

PART XX.

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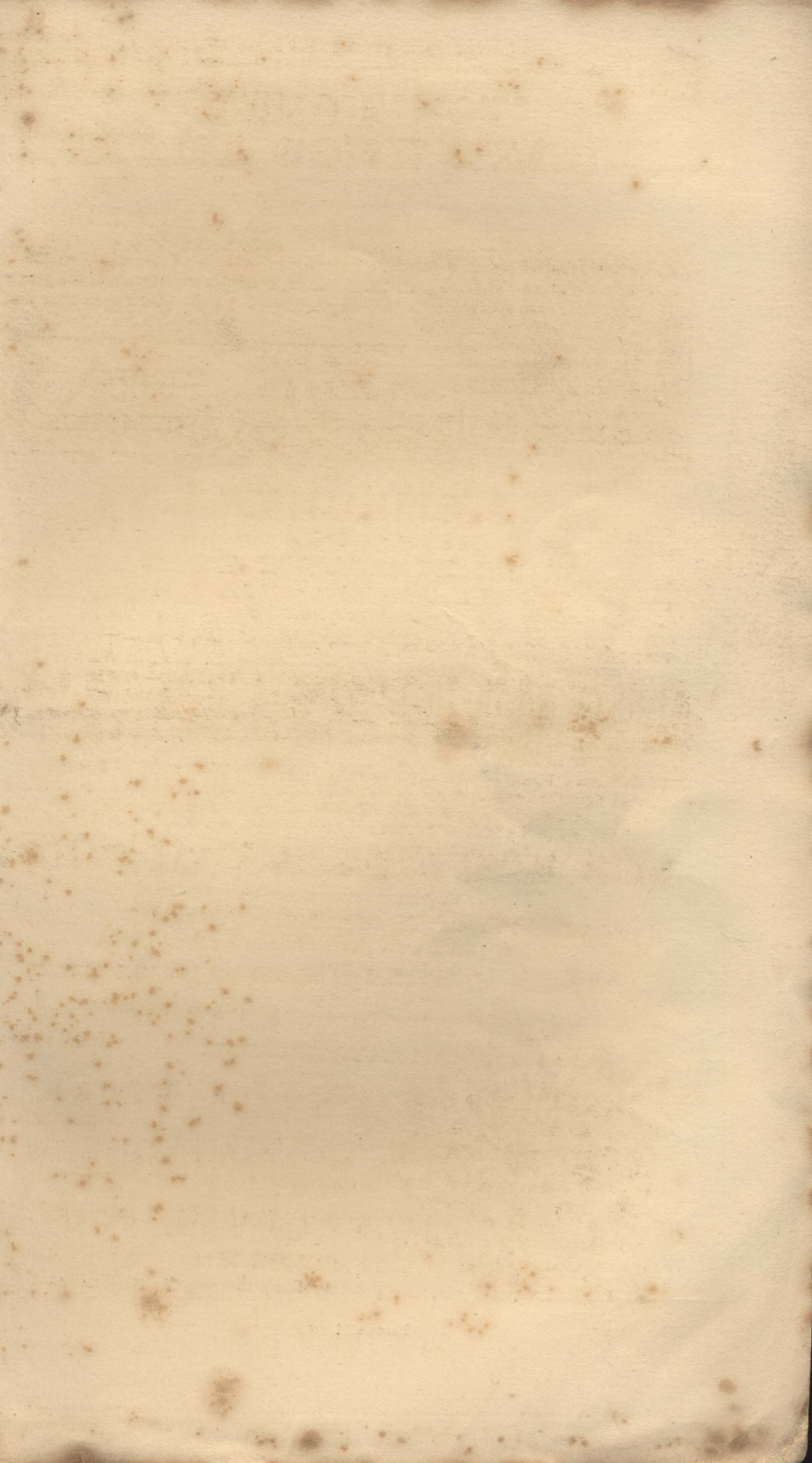
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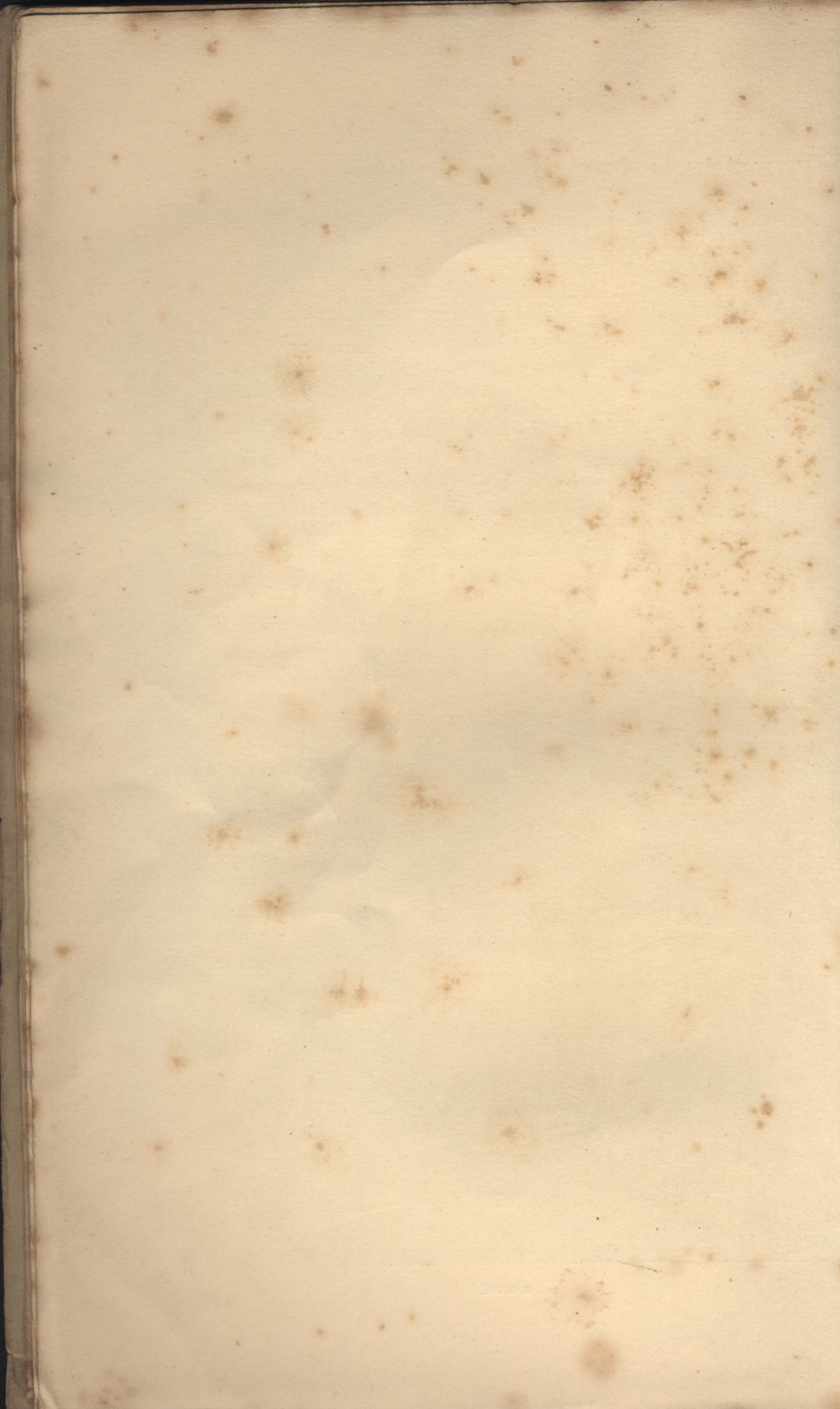




Farewell!



Farewell!



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### JOHN KENNEBY'S DOOM.

ON the evening but one after the trial was over Mr. Moulder entertained a few friends to supper at his apartments in Great St. Helen's, and it was generally understood that in doing so he intended to celebrate the triumph of Lady Mason. Through the whole affair he had been a strong partisan on her side, had expressed a very loud opinion in favour of Mr. Furnival, and had hoped that that scoundrel Dockwrath would get all that he deserved from the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. When the hour of Mr. Dockwrath's punishment had come he had been hardly contented, but the inadequacy of Kenneby's testimony had restored him to good humour, and the verdict had made him triumphant.

'Didn't I know it, old fellow?' he had said, slapping his friend Snengkeld on the back. When such a low scoundrel as Dockwrath is pitted against a handsome woman like Lady Mason he'll not find a jury in England to give a verdict in his favour.' Then he asked Snengkeld to come to his little supper; and Kantwise also he invited, though Kantwise had shown Dockwrath tendencies throughout the whole affair;—but Moulder was fond of Kantwise as a butt for his own sarcasm. Mrs. Smiley, too, was asked, as was natural, seeing that she was the betrothed bride of one of the heroes of the day; and Moulder, in the kindness of his heart, swore that he never was proud, and told Bridget Bolster that she would be welcome to take a share of what was going.

'Laws, M.,' said Mrs. Moulder, when she was told of this. 'A chambermaid from an inn! What will Mrs. Smiley say?'

'I aint going to trouble myself with what Mother Smiley may say or think about my friends. If she don't like it, she may do the other thing. What was she herself when you first knew her?'

'Yes, Moulder; but then money do make a difference, you know.'

