposed of. But some of those at Oak Villa were highly educated and well brought up. Many had fallen, not so much into sin as into very suspicious misfortune. To send such persons to scrub floors or black shoes was altogether out of the question. To set them to such work and expect them to remain virtuous, in the midst of its galling sacrifices, would be to require from them a strength of goodness which would

be looked for in vain from the vast majority even of the unfallen. Mr. Whitehouse was fortunately unfettered by any committee, or any constitution framed according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. If he found that he had been proceeding on a wrong principle, he could put it aside in a moment and get a better principle. He had never, however, had any need to change his plan, for his plan was simply this—spending his own money for the good of everybody whom he could afford to help; to regard each girl who came into his house as his own child, and therefore to do for her the very best it was in his power to do; taking into consideration the advantages the girl had had, and the work she was really fit for. He would never send one of his children away, because *a* place offered itself. He would in all cases wait until he found what he considered to be *the* place. Then he *would* send her. Everybody

knows that the people who, in modern society, have the worst of all chances, are girls with a moderate education and no fortune. The menial work of life they cannot do without degradation, and with the higher intellectual, moral, spiritual work of life they are not entrusted.

And so it came to pass that Patty found at Oak Villa some of those who had been there when she bid them good-bye "only to be married." How differently she came back to them.

Nevertheless, caring for old Johnny, watching over Samuel and Rebecca, almost wife and mother again, Patty was thoroughly at home.

She had never been so happy all her life.

CHAPTER V.

THE TICKET-OF-LEAVE MAN.

At last the dreary years of Forester's penal servitude, shortened by the orderly conduct which to him had been so much easier than insubordination, were at an end; and with the prison gratuities in his pocket he found himself once again in the London streets. Nothing could have kept him from London when he was again a free man, even if there had been no living being in the great wilderness for whom he had need to care. The mighty city has a fascination for those who have once lived in it, which nothing wholly removes. Even rich merchants hesitate to change its noisy, ever smokier suburbs, for a distant country seat, pure,

healthy, and horribly quiet. But they know that they can have at least chambers in town, and that, whenever they choose, an express train will whirl them thither almost sixty miles an hour. Brighton is almost as near to the Bank as Bayswater.

But the poor wretch who must *really leave* London, if he settles down in some other town or country village—who will be able to spare neither time nor money for frequent journeys to his old abode—he cannot tear himself away. There seems to him at first, even in the largest of the provincial towns, a terrible desolation, as if a pestilence had stunned the population, or they had been drawn off for some foreign war. There is no need to hurry across the streets, except in the busiest thoroughfares, and at the busiest hours. The streets too are so short, so soon walked over, that they seem scarcely bigger than toy streets, and it is but a stride from the centre to the outmost suburb.

What matters it to the poor wretch without a shilling to call his own, that London thoroughfares stretch on for miles, rich with the costliest treasures? What to him are the monuments and picture galleries, and museums, houses of parliament, and courts of law, mansions of the nobility, and palaces of the Queen? Are they anything better than a mockery of his poverty? Often enough they seem only sneering at him with cold, stony cruelty, and yet—on the other hand he feels that in a manner they are his. If a well-to-do uncle or cousin from the country, worth a thousand a year, were to meet him some day at Charing Cross, and ask him what that building was at the other side of the fountains, he would tell him that it was the National Gallery, with just a touch of scornful pity; and in spite of his empty purse, he would feel superior to his country kinsman.

But above all, the deadly quietness of an ob-

scure village or small town, disturbed only by the loud whispers of idle or malicious gossip, where even friendship itself is so jealously exclusive that it becomes for the most part little better than an intense selfishness—where men are constantly locked up in a gloomy dungeon of conventionality out of which they are never permitted for a single instant to escape—this is utterly intolerable to a man who has a guilty conscience or a dark past.

But there were other reasons for Forester's coming to London. He was coming for love, and he was coming for revenge. He cared now absolutely nothing for Patty, excepting indeed that she would stand in the way of what he purposed for Meggy Vickers; and on the contrary, in the comparative prosperity to which he knew she must have by this time returned, she might be made financially useful to him. He knew with tolerable accuracy the rights with which the English law endowed a husband,

even though the husband should be a convicted felon at large on a ticket-of-leave. He knew that Patty's friends would understand English law quite as well as he did, and take every precaution for the evasion of its most injurious provisions. He was also well aware that the very first approach to a breach of the peace, anything like even threatening or intimidation, much less violence, would send him back again to his old quarters to finish his term in gaol. Moreover, unless he were driven to it, he looked upon Patty's assistance as a thing to be studiously avoided. During the years of his solitude he had been maturing plans, the carrying out of which would require her absence, and, if possible, her complete ignorance of his own movements; but he could not starve, and it might therefore be necessary, in a quiet, cold, and not wholly ungentlemanly kind of way, to remind his wife that he still had certain rights over her, and that he would be compelled,

though he would not intrude upon her his company, to insist upon her supplying for a while his most pressing wants.

Patty in her new comfort, sheltered by the love of her foster-father, happy in the discharge of her new duties, mistress once again of an honest home, had never indeed forgotten by how heavy a chain she was fastened to the worst possibilities of trouble; but it was now at least two years since she had had any communication with her husband. He wanted her to forget him, and he knew quite well that she would be unable to calculate exactly the time of his release. All of his few letters had been cold and heartless, but the last had been filled with hypocritical rubbish, intended rather for the eyes of the prison officials than for those of his correspondent. He would rather, he told her, that she should write no more. Her letters disturbed his contentment, and made him long unduly for liberty. With the most anxious

desire to be patient, it was hard for him at the best to bear the just punishment that had been inflicted upon him. But every message from the old world of freedom cost him weeks of restless and useless discontent, so he begged she would write no more. The time of his release would come at last, however slowly the intervening months might seem to be passing; it would be time enough then to renew their correspondence. Meanwhile, he thanked God that his unhappy wife had recovered some at least of her old friends.

So Patty really knew nothing about him. That last letter had indeed confirmed her suspicion that she herself was utterly nothing to him; nothing at least, but a very heavy burden. She had found that out, however, at the old Hall. So she was quietly waiting, not without occasional shocks of terror, for the time of his return. Would she be compelled to go back and live with him? To share once more any

poverty or disgrace into which he might be willing to drag her down? She knew quite well that by the law of England she was Forester's slave, until death should them part, but she put away as much as she could all gloomy forebodings, and accepted with profoundest gratitude the peace which God was giving her. She knew that joy was strength, and so she determined that for whatever might lie before her, she would secure that strength of joy while it should yet be possible.

But now Forester was at large wandering about the London streets, brought face to face with both his firm purposes—brought face to face with both love and hate. In prison he had been able only to brood and plan; now he must act, and there was no time to lose. No words can describe the strange feeling, almost a sort of coldness, with which he walked about the streets, once more a free man; for freedom means responsibility, self-control, innumerable

duties to discharge, honest work for fair wages. In spite of all its horrible associations, the prison had become to Forester a kind of home, and a much more comfortable home than the one room in which Mr. Rodgers' clerk had been compelled to live. Everybody with whom Forester had come in contact for the last few years had known the very worst about him. He had been completely free from that grim necessity, the grimmest of all necessities, the need to keep up appearances, and even false appearances. Moreover, his very work had not been hard, and it had those elements of easiness which the work of no free man can ever have. To do it required no effort of thought, and to neglect it would bring no poverty. If a poor man—hard-working and honest, with a cottage to pay rent for and a wife and children to keep—should be smitten down by some dire disease, he knows full well as he lies on his sick bed that the house-rent is getting into arrears ;

that his wife must take such credit as she can get from the little tradesmen with whom she deals; and that if his illness should last long, it is only too possible that in spite of all his brave and honest labour his wife and little children may have to seek for the cruel mercies of a Christian workhouse. But for the idle convict, an illness which is not acutely painful is a positive luxury. If he lounges about for a whole year an interesting invalid, his rent will still be paid and his infirmary rations will still be provided. Forester had become used to this sort of coddling; he had several times been ill in a genteel nervous kind of way, and when his health was so indisputably good that shamming would have been sure to be detected, he found even his work a pleasant change. His cell was small indeed, and the bed was hard, and there was a certain menial work from which he could not escape, which for the first few days had galled him; but he soon reflected that there

was nobody there to see him, nobody who had not known the worst. It was the custom of the place; to make his bed and such like in a convict prison was not half so ridiculous as the voluntary slavery to which gentlemen affect to submit in their intercourse with ladies. So in a while he cared nothing for these trumpery inconveniences, and on his hard narrow little bed in the convict's cell he slept far more soundly than he had ever been able, since his marriage, to sleep on luxurious feathers at the old Hall. He had nothing to conceal, and secrecy is the greatest of all torments for human beings; it is the very peace of heaven to be above it, and it is a kind of peace to have sunk even beneath it.

But now Forester, wandering about the streets, began to feel that the warmth of a prison shelter had been stripped from him, and he had not yet recovered the compensating shelter of the concealments, or even the hypo-

crisies of ordinary society. He had now everything to hide. It might be easy for him to avoid saying where he had been last week, for instance, but it was plain enough that he must have been somewhere; and at almost a moment's notice to invent a lie which will have to last a lifetime, and which may be exposed to all manner of unforeseen tests, is not altogether easy; so he wandered about, walking very quickly, as distracted people always do. He was too much engrossed by his own reflections to notice where he was or whither he was going, but every now and then he would remember whence he had so lately come, and then suddenly, as if by magic, the streets seemed to be swarming with crowds of men and women, and every eye seemed watching him, and every foot moving towards him, and every tongue whispering about him. Like some poor hunted beast of the chace, he would turn aside into the first narrow passage that seemed to

offer shelter, threading his way through all kinds of lanes and alleys, ever choosing the narrowest, and ever turning out again at the sharpest angles, till he found himself miles away from the scene of his last terror, and could resume his plannings hurrying along once more, driven on by thought, quite deaf and blind to all the sights and sounds about him.

But he grew hungry and tired, and turned into what seemed to him a very quiet coffee-room, for such refreshment as he could afford to buy. He was indeed changed; before his imprisonment, with only a pound in his pocket, and Patty almost starving in his one room, he would have thought nothing of spending the whole pound on a cosy little dinner for himself, out of sheer pity for his own misfortunes. "Poor fellow!" he would have thought, as if he had been arguing quite independently about some unlucky friend, "he can't have many little treats, and he shall have a comfortable little

dinner for once, even if it costs me my last sovereign." He was very different now, so he just looked over the bill-of-fare, a dirty, blotty kind of thing, and he chose what was in his judgment the most nutritious and the most filling shilling's worth that the establishment could afford. It was a very quiet time of the day, and the coffee-room was nearly empty. While the waiter was preparing what Forester had ordered, he slipped out to the nearest stationers to buy some cheap note-paper and envelopes and a pencil. He had never felt so utterly desolate: his stock of money was very slender. and he began to think that perhaps after all there was nothing for it but to write to Patty and ask her to help him. So he began—

"My dear Patty"—

And there he stopped. To write to her at all, above all to write to her with any pretence of affection, seemed such unmitigated and such

disgusting hypocrisy, that even Forester himself for awhile shrunk from it.

"No," he said to himself, "I'll let it alone. I don't want her to know where I am; I don't want her even to know that I am out of gaol. She always has been a hindrance to me, and she always will be. What devil of madness ever made me marry her, I am utterly unable to divine—a simple, snivelling, virtuous ass. Bah! What if I get five pounds from her—and I couldn't ask for more just now—that five pounds would perhaps cost me everything I have set my mind upon: she will find out where I am; she'll have me watched, and I shall be cheated every way. No, I'll wait. I'll go over to Peckham as soon as it gets dusk, and try my chance of seeing Meggy."

"*À-la-mode* beef for you, sir?" said the waiter.

"All right," said Forester; "put it down."

"Yet, after all, why shouldn't I?" he

thought to himself. "She is my wife after all, and *I*'ve had trouble enough out of the connection, I'm sure."

He always thought *himself* the martyr.

"And a nice time she's had of it these last few years, while I've been shut up in prison like a caged beast; making herself as happy as possible among her old friends, and that damned old sneak the doctor among them too."

So he went on eating and thinking.

At last he began to write his letter :—

"My dear Patty,

"At last I am at liberty again. I cannot come to see you just now. I have a ticket-of-leave, and I must be very careful how I act. I could not bear to come to you just now, and I am quite sure you could not bear to see me. Most likely I shall have to leave London very early the day after to-morrow. Put a five-

pound note into a sheet of note-paper, and enclose them, without a single word, in an envelope. Address the envelope to Thomas Wilson Woods (of Halifax), *Poste Restante*, London. Take care that this letter is at the post office ready for me before to-morrow afternoon at five o'clock. When I come back again from the country, I will try to see you.

"Yours truly,

"E. M. F."

He asked for the paper, and sat reading it. It was the "Daily Telegraph." It was, moreover, the first newspaper that he had seen for many months. He had lived so quietly that he had almost forgotten that the world must have been going on in its old way, even though Edwin Marie Forester was forgotten. He read with a strange thrill of wonder how there were wars and rumours of wars, and he tried in vain to recall what news there had been

in the last paper he had had a chance of reading.

"How long has all this been going on, waiter?" he said, as the waiter was clearing the table.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the man, "was you speaking to me?"

"Oh, yes, never mind," said Forester, recollecting himself. "How long do the omnibuses take to go from here to Peckham Rye?"

"Well, sir, I'm sure, sir, I don't quite know, sir," said the waiter; "but you can't get 'em, sir, nearer than the bottom of Gracechurch Street. And then, I should think, they'd take the best part of an hour, sir, or it might be a little less, sir. I wont be sure; perhaps a minute or two over the three-quarters. But I should think, myself, it would be the best part of an hour."

"Well then, my boy," said Forester, "I think it's about time I was off."

And he gave the waiter—a penny.

It was dreadfully certain that Forester was beginning to mean business.

"What a fool I am!" said Forester to himself. "I'm as sure to let out my own secret, as if I had the words CONVICTED FELON on my brow!"

CHAPTER VI.

MAKING MONEY.

The coffee-room in which Forester had been sitting was in Barbican, and when he left it, he walked slowly along towards Finsbury Square; slowly, at least, until his busy thoughts began to urge him forward at his old speed. He walked down Moorgate Street, round the Bank, past the Royal Exchange, into Cornhill and Gracechurch Street. It was still too early, he thought, to take the omnibus to Peckham, and he began to try and discipline himself to a slow and steady pace. He turned into Leadenhall Market, and was almost reassured by the sights so common and yet to him so strange which were on

every side. Poulterers, fishmongers, dog-fanciers, asked him to buy, just as if he were not a convicted felon, with a ticket-of-leave in his pocket. He got out into Leadenhall Street, wandered up into Whitechapel, and so contrived to waste about two more hours of the declining daylight. Then he took the omnibus to Peckham.

"Do you think they'll ever find that murder out, sir?" said the driver by whom he was sitting.

"What murder do you mean?" said Forester.

"Why, there's only one murder that ever anybody's thinking about just now. You never heard of another like it, did you, governor?" said the man.

"Why, I only came up to London yesterday," said Forester. "I've been away in the country for two or three months."

"You must a been a oncommon long way

from London, sir, if you didn't hear of that murder," said the driver.

