

THE
GAME of LIFE

Waters

Recollections of a Detective
and Police Officer



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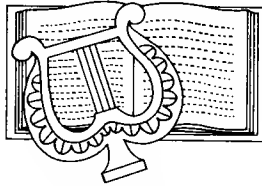
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THE
GAME OF LIFE.



BY "WATERS,"

AUTHOR OF

"RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE OFFICER;"

ETC., ETC., ETC.

"AMOR VINCIT OMNIA."

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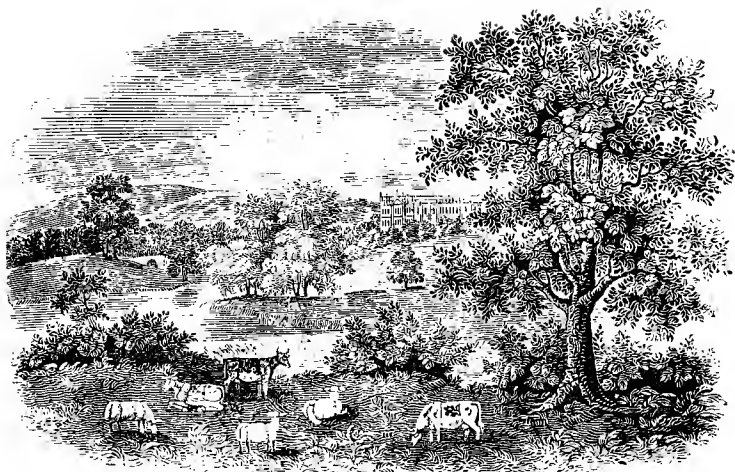
PREFACE.

I HOPE it will be fully understood that the sentiments expressed by the actors in this "Game of Life," must be taken in a purely dramatic sense,—as the utterances, not of the writer speaking through them, but of their own peculiar notions upon matters political and religious. Mrs. Lister's letter, for example, in the last chapter, is very nearly a literal transcript of one now in my possession, written under the precise circumstances described in the narrative. I have no capacity for the promulgation of dogmatic opinions upon lofty topics, spiritual or profane, and should be sorry to be suspected of the poor ambition of wishing to assume such a power.

C. W.

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VERE PRIORY.

THE GAME OF LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

“Thus spake the Tempter, and his proem tuned.”—MILTON.

IN consequence of some part of her machinery having given way, the steamer from Southampton to Havre de Grace was very much behind her time on Sunday, the 19th of March, 1848, a circumstance which greatly irritated the somewhat youngest-looking of two English, men, who for several hours had been pacing to and fro the pier-head, and from time to time sweeping the northern horizon with their glasses, in vain quest of the anxiously-expected vessel. The elder of the two—though the difference of age was slight, and neither had reached his twenty-sixth birthday—seemed to be more

impatient of enduring the bitter weather than of the steamer's appearance, and had several times suggested that by exchanging the bleak pier and biting north wind for the Hotel de France and a bottle of Burgundy, they would be quite as soon apprised by the signal hoisted at the flag-staff of the "Grand Turk" being in sight, as they would be through their own telescopes. This unanswerable reasoning had its effect, as the wintry day drew towards its close, upon the younger gentleman, who, angrily closing his glass, seized his readily-acquiescent companion's arm, and both were striding away, when a seaman announced that the steamer was at length in sight.

"Where away?" asked Sidney Polwarth, instantly turning back, and re-adjusting his glass. The sailor replied by pointing towards a stream of smoke scarcely visible in the far distance, which his questioner with some difficulty realised.

"When will she be here, think you?" inquired the excited gentleman.

"There will not," said the man, "be sufficient water for her in the harbour these three hours to come; but she will be off the pier-head in considerably less than half that time."

"In that case we will wait!" exclaimed Mr. Polwarth. "At least I will; you, Brydone, can of course do as you please."

"I will also wait," replied Mr. Brydone. "It is

scarcely worth while to go away when we must return so soon;" and the two gentlemen recommenced pacing to and fro the pier; Sidney Polwarth with his restless, eager glance scarcely removed for a moment from the advancing steamer, whilst Ernest Brydone seemed chiefly concerned to keep himself from being quite frozen to an icicle.