Bridget Bolster, however, was invited, and she came in spite of the grandeur of Mrs. Smiley. Kenneby also of course was there, but he was not in a happy frame of mind. Since that wretched hour in which he had heard himself described by the judge as too stupid to be held of any account by the jury he had become a melancholy, misanthropic man. The treatment which he received from Mr. Furnival had been very grievous to him, but he had borne

with that, hoping that some word of eulogy from the judge would set him right in the public mind. But no such word had come, and poor John Kenneby felt that the cruel hard world was too much for him. He had been with his sister that morning, and words had dropped from him which made her fear that he would wish to postpone his marriage for another space of ten years or so. 'Brickfields!' he had said. 'What can such a one as I have to do with landed property? I am better as I am.'

Mrs. Smiley, however, did not at all seem to think so, and welcomed John Kenneby back from Alston very warmly in spite of the disgrace to which he had been subjected. It was nothing to her that the judge had called her future lord a fool; nor indeed was it anything to any one but himself. According to Moulder's views it was a matter of course that a witness should be abused. For what other purpose was he had into the court? But deep in the mind of poor Kenneby himself the injurious words lay festering. He had struggled hard to tell the truth, and in doing so had simply proved himself to be an ass. 'I aint fit to live with anybody else but myself,' he said to himself, as he walked down Bishopsgate Street.

At this time Mrs. Smiley was not yet there. Bridget had arrived, and had been seated in a chair at one corner of the fire. Mrs. Moulder occupied one end of a sofa opposite, leaving the place of honour at the other end for Mrs. Smiley. Moulder sat immediately in front of the fire in his own easy chair, and Snengkeld and Kantwise were on each side of him. They were of course discussing the trial when Mrs. Smiley was announced; and it was well that she made a diversion by her arrival, for words were beginning to run high.

'A jury of her countrymen has found her innocent,' Moulder had said with much heat; 'and any one who says she's guilty after that is a libeller and a coward, to my way of thinking. If a jury of her countrymen don't make a woman innocent, what does?'

'Of course she's innocent,' said Snengkeld; 'from the very moment the words was spoken by the foreman. If any newspaper was to say she wasn't she'd have her action.'

'That's all very well,' said Kantwise, looking up to the ceiling with his eyes nearly shut. 'But you'll see. What'll you bet me, Mr. Moulder, that Joseph Mason don't get the property?'

'Gammon!' answered Moulder.

'Well, it may be gammon; but you'll see.'

'Gentlemen, gentlemen!' said Mrs. Smiley, sailing into the room; 'upon my word one hears all you say ever so far down the street.'

'And I didn't care if they heard it right away to the Mansion House,' said Moulder. 'We aint talking treason, nor yet highway robbery.'

Then Mrs. Smiley was welcomed;—her bonnet was taken from her and her umbrella, and she was encouraged to spread herself out



over the sofa. 'Oh, Mrs. Bolster; the witness!' she said, when Mrs. Moulder went through some little ceremony of introduction. And from the tone of her voice it appeared that she was not quite satisfied that Mrs. Bolster should be there as a companion for herself.

'Yes, ma'am. I was the witness as had never signed but once,' said Bridget, getting up and curtsying. Then she sat down again, folding her hands one over the other on her lap.

'Oh, indeed!' said Mrs. Smiley. 'But where's the other witness, Mrs. Moulder? He's the one who is a deal more interesting to me. Ha, ha, ha! But as you all know it here, what's the good of not telling the truth? Ha, ha, ha!'

'John's here,' said Mrs. Moulder. 'Come, John, why don't you show yourself?'

'He's just alive, and that's about all you can say for him,' said Moulder.

'Why, what's there been to kill him?' said Mrs. Smiley. 'Well, John, I must say you're rather backward in coming forward, considering what there's been between us. You might have come and taken my shawl, I'm thinking.'

'Yes, I might,' said Kenneby gloomily. 'I hope I see you pretty well, Mrs. Smiley.'

'Pretty bobbish, thank you. Only I think it might have been Maria between friends like us.'

'He's sadly put about by this trial,' whispered Mrs. Moulder. 'You know he is so tender-hearted that he can't bear to be put upon like another.'

'But you didn't want her to be found guilty; did you, John?'

'That I'm sure he didn't,' said Moulder. 'Why it was the way he gave his evidence that brought her off.'

'It wasn't my wish to bring her off,' said Kenneby; 'nor was it my wish to make her guilty. All I wanted was to tell the truth and do my duty. But it was no use. I believe it never is any use.'

'I think you did very well,' said Moulder.

'I'm sure Lady Mason ought to be very much obliged to you,' said Kantwise.

'Nobody needn't care for what's said to them in a court,' said Snengkeld. 'I remember when once they wanted to make out that I'd taken a parcel of teas—'

'Stolen, you mean, sir,' suggested Mrs. Smiley.

'Yes; stolen. But it was only done by the opposite side in court, and I didn't think a halfporth of it. They knew where the teas was well enough.'

'Speaking for myself,' said Kenneby, 'I must say I don't like it.'

'But the paper as we signed,' said Bridget, 'wasn't the old gentleman's will,—no more than this is;' and she lifted up her apron. 'I'm rightly sure of that.'

Then again the battle raged hot and furious, and Moulder became angry with his guest, Bridget Bolster. Kantwise finding himself supported in his views by the principal witness at the trial took heart against the tyranny of Moulder and expressed his opinion, while Mrs. Smiley, with a woman's customary dislike to another woman, sneered ill-naturedly at the idea of Lady Mason's innocence. Poor Kenneby had been forced to take the middle seat on the sofa between his bride and sister; but it did not appear that the honour of his position had any effect in lessening his gloom or mitigating the severity of the judgment which had been passed on him.

'Wasn't the old gentleman's will!' said Moulder, turning on poor Bridget in his anger with a growl. 'But I say it was the old gentleman's will. You never dared say as much as that in court.'

'I wasn't asked,' said Bridget.

'You weren't asked! Yes, you was asked often enough.'

'I'll tell you what it is,' said Kantwise, 'Mrs. Bolster's right in what she says as sure as your name's Moulder.'

'Then as sure as my name's Moulder she's wrong. I suppose we're to think that a chap like you knows more about it than the jury! We all know who your friend is in the matter. I haven't forgot our dinner at Leeds, nor sha'n't in a hurry.'

'Now, John,' said Mrs. Smiley, 'nobody can know the truth of this so well as you do. You've been as close as wax, as was all right till the lady was out of her troubles. That's done and over, and let us hear among friends how the matter really was.' And then there was silence among them in order that his words might come forth freely.

'Come, my dear,' said Mrs. Smiley with a tone of encouraging love. 'There can't be any harm now; can there?'

'Out with it, John,' said Moulder. 'You're honest, anyways.'

'There aint no gammon about you,' said Snengkeld.

'Mr. Kenneby can speak if he likes, no doubt,' said Kantwise; 'though maybe it mayn't be very pleasant to him to do so after all that's come and gone.'

'There's nothing that's come and gone that need make our John hold his tongue,' said Mrs. Moulder. 'He mayn't be just as bright as some of those lawyers, but he's a deal more true-hearted.'

'But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we signed. I'm well assured of that,' said Bridget.

But Kenneby, though thus called upon by the united strength of the company to solve all their doubts, still remained silent. 'Come, lovey,' said Mrs. Smiley, putting forth her hand and giving his arm a tender squeeze.

'If you've anything to say to clear that woman's character,' said Moulder, 'you owe it to society to say it; because she is a woman, and because her enemies is villains.' And then again there was silence while they waited for him.

'I think it will go with him to his grave,' said Mrs. Smiley, very solemnly.

'I shouldn't wonder,' said Snengkeld.

'Then he must give up all idea of taking a wife,' said Moulder.

'He won't do that I'm sure,' said Mrs. Smiley.

'That he won't. Will you, John?' said his sister.

'There's no knowing what may happen to me in th's world,' said Kenneby, 'but sometimes I almost think I aint fit to live in it, along with anybody else.'

'You'll make him fit, won't you, my dear?' said Mrs. Moulder.

'I don't exactly know what to say about it,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'If Mr. Kenneby aint willing, I'm not the 'woman to bind him to his word, because I've had his promise over and over again, and could prove it by a number of witnesses before any jury in the land. I'm a independent woman as needn't be beholden to any man, and I should never think of damages. Smiley left me comfortable before all the world, and I don't know but what I'm a fool to think of changing. Anyways if Mr. Kenneby——'

'Come, John. Why don't you speak to her?' said Mrs. Moulder.

'And what am I to say?' said Kenneby, thrusting himself forth from between the ample folds of the two ladies' dresses. 'I'm a slighted man; one on whom the finger of scorn has been pointed. His lordship said that I was——stupid; and perhaps I am.'

'She don't think nothing of that, John.'

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Smiley.

'As long as a man can pay twenty shillings in the pound and a rifle over, what does it matter if all the judges in the land was to call him stupid?' said Snengkeld.

'Stupid is as stupid does,' said Kantwise.

'Stupid be d——,' said Moulder.

'Mr. Moulder, there's ladies present,' said Mrs. Smiley.

'Come, John, rouse yourself a bit,' said his sister. 'Nobody ere thinks the worse of you for what the judge said.'

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'And as it becomes me to speak, I'll say my mind. I'm accustomed to speak freely before friends, and as we are all friends here, why should I be ashamed?'

'For the matter of that nobody says you are,' said Moulder.

'And I don't mean, Mr. Moulder. Why should I? I can pay my way, and do what I like with my own, and has people to mind me when I speak, and needn't mind nobody else myself;—and that's more than everybody can say. Here's John Kenneby and I, is engaged as man and wife. He won't say as it's not so, I'll be bound.'

'No,' said Kenneby, 'I'm engaged I know.'