"Well, my man," said Forester, "you're right enough. I dare say I wasn't far from London; and yet, on the contrary, I *was* a very long way from London. I've been staying with some friends who were in great trouble, and very likely the newspapers may have come to the house, but for my part I hadn't the heart to look at them—in fact, never saw them."

"They say it's all a hoax," said a gentleman on the other side of the driver.

"Lord, never!" said the driver; "too damned cool, that."

"Some medical student," said the gentleman, "got together a lot of old bones, and a few bits of flesh, and put them into a carpet bag, and dropped them over Waterloo Bridge into the river. Perhaps he was one of the coroner's jury sitting over the remains, knowing every

bone and bit of flesh as well as he knew his own mother, and keeping as grave as a judge all the time."

"Nay, nay, sir, that's too much of a good thing, damn *me*," said the driver, with a quite unaccountable unselfishness.

They stopped now at the "Elephant and Castle," and Forester got down. He thought he had better keep as much out of society as possible—at least until he had read a few of the back numbers of the newspapers.

So he walked slowly on towards Peckham Rye. He reached the Rye at last, and lurked about the house in Warwick Place, where Meggy's mistress lived. At last, after he had waited nearly an hour, Meggy herself came out, with an old lady and a little boy. They did not see him, but turned down the hill, walking quickly. Forester let them walk on for awhile, watching.

Then he walked swiftly past them, looking

hard at the old woman and child, and listening eagerly.

"It's late for you and Freddy, mother," Meggy was saying. "But I'll see you all the way home myself. These parts are not so safe as they used to be; a decent girl can hardly walk about of an evening alone without getting insulted by young men. There's one of them," she added, as Forester walked rapidly past.

Forester walked on not many yards, and then opened a gate and walked boldly up to the front-door of a large house, knocking and ringing.

"Is Colonel Johnson in?" he said to the girl who opened the door.

"No such person here, young man," said the servant, "and it's no use your trying that dodge, for we're pretty well watched at last, after half the houses in the Rye have been robbed."

And with that she slammed the door in his face.

What did it matter to him? He only wanted to be *behind* Meggy once more, that he might watch more easily. The only thing in all the world he cared to steal was Meggy's pretty self—and somebody else's life.

So he followed on behind them, and two or three times Meggy looked round, and then they hurried on faster, as if she had noticed that somebody was following them. They went on still till they came to old Mrs. Vickers' house. They all went in and shut the door.

Forester hid for a moment in a narrow passage, then crossed the road, and went into a public-house almost opposite Mrs. Vickers' house; and there he waited, watching, till Meggy should set out again for her home.

She was not long. The night was dark; Peckham Rye is never cheerful; and she was anxious to be back again at her own home as

soon as possible. She had not gone far before she heard footsteps at the other side of the road, and looking round, saw the very man who had been following them from Warwick Place. She walked faster, and he walked faster—still, however, keeping at about the same distance from her, and so they went on until she was within sight of her mistress's house. Then she turned round and waited till he came up. Standing by her own gate, with her hand on the bell, she almost hoped that he would have turned back again; but he came on all the quicker, and she rang the bell violently.

"Now, young man," she said, "what do you mean by following a girl in this way up and down a lonely road? If you don't want to be given in charge, you had better take yourself off as quickly as you can."

"Meggy," said Forester, "don't you know me?"

But it was too late. The door opened, and two of the servants, alarmed by the loudness of the ringing, were hurrying to the gate.

"Go in, go in," he said; "to-morrow night, at nine o'clock, I'll be at your mother's door."

So, at any rate, he had seen her, and she had seen him. He knew that she was still at the same place, from which her dear little letters had been written—the letters he had kissed so passionately, and kept like a silly girl next his heart all day, and under his pillow at night; and she, too, had scarcely thought there could be any harm in these little love-letters written to a friend in prison. It would have been a dreadful cruelty not to write at all; and if she did write, could any language be too tender or too soothing for one so terribly unfortunate. But now that he was once more at liberty, she began to be afraid. Indeed, she had started almost as if a ghost had confronted her, when his well-known "*Meggy*" had thrilled to her

heart, and the servants who came to her ringing had carried her almost senseless to her bed. She said, as she came to herself, that she had had a dreadful fright. Some strange man had been following her all the way to her mother's house, and waited for her, and followed her home again. He had even come close up to her, she said, as she was ringing the bell, and roughly accosted her.

The sudden shock was, after all, not half so painful as the wonder and uncertainty which followed it. The letters Forester had sent her had been directed to her mother's house, but if they had fallen into the hands of any stranger they would have instantly revealed the dreadful secret that it was now necessary for Forester to keep with the utmost care. She took out of her work-box the little packet and read over again the letters that were already worn to holes at every corner, and blotted with tears.

"What can I possibly do?" she said to herself. "These, at any rate, I must destroy. Good-bye, dear letters," she said, as she kissed them and put them back again into their hiding-place. "I have again seen him who wrote you, and to-morrow I must meet him."

How often had she longed for this, and wept over the imaginary sorrows of Forester; and thought how, if ever he came back again, she would try to shelter him from shame, and work for him, if needful, harder than any black slave, to keep him from care and want. Away out of her sight, glorified by sorrow, he had been gaining power over her that his real self could never have won. As usual, a woman had been fashioning for herself, out of common clay, a hero, and then bowing down to worship him.

But now he was at large, again this great hero of her soul was just the dark, frightened, eager-looking man that she had so lately fled

from and mistaken for a thief. What must she do? Had he seen his wife yet? If she should really meet him at her mother's door at nine o'clock to-morrow she knew what the end would be. She knew that she would come again under his power; that all her promises and resolutions would be broken; that she might herself come not only to deeper and deeper shame, but perhaps also to beggary, dragging little Freddy down with her. And yet, how could she refuse? If she had even known where he was. If she could only have written to him one last passionate letter. If she could only have told him that her love was still unchanged, and that it would break her heart to lose him, then also she might have found courage to write that they must see each other no more; but she could not leave him to-morrow night to wander about the streets without a syllable of comfort or explanation.

So she lay awake almost all the night

through, sobbing and thinking and growing weaker in purpose, giving herself more and more every hour to the man whom her imagination had glorified.

Forester, too, was in a manner baffled. That hasty engagement to meet Meggy at Peckham, at nine o'clock to-morrow, might interfere with other work, with that other firm purpose of his, dearer to him than even love itself. But he was much cooler than Meggy, so, as he walked home—alas! his home was to be the cheapest lodging-house that he could find—he already made up his mind that he would send a message to Meggy in the morning, and tell her that he would try to find a better place of meeting. He found a lodging-house—cheap enough, and miserably filthy, utterly loathsome to him after the scrupulous cleanliness of the great mansion from which he had come so lately. Half London might have slept in that foul bed since last the

sheets were clean, and he could scarcely sleep a minute for vermin. In the morning, when the daylight had come, he managed to get a few hours' rest, but even that was disturbed by the ever-increasing noise and clatter of London bustle.

"Your bed might be cleaner, mistress," he said, when he came down in the morning, "and none of your visitors would object if you let them sleep alone."

"Well, sir," she said, "if you want a better bed, it's easy to get one. But you won't get a bed at the West End for the money you pay me; and as for company, men like you generally bring quite as much as they find."

Nothing was to be gained by arguing, so Forester went out to get breakfast at some neighbouring coffee-house. There he wrote a hasty note to Meggy, telling her that he thought it would be hardly prudent for them to meet that night as he had appointed. He

would tell her in a day or two when and where they could meet.

He went to a bath to wash away the filth and nastiness of the dirty bed in which he had been sleeping. A convicted felon, who has been for years in a convict prison, knows, at any rate, what cleanliness is. Then he walked about the streets, still wondering whether it would be of the least use to make the attempt upon which, during the lonely years of his imprisonment, he had been determining. If he succeeded he would gain everything, and even if he failed he did not see what he should lose. He walked to Regent Street, and then along till he came to Maddox Street; pausing for an instant at the corner, and then walking on, irresolute, to Oxford Circus. He dared not loiter, so he walked along Oxford Street, and through Hanover Square, till he came once more to Maddox Street, at the other end.

Yes, he thought he would go. What could he possibly lose by it?

So he came to the well-known house, walked up the dingy staircase, and opened the door of Abrahams' office.

There the man was sitting as if he had never moved out of the room, with the customary papers strewn about on the table, ready still, as of old, to help any poor needy wretch to the devil. Even Forester himself, knowing what he knew and meaning what he meant, could scarcely keep his hands off his old enemy, though he knew full well that the hour was not yet come. But Abrahams started to his feet as if the ghost of a murdered man had risen up before him.

"Good morning, Mr. Abrahams," said Forester.

But Abrahams was too astonished, and even too frightened, to answer.

"I take you by surprise?" said Forester, coolly, seating himself. "But you see, Mr. Abrahams, even seven years of penal servitude,

especially when a man has sense enough to behave with decency, come to an end at last."

Abrahams was still silent and bewildered, managed even, fumbling among his papers, to get a hand-bell within easy reach.

"I don't know, after all," said Forester, "why you need be so much surprised to see me, Mr. Abrahams. It was not your little business that brought me to grief, except indirectly."

"You're quite right, Mr. Forester, quite right," he replied. "Of course, you're such a stranger, Mr. Forester," Abrahams said, with an attempt at a smile, "that a man may naturally be taken just a little aback to see you so suddenly."

"Yes, of course, Mr. Abrahams, I haven't sent notice to any of my friends that I am now at liberty to pay them a visit, and as to your share in my misfortunes, I am afraid you must

have lost a good round sum by my unlucky insolvency."

"Lost, good Lord!" said the Jew, "you cut out by far the largest part of a whole year's profit, Mr. Forester."

"Now, why do you think I've come to you first of all?" Forester asked him.

"Well, I'm damned if I can tell you," said the Jew.

"Well," said Forester. "I've come partly for your sake and partly for my own; indeed, to be candid, mostly for my own. A man in my circumstances, Mr. Abrahams, must *live*, as well as a man in any other circumstances; only he can't afford to be very squeamish about the way he gets his living. You know me, and I know you. You've lost money by me, and I've lost *just a trifle* through you, Mr. Abrahams; but my notion is, that if we pull together we may do one another service, and even get back something of what has been lost."

"Well, what do you propose?" said Abrahams.

"I don't think you made a clean sweep of the old Hall, Mr. Abrahams, said Forester, not noticing the interruption. "There were certain papers hidden away in a safe, and just as I was leaving the Hall I hid away the safe itself under a lot of rubbish in an unused outhouse; and my notion is that if those papers had been found, I should have been sure to hear of it."

"Ah!" said the Jew, "and so you think we didn't find them?"

Forester looked into his face for half a minute, and then said quietly, "I'm *sure*, you never found them, Mr. Abrahams, and perhaps you don't want to find them. To tell you the truth, I daresay they may be of no value; in fact, it's only a lot of lawyer's rubbish—receipts, and deeds, and odds and ends of one sort or another. But I've had a good deal of

time to myself lately, Mr. Abrahams, and thinking the matter over, I came to the conclusion that possibly even if they did you no good, it would be desirable to have them out of the way. Still, that's neither here nor there; if you don't mind, I don't mind."

"Nay, Mr. Forester," Abrahams said, "if we make a bargain so much the better; but of course there must be a consideration, there must really be papers, and the papers must really be valuable, if I am to give you any thing for them. And what's more, you must get them for me, Mr. Forester."

"Well, I like that," said Forester. "To hear a man of your discretion talk in that loose and random way; just as if you would trust me to go alone and fetch valuable papers for you. That's too confiding, even for a man of your amiable disposition, Mr. Abrahams. But however, damn the papers, fetch them if you like, or leave them where they are, to rot, if you like. I didn't

come here for money, I came here for work; and you must give it me, Mr. Abrahams."

"Well, now look here, Mr. Forester," the Jew said, "this is rather too much of a good thing. How do you think I'm going to get work for a man like you? And I just give you warning, that the conditions of your ticket-of-leave are tolerably strict, and you'd better conduct yourself with a good deal of prudence."

"Now, don't let anybody interrupt us, Mr. Abrahams," said Forester, taking up the hand-bell, "until we've got this little business settled. You *can* give me work, and I'm quite sure you will. What I want you to do is, to take me for one of your clerks. I can be at McIntosh's, in Piccadilly, or you can send me to any one of your numerous places of business, each one of which is totally independent of every other. I can be the friend in the City who advances the money, or I can be the inexorable holder of a bill, who will give no

time, and who cannot possibly renew. Indeed, I can be anything, only I don't want to be a corpse, and therefore I must be something. Look here, Mr. Abrahams, we'll shake hands over it, and I'll call in again to-morrow morning, and see which of your offices you mean to send me to."

"I don't know that it will be worth your while to call," said Abrahams.

"Very likely not," said Forester, with undisturbed good temper, "but as it will most certainly be worth *your* while, I'll just take the liberty to drop in. Good morning, Mr. Abrahams."

"He won't make a bad clerk," said Abrahams, meditating, "uncommon gift of the gab, and just the sort of face that nobody would ever suspect. He'll get ninety per cent. as easily as I should get seventy; and with that ticket-of-leave in his pocket, he'll always be in my power."

"Infernal bloody devil," said Forester, as he hurried away once more from that den of treachery, "I've got a good firm grip of your throat or I'm very much mistaken."

So in the comfort of his great success he walked to the post-office, and found a five pound note waiting for Mr. Woods, of Halifax.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE AND WAR.

"THEN we understand each other," said Abrahams to Forester the next morning. You understand the amount of risk you'll have to run, and that your salary will really be in the nature of a commission, so that the more business you do, the more money you'll make."

"All right," said Forester, "that's just what I want."

"And I'll give you one word of advice, Mr. Forester," said the Jew. "It's not original. It was, in fact, given to me by a very old hand at our work, and I've found it most

admirable. Take care that every man who leaves your office when he has come to borrow money leaves it *in tears*."

"Not bad," said Forester.

"Ah, well! I'm not offended," said Abrahams. "I can see you don't think much of it, but before you've been in our business a week you'll change your mind."

And so the matter was settled. Abrahams had opened a new office, somewhere in Sloane Street, and McIntosh had gone down to be Mr. Richardson in that district. So in a week's time, Forester became Mr. McIntosh in Piccadilly. Abrahams, therefore, was his solicitor. He had, of course, nothing to do with any other office, and all the routine and publicity of a money-lending establishment was entirely avoided.

It was not long before the clerk had an opportunity of testing the value of his principal's advice.

A young man applied for a loan of three hundred pounds.

He was tall, slim, and he looked dreadfully worn and ill, and his hand shook, and his voice trembled, as he told his case to "Mr. McIntosh."

"I've got into sad trouble," he said, "and seeing your advertisement, I thought I had better come and put my case before you. It's merely a temporary difficulty, Mr. McIntosh, but it's very hard while it lasts."

"Well, I dare say we may be able to help you," Mr. McIntosh answered. "What did you say your name was, sir?"

"My name—I understand all these matters are in confidence, Mr. McIntosh?"

"Most certainly, sir, the strictest confidence. It's hardly likely we should do otherwise," said he, with a bland smile.

"Because I'm the son of a clergyman," the

poor wretch went on, "and my wife's relations, too, are all highly respectable."

"And very likely," said Mr. McIntosh, "they would really help you, if the worst came to the worst?"

"That's the very thing I want to avoid," said the young man. "They *would* help me, but I want to help myself, and not intrude on their kindness. And really, from your advertisement, Mr. McIntosh, it seemed to me that your terms were very fair and reasonable.