'When I accepted John Kenneby's hand and heart,—and well I remember the beauteous language in which he expressed his feelings, and always shall,—I told him, that I respected him as a

man that would do his duty by a woman, though perhaps he mightn't be so cute in the way of having much to say for himself as some others. "What's the good," said I, "of a man's talking, if so be he's ashamed to meet the baker at the end of the week?" So I listened to the vows he made me, and have considered that he and I was as good as one. Now that he's been put upon by them lawyers, I'm not the woman to turn my back upon him.'

'That you're not,' said Moulder.

'No I aint, Mr. Moulder, and so, John, there's my hand again, and you're free to take it if you like.' And so saying she put forth her hand almost into his lap.

'Take it, John!' said Mrs. Moulder. But poor Kenneby himself did not seem to be very quick in availing himself of the happiness offered to him. He did raise his right arm slightly; but then he hesitated, and allowed it to fall again between him and his sister.

'Come, John, you know you mean it,' said Mrs. Moulder. And then with both her hands she lifted his, and placed it bodily within the grasp of Mrs. Smiley's, which was still held forth to receive it.

'I know I'm engaged,' said Kenneby.

'There's no mistake about it,' said Moulder.

'There needn't be none,' said Mrs. Smiley, softly blushing; 'and I will say this of myself—as I have been tempted to give a promise, I'm not the woman to go back from my word. There's my hand, John; and I don't care though all the world hears me say so.' And then they sat hand in hand for some seconds, during which poor Kenneby was unable to escape from the grasp of his bride elect. One may say that all chance of final escape for him was now gone by.

'But he can't say as how it was the old gentlemen's will as we signed,' said Bridget, breaking the silence which ensued.

'And now, ladies and gentlemen,' said Kantwise, 'as Mrs. Bolster has come back to that matter, I'll tell you something that will surprise you. My friend Mr. Moulder here, who is as hospitable a gentleman as I know anywhere wouldn't just let me speak before.'

'That's gammon, Kantwise. I never hindered you from speaking.'

'How I do hate that word. If you knew my aversion, Mr. Moulder—'

'I can't pick my words for you, old fellow.'

'But what were you going to tell us, Mr. Kantwise?' said Mrs. Smiley.

'Something that will make all your hairs stand on end, I think. And then he paused and looked round upon them all. It was at this moment that Kenneby succeeded in getting his hand once more to himself. 'Something that will surprise you all, or I'm very much mistaken. Lady Mason has confessed her guilt.'

He had surprised them all. 'You don't say so,' exclaimed Mrs. Moulder.

'Confessed her guilt,' said Mrs. Smiley. 'But what guilt, Mr. Kantwise?'

'She forged the will,' said Kantwise.

'I knew that all along,' said Bridget Bolster.

'I'm d—— if I believe it,' said Moulder.

'You can do as you like about that,' said Kantwise; 'but she has. And I'll tell you what's more: she and young Mason have already left Orley Farm and given it all up into Joseph Mason's hands.'

'But didn't she get a verdict?' asked Snengkeld.

'Yes, she got a verdict. There's no doubt on earth about that.'

'Then it's my opinion she can't make herself guilty if she wished it; and as for the property, she can't give it up. The jury has found a verdict, and nobody can go beyond that. If anybody tries she'll have her action against 'em.' That was the law as laid down by Snengkeld.

'I don't believe a word of it,' said Moulder. 'Dockwrath has told him. I'll bet a hat that Kantwise got it from Dockwrath.'

It turned out that Kantwise had received his information from Dockwrath; but nevertheless, there was that in his manner, and in the nature of the story as it was told to them, that did produce belief. Moulder for a long time held out, but it became clear at last that even he was shaken: and now, even Kenneby acknowledged his conviction that the signature to the will was not his own.

'I know'd very well that I never did it twice,' said Bridget Bolster triumphantly, as she sat down to the supper table.

I am inclined to think, that upon the whole the company in Great St. Helen's became more happy as the conviction grew upon them that a great and mysterious crime had been committed, which had baffled two courts of law, and had at last thrust itself forth into the open daylight through the workings of the criminal's conscience. When Kantwise had completed his story, the time had come in which it behoved Mrs. Moulder to descend to the lower regions, and give some aid in preparation of the supper. During her absence the matter was discussed in every way, and on her return, when she was laden with good things, she found that all the party was contented except Moulder and her brother.

'It's a very terrible thing,' said Mrs. Smiley, later in the evening, as she sat with her steaming glass of rum and water before her. 'Very terrible indeed; aint it, John? I do wish now I'd gone down and see'd her, I do indeed. Don't you, Mrs. Moulder?'

'If all this is true I should like just to have had a peep at her.'

'At any rate we shall have pictures of her in all the papers,' said Mrs. Smiley.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE LAST OF THE LAWYERS.

‘I SHOULD have done my duty by you, Mr. Mason, which those men have not, and you would at this moment have been the owner of Orley Farm.’

It will easily be known that these words were spoken by Mr. Dockwrath, and that they were addressed to Joseph Mason. The two men were seated together in Mr. Mason’s lodgings at Alston, late on the morning after the verdict had been given, and Mr. Dockwrath was speaking out his mind with sufficient freedom. On the previous evening he had been content to put up with the misery of the unsuccessful man, and had not added any reproaches of his own. He also had been cowed by the verdict, and the two had been wretched and crestfallen together. But the attorney since that had slept upon the matter, and had bethought himself that he at any rate would make out his little bill. He could show that Mr. Mason had ruined their joint affairs by his adherence to those London attorneys. Had Mr. Mason listened to the advice of his new adviser all would have been well. So at least Dockwrath was prepared to declare, finding that by so doing he would best pave the way for his own important claim.

But Mr. Mason was not a man to be bullied with tame endurance. ‘The firm bears the highest name in the profession, sir,’ he said; ‘and I had just grounds for trusting them.’

‘And what has come of your just grounds, Mr. Mason? Where are you? That’s the question. I say that Round and Crook have thrown you over. They have been hand and glove with old Furnival through the whole transaction; and I’ll tell you what’s more, Mr. Mason. I told you how it would be from the beginning.’

‘I’ll move for a new trial.’

‘A new trial; and this a criminal prosecution! She’s free of you now for ever, and Orley Farm will belong to that son of hers till he chooses to sell it. It’s a pity; that’s all. I did my duty by you in a professional way, Mr. Mason; and you won’t put the loss on my shoulders.’

‘I’ve been robbed;—damnably robbed, that’s all that I know.’

‘There’s no mistake on earth about that, Mr. Mason; you have been robbed; and the worst of it is, the costs will be so heavy! You’ll be going down to Yorkshire soon I suppose, sir.’

‘I don’t know where I shall go?’ said the squire of Groby, not content to be cross-questioned by the attorney from Hamworth.

‘Because it’s as well, I suppose, that we should settle something about the costs before you leave. I don’t want to press for my money exactly now, but I shall be glad to know when I’m to get it.’

‘If you have any claim on me, Mr. Dockwrath, you can send it to Mr. Round.’

‘If I have any claim! What do you mean by that, sir? And I shall send nothing in to Mr. Round. I have had quite enough of Mr. Round already. I told you from the beginning, Mr. Mason, that I would have nothing to do with this affair as connected with Mr. Round. I have devoted myself entirely to this matter since you were pleased to engage my services at Groby Park. It is not by my fault that you have failed. I think, Mr. Mason, you will do me the justice to acknowledge that.’ And then Dockwrath was silent for a moment, as though waiting for an answer.

‘I have nothing to say upon the subject, Mr. Dockwrath,’ said Mason.

‘But, by heaven, something must be said. That won’t do at all, Mr. Mason. I presume you do not think that I have been working like a slave for the last four months for nothing.’

Mr. Mason was in truth an honest man, and did not wish that any one should work on his account for nothing;—much less did he wish that such a one as Dockwrath should do so. But then, on the other side, in his present frame of mind he was by no means willing to yield anything to any one. ‘I neither deny nor allow your claim, Mr. Dockwrath,’ said he. ‘But I shall pay nothing except through my regular lawyers. You can send your account to me if you please, but I shall send it on to Mr. Round without looking at it.’

‘Oh, that’s to be the way, is it? That’s your gratitude. Very well, Mr. Mason; I shall now know what to do. And I think you’ll find——’

Here Mr. Dockwrath was interrupted by the lodging-house-servant, who brought in a note for Mr. Mason. It was from Mr. Furnival, and the girl who delivered it said that the gentleman’s messenger was waiting for an answer.

‘SIR,’ said the note,

‘A communication has been made to me this morning on the part of your brother, Mr. Lucius Mason, which may make it desirable that I should have an interview with you. If not inconvenient to you, I would ask you to meet me to-morrow morning at eleven o’clock at the chambers of your own lawyer, Mr. Round, in Bedford Row. I have already seen Mr. Round, and find that he can meet us,

‘I am, sir,

‘Your very obedient servant,

‘THOMAS FURNIVAL.

‘J. Mason, Esq., J.P.  
(of Groby Park).’

Mr. Furnival when he wrote this note had already been over to Orley Farm, and had seen Lucius Mason. He had been at the farm almost before daylight, and had come away with the assured conviction that the property must be abandoned by his client.

'We need not talk about it, Mr. Furnival,' Lucius had said. 'It must be so.'

'You have discussed the matter with your mother?'

'No discussion is necessary, but she is quite aware of my intention. She is prepared to leave the place—for ever.'

'But the income——'

'Belongs to my brother Joseph. Mr. Furnival, I think you may understand that the matter is one in which it is necessary that I should act, but as to which I trust I may not have to say many words. If you cannot arrange this for me, I must go to Mr. Round.'