"Well," said Mr. McIntosh, with a smile, "kindly fill up this paper, will you?"

"Etheridge, ah! Mr. George Etheridge! You see, Mr. Etheridge, it's not for me to blow my own trumpet, but I can assure you that our charges barely cover the great risks which are inseparable from our business. Have you quite filled up the paper?"

"Just sign your name here," he said, pointing

to the foot of the page. "It's only to indicate that you agree to the conditions upon which the loan is to be granted, if we can grant it at all."

"Three hundred pounds, Mr. Etheridge; can't you do with less?"

"Well, yes," he said, hesitating. "I don't need three hundred pounds just now; but I want to clear everything off, and then I shall feel that I have only three hundred pounds to provide, and it will all be compact."

"Yes, Mr. Etheridge," said McIntosh, "there's something in that; but, on the other hand, you see, all the risks would be equally compact, and *we* should have all the risks, Mr. Etheridge. Suppose we say *one* hundred?"

"Well, of course, Mr. McIntosh, I must take what I can get," said Mr. George Etheridge, with a sigh.

"And how soon do you want it?" the money-lender asked.

"I must have it to-day, somehow or other," he said. "There is one of my creditors who is exceedingly impracticable, and I know he can take out an execution to-morrow, and my solicitor tells me it may be against my person. I must somehow protect myself from that."

"Can't possibly do it before to-morrow, Mr. Etheridge," said McIntosh. "And what's your security?"

"Why," he said, "I haven't got much security to offer. I have a moderately well-furnished house. Perhaps you might make something of that."

"Well, you see, Mr. Etheridge, there's always a great deal of doubt about such security. Have you got a receipt for your last quarter's rent?"

Poor Etheridge shook his head. He was getting rapidly to that point at which conversation becomes impracticable.

"And then, Mr. Etheridge, there's this execution you speak of. Perhaps they'll put an execution in to-morrow morning, before your breakfast is over; and then what will become of our furniture, you know? How much is it they are pressing you for?"

"Fifty-seven pounds, eighteen, and two-pence," said Etheridge.

"Ah! that's the debt; and then there will be the costs. I should say seventy pounds, Mr. Etheridge—seventy pounds, if a penny."

The poor young fellow's face was working, but he couldn't speak.

"Now, look here. I tell you what we'll do," said Mr. McIntosh; "you go home, and find the receipt for your last quarter's rent. I'll send a clerk over to your place in an hour to look over the furniture and make an inventory, and if it's worth a hundred pounds, we'll lend you seventy for a fortnight, and leave a man in possession till it's paid."

"Good God!" said Etheridge, starting up, and laying his hand heavily on McIntosh's shoulder, "*I daren't.* My wife is expecting her confinement every hour; a man in the house would kill her—poor darling Effie! Come yourself, sir. See what my poor things are worth. Take them all—anything—but my poor darling.—Are you married? Do you know what a woman's heart is? Have you ever knelt down with your wife and children round you to pray for God's blessing——"

It was no use. He could say no more, only moan and weep. A grown man, with scalding tears streaming down his cheeks!

"I'm very sorry," said McIntosh, "*very!* But what can we do? We are not here to *give* money away, and *lending* implies some reasonable chance of getting it back; some genuine marketable security. I deeply pity you!"

"Good bye," said the poor wretch, grasping

his hand. "It was my only hope; and Effie! Effie!——"

He went weeping out of the office.

"Well," said Forester, "I shall have to throttle him sooner than I thought, if this devil's work is to go on much longer."

But he had chosen his way. Love and vengeance alike required from him the sacrifice of all that was noblest. That night he was to meet Meggy. He had put off their meeting until now, that he might have some kind of quiet home to ask her to, where they might talk together without interruption. It was humble enough. Two rooms, in a narrow street out of Tottenham Court Road. He had written to Meggy to be there at six o'clock, but she had to wait for him for more than an hour. The poor wretch Etheridge had detained him. At last she heard a ring, then his well-known step, and then—she was in his arms!

"Oh, Meggy, my darling, my darling," he

murmured, as he almost smothered her with his passionate kisses.

Not altogether false ; for was she not the only friend he had spoken to for weary lonely years ?

Meggy was far too overcome to speak. She could only press his hand, put her arm round his neck, and kiss him a thousand times over with streaming tears.

" Cheer up, my own pet," said Forester, " don't cry because I've come back to you, Meggy."

She smiled through her tears, and murmured that she was only weeping for joy and love.

" And is this your house ? " she said at last, " where you are going to live ? "

" Yes, dearest, and a very happy little home I'm going to make it. Couldn't you be happy in such a quiet place ? "

" Oh, but I'm nobody," said Meggy. " I never was master of Clayton's Hall. But how

will your wife like it? Have you seen her yet, Edwin?"

"I have no wife, Meggy," Forester replied.

"*No wife*, Edwin?"

"No! no wife now."

"And is she dead?" said Meggy. "Poor girl, dead of grief, Edwin?"—and her eyes filled with tears.

"No, Meggy, not dead, but she is no more a wife for me."

"What do you mean, Edwin?"

"Meggy. I'm a very poor man now, and disgraced, watched by policemen, and liable for very slight faults to be sent back again to my lonely prison. There is no way back for me into good society. I have always had to fight against the disadvantages even of my birth, but they are nothing compared to the difficulties that are in my way now."

"But what has all that to do with your wife?" said Meggy, "she knows it all; she

would be all the more gentle and affectionate because of the trouble you have had."

"Ah, Meggy," said Forester, "if all women were like you, my darling, there would be some chance of a reformation among men. But very likely Patty's right. She could not introduce me among her friends. Which of them would send me to buy a thing that cost eleven pence halfpenny and trust me with the change out of a shilling? Yes, I should be a disgrace to her, of course. Most certainly Patty is quite right, quite right, Meggy."

"You don't mean, Edwin——?"

"Yes, that's exactly what I do mean," said Forester, interrupting her, and in the depth of his hypocrisy contriving to keep as near to the form of truth as possible.

"Patty will never come to live in a place like this with me, though I am her husband. She's got back again among her old friends. She can do without me now, and except in name,

except in that poor outward form, that depends only upon a stupid law, we are man and wife no more."

"Edwin, you must have mistaken her somehow," said Meggy.

"Now look here, Meggy," said Forester; "of course I don't care about it—at least it hurt me very much at the time, but I'm getting over it, and it's all I have a right to expect—but I wrote to my wife almost as soon as I was at liberty. The first letter I wrote to anybody was to her, of course."

Here Forester, with sad, down-cast eyes, seemed too affected to proceed.

"Well, Edwin?" said Meggy, her own poor little heart beginning to ache, and her ready tears to flow.

"Well, Meggy, I wrote to say that I was just at liberty, that I scarcely knew which way to turn, that I must of course somehow or other get a few pounds to go on with, and that

when I knew what to be doing, I would try to see her. Of course I gave her an address that I thought would be safe."

"Well," said Meggy, "and you've misunderstood her letter, I've no doubt. She's been writing to you cautiously, and in her first surprise—and you must know, Edwin, it *is* a surprise, and—why even those who love you best don't quite know what to say in the first moment. Don't think her hard or unkind, Edwin."

"Meggy," said Forester, "you can't judge other people's hearts by yours. It wasn't very difficult to understand Patty's letter; there it is——"

And he gave her the envelope containing the blank sheet of paper, and the enclosed five-pound note.

"Well, but where's the letter?" said Meggy.

"There," said Forester.

"No, no, no," said Meggy; "this is only the blank paper in which the note was folded."

"That's all the letter," said Forester. "Too affectionate, isn't it?" he added, with a cruel sneer.

"All, Edwin?—poor boy!" and she stroked his face with her hand, and kissed him; "but you may be sure there's some mistake. She forgot to put the letter in."

Forester just shrugged his shoulders.

"No, no, Meggy, it's too plain, she wants to forget me—to lose sight of me! Five pounds, indeed! what are five pounds to a man who wants love?—somebody to speak to, and lean upon; somebody to make him feel that after all he is not for ever hopelessly damned, even in this world? Well, well, Meggy, she's very happy among her own friends, I dare say. My old rival among them."

He paused for a few moments, seemed buried in thought and misery.

"What am I to do, my darling?" he said, after awhile; "I cannot be utterly alone. If I

am left wholly to myself, even virtue itself will not be worth having. Won't you come and stay here with me, Meggy?"

Meggy hung her head and was silent.

"Why, you weren't afraid of coming to be nursemaid and companion at the old Hall; and I'll make you the same promises now. Come and be my housekeeper, Meggy, just as a sister might do for a brother."

Still Meggy was silent.

Forester got up from his chair, and moved to the other side of the table.

"See," he said, "we will talk quite calmly. You think we shall never forget the past; or rather, you think we shall forget that one great obstacle that lies in the way of our complete happiness—the happiness which fairly, honourably, in the sight of God, belonged always to you, Meggy, and not to her."

"No, Edwin," Meggy said, "it must never

be. It might have been once, you know, but not now."

"Meggy," said Forester, "be reasonable; I am asking you for nothing—nothing but what any girl who advertises in a newspaper would give without a word of hesitation. I promise you—well, I promise you everything I did, when you came to the old Hall to be companion and nurse."

Still Meggy shook her head, and was silent.

"Yes, Meggy," Forester said, interpreting her thoughts, "you are quite right; you will be more to me, infinitely more, than all the advertising women put together. You know quite well what I wish you *could* be even now. Perhaps it will be possible some day, Meggy. We can wait, can we not?"

Still silent.

"And what after all is marriage?" Forester went on. "Are a few sentences spoken in a

church—when, perhaps, after all they are mere lies—are they to be more binding than the most solemn vow of genuine affection; and are they to bind for ever, even when the little meaning they had is gone out of them? Am I to be bound by these grand matrimonial promises, Meggy, when they are not strong enough to keep me from having to live alone in these poor rooms?"

Again there was a pause. Meggy was in a manner fascinated—spell-bound. Forester was not altogether an unskilful pleader, and Meggy knew how, if the rightest right had been done, there would have been no need for all this clever sophistry.

"Come," said Forester, "come and be my housekeeper."

"Edwin," she said, rising, "I must go. I cannot say yes,—I don't know what to say. You must give me a long time to think it over. But I must get home now; it will be quite ten

o'clock before I can get there, and Peckham Rye is dark and lonely."

She would not let him accompany her, but hurried away alone to her mistress's house.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIFE AND NO WIFE.

THERE could be no sleep for Meggy that night. If her own future had not been brought all at once into such perilous uncertainty, she could see how deep and dark was the abyss to the brink of which Forester had come. This was what she had all along been fearing. Now he had really asked her for it, and how could she refuse? The little bundle of prison-letters was not burnt yet. She took them out of her box and read them over again—every one. She remembered when each had come, after sad long intervals; every day of those gloomy years dawned and darkened once more—each step of her weary life's journey since Forester's

arrest, she could trace by those landmark love-letters.

Why had he been so mad as to write to her? And yet how could he quite help it? It was by mere accident that they had met in Dean's Court, and after such a parting as theirs had been, how could he do less than tell her of his great calamity and disgrace? And how could she do less than answer? If friends grow cold in the day of adversity, from whom can comfort come?

But it had come to this. Housekeeper! And who would believe it? Would Patty, if she should relent towards her unhappy husband, and seek him out in his dull home and come to live with him again? Cruel Patty, to leave him without a single syllable of explanation, one word of forgiveness or consolation; cruel wife, to drive a husband into despair, and so deeper down into misery and sin. It was she who was really to blame, thought Meggy.

Poor lone boy! Without a friend to stand by him when all the world was filled with his foes.

And yet this woman, who was so hard and stern, was it not the same who had found Freddy in Dan Bank Wood and nursed him, whose motherly tenderness had saved his life, whom the child still remembered so fondly, and never forgot to bless in his simple prayers? Meggy felt more and more certain that Forester must be mistaken. Likely enough the blank paper might have startled him, and naturally doubtful for a while of everybody, he might have hurried to the conclusion that his wife had abandoned him. And now, however completely he might be mistaken, he could never be set right until Patty knew of it. She did not even know where her husband was, and Forester would most certainly never write to tell her.

"*I* will tell her," said Meggy; and a new

thrill of the old joy passed over her as she thought of once again meeting the woman who had been more than a mother to her boy, whom she had never seen since they parted at old Bob's cottage, when the great crash of Forester's ruin was overwhelming her.

"*I* will tell her, and I will tell her everything I know since I saw him last before he was taken away. At any rate I have meant nothing wrong, nothing treacherous to her."

So the next day she determined to ask her mistress for a holiday, and take her boy with her and find out Patty. First of all she wrote a very short note to Forester to say she could not answer him for at least a fortnight. During that time he must leave her to herself, and neither write to her nor attempt to see her. So she set off to the school for Freddy. Might he have a holiday to go with auntie to London, to see an old friend ?

Of course he might. The day was fine and

bright, making even London cheerful, in spite of all the dirt and smoke. And Freddy loved his auntie better than all the world, as well he might.

"Where are we going, auntie?"

"Why, we're going to the City to call on a very kind old gentleman first of all, and then, Freddy, guess where next."

"I can't guess, auntie. To the Tower? or the Zoological Gardens? or Madame Tussaud's? But I don't care for wax works. But I don't care where it is," he said, as he skipped along by her side. It was pleasure enough to be anywhere with auntie.

"We're going to see an old friend of yours, Freddy," Meggy said; "now can you guess?"

"An old friend," said the child, "do you mean with gray hair and all that?"

"No child, one you've known and loved a long time."

"Well, then, there's only Mrs. Patty and Granny, but this isn't the way to Granny's."

"Well, we're going to see Mrs. Patty if you're a very good boy. Aren't you pleased, Fred?" Meggy asked him, he seemed so shy and silent, blushing crimson, too, in his excitement of gratitude and love. Patty had seemed so far away of late, like God's angels.

"Yes, auntie, very pleased? Am I much grown? Will she know me? Is she just the same? Where does she live?"

"I don't know the house, dear," said Meggy, "that's what I'm going to the City to find out. The old gentleman knows."

She was very proud of him as they walked along together, as one after another, even in the busy streets, would exclaim: "What a beautiful boy!" And so he was, none the less a son of God for his mother's folly and his father's sin. They crossed the river in a ferry boat that Freddy might get a glimpse of the

shipping through the arches of London Bridge, and then it was so charming on the water, even the Thames, once again turned into silver by the glorious sunbeams; they went further up the river to Waterloo Bridge, and so back again by Fleet Street, and soon to Mr. Rodgers' office.

She left Freddy outside till she could learn Patty's address. Mr. Rodgers seemed surprised and curious, half inclined to ask her who she was, and why she wanted to see Mrs. Forester. But he was very kind, explained to her that for a short time Patty had lived with his wife, and that now she was with old friends she had known before her marriage, in Canonbury Square.

"And is her little boy with her," asked Meggy.

"Then you know her well?" said Mr. Rodgers, inquiringly. "No, her little boy died very shortly before her husband's trouble.

How did you know that I had anything to do with the family?"

"Because I was at the trial," said Meggy.

"Of course, of course, but I believe she's very comfortably placed now, and indeed happier I dare say than she's been for years. Her marriage, poor girl, seems to have been a dreadful mistake. You can scarcely imagine what privations she has suffered. But that's her address—Mr. Carlisle's, Canonbury Square."

So Meggy joined Freddy again, and they walked together to the Bank for an Islington omnibus. She wondered whether Mr. Rodgers knew of Forester's release. Patty then was happy, happier than ever since that dreadful mistake, her marriage. Perhaps she was trying to lose her husband after all; possibly the blank paper said more than if it had been covered with writing on both sides.

"Shall we soon see her, auntie?" Freddy asked.

"Very soon now," said Meggy, and the boy's voice banished in a moment all her hard thoughts, and her heart again was Patty's.

And yet, when the omnibus stopped at Compton Terrace, and they were close to Canonbury Square, Meggy trembled. Was she not coming to an old friend, one whose gentle love she had so much reason to know and trust? Yes, surely; but she was coming to an oracle where she was to learn her own destiny.

"A young woman has brought a little boy to see you, ma'am," said the servant, "she'll call herself in about ten minutes."

For Meggy had turned faint with fear, and fancied it was best, poor timid soul, to let the child make peace for her.

"A little boy to see *me*, and left him here? Where is he?"

"In the passage, ma'am; shall I bring him

in? he's not a beggar or anything of that sort."

"Well, bring him in, then."

So Freddy was soon in the room.

"And what is your name, dear?" said Patty. "Do you know me at all?"

"Yes, Mrs. Patty," said the child, "auntie will be back directly. I'm Freddy."

"Freddy!" Patty said, and it was now her turn to sicken with a vague dread and wonder.

But she looked at Freddy, his grand blue eyes, his soft fair curling hair.

"I knew you wouldn't remember me," with some touch of sorrow and disappointment in his tone. "But auntie was sure you would. Don't you remember Freddy that you found in the wood at Dan Bank and nursed——"

But there was no need to go on, nor power even, for he was already in Patty's embrace, half smothered with love.

What with tears, and laughter, and half hysteric joy, Patty had almost forgotten the surprise that was still awaiting her, when a gentle, timid knock at the door reminded her that Meggy had come to see her. The meeting was not wholly painless, for the long interval since their parting had been filled so full of suffering and disgrace. But the presence of the child was a kind restraint until the first gush of emotion was over, and each had recovered strength. Soon, however, Meggy thought that Freddy would like to look at the Islington shops, and then the two were alone, bound together by a common misery, each wronging the other so deeply, each so innocent of the wrong, each so deeply wronged by him who was even now scheming new ruin for them both.

"I've often wanted to see you, Meggy," Patty began.

"And I you."

"But I lost you, we had to be so careful about our address, even had to conceal our real name, until it was no use to hide. How did you find me out here?"

"Mr. Rodgers told me your address, I asked him for it this morning."

"Do you know him, Meggy?" Patty asked.

"No, not at all; but I knew that he would be sure to be able to tell me about you."

"Then you know all, do you?" said Patty. "How I lost my husband?"

"Yes, dear friend, I know all," Meggy answered, "more even than you think."

Then she told Patty of her chance meeting with Forester in Dean's Court, how ill he seemed and agitated, of his arrest, of her being at the trial, of his letters, of her having seen him since his release.

"And where is he?" asked Patty, eagerly. "Poor lonely, wretched man. If I could only

help him, God knows I would sacrifice all. Meggy, I am his for better or worse, till death us do part. And I think I might help him now to a better, even to a happy life, if he would let me. But look, Meggy, this is all I have heard from him *for years!*"

Meggy took up the letter, a poor pencil scrawl, only the address in ink.

"Put a five-pound note into a sheet of note paper and enclose them without a single word in an envelope."

Meggy rose to her feet ghastly white with rage and horror.

"So *that* was his love and his forlornness, his deep need of sympathy, the cruel desertion of his wife. Abandoned villain!" said Meggy, her eyes flashing fire as she held out his letter at arm's length; "so this is the trap he has been laying for us."

"Poor darling," she went on, as she saw the growing terror in Patty's face, and she laid the

treacherous letter on the table, and as she fondled Patty her fierce wrath melted into scalding grief, and her whole frame seemed convulsed with agony as she sobbed and wept, and tried in vain to speak.

"Oh, my darling," she went on at last, with broken voice and a thousand interruptions of overmastering sorrow, remorse, indignation, rage. "My poor dear friend, that he could so have lied, lied about you, lied to me, and for my destruction, my utter, hopeless ruin. He has never been into the country. He is living,—but never mind where, don't find out, and don't let him find you. He wanted *me* to live with him, he showed me the blank sheet you sent him, and said that was all your answer when he asked for pity and help. *Five pounds,* when he wanted *love.* Treacherous, cruel-hearted hypocrite."

She pressed her hand upon her beating heart, it seemed almost bursting in her breast.

And it was for this poor villain that she had been so sorely tempted. She had loved him, loved him with all the passionate might of her whole soul, loved him as the one grand ideal man she had ever known, loved him even in shame, the very shame only deepening the tenderness of her passion. And if Patty had been all he said she was, what would not her love have borne or lost for his sake. And he was only this, a base schemer, basest of all seducers, betraying with a double treachery, ruining with a double ruin.

"Be calm, dearest," said Patty, "thank God for your escape, but for me——"

And then, covering her face, she wailed and wept, broken-hearted utterly. This was *her husband.* She must find him, perhaps live with him again, in that worst of hells, a *home empty of love and trust.*

"Nay, nay, dearest, dearest pet," said Meggy, lifting up Patty's head that it might

rest on her own bosom. "Ask your friends what to do. They will advise you, they will protect you. God above will help you and bless you."

They sat together scarcely speaking. What could either say? They were paralysed by this dreadful treachery, the curse of which neither of them could wholly escape. In their overwhelming trouble even little Freddy was forgotten.

"My poor Freddy," said Meggy, "he'll be lost."

And she started to find him.

"But come back, dear," Patty pleaded, "bring Freddy here with you; we can help each other, perhaps. Mr. Carlisle will be home soon."

Freddy was quite tired of the shops, and beginning to think that auntie must have a

very great many secrets to talk over with Mrs. Patty. But when he looked up and saw her red and swollen eyes, he began to understand that somehow the brightness of his holiday was clouding over. By the time, however, he got back to Canonbury Square, Patty had washed her face and regained something of her wonted composure and self restraint. After all she had been always waiting for this great shock, she had known how any moment it might crash down upon her, but who is quite prepared for a great calamity ?

The bright boy cheered her, and even the restraint of his presence would have given her strength. As violent screaming often increases the pain that causes it, and exhausts the patient, so often does the utterance of violent passion increase the torment and wear out the sufferer. So Patty, and Meggy, and Freddy talked together of old days, such old days as the boy could remember and might well recal.

And Samuel came down, and a sort of peace came upon them, and Freddy's holiday was not so much spoiled after all.

About five o'clock Mr. Carlisle came home to-dinner, late for him, but Patty had almost forgotten in her trouble that the doctor was to spend the evening with them and Mr. Whitehouse ; at any rate, all the better.

"Why, my little man," said Leighton, "how you grow. Do you like chemistry as much as ever ? But you don't remember me, I daresay. I saw him at the school at Peckham, Mr. Carlisle. You're always promising me to go and see it, and you somehow never manage to get there."

So they talked away all dinner time, talked what some would have called "shop"—not ironmonger's shop, but Oak Villa shop. Anyhow it interested them ; and perhaps a subject

in which all are interested, is the best foundation for pleasant, sensible talk. Nevertheless there was a kind of reserve, a feeling that something was coming of gravest importance; and what a long business dinner was.

"Leave us to talk it over together, my love," Mr. Carlisle said to Patty when the story was told, and all Forester's treachery was laid bare. So Leighton, and Mr. Whitehouse, and their host, were alone in the dining-room

"I knew exactly how it was, and how it would be," said the doctor. "I'm not often mistaken in faces, and that fellow has lazy, sneaking savage, written on every line of his. Here's another of the mean scoundrel's villanies. That girl Meggy was as innocent as that magnificent boy of hers, till Forester came in her way; and even now, see how he's trying once more, worse than ever, to trick and ruin her."

"I've no doubt you're quite right in the main, doctor," said Mr. Whitehouse, "though I fancy that blank sheet trick was not a plot. He's too idle to plot far. Most likely this Meggy's innocence was so clear to him, that he felt he must win her by an appeal to her better feelings, to her very goodness; and then for the first time the blank sheet presented itself to his clever mendacity. But it doesn't matter. The question is, what's to be done?"

"Let him alone," said Leighton, "give him rope enough and he'll hang himself. I only wish forgery had been a capital crime. And besides, if he's a ticket-of-leave man, he must be very discreet indeed or he'll soon be in our power."

"Meanwhile, doctor, do you remember who for the present is in *his* power?"

"Why Meggy can protect herself, and evidently means to do it."

"Yes, of course, and yet even *she* may need

our help. But *his own wife* is altogether in his power, and her we cannot help."

"What do you mean, Mr. Whitehouse?" said Mr. Carlisle.

"You're right," said the doctor, getting up and pacing the room in great agitation.

"Can't we remove her somewhere?" he went on; "away into the country, where that scoundrel can't find her?"

"It wouldn't be worth while, he *would* find her. Besides, he has a right to her, and if he asked her to live with him I doubt much whether she would think it her duty to refuse. We can only keep a watch over her ourselves. Perhaps he may prefer to be without her."

"I pray God he may," said Leighton, "but it doesn't seem to me likely."

"I think—at least, I half hope—it is," said Whitehouse. "To begin with, he must get a living, and he won't find that very easy."

"Well, there's some chance in that," Leighton

answered. "He's a savage brute enough, but he's also an idle brute, and he'll understand quite plainly that by far the easiest way for him to get a living, will be to get it out of us. He'll be perfectly certain that to save his wife from trouble, we should be willing to bribe even the very devil; so whenever he wants five pounds, he'll come and beg it of us, and if we hesitate about giving it to him he'll tell us that he has an idle wife to keep, and that if he can't get money somehow he'll have to cure her of her pretence of being a fine lady, and make her take in washing."

"Why you don't mean," said Mr. Carlisle, that he'll have power to take her away from me, and make her go back to him after all that's happened, and make her live in a couple of dark, dirty rooms, without a comfort of any sort?"

"Yes, that's really what I mean, Mr. Carlisle," said Mr. Whitehouse. "That's the law of this country. A man's wife is his slave, unless he

beats her within an inch of her life, and can be proved to have committed adultery. He may be a drunken, idle brute, making her work and living on her earnings, and yet she is his, and nothing but death can part them."

"Why, I'd better," said Mr. Carlisle, "get away with her at once; right off away into the country: away into France; anywhere, to save her from that fellow."

"No, my dear friend," said Mr. Whitehouse, "there's nothing for it but to wait and see what this Forester will do, and then make the best counter arrangements we possibly can. Excepting for the sake of mere revenge, I don't think he'll take her away at all from you; and if he wants to illuse her, his ticket-of-leave will give us an advantage over him of which we shall not be slow to avail ourselves."

"Well, then, what's the next move?" said Leighton, sitting down to the table again, chafing with impotent rage.

"Well, first of all," Mr. Whitehouse said, "over the girl Meggy and her mother, and Freddy, Forester has manifestly no legal power whatever; so we must take them bodily off, and leave not a trace of them anywhere in Peckham. I think we can manage that quite easily. There's the little boy, who of course must go on with his schooling, and we can settle that easily enough at Kingsland; and as for Meggy, we've room enough for her for a day or two ourselves; and as to Meggy's mistress, we must go over and see her, and honestly explain the case as far as necessary, and do what we can to lessen the inconvenience of Meggy's sudden removal."

So the next evening Meggy was at Oak Villa, and Freddy and his grandmother were comfortably settled in a couple of cheerful rooms on Kingsland Green.

CHAPTER IX.

AN EVENING PARTY.

Forester waited patiently for a fortnight: at least, not patiently, but he waited. Every night, in fact, not knowing what to do, with not a creature in all London that he could speak to but the detestable Jew scoundrels that swarmed about Abrahams' offices, he half resolved to take an omnibus to Peckham and watch about Warwick Place, or in front of old Mrs. Vickers' house, for the chance of at least seeing Meggy. Even if he did see her, he was by no means sure whether he would speak to her. It was very dreadful to be so utterly alone, and, somehow, he never doubted that, if he left her to herself, she would soon submit to

his will, come and keep his home, and perhaps, before long, sail away to some far-off land, and make believe to marry him. He had the profoundest belief in his own sophistries, or rather in their power over other people ; and especially he had confidence in those sophistries that in a manner smack of virtue. If only he could make Meggy believe that his marriage with Patty was in some way or other wronging him, that would be a long step towards a victory. In plain English, he believed in Meggy's virtue, and if he meant to win her, he could see clearly that he must make even his villanies look virtuous : so for the fortnight he let her alone. Only the very last night he wrote her a little note, to tell her how he was distracted with anxiety, and almost killed with his loneliness, and that he was looking for to-morrow's post with far more eagerness than he had felt when waiting for the day of his release from the long dreary years of his captivity. To-

morrow would end his trouble, and bring his own Meggy back to him—*his own* Meggy—to be torn away no more for ever.

But to-morrow's post brought Forester no letter: his loneliness was not to end so easily and so soon.

That night he went to Peckham Rye; he watched for hours in Warwick Place, and then he took his way home past old Mrs. Vickers' house. It was now late, and the house was closed. It was, in fact, only a sort of stupid last thought. Meggy was sure not to be there so late; still he went into the public-house over the way, and waited there till they closed the doors, and then miles back again to his dreary home in Tottenham Court Road.

Another post, all the posts of another day, and then again all the posts of another, and at last a letter. "On Her Majesty's Service,—*removed and left no address.*" That was the only answer to his sweet little letter to Meggy.

He cursed his folly that he had not seen her, in spite of her wish that he should give her a quiet fortnight to consider her answer. He was sure that he could have mastered her scruples, and now, leaving her to think so serious a matter over,—to think about it at all,—she had grown frightened, and fled; and yet, after all, what a fool he was. How did he know that she had fled? Perhaps the return of the letter might have been her mother's doing; or her mother might have removed, and his letter had been directed to her mother's care. He would go that night, and get to the bottom of the mystery. He went first of all to old Mrs. Vickers' house, and knocked at the door.

"Was Mrs. Vickers in?"

"No, sir; she doesn't live here, now."

"Not live here, now; why, when did she leave?"

"Well, she left about ten days ago, sir."

"But didn't she give you any notice that

she was going? Don't you let your apartments from month to month, or something like that?"

"No, sir; we let 'em week by week."

"Oh, and so she left you without any notice, did she?"

"Yes, sir, she did. Not as she behaved anyways unhandsome, though; for she gave us a month's rent, because she was obliged to leave us so sudden."

"Oh, she left you suddenly, did she? Well, and where has she gone?"

"Well, sir, she said that perhaps a gentleman,—rather tallish, with a stoop very much like you sir,—might perhaps be calling to make inquiries, and so they wouldn't leave their address. They didn't expect any letters, the old lady said, and so, if any came, I was to give them back to the postman."

"And did she go away alone? By the way, is the little boy gone, too?"

"Yes, sir; he's gone, too."

"Why, I thought he was at school," said Forester. "He did go to school, didn't he, somewhere here?"

"Oh, yes, he used to go to school. It wasn't far off; but I can't tell you to half a yard where it was. Besides, they've gone from here, and I haven't much time to answer questions."