Of course Mr. Furnival did understand it all. His client had been acquitted, and he had triumphed; but he had known for many a long day that the estate did belong of right to Mr. Mason of Groby; and though he had not suspected that Lucius would have been so told, he could not be surprised at the result of such telling. It was clear to him that Lady Mason had confessed, and that restitution would therefore be made.

'I will do your bidding,' said he.

'And, Mr. Furnival,—if it be possible, spare my mother.' Then the meeting was over, and Mr. Furnival returning to Hamworth wrote his note to Mr. Joseph Mason.

Mr. Dockwrath had been interrupted by the messenger in the middle of his threat, but he caught the name of Furnival as the note was delivered. Then he watched Mr. Mason as he read it and read it again.

'If you please, sir, I was to wait for an answer,' said the girl.

Mr. Mason did not know what answer it would behove him to give. He felt that he was among Philistines while dealing with all these lawyers, and yet he was at a loss in what way to reply to one without leaning upon another. 'Look at that,' he said, sulkily handing the note to Dockwrath.

'You must see Mr. Furnival, by all means,' said Dockwrath. 'But——'

'But what?'

'In your place I should not see him in the presence of Mr. Round,—unless I was attended by an adviser on whom I could rely.' Mr. Mason, having given a few moments' consideration to the matter, sat himself down and wrote a line to Mr. Furnival, saying that he would be in Bedford Row at the appointed time.

'I think you are quite right,' said Dockwrath.

'But I shall go alone,' said Mr. Mason.

'Oh, very well; you will of course judge for yourself. I cannot



say what may be the nature of the communication to be made; but if it be anything touching the property, you will no doubt jeopardize your own interests by your imprudence.'

'Good morning, Mr. Dockwrath,' said Mr. Mason.

'Oh, very well. Good morning, sir. You shall hear from me very shortly, Mr. Mason; and I must say that, considering everything, I do not know that I ever came across a gentleman who behaved himself worse in a peculiar position than you have done in yours.' And so they parted.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on the following day Mr. Mason was in Bedford Row. 'Mr. Furnival is with Mr. Round,' said the clerk, 'and will see you in two minutes.' Then he was shown into the dingy office waiting-room, where he sat with his hat in his hand, for rather more than two minutes.

At that moment Mr. Round was describing to Mr. Furnival the manner in which he had been visited some weeks since by Sir Peregrine Orme. 'Of course, Mr. Furnival, I knew which way the wind blew when I heard that.'

'She must have told him everything.'

'No doubt, no doubt. At any rate he knew it all.'

'And what did you say to him?'

'I promised to hold my tongue;—and I kept my promise. Mat knows nothing about it to this day.'

The whole history thus became gradually clear to Mr. Furnival's mind, and he could understand in what manner that marriage had been avoided. Mr. Round also understood it, and the two lawyers confessed together, that though the woman had deserved the punishment which had come upon her, her character was one which might have graced a better destiny. 'And now, I suppose, my fortunate client may come in,' said Mr. Round. Whereupon the fortunate client was released from his captivity, and brought into the sitting-room of the senior partner.

'Mr. Mason, Mr. Furnival,' said the attorney, as soon as he had shaken hands with his client. 'You know each other very well by name, gentlemen.'

Mr. Mason was very stiff in his bearing and demeanour, but remarked that he had heard of Mr. Furnival before.

'All the world has heard of him,' said Mr. Round. 'He hasn't hid his light under a bushel.' Whereupon Mr. Mason bowed, not quite understanding what was said to him.

'Mr. Mason,' began the barrister, 'I have a communication to make to you, very singular in its nature, and of great importance. It is one which I believe you will regard as being of considerable importance to yourself, and which is of still higher moment to my—my friend, Lady Mason.'

'Lady Mason, sir—' began the other; but Mr. Furnival stopped him.

‘Allow me to interrupt you, Mr. Mason. I think it will be better that you should hear me before you commit yourself to any expression as to your relative.’

‘She is no relative of mine.’

‘But her son is. However,—if you will allow me, I will go on. Having this communication to make, I thought it expedient for your own sake that it should be done in the presence of your own legal adviser and friend.’

‘Umph!’ grunted the disappointed litigant.

‘I have already explained to Mr. Round that which I am about to explain to you, and he was good enough to express himself as satisfied with the step which I am taking.’

‘Quite so, Mr. Mason. Mr. Furnival is behaving, and I believe has behaved throughout, in a manner becoming the very high position which he holds in his profession.’

‘I suppose he has done his best on his side,’ said Mason.

‘Undoubtedly I have,—as I should have done on yours, had it so chanced that I had been honoured by holding a brief from your attorneys. But the communication which I am going to make now I make not as a lawyer but as a friend. Mr. Mason, my client Lady Mason, and her son Lucius Mason, are prepared to make over to you the full possession of the estate which they have held under the name of Orley Farm.’

The tidings, as so given, were far from conveying to the sense of the hearer the full information which they bore. He heard the words, and at the moment conceived that Orley Farm was intended to come into his hands by some process to which it was thought desirable that he should be brought to agree. He was to be induced to buy it, or to be bought over from further opposition by some concession of an indefinitely future title. But that the estate was to become his at once, without purchase, and by the mere free will of his hated relatives, was an idea that he did not realize.

‘Mr. Furnival,’ he said, ‘what future steps I shall take I do not yet know. That I have been robbed of my property I am as firmly convinced now as ever. But I tell you fairly, and I tell Mr. Round so too, that I will have no dealings with that woman.’

‘Your father’s widow, sir,’ said Mr. Furnival, ‘is an unhappy lady, who is now doing her best to atone for the only fault of which I believe her to have been guilty. If you were not unreasonable as well as angry, you would understand that the proposition which I am now making to you is one which should force you to forgive any injury which she may hitherto have done to you. Your half-brother Lucius Mason has instructed me to make over to you the possession of Orley Farm.’ These last words Mr. Furnival uttered very slowly, fixing his keen grey eyes full upon

the face of Joseph Mason as he did so, and then turning round to the attorney he said, 'I presume your client will understand me now.'

'The estate is yours, Mr. Mason,' said Round. 'You have nothing to do but to take possession of it.'

'What do you mean?' said Mason, turning round upon Furnival.

'Exactly what I say. Your half brother Lucius surrenders to you the estate.'

'Without payment?'

'Yes; without payment. On his doing so you will of course absolve him from all liability on account of the proceeds of the property while in his hands.'

'That will be a matter of course,' said Mr. Round.

'Then she has robbed me,' said Mason, jumping up to his feet.

'By ——, the will was forged after all.'

'Mr. Mason,' said Mr. Round, 'if you have a spark of generosity in you, you will accept the offer made to you without asking any question. By no such questioning can you do yourself any good,—nor can you do that poor lady any harm.'

'I knew it was so,' he said loudly, and as he spoke he twice walked the length of the room. 'I knew it was so;—twenty years ago I said the same. She forged the will. I ask you, as my lawyer, Mr. Round,—did she not forge the will herself?'

'I shall answer no such question, Mr. Mason.'

'Then by heavens I'll expose you. If I spend the whole value of the estate in doing it I'll expose you, and have her punished yet. The slippery villain! For twenty years she has robbed me.'

'Mr. Mason, you are forgetting yourself in your passion,' said Mr. Furnival. 'What you have to look for now is the recovery of the property.' But here Mr. Furnival showed that he had not made himself master of Joseph Mason's character.

'No,' shouted the angry man;—'no, by heaven. What I have first to look to is her punishment, and that of those who have assisted her. I knew she had done it,—and Dockwraith knew it. Had I trusted him, she would now have been in gaol.'

Mr. Furnival and Mr. Round were both desirous of having the matter quietly arranged, and with this view were willing to put up with much. The man had been ill used. When he declared for the fortieth time that he had been robbed for twenty years, they could not deny it. When with horrid oaths he swore that that will had been a forgery, they could not contradict him. When he reviled the laws of his country, which had done so much to facilitate the escape of a criminal, they had no arguments to prove that he was wrong. They bore with him in his rage, hoping that a sense of his own self-interest might induce him to listen to reason. But it was

all in vain. The property was sweet, but that sweetness was tasteless when compared to the sweetness of revenge.

‘Nothing shall make me tamper with justice;—nothing,’ said he.

‘But even if it were as you say, you cannot do anything to her,’ said Round.

‘I’ll try,’ said Mason. ‘You have been my attorney, and what you know in the matter you are bound to tell. And I’ll make you tell, sir.’

‘Upon my word,’ said Round, ‘this is beyond bearing. Mr. Mason, I must trouble you to walk out of my office.’ And then he rang the bell. ‘Tell Mr. Mat I want to see him.’ But before that younger partner had joined his father Joseph Mason had gone. ‘Mat,’ said the old man, ‘I don’t interfere with you in many things, but on this I must insist. As long as my name is in the firm Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby shall not be among our customers.’

‘The man’s a fool,’ said Mr. Furnival. ‘The end of all that will be that two years will go by before he gets his property; and, in the meantime, the house and all about it will go to ruin.’

In these days there was a delightful family concord between Mr. Furnival and his wife, and perhaps we may be allowed to hope that the peace was permanent. Martha Biggs had not been in Harley Street since we last saw her there, and was now walking round Red Lion Square by the hour with some kindred spirit, complaining bitterly of the return which had been made for her friendship. ‘What I endured, and what I was prepared to endure for that woman, no breathing creature can ever know,’ said Martha Biggs, to that other Martha; ‘and now——’

‘I suppose the fact is he don’t like to see you there,’ said the other.

‘And is that a reason?’ said our Martha. ‘Had I been in her place I would not have put my foot in his house again till I was assured that my friend should be as welcome there as myself. But then, perhaps, my ideas of friendship may be called romantic.’

But though there were heart-burnings and war in Red Lion Square, there was sweet peace in Harley Street. Mrs. Furnival had learned that beyond all doubt Lady Mason was an unfortunate woman on whose behalf her husband was using his best energies as a lawyer; and though rumours had begun to reach her that were very injurious to the lady’s character, she did not on that account feel animosity against her. Had Lady Mason been guilty of all the sins in the calendar except one, Mrs. Furnival could find it within her heart to forgive her.

But Sophia was now more interested about Lady Mason than was her mother, and during those days of the trial was much more eager to learn the news as it became known. She had said nothing to her mother about Lucius, nor had she said anything as to Augustus

Staveley. Miss Furnival was a lady who on such subjects did not want the assistance of a mother's counsel. Then, early on the morning that followed the trial, they heard the verdict and knew that Lady Mason was free.

'I am so glad,' said Mrs. Furnival; 'and I am sure it was your papa's doing.'

'But we will hope that she was really innocent,' said Sophia.

'Oh, yes; of course; and so I suppose she was. I am sure I hope so. But, nevertheless, we all know that it was going very much against her.'

'I believe papa never thought she was guilty for a moment.'

'I don't know, my dear; your papa never talks of the clients for whom he is engaged. But what a thing it is for Lucius! He would have lost every acre of the property.'

'Yes; it's a great thing for him, certainly.' And then she began to consider whether the standing held by Lucius Mason in the world was not even yet somewhat precarious.

It was on the same day—in the evening—that she received her lover's letter. She was alone when she read it, and she made herself quite master of its contents before she sat herself to think in what way it would be expedient that she should act. 'I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law my title to Orley Farm.' Why should he be so bound, unless—? And then she also came to that conclusion which Mr. Round had reached, and which Joseph Mason had reached, when they heard that the property was to be given up. 'Yes, Sophia, I am a beggar,' the letter went on to say. She was very sorry, deeply sorry;—so, at least, she said to herself. As she sat there alone, she took out her handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes. Then, having restored it to her pocket, after moderate use, she refolded her letter, and put that into the same receptacle.

'Papa,' said she, that evening, 'what will Mr. Lucius Mason do now? will he remain at Orley Farm?'

'No, my dear. He will leave Orley Farm, and, I think, will go abroad with his mother.'

'And who will have Orley Farm?'

'His brother Joseph, I believe.'

'And what will Lucius have?'

'I cannot say. I do not know that he will have anything. His mother has an income of her own, and he, I suppose, will go into some profession.'

'Oh, indeed. Is not that very sad for him, poor fellow?' In answer to which her father made no remark.

That night, in her own room, she answered her lover's letter, and her answer was as follows:—

Harley Street, March, 18—.

‘ MY DEAR MR. MASON,

‘ I need hardly tell you that I was grieved to the heart by the tidings conveyed in your letter. I will not ask you for that secret which you withhold from me, feeling that I have no title to inquire into it; nor will I attempt to guess at the cause which induces you to give up to your brother the property which you were always taught to regard as your own. That you are actuated by noble motives I am sure; and you may be sure of this, that I shall respect you quite as highly in your adversity as I have ever done in your prosperity. That you will make your way in the world, I shall never doubt; and it may be that the labour which you will now encounter will raise you to higher standing than any you could have achieved, had the property remained in your possession.

‘ I think you are right in saying, with reference to our mutual regard for each other, that neither should be held as having any claim upon the other. Under present circumstances, any such claim would be very silly. Nothing would hamper you in your future career so much as a long marriage engagement; and for myself, I am aware that the sorrow and solicitude thence arising would be more than I could support. Apart from this, also, I feel certain that I should never obtain my father’s sanction for such an engagement, nor could I make it, unless he sanctioned it. I feel so satisfied that you will see the truth of this, that I need not trouble you, and harass my own heart by pursuing the subject any further.

‘ My feelings of friendship for you—of affectionate friendship—will be as true as ever. I shall look to your future career with great hope, and shall hear of your success with the utmost satisfaction. And I trust that the time may come, at no very distant date, when we may all welcome your return to London, and show you that our regard for you has never been diminished.

‘ May God bless and preserve you in the trials which are before you, and carry you through them with honour and safety. Wherever you may be I shall watch for tidings of you with anxiety, and always hear them with gratification. I need hardly bid you remember that you have no more affectionate friend

‘ Than yours always most sincerely,

‘ SOPHIA FURNIVAL.

‘ P.S.—I believe that a meeting between us at the present moment would only cause pain to both of us. It might drive you to speak of things which should be wrapped in silence. At any rate, I am sure that you will not press it on me.’

Lucius, when he received this letter, was living with his mother in lodgings near Finsbury Circus, and the letter had been redirected from Hamworth to a post-office in that neighbourhood. It was his

ention to take his mother with him to a small town on one of the rivers that feed the Rhine, and there remain hidden till he could find some means by which he might earn his bread. He was sitting with her in the evening, with two dull tallow candles on the table between them, when his messenger brought the letter to him. He read it in silence very deliberately, then crushed it in his hand, and threw it from him with violence into the fire.

'I hope there is nothing further to distress you, Lucius,' said his mother, looking up into his face as though she were imploring his confidence.

'No, nothing; nothing that matters. It is an affair quite private to myself.'

Sir Peregrine had spoken with great truth when he declared that Lucius Mason was able to bear adversity. This last blow had now come upon him, but he made no wailings as to his misery, nor did he say a word further on the subject. His mother watched the paper as the flame caught it and reduced it to an ash; but she asked no further question. She knew that her position with him did not permit of her asking, or even hoping, for his confidence.

'I had no right to expect it would be otherwise,' he said to himself. But even to himself he spoke no word of reproach against Miss Furnival. He had realized the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and had made up his mind to bear their result.

As for Miss Furnival, we may as well declare here that she did not become Mrs. Staveley. Our old friend Augustus conceived that he had received a sufficient answer on the occasion of his last visit to Harley Street, and did not repeat it immediately. Such little scenes as that which took place there had not been uncommon in his life; and when in after months he looked back upon the affair, he counted it up as one of those miraculous escapes which had marked his career.

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## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### FAREWELL.

THAT letter you got this morning, my dear, was it not from Lady Mason?

'It was from Lady Mason, father; they go on Thursday.'

'On Thursday; so soon as that.' And then Sir Peregrine, who had asked the question, remained silent for a while. The letter, according to the family custom, had been handed to Mrs. Orme over the breakfast-table; but he had made no remark respecting it till they were alone together and free from the servants. It had been a farewell letter, full of love and gratitude, and full also of repentance.

Lady Mason had now been for three weeks in London, and once during that time Mrs. Orme had gone up to visit her. She had then remained with her friend for hours, greatly to Lady Mason's comfort, and now this letter had come, bringing a last adieu.

'You may read it, sir, if you like,' said Mrs. Orme, handing him the letter. It was evident, by his face, that he was gratified by the privilege; and he read it, not once only, but over and over again. As he did so, he placed himself in the shade, and sat with his back to Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless she could see that from time to time he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, and gradually raised his handkerchief to his face.

'Thank you, dearest,' he said, as he gave the letter back to her.

'I think that we may forgive her now, even all that she has done,' said Mrs. Orme.

'Yes—yes—yes,' he answered. 'For myself, I forgave her from the first.'

'I know you did. But as regards the property,—it has been given up now.' And then again they were silent.

'Edith,' he said, after a while, 'I have forgiven her altogether. To me she is the same as though she had never done that deed. Are we not all sinners?'

'Surely, father.'

'And can I say because she did one startling thing that the total of her sin is greater than mine? Was I ever tempted as she was tempted? Was my youth made dangerous for me as was hers? And then she did nothing for herself; she did it all for another. We may think of that now.'

'I have thought of it always.'

'It did not make the sin the less; but among her fellow-mortals——' And then he stopped himself, wanting words to express his meaning. The sin, till it was repented, was damning; but now that it was repented, he could almost love the sinner for the sin.

'Edith,' he said, again. And he looked at her so wishfully! She knew well what was the working of his heart, and she knew also that she did not dare to encourage him.

'I trust,' said Mrs. Orme, 'that she will bear her present lot for a few years; and then, perhaps——'

'Ah! then I shall be in my grave. A few months will do that.'

'Oh, sir!'

'Why should I not save her from such a life as that?'

'From that which she had most to fear she has been saved.'

'Had she not so chosen it herself, she could now have demanded from me a home. Why should I not give it to her now?'

'A home here, sir?'

'Yes; why not? But I know what you would say. It would be wrong,—to you and Parry.'



'It would be wrong to yourself, sir. Think of it, father. It is the fact that she did that thing. We may forgive her, but others will not do so on that account. It would not be right that you should bring her here.'

Sir Peregrine knew that it would not be right. Though he was old, and weak in body, and infirm in purpose, his judgment had not altogether left him. He was well aware that he would offend all social laws if he were to do that which he contemplated, and ask the world around him to respect as Lady Orme—as his wife, the woman who had so deeply disgraced herself. But yet he could hardly bring himself to confess that it was impossible. He was as a child who knows that a coveted treasure is beyond his reach, but still covets it, still longs for it, hoping against hope that it may yet be his own. It seemed to him that he might yet regain his old vitality if he could wind his arm once more about her waist, and press her to his side, and call her his own. It would be so sweet to forgive her; to make her sure that she was absolutely forgiven; to teach her that there was one at least who would not bring up against her her past sin, even in his memory. As for his grandson, the property should be abandoned to him altogether. 'Twas thus he argued with himself; but yet, as he argued, he knew that it could not be so.