With that she shut the door, and Forester rushed away, boiling with rage, to Warwick Place.

He didn't waste much time in lurking about; for one thing, he began to think it was no use, and for another he could bear the suspense no longer. So he went boldly to the front door, and asked for Meggy Vickers.

"Would you be kind enough to give your name, sir?" said the servant.

"Oh, never mind my name," he said. "You tell her a gentleman has called to see her—an

old friend from the country. She'll know who it is, fast enough."

"Very likely she might, sir," said the servant; "but my orders are to let nobody into the house, and to take no message, without either a card or a name."

She waited for a minute.

"What name did you say, sir?" she said, in a somewhat louder tone.

"Well, then," he said, "tell her Mr. Forester has called to see her.

"Very good, sir," said the servant. "You'll excuse my shutting the door while I go away. There's been a good many thieves about lately."

She took the message in, and the master of the house himself came back with the answer.

"Oh, from the country, Mr. Forester. I'm sorry you've had a long journey for nothing. There's nobody of the name of Meggy Vickers living here; but, to tell you the truth, a young man uncommonly like you has been watched

lurking about this road a good deal, and we've had a gentleman also call at this very house to warn us that a young man from the country —Portland, I think he said, or something of that sort—was hovering about the neighbourhood, and that the police had their eye upon him. If you should happen to see a ticket-of-leave man about here, you'd really be doing him a kindness to give him a word of warning."

Thereupon Mr. Elliotson shut the door, and bolted it.

What was the use of fury—blind, mad rage? Plainly enough, Meggy had gone, and if he could have beaten out the brains of the man who had just turned him from his door, that would not have brought Meggy to Tottenham Court Road. So he wandered away, poor wretch, lonely and accursed, like Cain, when the Lord had set a mark upon him.

He knew no other way of finding out where Meggy was, excepting, possibly, by going to Freddy's school; and that could only be done when he could secure a day's holiday, or find some business in the direction of Peckham. And what was the use of trying? More and more strongly he began to suspect that Meggy had been fetched away. Indeed he almost guessed how the matter stood: he fancied that she had gone to Patty to plead with her for him, and that Patty had warned her to flee. Never mind, if he could not have love, he might at any rate have revenge.

He went on for some days at his dreary work, cheating and robbing, under the name of McIntosh, scores of despairing wretches who little knew the traps into which they were falling, and every day the bitterness of his own disappointment made him more hard and cruel. In his own misery he seemed to find a sort of fiendish relief in tormenting others. No work

was now too harsh for him to undertake. Widows and orphans, the sick, and even the dying, might plead for mercy, for one more chance, for just a few short days of time, but they had all to plead in vain.

"Now, look here," he would say, "it's all very well to be teazing me in this sort of way. I can't help your misfortunes; and if you had come to my office, and asked me, in plain English, to *give* you a few score pounds, I should have told the clerk to turn you out, and send you about your business. You didn't come to beg, did you? Eh? You came to borrow, that was it, wasn't it?"

"Oh yes, sir, of course it was; and we only want a little time, and the interest and charges were very high."

"Very high! well, I like that. It's quite plain that they weren't high enough to cover the risk, for if we sell up every stick you've got—I must have been a fool to lend you

anything on such trumpery security—we shan't get back our principal, let alone interest and charges."

"I say, old boy," Abrahams would tell him sometimes, "you'll soon make your fortune, if you go on at this rate. You are the fellow to screw 'em up. It's all very well to be tender-hearted, but these old fools ought to know their own circumstances before they come to us."

"Of course they ought," Forester would say: "I've had my apprenticeship to serve, and a pretty time I had of it. I mean to take it out of them now; to pay my own expenses, and just a little trifle of interest. Besides, a man ought to be well paid for work like this: it's a dreadful wear to a fellow's feelings."

"Ah! I like that," Abrahams would chuckle. "I'll tell you what it is, old fellow; I never

was more mistaken in a man in all my life than I was in you. When first you came into our office, I thought—poor devil! But, Lord, a man lives and learns."

And so they were really growing quite friendly, this Jew and this Christian,—"thick as thieves." Sometimes, for a single moment, Forester would think that he might comfortably settle down to the life he was leading. He might even get rich. In a short time the full term of his penal servitude would be at an end, and he would be his own master. And yet, when he went home, for he knew no other name by which to call the desolate two rooms which he had hired, the dreadful loneliness would remind him how he had been robbed of that prize which seemed the only prize left him after his great disgrace, and which he had felt so sure of winning;—and his whole soul would grow bitter against Patty, Abrahams, everybody.

There was a snug little party one evening in Canonbury square: Mr. Whitehouse and Leighton, and Mr. Faithful, and one or two other friends, with their wives and elder daughters, and Patty, of course, as mistress of Mr. Carlisle's house. Patty seemed all herself again. Her nearest friends, indeed, could see that she was never wholly free from anxiety, an anxiety that sometimes amounted to fear. Even a loud ring or knock at the front door would often startle her, and drive the blood from her cheeks, and she got a habit of listening for strange voices, and seemed quite unable to bear any long suspense. But those who knew her less intimately would scarcely observe these peculiarities; and at any rate this evening, in that little company of fast friends she seemed quite free from care. Indeed she had not noticed even a loud knocking at the door, nor yet the voice of a stranger in the hall, until there was a kind of scuffle outside the drawing-room door itself.

"Get away with you, woman," she heard a man say to the housemaid; "you tell me she's in the house, and I know quite well she's in this room, and I shall go in."

With that he opened the door, and stalked into the drawing-room.

"There you are," he said, with a bitter laugh.

"And who the devil are you?" said Leighton, springing to the door.

But Forester had glided past, and was already at his wife's side.

"Pack up, young woman," he said, "and come home with me. Home! It's a good many years since we had that pleasure, isn't it?"

Poor Mr. Carlisle was far too horror-stricken to know what to do, while Leighton and Whitehouse, and the clergyman, and one or two others, drew together round Forester and his poor trembling wife.

"Send for a policeman, at any rate, Mr. Carlisle," said Mr. Whitehouse. "If this is the man he pretends to be, he must prove that he is. He has his rights, but it's not one of his rights to thrust himself into a private gentleman's house."

"Get out of the house," said Leighton; "you're a ticket-of-leave man, and you know you're trespassing here. And if you don't walk out at once I'll take care that you get your ticket-of-leave taken from you, and go back again to your old quarters."

"My dear sir," said Forester, resuming his easy manner, and giving Patty no opportunity of making herself heard, "as to my identity, there are at least four people in this room who can swear to it. I'm uncommonly sorry for you, Mr. Leighton. It must have been a bitter disappointment to you at first, and it must be a much more galling disappointment to you now."

"You infernal insolent scoundrel," said Leighton.

"Now don't, Mr. Leighton, don't," said Forester, interrupting him. "Don't lose your temper and don't shock the clergyman. You've a remarkable flow of language, magnificent force of expression, but you know, Mr. Leighton—or is it Doctor Leighton—doctor, I beg your pardon, you know *Doctor* Leighton, that if a man were required to give up his wife to everybody who has a good flow of words, the Seventh Commandment might as well be repealed."

"Be quiet, be quiet, doctor," said Mr. Whitehouse, laying his hand firmly on Leighton's arm.

"Really, ladies and gentlemen," said the imperturbable Forester, "I'm unfeignedly sorry to disturb you. If I had known of this little party, I would have waited till to-morrow. But in plain English, I'm a married man, and

that lady yonder is my wife. Mr. Leighton knows quite well that we were married, and Mr. Carlisle was himself present at the wedding. I have been very unfortunate. I have had many enemies, and I myself have been my own worst enemy. I am a ticket-of-leave man, as this gentleman says. I am very poor, I have only two small rooms in a dark, dingy street out of Tottenham Court Road ; very dirty and very shabby, not at all what I've been used to. I must work very hard for a living, even for a bare living, and what I mean and intend is this, that my wife shall come back with me this night, and help me to earn my bread, and make my dark, dirty rooms some trifle cleaner." Then, turning to Mr. Carlisle, he went on. "As to intruding into your house, sir, I'm very ready to apologise for any rudeness, but your own servant opened the door. As to trespassing, I'm not quite a fool, Mr. Carlisle ; and you, I am sure, will take the

advice of your solicitor before you begin to prosecute me for a trespass. Meanwhile, there stands my wife, and I shall take her out of this house to-night, if I drag her out by the hair of her head."

"Now, Leighton, be quiet," said Mr. Whitehouse, "you see that we can do nothing."

"Mr. Forester," he said, addressing Patty's husband, "your legal rights are of course beyond dispute; but your poor wife is quite unprepared for this very sudden visit. None of her things are ready, and surely you can leave her alone to-night, and come back for her to-morrow."

"You're very wise, sir," said Forester; "but to begin with, where would my wife be to-morrow morning? And then" (and this he said with a sneering laugh), "a working man can't spare two or three hours out of the middle of a morning."

"Well," said Mr. Carlisle, "but we may

make some arrangement. You wouldn't think of taking Patty to the sort of place you've been speaking of."

"I have no better," said Forester.

"But we can get you a better," said Mr. Carlisle; "something must be done."

"See here, old man," he answered, sternly, "do you want to hire my wife, that she may play the lady in your house and enjoy the company of her old lover? I'm a very poor man, but I'm not poor enough for that. Go and get ready," he said, turning to Patty.

What was to be done? Poor Mr. Faithful, perfectly stunned by being brought into this rude contact with real life, had tried in vain to find among all his goodly formulas, befitting words of power.

Meanwhile Patty had gone out of the room to dress, to kiss Samuel in his little bed, and once again to depart for the ease and joy of married life.

"Now, sir," said Mr. Whitehouse, tapping Mr. Faithful on the shoulder, "if you'll just run out and get a policeman, he'll be worth five hundred of your sermons."

Patty was long in dressing, and for once a policeman was not far to seek. Nearly all the policemen on that beat knew Mr. Whitehouse.

"Take this man away, policeman," said Mr. Whitehouse. "The servant opened the door to him, and he rudely thrust his way in. He has come here to demand his wife. She is not in this room, and I don't know where she is. He's a ticket-of-leave man, and you'd better keep your eye on him. I think I can trust him with you, Jones."

"Now, then, young gentleman," said the policeman, "you had better move on, because if you don't, I'll have you locked up and your ticket looked at."

It was no use for Forester to dispute this

authority. He knew that he was right, and he knew also that he was wrong.

"If your wife really is here, Mr. Forester," said Mr. Whitehouse, "any respectable solicitor will tell you what to do, and any respectable solicitor will warn you not to repeat the gross insolence of which you have been guilty to-night."

"The longer it is before she comes to me," said Forester, "the worse it will be for her when she does come, that's all."

"Come, come, young man, move on," said Jones. "We've had enough of your jaw here for one night."

CHAPTER X.

REVENGE.

Of course the party was broken up. There was much sympathy and perhaps even more wonderment. It is not often that quiet English people find themselves actors in a real tragedy, and this night's grim business could scarcely have been more tragical, if it had been a play on the stage. Leighton and Whitehouse of course stayed behind; and policeman Jones had orders to return that night, however late it might be, and tell them what had become of Forester. Mr. Carlisle had seized the first opportunity of hurrying to Patty's room —was she not his own child? And there they were, dear hearts — what but utter

silence could speak out what was in their thoughts?

"Patty, my own darling, what can this be? What must we do?"

"I *must* go with him, he is my husband," Patty sobbed out; and then there was again silence; neither could see any way of escape. Soon there was a knocking at the door.

"Could you come down, sir, please," said the housemaid, "the man has gone, and the gentlemen want to speak to you and to mistress. In the dining-room, please, sir."

"I thought we might have escaped this, my dear sir," said Whitehouse to Mr. Carlisle. "I thought his idleness would have mastered his revenge. And, my dear, dear friend," he went on, speaking to Patty, "how often we've talked about these cruel laws, seeing their cursed injustice to others, little thinking how soon they might curse ourselves."

"And now we must try to be brave," Patty said, "and show others how to bear, and wait, and act. God help me."

"But *must* you bear it?" Leighton said. "He can't hold us responsible for your acts. Go away—he can't follow you—he can't afford to find out where you are."

"Let us go together, dearest," said Mr. Carlisle; "anywhere. Business is nothing to me now. We can set off to-morrow—even to-night."

"And didn't you hear this very night his cruel taunts?" Patty said. "I *must* go to him, and perhaps even still may do him good. Thank God we are spared one great wrong. Meggy is safe."

"Yes," said Mr. Whitehouse, "thank God, indeed; and, for dear Patty, I think she is right. My dear friend, you know we will do all we can. Your house shall be watched, if need be, day and night. We will go with

you. If your husband will come here and get a better home, no money, no persuasion shall be wanting. We must put our trust in God."

And as they talked together the prospect for poor Patty seemed to brighten. Forester, they felt sure, would never dream of violence. He was selfish and lazy; but Patty working at hard menial work, could never earn as much as her friends would cheerfully give. Forester might be vexed, anxious to show his power, anxious to have Patty in his own hands that he might extort more money from her friends. They did not care; they would submit to be plundered—anything for Patty.

The policeman Jones came back very late. He had soon let Forester go when he was at a safe distance from Canonbury Square, and then he had set an officer in plain clothes to watch him. They had found out his

home, and they knew that he was there that night.

Patty wrote a hurried note, and gave it to the policeman, that it might be left at her husband's house early the next morning.

"DEAR EDWIN,

"I will *come* to you to-morrow evening at eight o'clock.

"Your unhappy, faithful wife,

"PATTY FORESTER."

The friends then separated. They would meet again in the morning to make necessary arrangements, and would accompany Patty to her new sad "home." Little sleep had any of them that night. Poor Mr. Carlisle felt an utter desolation, that not even his wife's death had caused. Leighton was raging like a caged beast of prey, scarcely less murderous in

thought and will than even Forester himself. Mr. Whitehouse was planning and scheming, and trying to find some power less stern than death to loose the fetters which bound Patty and her husband together.

The next morning came—and evening—and then they must set out on their dreary errand; to carry off their choicest and dearest to be devoured by a hungry monster, as in the old mystic legends, to give up their gentlest and tenderest to one most cruel. But there was no help; the law of England was against them, and how very seldom can even the worst laws be defied and broken with any chance of good.

Forester knew that Patty would come. She had never yet broken her word to him; and even now, when she was coming to misery worse than any death, he knew that she still would keep it; and he suspected that her friends would come with her, and he meant to pay

them in their own coin. So they came, saw, and did not conquer.

Forester was home as early as possible, and he was in his own room when his visitors arrived—a cab-load—boxes, men, Patty.

"What do you want?" says the woman of the apartments.

"We want Mr. Forester," said Leighton.

"He's not in," said the woman.

"Not in? He's looking out of the window this minute," said the doctor, red with indignation.

"I don't care," said the woman, "if he's at every window in the house. *He's not in*—them's my orders; and he said any *gentleman* would know what he meant."

"Oh yes, we know what he means," said Leighton, stepping over the threshold.

"You'll keep at your own side of the door, young man," said the woman, "or you'll spend the night in a lock-up; and better lodging than you're worth, too."

And thereupon Forester came down.

"Is my wife here?" he said.

"Yes, Edwin, I am here," Patty answered, stepping into the passage.

Then Forester slammed the door in their faces, bolted and barred it, and quietly resumed his watch at the first-floor window.