'I was harsh to her when she told me,' he said, after another pause—'cruelly harsh.'

'She does not think so.'

'No. If I had spurned her from me with my foot, she would not have thought so. She had condemned herself, and therefore I should have spared her.'

'But you did spare her. I am sure she feels that from the first to the last your conduct to her has been more than kind.'

'And I owed her more than kindness, for I loved her;—yes, I loved her, and I do love her. Though I am a feeble old man, tottering to my grave, yet I love her—love her as that boy loves the fair girl for whom he longs. He will overcome it, and forget it, and some other one as fair will take her place. But for me it is all over.'

What could she say to him? In truth, it was all over,—such love at least as that of which his old heart was dreaming in its dotage. There is no Medea's caldron from which our limbs can come out young and fresh; and it were well that the heart should grow old as does the body.

'It is not all over while we are with you,' she said, caressing him. But she knew that what she said was a subterfuge.

'Yes, yes; I have you, dearest,' he answered. But he also knew that that pretence at comfort was false and hollow.

'And she starts on Thursday,' he said; 'on next Thursday.'

‘Yes, on Thursday. It will be much better for her to be away from London. While she is there she never ventures even into the street.’

‘Edith, I shall see her before she goes.’

‘Will that be wise, sir?’

‘Perhaps not. It may be foolish,—very foolish; but still I shall see her. I think you forget, Edith, that I have never yet bidden her farewell. I have not spoken to her since that day when she behaved so generously.’

‘I do not think that she expects it, father.’

‘No; she expects nothing for herself. Had it been in her nature to expect such a visit, I should not have been anxious to make it. I will go to-morrow. She is always at home you say?’

‘Yes, she is always at home.’

‘And, Lucius—’

‘You will not find him there in the daytime.’

‘I shall go to-morrow, dear. You need not tell Peregrine.’

Mrs. Orme still thought that he was wrong, but she had nothing further to say. She could not hinder his going, and therefore, with his permission she wrote a line to Lady Mason, telling her of his purpose. And then, with all the care in her power, and with infinite softness of manner, she warned him against the danger which she so much feared. What might be the result, if, overcome by tenderness, he should again ask Lady Mason to become his wife? Mrs. Orme firmly believed that Lady Mason would again refuse; but, nevertheless, there would be danger.

‘No,’ said he, ‘I will not do that. When I have said so you may accept my word.’ Then she hastened to apologize to him, but he assured her with a kiss that he was in nowise angry with her.

He held by his purpose, and on the following day he went up to London. There was nothing said on the matter at breakfast, nor did she make any further endeavour to dissuade him. He was infirm, but still she knew that the actual fatigue would not be of a nature to injure him. Indeed her fear respecting him was rather in regard to his staying at home than to his going abroad. It would have been well for him could he have been induced to think himself fit for more active movement.

Lady Mason was alone when he reached the dingy little room near Finsbury Circus, and received him standing. She was the first to speak, and this she did before she had even touched his hand. She stood to meet him, with her eyes turned to the ground, and her hands tightly folded together before her. ‘Sir Peregrine,’ she said, ‘I did not expect from you this mark of your—kindness.’

‘Of my esteem and affection, Lady Mason,’ he said. ‘We have known each other too well to allow of our parting without a word. I am an old man, and it will probably be for ever.’

Then she gave him her hand, and gradually lifted her eyes to his face. 'Yes,' she said; 'it will be for ever. There will be no coming back for me.'

'Nay, nay; we will not say that. That's as may be hereafter. But it will not be at once. It had better not be quite at once. Edith tells me that you go on Thursday.'

'Yes, sir; we go on Thursday.'

She had still allowed her hand to remain in his, but now she withdrew it, and asked him to sit down. 'Lucius is not here,' she said. 'He never remains at home after breakfast. He has much to settle as to our journey; and then he has lawyers to see.'

Sir Peregrine had not at all wished to see Lucius Mason, but he did not say so. 'You will give him my regards,' he said, 'and tell him that I trust that he may prosper.'

'Thank you. I will do so. It is very kind of you to think of him.'

'I have always thought highly of him as an excellent young man.'

'And he is excellent. Where is there any one who could suffer without a word as he suffers? No complaint ever comes from him; and yet—I have ruined him.'

'No, no. He has his youth, his intellect, and his education. If such a one as he cannot earn his bread in the world—ay, and more than his bread—who can do so? Nothing ruins a young man but ignorance, idleness, and depravity.'

'Nothing;—unless those of whom he should be proud disgrace him before the eyes of the world. Sir Peregrine, I sometimes wonder at my own calmness. I wonder that I can live. But, believe me, that never for a moment do I forget what I have done. I would have poured out for him my blood like water, if it would have served him; but instead of that I have given him cause to curse me till the day of his death. Though I still live, and eat, and sleep, I think of that always. The remembrance is never away from me. They bid those who repent put on sackcloth, and cover themselves with ashes. That is my sackcloth, and it is very sore. Those thoughts are ashes to me, and they are very bitter between my teeth.'

He did not know with what words to comfort her. It all was as she said, and he could not bid her even try to free herself from that sackcloth and from those ashes. It must be so. Were it not so with her, she would not have been in any degree worthy of that love which he felt for her. 'God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,' he said.

'Yes,' she said, 'for the shorn lamb—' And then she was silent again. But could that bitter, biting wind be tempered for the she-wolf who, in the dead of night, had broken into the fold, and with

prowling steps and cunning clutch had stolen the fodder from the sheep? That was the question as it presented itself to her; but she sat silent, and refrained from putting it into words. She sat silent, but he read her heart. 'For the shorn lamb—' she had said, and he had known her thoughts, as they followed, quick, one upon another, through her mind. 'Mary,' he said, seating himself now close beside her on the sofa, 'if his heart be as true to you as mine, he will never remember these things against you.'

'It is my memory, not his, that is my punishment,' she said.

Why could he not take her home with him, and comfort her, and heal that festering wound, and stop that ever-running gush of her heart's blood? But he could not. He had pledged his word and pawned his honour. All the comfort that could be his to bestow must be given in those few minutes that remained to him in that room. And it must be given, too, without falsehood. He could not bring himself to tell her that the sackcloth need not be sore to her poor lacerated body, nor the ashes bitter between her teeth. He could not tell her that the cup of which it was hers to drink might yet be pleasant to the taste, and cool to the lips! What could he tell her? Of the only source of true comfort others, he knew, had spoken,—others who had not spoken in vain. He could not now take up that matter, and press it on her with available strength. For him there was but one thing to say. He had forgiven her; he still loved her; he would have cherished her in his bosom had it been possible. He was a weak, old, foolish man; and there was nothing of which he could speak but of his own heart.

'Mary,' he said, again taking her hand, 'I wish—I wish that I could comfort you.'

'And yet on you also have I brought trouble, and misery—and—all but disgrace!'

'No, my love, no; neither misery nor disgrace,—except this misery, that I shall be no longer near to you. Yes, I will tell you all now. Were I alone in the world, I would still beg you to go back with me.'

'It cannot be; it could not possibly be so.'

'No; for I am not alone. She who loves you so well, has told me so. It must not be. But that is the source of my misery. I have learned to love you too well, and do not know how to part with you. If this had not been so, I would have done all that an old man might to comfort you.'

'But it has been so,' she said. 'I cannot wash out the past. Knowing what I did of myself, Sir Peregrine, I should never have put my foot over your threshold.'

'I wish I might hear its step again upon my floors. I wish I might hear that light step once again.'

'Never, Sir Peregrine. No one again ever shall rejoice to hear

either my step or my voice, or to see my form, or to grasp my hand. The world is over for me, and may God soon grant me relief from my sorrow. But to you—in return for your goodness—'

'For my love.'

'In return for your love, what am I to say? I could have loved you with all my heart had it been so permitted. Nay, I did do so. Had that dream been carried out, I should not have sworn falsely when I gave you my hand. I bade her tell you so, from me, when I parted with her.'

'She did tell me.'

'I have known but little love. He—Sir Joseph—was my master rather than my husband. He was a good master, and I served him truly—except in that one thing. But I never loved him. But I am wrong to talk of this, and I will not talk of it longer. May God bless you, Sir Peregrine! It will be well for both of us now that you should leave me.'

'May God bless you, Mary, and preserve you, and give back to you the comforts of a quiet spirit, and a heart at rest! Till you hear that I am under the ground you will know that there is one living who loves you well.' Then he took her in his arms, twice kissed her on the forehead, and left the room without further speech on either side.

Lady Mason, as soon as she was alone, sat herself down, and her thoughts ran back over the whole course of her life. Early in her days, when the world was yet beginning to her, she had done one evil deed, and from that time up to those days of her trial she had been the victim of one incessant struggle to appear before the world as though that deed had not been done,—to appear innocent of it before the world, but, beyond all things, innocent of it before her son. For twenty years she had striven with a labour that had been all but unendurable; and now she had failed, and every one knew her for what she was. Such had been her life; and then she thought of the life which might have been hers. In her earlier days she had known what it was to be poor, and had seen and heard those battles after money which harden our hearts, and quench the poetry of our natures. But it had not been altogether so with her. Had things gone differently with her it might afterwards have been said that she had gone through the fire unscathed. But the beast had set his foot upon her, and when the temptation came it was too much for her. Not for herself would she have sinned, or have robbed that old man, who had been to her a kind master. But when a child was born to her, her eyes were blind, and she could not see that wealth ill gotten for her child would be as sure a curse as wealth ill gotten for herself. She remembered Rebekah, and with the cunning of a second Rebekah she filched a world's blessing for her baby. Now she thought of all this as pictures of

that life which might have been hers passed before her mind's eye.

And they were pleasant pictures, had they not burnt into her very soul as she looked at them. How sweet had been that drawing-room at the Cleeve, as she sat there in luxurious quiet with her new friend! How sweet had been that friendship with a woman pure in all her thoughts, graceful to the eye, and delicate in all her ways! She knew now, as she thought of this, that to her had been given the power to appreciate such delights as these. How full of charm to her would have been that life, in which there had been so much of true, innocent affection;—had the load ever been absent from her shoulders! And then she thought of Sir Peregrine, with his pleasant, ancient manner and truth of heart, and told herself that she could have been happy with the love of even so old a man as that,—had that burden been away from her! But the burden had never been away—never could be away. Then she thought once more of her stern but just son, and as she bowed her head and kissed the rod, she prayed that her release might come to her soon.

And now we will say farewell to her, and as we do so the chief interest of our tale will end. I may, perhaps, be thought to owe an apology to my readers in that I have asked their sympathy for a woman who had so sinned as to have placed her beyond the general sympathy of the world at large. If so, I tender my apology, and perhaps feel that I should confess a fault. But as I have told her story that sympathy has grown upon myself till I have learned to forgive her, and to feel that I too could have regarded her as a friend. Of her future life I will not venture to say anything. But no lesson is truer than that which teaches us to believe that God does temper the wind to the shorn lamb. To how many has it not seemed, at some one period of their lives, that all was over for them, and that to them in their afflictions there was nothing left but to die! And yet they have lived to laugh again, to feel that the air was warm and the earth fair, and that God in giving them ever-springing hope had given everything. How many a sun may seem to set on an endless night, and yet rising again on some morrow—

‘He tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore  
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky!’

For Lady Mason let us hope that the day will come in which she also may once again trick her beams in some modest, unassuming way, and that for her the morning may even yet be sweet with a glad warmth. For us, here in these pages, it must be sufficient to say this last kindly farewell.

As to Lucius Mason and the arrangement of his affairs with his step-brother a very few concluding words will suffice. When Joseph Mason left the office of Messrs. Round and Crook he would gladly

have sacrificed all hope of any eventual pecuniary benefit from the possession of Orley Farm could he by doing so have secured the condign punishment of her who had so long kept him out of his inheritance. But he soon found that he had no means of doing this. In the first place he did not know where to turn for advice. He had quarrelled absolutely with Dockwraith, and though he now greatly distrusted the Rounds, he by no means put implicit trust in him of Hamworth. Of the Rounds he suspected that they were engaged to serve his enemy, of Dockwraith he felt sure that he was anxious only to serve himself. Under these circumstances he was driven into the arms of a third attorney, and learned from him, after a delay that cut him to the soul, that he could take no further criminal proceeding against Lady Mason. It would be impossible to have her even indicted for the forgery,—seeing that two juries, at the interval of twenty years, had virtually acquitted her,—unless new evidence which should be absolute and positive in its kind should be forthcoming. But there was no new evidence of any kind. The offer made to surrender the property was no evidence for a jury whatever it might be in the mind of the world at large.

‘And what am I to do?’ asked Mason.

‘Take the goods the gods provide you,’ said the attorney.

‘Accept the offer which your half-brother has very generously made you.’

‘Generously!’ shouted Mason of Groby.

‘Well, on his part it is generous. It is quite within his power to keep it; and were he to do so no one would say he was wrong. Why should he judge his mother?’

Then Mr. Joseph Mason went to another attorney; but it was of no avail. The time was passing away, and he learned that Lady Mason and Lucius had actually started for Germany. In his agony for revenge he had endeavoured to obtain some legal order that should prevent her departure;—‘*ne exeat regno*,’ as he repeated over and over again to his advisers learned in the law. But it was of no avail. Lady Mason had been tried and acquitted, and no judge would interfere.

‘We should soon have her back again, you know, if we had evidence of forgery,’ said the last attorney.

‘Then, by —! we will have her back again,’ said Mason.

But the threat was vain; nor could he get any one even to promise him that she could be prosecuted and convicted. And by degrees the desire for vengeance slackened as the desire for gain resumed its sway. Many men have threatened to spend a property upon a lawsuit who have afterwards felt grateful that their threats were made abortive. And so it was with Mr. Mason. After remaining in town over a month he took the advice of the first of those new lawyers and allowed that gentleman to put himself in

communication with Mr. Furnival. The result was that by the end of six months he again came out of Yorkshire to take upon himself the duties and privileges of the owner of Orley Farm.

And then came his great fight with Dockwrath, which in the end ruined the Hamworth attorney, and cost Mr. Mason more money than he ever liked to confess. Dockwrath claimed to be put in possession of Orley Farm at an exceedingly moderate rent, as to the terms of which he was prepared to prove that Mr. Mason had already entered into a contract with him. Mr. Mason utterly ignored such contract, and contended that the words contained in a certain note produced by Dockwrath amounted only to a proposition to let him the land in the event of certain circumstances and results—which circumstances and results never took place.

This lawsuit Mr. Joseph Mason did win, and Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was, as I have said, ruined. What the attorney did to make it necessary that he should leave Hamworth I do not know; but Miriam, his wife, is now the mistress of that lodging-house to which her own mahogany furniture was so ruthlessly removed.

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## CHAPTER XL.

### SHOWING HOW AFFAIRS SETTLED THEMSELVES AT NONINGSBY.

WE must now go back to Noningsby for one concluding chapter, and then our work will be completed.

‘You are not to go away from Noningsby when the trial is over, you know. Mamma said that I had better tell you so.’ It was thus that Madeline had spoken to Felix Graham as he was going out to the judge’s carriage on the last morning of the celebrated great Orley Farm case, and as she did so she twisted one of her little fingers into one of his buttonholes. This she did with a prettiness of familiarity, and the assumption of a right to give him orders and hold him to obedience, which was almost intoxicating in its sweetness. And why should she not be familiar with him? Why should she not hold him to obedience by his buttonhole? Was he not her own? Had she not chosen him and taken him up to the exclusion of all other such choosings and takings?

‘I shall not go till you send me,’ he said, putting up his hand as though to protect his coat, and just touching her fingers as he did so.

‘Mamma says it will be stupid for you in the mornings, but it will not be worse for you than for Augustus. He stays till after Easter.’

‘And I shall stay till after Whitsuntide unless I am turned out.’



‘Oh! but you will be turned out. I am not going to make myself answerable for any improper amount of idleness. Papa says you have got all the law courts to reform.’

‘There must be a double Hercules for such a set of stables as that,’ said Felix; and then with the slight ceremony to which I have before adverted he took his leave for the day.

‘I suppose there will be no use in delaying it,’ said Lady Staveley on the same morning as she and her daughter sat together in the drawing-room. They had already been talking over the new engagement by the hour, together; but that is a subject on which mothers with marriageable daughters never grow tired, as all mothers and marriageable daughters know full well.

‘Oh! mamma, I think it must be delayed.’

‘But why, my love? Mr. Graham has not said so?’

‘You must call him Felix, mamma. I’m sure it’s a nice name.’

‘Very well, my dear, I will.’

‘No; he has said nothing yet. But of course he means to wait till,—till it will be prudent.’

‘Men never care for prudence of that kind when they are really in love;—and I’m sure he is.’

‘Is he, mamma?’

‘He will marry on anything or nothing. And if you speak to him he tells you of how the young ravens were fed. But he always forgets that he’s not a young raven himself.’

‘Now you’re only joking, mamma.’

‘Indeed I’m quite in earnest. But I think your papa means to make up an income for you,—only you must not expect to be rich.’

‘I do not want to be rich. I never did.’

‘I suppose you will live in London, and then you can come down here when the courts are up. I do hope he won’t ever want to take a situation in the colonies.’

‘Who, Felix? Why should he go to the colonies?’

‘They always do,—the clever young barristers who marry before they have made their way. That would be very dreadful. I really think it would kill me.’

‘Oh! mamma, he sha’n’t go to any colony.’

‘To be sure there are the county courts now, and they are better I suppose you wouldn’t like to live at Leeds or Merthyr-Tydvil?’

‘Of course I shall live wherever he goes; but I don’t know why you should send him to Merthyr-Tydvil.’

‘Those are the sort of places they do go to. There is young Mrs. Bright Newdegate,—she had to go to South Shields, and her babies are all dreadfully delicate. She lost two, you know. I do think the Lord Chancellor ought to think about that. Reigate, or Maidstone, or anywhere about Great Marlow would not be so bad.’

And in this way they discussed the coming event and the happy future, while Felix himself was listening to the judge's charge and thinking of his client's guilt.

Then there were two or three days passed at Noningsby of almost unalloyed sweetness. It seemed that they had all agreed that Prudence should go by the board, and that Love with sweet promises, and hopes bright as young trees in spring, should have it all her own way. Judge Staveley was a man who on such an occasion—knowing with whom he had to deal—could allow ordinary prudence to go by the board. There are men, and excellent men too, from whose minds the cares of life never banish themselves, who never seem to remember that provision is made for the young ravens. They toil and spin always, thinking sternly of the worst and rarely hoping for the best. They are ever making provision for rainy days, as though there were to be no more sunshine. So anxious are they for their children that they take no pleasure in them, and their fear is constant that the earth will cease to produce her fruits. Of such was not the judge. 'Dulce est desipere in locis,' he would say, 'and let the opportunities be frequent and the occasions many.' Such a love-making opportunity as this surely should be one.