"Here's your wife's luggage," said Mr. Whitehouse. "We only came to know of what use we can be to you both."

"Pay the cab and take your damned rubbish home again," said Forester, shutting the window.

It was vain to knock and call, and in about three or four minutes the cab drove away again.

"Well, you'll find this rather a change, Patty," he said, when, looking out of the window, he had seen the cab turn into Tottenham Court Road. "I'm only dull company just now myself, and you won't have very much even of

my society. In fact, in about an hour I shall have to go out to-night, though it is the first night of our being at home together after many years. It's a dull neighbourhood, very ; but I'll take care you're not annoyed with visitors. I'll just lock the door and take the key in my pocket, and then you'll be safe and comfortable."

Patty could not speak. She could only look at him and at their wretched rooms with scared misery.

"Now don't begin crying," said Forester, just as if he didn't know that that sort of talk was the best thing to make her. "I've had a deal to go through, Patty, and it hasn't improved my temper."

"I haven't been altogether without trouble myself, Edwin," Patty said ; "but I've never yet refused to work, and I've no doubt I can make these rooms rather more cheerful than they are now. Only be gentle with me," she said.

For, indeed, poor child, she was beginning to be frightened; to fear almost that Forester might even strike her.

However, he took out of his pocket a cigar case, and sat at the window smoking for about an hour, not speaking a single syllable to Patty. He kept looking up and down the street, as if to make sure that Patty's friends were not returning; and then, at last, he got up, put on his hat, and walked out of the room; locked the door, put the key in his pocket and went down-stairs.

"Here, missis," he said to the landlady, "just take care of this key, will you? I don't think I shall be home to-night; so about half-past twelve you can go up-stairs and unlock the door, and tell my wife I don't quite know at what time she may expect me, but it will most likely be some time to-morrow afternoon."

With that he walked out of the house, and Patty watched him from the window to the

end of the street. He stood lounging at Tottenham Court Road corner for about five minutes, and then he strolled away in the direction of Oxford Street.

It was late the next evening before Patty saw him again, and when he came into the house he affected to be surprised to find her there.

"Lord bless me!" he said; "it never occurred to me for a moment that you were here, and I'll be bound you've had nothing to eat all this time. You see my wife living with somebody else, I was just a sort of bachelor, and couldn't afford a housekeeper; so I'm sure you must have found the pantry uncommonly empty. Look there," he said, flinging down upon the table some four shillings.

"You may spend that for yourself, and mind you're careful; I'm only a poor working man, and can't afford to make my wife a lady.

You needn't trouble about me. I shall just get a bite of something to eat wherever it's most convenient."

And so sad weeks wore away. The bitter unkindness of Forester was sometimes even varied by a coarser brutality, and Patty could do nothing. She had indeed once cherished the flattering hope that by her mere patience, her all-enduring meekness, she might win back her husband. He might have very hard, coarse work to do, but he should find that no work was too coarse for his own wife to try to help him in. He might set her any sort of hard tasks; needlework, washing, scrubbing. No matter, she would work as long as body and soul would keep together; and surely at last, she thought, her submissive gentleness would gain the victory.

And very likely, if Forester had been working hard—working hard in the way Patty

expected, like a day labourer—if it had been necessary for herself to wear out her life with menial toil, perhaps she would have conquered; but the more she saw her husband the more she wondered and feared. His hands were still white and delicate; he wore the clothes of a gentleman, nay, rather almost of a dandy. He came home often enough, vexed and worried, with ruffled temper and the sterner form of his cruelty, but scarcely ever physically tired. Poor Patty began to fear whether her husband's work was even honest, he would never tell her anything about it. Once for all he put a stop to her curiosity and inquiries.

"Now, if you don't want to quarrel," he said, "you'll be very careful indeed to avoid meddling with my affairs. I suppose if I were to tell you what my employment is, you haven't got a better situation to offer me; so just leave me to myself."

It was no use murmuring, it was no use even suggesting that if his work were too hard, or if there were anything else in it that galled him, perhaps she might be able to find him a better situation. He only answered with brutal sneer and coarse innuendo.

"You'd better not propose any of your better situations to me," he said; "I'm not going to live on those miserable Canonbury snivellers, and I'm not going to be paid for letting you live among them either."

And so weeks and weeks passed slowly on with dull monotony of misery. Poor Patty's health began to fail, but her husband did not seem to heed it. Perhaps in his inmost soul he wished her dead. It was a costly piece of sentimentalism, of petty thriftless revenge, he began to feel, that had led him to burden himself afresh even with the very moderate expense of Patty's maintenance.

It was some comfort to her to remember that

her friends, helpless as they were, were at least watching over her—would shield her from outrage, would come and bury her when she was dead, would weep tears of love and pity over her untimely grave. But they were never permitted to enter the house; their letters were constantly intercepted, and Forester would throw them into the fire unopened before Patty's face.

Such was her married life! And this man could claim this woman, drag her away from her best friends, feed her on the bread of affliction and the water of affliction, compel her to work, or doom her to ignominious idleness, torture her with the heartless cruelty of his own company, or leave her to utter loneliness, almost anything but kill her—because she was his wife!

CHAPTER XI.

THE AQUEDUCT.

Forester and Abrahams were becoming, after the manner of such people, intimate friends. The new clerk was evidently a most valuable assistant, and was pocketing a very handsome commission. Moreover, he was not altogether a common clerk. He could manage the more respectable parts of Abraham's business, and conduct a legal robbery with something of the manners of a gentleman. With his gentle voice and confiding stoop he could secure confidence, where the hooked-nose of Abrahams, and his greedy, grasping face, would have aroused suspicion even in the most trustful. Nay, he could, somehow, gild

even calamity with a thin coating of worthless consolation, and could make an execution more agreeable than Abrahams could make the renewal of a bill. So these two worthies were becoming very necessary to each other. In certain stages of their business, Abrahams would have spoiled the sport; and, on the other hand, though Forester was becoming more and more convinced that business was business, and that silly sentimentalism was in no way to interfere with a man's prospects in life, yet still Abrahams was, for the most part, the best Jack Ketch of the company. It is saying little to affirm that the Jew would have sold the bed on which one of his victims was dying. If it would have saved him a sovereign, he would have sold coffin and shroud, and flung the naked corpse into the road. Dreadful devil! And yet he had been a man once, and had some little touch of human nature left him, even, still; if anybody could have found it,

there was a little soft place, somewhere, no doubt, even in his hardened soul.

"Money," said his illustrious ancestor, "is a defence." And it was the only defence that Abrahams had. "The heaven of the British nation," says Mr. Carlisle, "is success."

"'What is the hell of the English people?' says Sauerteig. 'With hesitation, with astonishment, I pronounce it to be the terror of "not succeeding"—of not making money, fame, or some other figure in the world—chiefly of not making money! Is not this a somewhat singular Hell?'" Very likely, but was Abrahams the only man in all London who wished to keep *out of* that Hell?

Yet, carefully looked into, what a very singular life the life of a Jew money-lender must be. Possibly religion may come to his aid, and he and his wife, and all his kith and kin, may simply be spoiling the Egyptians; but there are many Jew money-lenders who are Jews

only so far as they are money-lenders, and for the rest are but uncircumcised Philistines. Forester, for instance, could trace his lineage to none of the sons of Israel, and very probably scores of the McIntoshes and Stickems—in fact, a good half of the advertising harpies, who are continually offering advantageous loans to ruined men, are no more Jews than Beelzebub. What *is* the sort of life, then, that such people lead?

Is a money-lender, for instance, sufficiently human to need the solace of a wife, or to indulge in the expensive luxury of a little family? With what an all but magic ease such a person might furnish this house; even his wife's wardrobe, and the nursery of his children. By a man sufficiently wide awake, the best of furniture may be bought for an old song; for a forced sale is not, perhaps, the most remunerative way of disposing of one's goods and chattels. So he might pick and choose

quietly, say for a year before his marriage, out of the furniture of his divers clients. He might call again and again on his debtors on almost any pretence, to ask after their health even ; and he might make a mental note in one house of the value of a sideboard, in another of the dining-table and chairs, in another of the china and plate; and so he might bring home his bride to a well-stored house, crammed with the trophies of financial victories. The bridal bed itself might be one upon which some unlucky debtor had died. Even his wife's jewels might almost literally have been torn from the bosom or the ears, or the wrists of the wife of one whom he had made bankrupt. But would that be altogether pleasant ?

Forester had not a single friend in all the world—excepting Abrahams. And what sort of a friendship could that be ? What was the bond which knit those two together ? When they dined together—sometimes at Abrahams's

house, well furnished with plunder, sometimes, on Forester's side, at a hotel—what could they possibly talk about? Literature, politics, religion, the good of their native land, the glorious conflicts abroad for liberty and honour? Was there a single great question that they could discuss together? Does not every great question come at last to be an inquiry into the simple facts of morality? And can one of the simple facts, or the fundamental laws of morality, be so much as hinted at in the presence of a couple of Jew money-lenders, without making them feel that the very floor on which they are walking is hot with the fire of Hell. No! Forester and Abrahams could talk of nothing great or good. The only part of a newspaper they cared to see was the list of bankrupts and the law reports; and even these they had generally anticipated. Their conversation was always about the shop, how they were making so much per cent. out of

that fellow, and how they would have to come down pretty sharp upon that other fellow. And once they were talking together quite confidentially — dining cozily that day at Forester's expense, while his wife was nearly starving—about a fellow who might be a loss if they didn't look sharp after him; but, on the other hand, who might be a gain; and yet the case needed very delicate handling, and it was a toss up whether being very sharp indeed would quite answer the purpose.

"You see," said Abrahams, "we want to get as much as we can just now; and, at the same time, to reserve certain rights. We're sure pretty nearly to cover our risk as it is, but we've got an uncommonly good hand, and if we play our cards well, we may really get everything twice over—*twice over*, my dear boy."

"I don't quite see it," said Forester.

"You don't quite see it?" said Abrahams. "H'm! Well, then, you haven't looked at it,

that's all I can say, so I'll show it you. Not many people have quicker eyes in their heads than you have."

"Why, we've put an execution in already," said Forester, "and I don't see what more we can do."

"Don't you?" said Abrahams. "Never mind, my boy, live and learn. You see there's a good deal of dispute about the matter to begin with. The landlord has put in his claim, and of course that must be satisfied; and, above all, the fellow's frightened, and he's cut away."

"Well, then we shall have the sale all the quieter," said Forester.

"Yes, I've no doubt we shall," said Abrahams; "but I know where he is."

"Well, and what are you going to do with him?"

"Well," said Abrahams, "our bill of sale is just a very little shaky. "I don't know whether it will really clear everything, so of course I'm

proceeding on all the securities together. He's been already served with a writ upon the promissory note, and as he thinks that he's in safe hiding, he won't put in an appearance, and it's doubtful whether he knows how to do it. He's but a poor milksop."

"Wretched ass," said Forester.

"Well, of course," Abrahams said, "I shall go on to judgment and execution, and I shall get a *ca. sa.* and I shall just quietly drop down upon him some day and arrest him, and my own notion is that there's a good deal to be squeezed out of him yet. It's a very dry sponge indeed that yields nothing when a *ca. sa.* squeezes it."

"Well, but if we get all that we have a claim upon him out of the sale, what's the good of a *ca. sa.?*" said Forester.

"But suppose we don't," said Abrahams; "and suppose we do, and he doesn't know that we do; and suppose fifty thousand things, the only thing that we need care about is this,

that he's sure to neglect making any defence, and when he finds out his mistake it will be too late to remedy it."

"Well, what shall we do with him?" said Forester.

"Well," said Abrahams, "I shall go to his place with the officer, and I shall quietly break it to him—you know my quiet way, don't you. old fellow? I shall gently break it to him and tell him that we've had a great loss by him, and that we've been obliged to resort to extreme measures in consequence of his absconding, and I shall say to him, 'I have really—I am very sorry to say so—but really I have an officer outside, and unless we can come quietly to some sort of satisfactory arrangement, he will be compelled to arrest you.'"

"He's a regular fool," said Forester; "but you'll put him in a devil of a fright if any one can. Well, what then?"

"Well, then," said the Jew, with a winning smile, "I should say a little bill. Just a little bill for one month, or even six weeks after date."

"How much for?" said Forester.

"How much for? Well, we've lent him one hundred and twenty, and what with one thing and another thing, it comes to about two hundred and sixty-four. That's what I should draw the bill for."

"And what should you deduct for the sale?" said Forester.

"Not a damned copper," said the Jew.

"Well, but——" Forester was beginning to say.

"Well, but," said Abrahams, not altogether without scorn. "Do you really suppose he'll be able to stand arguing with me and demurring and asking all sorts of questions, with a sheriff's officer in the passage?"

"You're a clever card, old fellow," said

Forester; "and besides, when once he accepts the bill, that's a new debt, and it is for him to prove that there was no consideration or that the consideration was fraudulent."

"Nothing like a little bill, my dear friend," said the Jew. "As long as the acceptor has a penny to bless himself with we can renew it with interest, and when we can get no more out of him in that way, we sue him. And then—but I needn't tell you—you're wide awake enough. A fortnight finishes the business."

"Yes," said Forester, "it's an uncommonly neat instrument, a little bill; and by the way, there are a good many of our clients that might be managed just in the same way, as far as I can see. There's—but never mind, what's the good of going into business now? Let's have another bottle of wine. There are three or four accounts I mean to look over to-morrow,

and I mean to pocket a very handsome commission, old boy."

And so they drank another bottle of wine, and it was the best thing they did that night. And they tried, for a short interval, to avoid talking about the shop, but as there was nothing in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth, in which they had any common interest *except* the shop, the conversation soon began to flag, and, fortunately, the evening also.

"Now, really," said Forester to himself, as he walked home, "I'd almost made up my mind to forget that that damned Jew is an incarnate devil. It's perfectly astonishing how soon a fellow gets accustomed to the smell of brimstone. I knew all along that that scoundrel was robbing me, and now I know exactly how he did it. Very well. I'll pay him my little bill. I'd almost made up my mind to let him off. I'd almost forgotten—

good God!—that it was this scoundrel that snapped me up that happy evening with Meggy, that sent me away for all those years to that accursed penal servitude, and that has robbed me of her altogether. What the devil should I lose if I blew his brains out to-morrow morning and were hanged to-morrow night?"

He walked fast home; fast, as people always do walk who have troubled minds. For once there was just a touch of his old kindness, even to Patty. He had very little sleep that night, and he was very early away to business the next morning.

He did a good deal of business that day: some dozen of people were waiting in the outside office for Mr. McIntosh's solicitor when that worthy Jew presented himself. Other dozens had been sent away weeping, according to the approved prescription.

"First-rate," said Abrahams; "you'll be as

rich as—as a Christian in a year or two, Mr. Forester."

"Ay, they're a juicy lot, aren't they?" said Forester. "I should think, what with one thing and another, we should squeeze a good deal out of these sponges, Mr. Abrahams?"

"Why, I know half of them," said Abrahams, "and yet they don't know me. I've seen 'em in Maddox Street, I've seen 'em in Sloane Street, and I've seen 'em in King William Street, London Bridge, and I've seen 'em in Cannon Street, and I've seen 'em — see 'Daily Telegraph.' Wherever money can be borrowed do these unhappy wretches rush to borrow it. Now, I should have thought that my distinguished countenance would have been easily recognised, eh, Forester?"