So Graham wandered about through the dry March winds with his future bride by his side, and never knew that the blasts came from the pernicious east. And she would lean on his arm as though he had been the friend of her earliest years, listening to and trusting him in all things. That little finger, as they stood together, would get up to his buttonhole, and her bright frank eyes would settle themselves on his, and then her hand would press closely upon his arm, and he knew that she was neither ashamed nor afraid of her love. Her love to her was the same as her religion. When it was once acknowledged by her to be a thing good and trustworthy, all the world might know it. Was it not a glory to her that he had chosen her, and why should she conceal her glory? Had it been that some richer, greater man had won her love,—some one whose titles were known and high place in the world approved,—it may well be that then she would have been less free with him.

'Papa would like it best if you would give up your writing, and think of nothing but the law,' she said to him. In answer to which he told her, with many compliments to the special fox in question, that story of the fox who had lost his tail and thought it well that other foxes should dress themselves as he was dressed.

'At any rate papa looks very well without his tail,' said Madeline with somewhat of a daughter's pride. 'But you shall wear yours all the same, if you like it,' she added with much of a young maiden's love.

As they were thus walking near the house on the afternoon of

the third or fourth day after the trial, one of the maids came to them and told Madeline that a gentleman was in the house who wished to see her.

‘A gentleman!’ said Madeline.

‘Mr. Orme, miss. My lady told me to ask you up if you were anywhere near.’

‘I suppose I must go,’ said Madeline, from whom all her pretty freedom of manner and light happiness of face departed on the moment. She had told Felix everything as to poor Peregrine in return for that story of his respecting Mary Snow. To her it seemed as though that had made things equal between them,—for she was too generous to observe that though she had given nothing to her other lover, Felix had been engaged for many months to marry his other love. But girls, I think, have no objection to this. They do not desire first fruits, or even early fruits, as men do. Indeed, I am not sure whether experience on the part of a gentleman in his use of his heart is not supposed by most young ladies to enhance the value of the article. Madeline was not in the least jealous of Mary Snow; but with great goodnature promised to look after her, and patronize her when she should have become Mrs. Albert Fitzallen. ‘But I don’t think I should like that Mrs. Thomas,’ she said.

‘You would have mended the stockings for her all the same.’

‘O yes, I would have done that;—and so did Miss Snow. But I would have kept my box locked. She should never have seen my letters.’

It was now absolutely necessary that she should return to the house, and say to Peregrine Orme what words of comfort might be possible for her. If she could have spoken simply with her heart, she would have said much that was friendly, even though it might not be comfortable. But it was necessary that she should express herself in words, and she felt that the task was very difficult. ‘Will you come in?’ she said to Felix.

‘No, I think not. But he’s a splendid fellow, and to me was a stanch friend. If I can catch him as he comes out I will speak to him.’ And then Madeline, with hesitating steps, with her hat still on her head, and her gloves on her hands, walked through the hall into the drawing-room. There she found her mother seated on the sofa, and Peregrine Orme standing before her. Madeline walked up to him with extended hand and a kindly welcome, though she felt that the colour was high in her cheeks. Of course it would be impossible to come out from such an interview as this without having confessed her position, or hearing it confessed by her mother in her presence. That, however, had been already done, and Peregrine knew that the prize was gone.

‘How do you do, Miss Staveley?’ said he. ‘As I am going to

leave the Cleeve for a long time, I have come over to say good-bye to Lady Staveley—and to you.'

'Are you going away, Mr. Orme?'

'Yes, I shall go abroad,—to Central Africa, I think. It seems a wild sort of place with plenty of animals to kill.'

'But isn't it very dangerous?'

'No, I don't think so. The people always come back alive. I've a sort of idea that nothing will kill me. At any rate I couldn't stay here.'

'Madeline, dear, I've told Mr. Orme that you have accepted Mr. Graham. With a friend such as he is I know that you will not be anxious to keep this a secret.'

'No, mamma.'

'I was sure of that; and now that your papa has consented to it, and that it is quite fixed, I am sure that it is better that he should know it. We shall always look upon him as a very dear friend—if he will allow us.'

Then it was necessary that Peregrine should speak, which he did as follows, holding Madeline's hand for the first three or four seconds of the time:—'Miss Staveley, I will say this of myself, that if ever a fellow loved a girl truly, I loved you;—and I do so now as well or better than ever. It is no good my pretending to be contented, and all that sort of thing. I am not contented, but very unhappy. I have never wished for but one thing in my life; and for that I would have given all that I have in the world. I know that I cannot have it, and that I am not fit to have it.'

'Oh, Mr. Orme, it is not that.'

'But it is that. I knew you before Graham did, and loved you quite as soon. I believe—though of course I don't mean to ask any questions—but I believe I told you so before he ever did.'

'Marriages, they say, are planned in heaven,' said Lady Staveley.

'Perhaps they are. I only wish this one had not been planned there. I cannot help it,—I cannot express my satisfaction, though I will heartily wish for your happiness. I knew from the first how it would be, and was always sure that I was a fool to love you. I should have gone away when I first thought of it, for I used to feel that you never cared to speak to me.'

'Oh, indeed I did,' said poor Madeline.

'No, you did not. And why should you when I had nothing to say for myself? I ought to have fallen in love with some foolish chit with as little wit about her as I have myself.'

'I hope you will fall in love with some very nice girl,' said Lady Staveley; 'and that we shall know her and love her very much.'

'Oh, I dare say I shall marry some day. I feel now as though I should like to break my neck, but I don't suppose I shall. Good-bye, Lady Staveley.'

‘Good-bye, Mr. Orme; and may God send that you may be happy.’

‘Good-bye, Madeline. I shall never call you so again,—except to myself. I do wish you may be happy,—I do indeed. As for him,—he has been before me, and taken away all that I wanted to win.’

By this time the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was not free from their effect. Of this he was aware, and therefore, pressing her hand, he turned upon his heel and abruptly left the room. He had been unable to say that he wished also that Felix might be happy; but this omission was forgiven him by both the ladies. Poor Madeline, as he went, muttered a kind farewell, but her tears had mastered her also, so that she could hardly speak.

He went directly to the stables, there got upon his horse, and then walked slowly down the avenue towards the gate. He had got the better of that tear-compelling softness as soon as he found himself beyond the presence of the girl he loved, and was now stern in his mood, striving to harden his heart. He had confessed himself a fool in comparison with Felix Graham; but yet,—he asked himself,—in spite of that, was it not possible that he would have made her a better husband than the other? It was not to his title or his estate that he trusted as he so thought, but to a feeling that he was more akin to her in circumstances, in ways of life, and in tenderness of heart. As all this was passing through his mind, Felix Graham presented himself to him in the road.

‘Orme,’ said he, ‘I heard that you were in the house, and have come to shake hands with you. I suppose you have heard what has taken place. Will you not shake hands with me?’

‘No,’ said Peregrine, ‘I will not.’

‘I am sorry for that, for we were good friends, and I owe you much for your kindness. It was a fair stand-up fight, and you should not be angry.’

‘I am angry, and I don’t want your friendship. Go and tell her that I say so, if you like.’

‘No, I will not do that.’

‘I wish with all my heart that we had both killed ourselves at that bank.’

‘For shame, Orme, for shame!’

‘Very well, sir; let it be for shame.’ And then he passed on, meaning to go through the gate, and leaving Graham on the grass by the road-side. But before he had gone a hundred yards down the road his better feelings came back upon him, and he returned.

‘I am unhappy,’ he said, ‘and sore at heart. You must not mind what words I spoke just now.’

‘No, no; I am sure you did not mean them,’ said Felix, putting his hand on the horse’s mane.

‘I did mean them then, but I do not mean them now. I won’t say anything about wishes. Of course you will be happy with her.’

Anybody would be happy with her. I suppose you won't die, and give a fellow another chance.'

'Not if I can help it,' said Graham.

'Well, if you are to live, I don't wish you any evil. I do wish you hadn't come to Noningsby, that's all. Good-bye to you.' And he held out his hand, which Graham took.

'We shall be good friends yet, for all that is come and gone,' said Graham; and then there were no more words between them.

Peregrine did as he said, and went abroad, extending his travels to many wild countries, in which, as he used to say, any one else would have been in danger. No danger ever came to him,—so at least he frequently wrote word to his mother. Gorillas he slew by scores, lions by hundreds, and elephants sufficient for an ivory palace. The skins, and bones, and other trophies, he sent home in various ships; and when he appeared in London as a lion, no man doubted his word. But then he did not write a book, nor even give lectures; nor did he presume to know much about the huge brutes he had slain, except that they were perversive to powder and ball.

Sir Peregrine had endeavoured to keep him at home by giving up the property into his hands; but neither for grandfather, nor for mother, nor for lands and money would he remain in the neighbourhood of Noningsby. 'No, mother,' he said; 'it will be better for me to be away.' And away he went.

The old baronet lived to see him return, though with plaintive wail he often declared to his daughter-in-law that this was impossible. He lived, but he never returned to that living life which had been his before he had taken up the battle for Lady Mason. He would sometimes allow Mrs. Orme to drive him about the grounds, but otherwise he remained in the house, sitting solitary over his fire,—with a book, indeed, open before him, but rarely reading. He was waiting patiently, as he said, till death should come to him.

Mrs. Orme kept her promise, and wrote constantly to Lady Mason,—hearing from her as constantly. When Lucius had been six months in Germany, he decided on going to Australia, leaving his mother for the present in the little German town in which they were staying. For her, on the whole, the change was for the better. As to his success in a thriving colony, there can be but little doubt.

Felix Graham was soon married to Madeline; and as yet I have not heard of any banishment either to Patagonia or to Merthyr-Tydvil.

And now I may say, Farewell.

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