"Well," said Forester, "I should have thought so too. It's rather an uncommon

face, and yet on the other hand there are a good many like it."

And so they chatted in a friendly way, until quite late that evening. You can't ruin, even prospectively, a dozen people in ten minutes.

"By the way, Abrahams," said Forester, "what do you think of a trip into the country next Saturday? I think we may spend the Sunday in such a way as to combine pleasure and business in a single operation."

"Well, what is it?" said the Jew.

"Well, you know I speak without prejudice," Forester said. "I daresay it's your business, but I mean to go in for my commission, and so do you agree to that?"

"Why, of course I do," said Abrahams; "what is it?"

"Why, I don't think you made all you might have made out of that affair of mine down at the old Hall. I was rather vexed at

the time myself; but, however, business is business, and at any rate I may as well get my commission upon what little bit of the wreck may be saved."

"Most certainly," said Abrahams; "but what is the case?"

"Why, you know the people who bought the old Hall bought up a lot of the fixtures and some of the furniture, and, as far as I can remember, those papers I told you of would very materially strengthen their title, even if it is safe at all without them; and would I think enable you at the very least to make a good profitable business-like compromise. But, however," he went on, "it's rather a chance what we may make of it; still I know exactly where to find the papers, and it will be a pleasant trip. We've made a capital deal of money this last week, and we can afford both a rest and a risk."

"Well," said Abrahams, "if it's business, it's

business, and if it's pleasure it's pleasure. I don't see my way to it as business; but if it's pleasure, and you like to take your share, all well and good, and if we can do a stroke of business at the same time, of course you'll get your commission."

"All right," said Forester. "I'm really a damned sentimental old fool, but still I shouldn't be sorry for an excuse to see the old Hall once again, so we'll make a holiday of it. Just once in our lives have a rest."

So it was agreed. Abrahams knew, even better than Forester expected, that his dealings at the old Hall had been so reckless and unprincipled, that he might in his compromise between greediness and danger have left almost any amount of treasure behind him. At any rate, why not a little holiday?

On Friday morning Forester said to Abrahams, "I don't know whether you care which

way you go, but I should recommend the line through Sheffield, and we can stay all night on Saturday at Ashton-under-Lyne. Then, on Sunday morning, I fancy there's a boat—at any rate there used to be, a canal boat with a couple of horses—that runs pretty quickly from Dukinfield, which is close to Ashton, to Marple, close by the old Hall. But it doesn't much matter if the boat doesn't run; it's a splendid walk along the canal-side. We pass over what they call down there 'Th' Akodock,' that is to say, an aqueduct. The canal runs through a fine hill, the water goes through a tunnel, and the horses go over the top of the hill, and the boatmen lie on their backs and push the boat through the tunnel by sticking their feet against the top. Then almost immediately at the other side of the tunnel there's a splendid valley, and at the bottom of the valley a river. The river is either the Mersey, or else some miserable little

tributary of the Mersey—but Lord! what is the use of geography? Well, the canal is carried over this river on arches, and that's what they call 'Th' Akodock,' and from the aqueduct you have one of the finest views in all Cheshire. Well, then you walk on—splendid country all the way—and very soon come to the Leigh road, and slip down to the old Hall. Now I recommend, as I've just said, stay Saturday night at Ashton-under-Lyne, go in the boat or walk, as the case may be, from Dukinfield to Marple on Sunday morning; slip down to the old Hall and see if there's any business worth doing in the afternoon; get on to Stockport at night. I think there's a coach, or, if not, we can get a lift in somebody's trap—and back again to London either by the night mail, or by the early fast train on Monday morning."

"Very well, old boy, let it be so," said Abrahams; "we mustn't waste more time than we can help, and I should think if we set off

by the five o'clock train on Saturday night we shall do very well."

So that little matter was settled.

On Friday night, Forester began, as it were, clearly to take stock, to ascertain precisely what he meant to do.

"I don't know," he said; "why not let him alone; what shall I gain by it if I get rid of him? And what am I gaining now? Men may be beggars and yet heroes. If I make thousands of pounds, I can of course buy friends as long as the money I pay them will last, but of all free human beings, free from poverty and free from covetousness, is there so much as one who would call himself my friend for all the money I could earn till doomsday? And it is this very fellow, this Abrahams, who has been my ruin: I have sworn, and day after day for long years I have repeated the oath, that I would make him pay for it; and why not? Will any human being care if I

am a murderer, and if I die a murderer's death? And how shall I do it?"

He took a little bottle out of his pocket. A very little bottle containing a white powder. Not enough nearly to cover a fourpenny piece. "Why not this? One-tenth of a grain will do. Suppose I drop it into his grog at Ashton-under-Lyne, and he dies suddenly of apoplexy? I can empty this little bottle into my waistcoat pocket, rub my finger on it, and pretend to feel one of his loose teeth, and who will ever know why he drops down dead so suddenly?

"No," he said, "what's the pleasure of poisoning a man? You don't see him writhe with pain; you don't feel that you've done anything. Now, if you could beat his brains out, or cut his throat, or fling him down a precipice, or pitch him over the aqueduct, why I could comfortably lean over and see him struggling away at the bottom, down in the

water, his brains smashed out against a stone, and then I should know it was done! I'll take the little bottle, there's no knowing what may happen; and I'll take a life-preserver."

"Good-bye, Patty," he said, on Saturday morning; "you don't look well. Go and see your friends if you like; I shan't be home till Monday."

"Edwin," she said, and she was going to put her arms round his neck; she fancied that in some strange way her patience was after all victorious.

"Don't be stupid!" he said, pushing her off; "get your holiday, and it will do you good." And then for a moment he seemed to relent, and for the first time since she came back to him he kissed her face.

"Good-bye, my dear," he said, and rushed away.

It was a splendid Sunday morning, and as all the bells were ringing for church Abrahams and Forester set out from Ashton-under-Lyne. They little cared, when they reached Dukinfield, to find that there was no boat to Marple on Sunday. They walked along the canal side; four or five miles through a beautiful country, and then they came to the mouth of the tunnel. Over or under?

There was a common canal boat coming along, and Forester said to Abrahams—

"It's almost worth while going through here if you've never been through such a place."

They hailed the boatman, and asked if he would let them ride through.

"All right," he said.

And they jumped into the boat. A nasty narrow cold tunnel, the water dripping on them all the way through; half a mile long, perhaps, at the longest, but when you have to lie on your back and push a boat through with your

feet, a half-mile tunnel might be twenty miles long for the time it seems to take to get through. However, they did get through at last. Forester "tipped" the boatman, and he and Abrahams, looking out upon the grand prospect before them, climbed the hill under which they had come.

"Lord bless you," said Forester, "I know every inch of the ground here," and he went bounding down the hill like a boy. "Look here!" he called out to Abrahams, who was stumbling slowly downwards, wondering how a grown man could be such a fool—for there was Forester sitting on a mossy stone by the water's edge, drinking out of his hollow palm, snapping at the little fishes as they darted by. "Come along!" he called out; "what a time you are. Now don't you call that a grand arch?" he went on, pointing up to the aqueduct.

"Well," said Abrahams, "it's a good big bridge; but we shall lose the best of the day if

you don't mind: and we have to get to that place at the old Hall."

"All right," said Forester; "I forgot you hadn t been a boy here. Come along to the top."

So they went together to the top, and walked along over the aqueduct.

"Look over there," said Forester, "that's the finest view in all Cheshire. This canal here is so narrow that, if you stoop pretty well over, you can see very nearly through the arch. And down there," he said, getting the life-preserver out of his pocket, "is the very stone I was sitting on. Good God! there's my hat down."

Abrahams stooped down to see where the hat was lighting, and in another moment the life-preserver went crashing into the back of his head.

He was already half leaning over the wall, and Forester took hold of his legs and flung him over. His head crashed against the stone-

work of the arches, he struggled for a few minutes in the water, and then was still!

Forester walked coolly down to fetch his hat, looked into the dead face—scarcely dead yet—beat out of it every possibility of recognition, flung the life-preserver across the water, walked coolly back again over the hill to Dukinfield; and then by the next train that passed he returned to London.

CHAPTER XII.

UNMARRIED.

It was with sickening horror that "McIntosh" appeared in Piccadilly on Monday morning. He was tired with wandering about the streets all night, for he had not dared to sleep at an hotel; and with the chill morning had come the dreadful reaction which always follows such work as he had done. He, however, sent a message to Abrahams' house to say that important business would detain him possibly for some days in the country. He had found papers of much value in the north, but they needed verifications and references which had already taken him to Bristol.

Meanwhile the business was almost at a

stand-still. Money indeed was received, writs served; even executions, with all their grim horrors, wrung the last farthing from the most utterly ruined of Abrahams' debtors, just as if the Jew money-lender could any longer count his growing treasure, or congratulate himself on his shrewdness and vigour. But no new loans could be granted; the solicitor wouldn't attend till to-morrow, so applicants must fill up the form, pay their inquiry fees, and come again at the end of the week.

And how would Forester meet his wife? He wondered whether she had taken his permission to return and visit her friends. He wished she would stay there. His haggard look would scarcely startle her, for all along, as he knew full well, she had suspected him of an evil living that could never bear the light. But he scarcely dared to think to what his very despair might tempt him, if he looked into her pure face again.

But he must have rest, and a quiet place where he could think and plan unwatched. He must return to his home.

So he waited till the dusk, and then made his way to Tottenham Court Road. Three times he passed irresolute the end of the dull street, where his poor wife was watching for his coming; the fourth time, with swift firm step, as if he feared that his purpose would scarcely hold a moment, he hurried to his own door.

There she was,—the rooms at least tidy, and not wholly unhomelike. Tea was ready for him, and Patty's face seemed brighter. Plainly enough she had taken her holiday, and found strength from sympathy and love.

"How ill and tired you look, Edwin," Patty said; "have you had a hard day?"

"No, Patty, not harder—and yet, perhaps, it was a little harder than usual."

She looked at him; and as he turned his eyes from her searching gaze she feared more

than ever that he must be living a strange and wicked life from which no good could come.

"You won't really be vexed with me, Edwin, shall you, if I ask where you've been?" she said. "I do so want to help you. I'm sure we have work that we can do together. Our friends would help us, and we should soon be happy again. Shouldn't you like it, Edwin?"

He sat perfectly silent, his head leaning on his hand, his foot nervously beating the ground.

She drew nearer to him—nearer than she had dared to come all those dreary weeks of her married widowhood.

"Edwin," she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, "don't be hard to me. Let us love each other and help each other. Tell me all about your work. The worst has been; we have nothing to conceal now. We can begin afresh with clear consciences, and God will help us."

Poor wretched man, trembling violently,

sobbing, weeping — there he sat helpless, crushed down by love, even more than by all the dire calamities which had fallen upon him.

Patty kissed his brow and soothed him. She could not grieve to see those streaming tears. Surely all the icy coldness was dissolving now, and they would be man and wife at last—made perfect through suffering.

"Patty," he said, shuddering, "you do not know me. I am utterly and for ever undone. My work is at an end. I cannot afford even these miserable rooms; and I must send you back to your friends while I seek for something to do. I am—I am out of work again."

The last time they had met, how thankful would Patty have been for such tidings. But now all seemed changed.

"No, dear Edwin," she said, "it is all well now; now you are kind to me. Don't send

me away. I can live on very little. I can get money. Let me comfort you. We shall love each other so dearly when we work side by side."

He looked at her—into her face, bright with love and divinest mercy.

"Oh, that I had known it before," he murmured. "Patty, my darling, my wife, *you must leave me* for a little while, and then—— Go, love; get on your things and go NOW. I will write a letter to send with you."

She could not resist. She would not put to peril this new affection. Soon she was ready; as her husband gave her the letter, and bade her good-bye, his voice so trembled, and his face so quivered, that she almost thought he was dying as he stood before her.

"No, don't call for anybody, Patty," he gasped; "it will soon be over. Oh, my darling," he went on in low wailing tones, "if I had only known you—if I had only known

myself. And your poor heart I have broken, and covered you with shame. Too late! too late now! But yet forgive me—forgive me, Patty; perhaps if *you* can, God will too."

"Dearest Edwin," she said, "let me stay with you. Then you'll *know* that I forgive you utterly—that I am your own true wife, that——"

"No, no," said Forester; "go—go NOW, for awhile—when we meet again, all will be well."

And so they parted; and as Patty shut the door behind her, he felt as if all comfort, all blessing had gone for ever—there was nothing left but to *die*.

He took the little bottle from his pocket, and looked at the deadly powder that seemed so innocent.

"I never thought," he said to himself, "that I should need this for myself, and welcome it as a friend. There is no need for the law to kill me. I *cannot live*. I cannot live

with that bruised, dead face ever staring at me."

He emptied the little bottle, putting the white powder on a clean sheet of note-paper.

"It will leave me no time," he said; "I must think of everything I have to do or leave undone *now*."

He thought of Patty—she would be well cared for. Of Meggy and of Freddy. Poor Meggy—beautiful blue-eyed Freddy—but he could do nothing. He did not even know where they were—better far that for evermore they should be lost to each other.

And then he thought of Abrahams—dead and cold, the shallow water rippling over him as he lay in the lonely river in that thick-wooded valley so far away.

Yet that hard man had a wife and little children, who for dreary weeks of agony and suspense might wait his coming—wait in vain. What would they heed that the body of a

murdered man had been found in a river in Cheshire? It could never be *him*—the husband, the father, hard to others, but tender as a woman to the little ones prattling round his knees and to their mother! Were any jewels he could buy too costly to adorn her Jewish beauty?

Yes, *that* must be done. He must *tell her* where to find her husband. Poor consolation, indeed; but better than the long, dreary, despairing waiting for the return of the dead.

And when the body was found, and the inquest sat, on whom would suspicion rest? Might it not fall on the two boatmen who had carried them through the tunnel that Sunday morning? Or on some farmer in the valley, or weaver in the mill below—the mill for whose great wheel the water hurried on so fast over the dead man's face? That must never be! How many murders might come from that one dark crime—from his own

selfish cowardice, if he should die with his crime unconfessed.

"No," he said, "I must wait; I have something to do yet."

He had a large seal-ring on his finger. He took it off, took out the stone, and ground away a portion of the under side. Then he emptied the white powder into the ring, and fastened in the stone again.

Then he sat down to write.

"If Mr. Abrahams does not return at the time expected—if he does not come back before next Monday night—send men to seek for him. He has been with dangerous companions. They will be at Dukinfield some day this week; they will go on to Marple and Leigh by the canal towing-path over the aqueduct. Let the wood and the river over which the canal passes be well searched. He may have valuable papers; he may be robbed. *He may be murdered!*"

This he directed to Mrs. Abrahams.

He had not the faintest hope of escaping detection. He no longer wished to escape; but he had his confession to make and he wished to make it in the best possible way. Moreover, as yet he was in no danger, so he left the house and went into Tottenham Court Road for an evening paper. There was no "dreadful and mysterious tragedy" published yet.

Safe in his perfect insecurity, saved the misery of concealment by the complete certainty of detection, he went still to Piccadilly. In the absence of the solicitor he did as little business as possible; but with eager haste he read each latest newspaper—waiting till his hour was come.

At last on Saturday morning it came.

"*Mysterious Tragedy in Cheshire.*—Yesterday morning the body of a man was found in the river, underneath the aqueduct, near

Marple, in Cheshire. It seems to have been lying for some days in the shallow water; and it was at first thought that the unhappy gentleman had been incautiously leaning over the aqueduct to watch the river and wood below—the view here being one of the finest in that neighbourhood—and so had fallen into the rocky bed of the stream beneath. The back of his head was dreadfully shattered, and death must have been almost instantaneous. But on a surgical examination of the body it was discovered that the face which was lying upwards, had been fearfully beaten, the bones being broken in many places. A life preserver also, by which the blows might have been given, was found on the bank about a hundred yards further down the stream. It seems certain that a horrible murder has been committed; and already a large reward (£200) has been offered for the apprehension of the murderer. No clue has yet been discovered,

but the keeper of the lock-house, a few hundred yards from the aqueduct, remembers that two boatmen passed his lock on Sunday, and had beer with him at the neighbouring public-house. They said that they had just brought two gentlemen through the tunnel in their boat, strangers to these parts, south country folk most likely, who had come to look at the scenery. Careful search is being made for these boatmen. Meantime, the body of the unfortunate victim has not been recognised. He was rather under the middle height, stoutish, and, so far as can be traced, with a Jewish cast of countenance—very well dressed. The murder is the more mysterious, as its motive cannot have been plunder. The deceased had a valuable diamond ring on his finger, a gold lever watch, and several pounds in his pocket."

So the hour had come at last.

There was a young under-clerk in the outer

office, a poor, tender soul, far unfit for the rough work of a usurer. He was from the country, too, a widow's son; had applied for the place in answer to an advertisement, and was plainly not too happy in the midst of its legal iniquities. Forester, with the newspaper in his pocket, came into the outer office.

"William," he said, "I want you to come with me. I've some business this afternoon that needs both of us."

The youth put on his hat and accompanied his master.

Into the first letter-box they passed, Forester dropped the letter for Abrahams' wife.

"We'll go to my rooms, William," he said; "and wretched rooms they are. But they answer my purpose for the present. I shall change them soon."

They were dreary enough. No Patty now to make them look just a little homelike.

"Do you much like our work, William?" Forester said.

"It's not for me to choose, sir; I must get my living."

"Yes, but do you like it?"

"No, sir, I don't."

"Why not?"

"Well, sir, I don't know how it is exactly, but I'd rather be an undertaker. Everybody that comes to our place is so awfully miserable. And Mr. Abrahams *is* a little hard, sir, isn't he? But I don't know, of course. He understands business I should think."

"Leave us, William," said Forester.

"Leave, sir? You surely don't mean to dismiss me, do you, sir? Haven't I given satisfaction?"

"Yes, yes, but you'll never get on at this kind of work. I'll get you something else."

"You're very kind, sir, but how?'

Forester pushed the newspaper to him,

pointing out to him the "mysterious tragedy," and watching his face till he came to the description of the murdered man.

"Well, William?"

"Horrible, sir; who can it have been?"

"I think I know."

"You, sir! who was it?"

"*Abrahams.*"

The youth stared into his face with horror.

"Two hundred pounds would set you up, William. Come with me to the police office. *I* murdered Abrahams. I went with him to Dukinfield. We walked along the towing path till we came to the tunnel. We rode through in a boat; a long narrow barge. I enticed him to look over the aqueduct, I struck him on the head with a life-preserver and hurled him over the low wall into the river. Go with me, give me up to justice, and get your reward."

The boy looked at him for a moment, and

then, with a shriek of terror, fled out of the house.

"Then I must die and benefit nobody," Forester murmured, "or only some strange policeman."

He put on his hat and walked into the street. He soon met a policeman—a surly ruffian, pushing a wretched girl, who had been shoplifting, to the station-house.

"Not you," he said.

He waited and watched the face of every policeman that passed, until he was tired—and what did it matter?

"Have you a wife and family, young man?" he said to the next that came up.

"*Only* eight," said the man; "that's all."

"You'll do," said Forester.

He showed him the paper.

"Well, what do you know about it?" the policeman asked.

"*I* murdered him."

"Come, don't be a fool," the man said. "You know what you're doing, I suppose? It's a hard knot to untie, you know, and if you don't get it untied pretty quickly, it spoils your breathing."

"He was a Jew money-lender," said Forester, heedless of the man's incredulity, "named Abrahams. His office was in Maddox Street. Go and see. Lock me up first, and claim your two hundred pounds."

Still only half believing, the man arrested him and took him to the station-house.

It was soon in every paper—a new sensation of horror. And Forester knew that the dreadful news would soon reach Patty. So he wrote at the station-house, a very short note, which a policeman undertook to deliver.

"You will know all now, my darling. God bless you for your patient love and your forgiveness. Don't come to me—I shall die more

bravely alone. If I saw you again, I should cling to life in spite of all its horrors. Good-bye, dearest—good-bye—a last long good-bye.

"Your own

"EDWIN."

* * * *

"Have you anything to say, prisoner?" said the judge.

"Very little, my lord; but if it may please you, and you, gentlemen of the jury, to listen, I would fain say a few words that may make my own heart lighter, and possibly save others. I was a careless, reckless young man. Extravagance brought me to beggary. I could not bear to seem a beggar. This unhappy murdered man lent me money at ruinous interest—he ruined me—he robbed me—he tempted me, with scarcely a disguise, to rob my master that I might pay himself; he flung me into prison. And during all the dreary years of penal servitude I have nursed this cruel purpose of

vengeance. For a while after my release I almost relented; but my heart was broken, my character was gone, my whole future blighted, and all through him.

"May God have mercy on me!

"And if it may be so—this ring—it was a gift to me—may it be buried with my dead body in my prison grave—that and the prayers of all good men is all I ask."

The next morning the gaoler entered the doomed man's cell. He was still, it seemed, sleeping—so very quiet, not even the sound of breathing could be heard.

The gaoler looked again; came close to the little bed.

"And I'm not sorry," he said to himself; "he wasn't the sort of man to hang over Newgate."

Forester was dead.

The surgeon came and examined the body. Cold already.

"Why, his ring's broken," said the gaoler.

"Let me look," said the surgeon. "Mind what you do. Sucked clean. Well, there must be a *post mortem.* Get all ready."

But the white powder had done its work at last.

CHAPTER XIII.

TILL DEATH US DO PART.

For months Patty lay ill at the home in Canonbury Square. They almost thought, as they lovingly watched over her, that her mind would fail, and that the wreck of brain and soul would work a cure for the body far worse than death. The long misery of her grief in the lonely chambers that were Forester's home, had ill-prepared her for the sudden shock of his crime, his trial, his death! and vainly, and with needless cruelty, she reproached *herself*. She had been frightened—coldly, roughly repelled; but if she had only tried more earnestly she might perhaps, she thought, have saved him. And the shock was all the harder to bear, because at last she seemed so surely conquering. How

the ice had melted—how, in that last adieu, he seemed to love her as he had never loved her before! And if only he would have loved her, how well she would have loved him in return.

But at last her faithful friends began once more to hope. The worst symptoms abated. Surrounded with all manner of comforts, above all with such comforts as might soothe her troubled mind, she steadily recovered; not very rapidly, but safely and surely. There was no fear now that she would ever again be dragged away from her foster-father's home; and indeed they all tried to forget, and so to help Patty to forget, that darkest chapter in all her life's history. Mr. Carlisle, who had been sorely shaken by losing his adopted child, seemed in the complete safety of his treasure to have renewed his youth. They were constantly to be seen together. The old man's hair and beard were white as snow; and even Patty's head was growing grey with the years that had been so

lengthened by sorrow—but they seemed ever cheerful; and it would have been hard to tell which thought the other most needing help; she him for his age, or he her for her sorrow.

Meggy remained for some time at Oak Villa, and after Forester's death she went, under Mr. Whitehouse's directions, to one of the London hospitals to be trained as a nurse. She, too, was overwhelmed by the great shame and misery of her lover's end. She was glad he had not written to her. She was quite sure that it was no unkindness; but she seemed to perceive, even in that little nothing, in his mere abstinence from a fresh fault, the token of a genuine repentance, an earnest wish that every old wrong could be undone, and that what was now unalterable might be fashioned into good. So she watched all the more carefully over Freddy until her mother died; and then Mr. Carlisle took him to live with Patty till his

schooling should be over, and some good place of business provided for him.

The Oxford Street shop, with its goodwill and all its belongings, was sold. Mr. Carlisle retired; and, by the way, once again he had to instruct his solicitors to make a will. He divided the great bulk of his property between Samuel and Patty, and the rest, apart from smaller legacies, to Meggy and her boy.

Oak Villa still prospers. Unhappily any institution which depends upon crime may, in one sense, too easily prosper; but Mr. Whitehouse is still working on at his good work, seeking and saving them that are lost. There is still no committee, no list of subscribers, no well-meant and half-unconscious mendacity of annual reports. The "Home" is one of those few institutions at once public and private, unostentatious and yet without any affectation of reticence, wherein the right hand does not know,

and does not care to conceal, what the left hand doeth.

It was, perhaps, well for Leighton that Patty was ill so long. He would scarcely have ventured to come and see her after that great shock, unless he had been compelled to come; and if their intimacy had once been broken, what possible excuse could there have been for patching it up again. Sometimes, as he drives about from one patient to another, he wonders whether a house of his own might not be more comfortable and more convenient even than his chambers at Oak Villa. But what a stupid fancy! What can an old bachelor want with a house?

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END.

"PATTY, my darling," said Mr. Carlisle one day—it was evening, of course, blind man's holiday, only firelight to talk by—"I wonder whether you would care so much for your old foster-father if you had a husband."

"Well, you know," she said, "I shouldn't have had half so much to love you for, should I?"

"Ah, that's all very well, my dear; but what I really mean, is, I wonder what you'll do with me when you *are* married again."

"Why, you silly old love," said Patty, "what nonsense you're talking; I should never dare to marry again, and besides—why—you

know there's nobody that would care to have me."

"Well, well, never mind," said Mr. Carlisle, "I almost hope there is nobody; and by the way, talking of marrying, there's the doctor taken a house, and furnishing it in the snuggest and prettiest possible way, and he told me the other day—but it's a secret, Patty, so mind you don't let him know that you've found it out—that he'd made up his mind at last, and was going to get married. I thought he was about the safest old bachelor in the parish, didn't you?"

Patty did not seem to know what to say, so she began to poke the fire.

"Well, are you not surprised?" Mr. Carlisle began again.

"I don't know that I am, dear," she said. "I am sure he is one of the *best* men in the parish, whether he's one of the safest bachelors or not. And I am only surprised he has not

married years ago. But it's getting long past tea-time; the kitchen clock must surely have stopped."

Thereupon Patty rose, and went to see after the tea; feeling, of course, exceedingly pleased that her old friend the doctor was settling down at his mature age, so comfortably, into the delights and blessings of matrimony. She could not for the life of her think who the happy lady was to be; but, on the other hand, as long as Mr. Leighton was satisfied, what did it matter to her? And moreover it was plain that he wished it, for a time at any rate, to be a secret. So she would ask no questions; why even think thoughts on a matter so purely personal to some one else? But for all that she quite forgot to put sugar into Mr. Carlisle's tea, and seemed strangely restless and dreamy.

"By the way," Mr. Carlisle said, "I am going round this evening to Oak Villa, and

I shall just walk on with the doctor to see his new house. Will you go with me, Patty?"

"No, thank you, dear," she said; "I've a good many little things to look after, and—besides—" and then she began to cry.

"Never mind, darling," the old man said, fondly stroking her hair, "what does it matter so long as he is happy; we shall see as much of him as ever. He is only going to be married; and I don't think we two shall ever get tired of one another, if all the friends we have in the world get married; shall we?"

"Oh, no, no," she said, kissing him; "it's all over now. It doesn't matter. I'm very thankful."

But somehow it did seem to matter; and obviously enough, thankfulness is capable of expressing itself in very various ways.

Anyhow, Mr. Carlisle set off to Oak Villa,

and went with Leighton to see his new house.

"But how sly you are," he said to the doctor; "you always seem so quiet, we were all conceited enough to think that you had not a friend in the world that you had not already introduced to us; and now you are on the verge of matrimony, and we can't for the life of us guess who the bride is to be."

"Can't you?" said Leighton; "I should have thought anybody might have guessed it, years ago. Can't Mrs. Forester guess?"

"Has not the faintest notion," said Mr. Carlisle. "Besides, going to be married does not seem quite so cheerful to her as it might seem to some people. She said she was very glad to hear of it though; and she seemed—why she seemed so uncommonly pleased about it, that, for the life of me, I shouldn't have known that she was not uncommonly sorry."

"God bless her!" said Leighton.

"Amen," said Mr. Carlisle.

"But who *is* the lady, doctor? Don't tell me unless you like. But old men, you see, are almost as inquisitive as young girls."

"I don't know," said the doctor.

"You don't?"

"No, I *really* don't—not exactly; I'll tell you next week." said Leighton.

For even yet he had not asked her, and though he had quite made up his mind that he would, he was as bashful as a girl. Even now, in spite of his experience of the folly of that mode of expressing his sentiments, he was almost making up his mind that he would once again *write* to her; but as he sat down with pen and paper, the old difficulties so came back upon him, he so clearly remembered that other letter, and what came of it, that he flung the innocent paper into the fire, and determined that next morning he would see Patty and tell her all that was in his heart, and

learn his fate. He surely could not be very doubtful about it when he had already taken a house and furnished it.

"So Mr. Carlisle has told you my secret, Mrs. Forester," he said; having at last, as he thought, sufficiently braced himself fairly to tell Patty that she was his first and only love, and that, in fact, she *must* marry him.

"Yes, indeed, he has, Mr. Leighton, and I am very glad to hear it, and I most sincerely wish you all the happiness you can yourself desire."

"Well," he said, "I wouldn't marry at all, if I didn't think so. If *you* didn't wish me to be happy, I am perfectly certain I never should be. But won't you go with me, and see my house? I want to make it very snug and comfortable; and you are sure to be able to suggest a score of improvements."

"Oh, yes," Patty said, "I shall be very pleased to be of any service. You are not

going to live very far away from us, Mr. Leighton, are you?".

"No," he said, "not far; about half-way between Oak Villa and Canonbury Square. I am so dependent upon my friends, Mrs. Forester, that if I had to part from them life itself in this world would not seem worth having. And as to marrying, it would be an ill-omened love that should empty my heart of every old affection. You told me so yourself, you remember, years ago, when *you* were leaving us for awhile, didn't you, Patty?"

"Well, I'm quite sure I've always thought so," she said, "whether I've said so or not."

"You won't be long getting ready, will you? I've a hard day's work before me, so I shall be glad to get this visit to the house over; and when once I've shown you the way there, you can go as often as you like, and

suggest any improvement you can possibly think of."

She was soon ready, and they were soon at the house; everything there was so pretty and cosy, and thoroughly good, there was nothing for her to suggest.

"Everything is beautiful, Mr. Leighton," Patty said; "nobody could improve this; the house needs nothing now but—those who are to live there."

"But you have not seen my own little room yet, Mrs. Forester; my library, study, sanctum, whatever you like to call it; and, by the way, I can show you there the portrait of my bride—my first, only love."

They were soon in the sanctum, and Leighton began to uncover a picture, an enlarged photograph, painted and perfected by a true artist.

"There she is! God bless her," cried Leighton, "my only love."

The picture was uncovered, and Patty looked with swimming eyes upon the portrait of——

HERSELF.

THE END.

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