The two young men, it may be here observed, so nearly resembled each other in person, that they might easily have been taken for brothers, but for a certain air of superiority seemingly habitual with Sidney Polwarth, and as habitually acquiesced in by his companion. In mental organisation they differed much less widely than a casual looker-on would have supposed, Polwarth being manifestly hot, impulsive, fierce as flame; and Brydone—exteriorly—cold, calm, impassive—albeit it was well known to his intimates, and by none better than Leonard Harlowe, whose expected arrival in the "Grand Turk," and "the great fact" of which he was presumed to be the bearer, so excited Mr. Polwarth, that fire—intense, consuming, the red-hot steel of virile passion—glowed fiercely beneath the marble surface.

Darkness was falling when the steamer arrived off the pier with the intention of landing her passengers, and then, as quickly as possible, getting a better offing till the tide allowed her to enter the harbour, as there was a rough, tumbling sea on, and the wind, which

was rising, blew dead ashore. It was at first doubted by the people on the pier that the passengers would be permitted to land till the steamer came in; but a signal being made that a French gentleman of official importance was on board, the gendarmes in waiting put off, though with evident reluctance, for the examination of passports, and were immediately followed by several passenger boats.

“It is doubted, now,” exclaimed Sidney Polwarth, addressing Brydone, “that any one except the important Frenchman will be allowed to come on shore, and with such weather threatening, the steamer may be obliged to keep well out to sea till daylight to-morrow. Another night’s suspense would be intolerable, and I have therefore half a mind to go on board.”

Brydone shrugged his shoulders, but complaisantly remarked that there could be no valid objection to going aboard if Mr. Polwarth wished to do so. This decided his companion. A boat was instantly hailed; the two friends embarked, and were swiftly pulled towards the steamer, then distant half a mile from the pier-steps.

Leonard Harlowe was as eager to get on shore as his expecting friends could be to see him there, and, his passport being found *en regle*, he asked for and obtained a seat in the boat which took off the French official and his lady. Leonard Harlowe a fine-looking man, of some five-and-thirty years of age, was one to whom it would have been difficult to refuse such a

favour, so bold, yet courteous—decided, yet deferential, was his address. A highly intellectual man, dull eyes could discern at the first glance, and endowed, moreover, with the personal advantages necessary to give that intellectuality effective interpretation; but whether Leonard Harlowe was as distinguished for moral, as for personal and mental superiority, were a darker problem—solvable only by time and circumstances.

Meanwhile, he is in the only boat that will be allowed to take passengers, the operation being, he heard the officers of the “Grand Turk” remark, not only tedious but in some degree dangerous, from the heavy sea running, and that it was imperative the steamer should get a wide offing, partially disabled as she was, without a moment’s unnecessary delay.

As the favoured passengers left, there was a cry from the other side of the steamer—frequently afterwards recalled to mind by Leonard Harlowe, though scarcely heeded at the time—that a boat was swamped; and presently, though it was then quite dark, he witnessed a great commotion amongst the passenger-boats, accompanied by confused outcries, from which he could only gather that some person or persons were still, or had recently been, in mortal peril.

The buoyant, elastic state of Leonard Harlowe’s mind just then would have easily thrown off a much heavier load than a vague alarm of danger to unknown individuals, and when he leaped on shore and hurried

along the pier towards the Hotel de France, the circumstance had passed from his mind.

“Are the friends—the two gentlemen from Paris—I expected to meet here yet arrived?” asked Leonard Harlowe of the waiter at the Hotel de France, to whom he was well known.

“Yes,” was the reply. “They had arrived that morning, at Havre, by rail; but he, Philippe, had not seen them since about two o’clock, when they proceeded to the pier, with the proclaimed intention to there await the arrival of the steam-packet from England.”

“That being so,” said Leonard Harlowe, “they will, no doubt, be here in a few minutes, and *en attendant*, you, Philippe, will please to bring me some of your choicest brandy, hot water, sugar, and cigars.”

Half an hour, with the help of those calming ministrants, passed pleasantly away, at the end of which a feeling of surprise began to arise in Harlowe’s mind at the continued absence of his friends, a feeling which the abrupt entrance and scared looks of the waiter changed instantly to a flashing, terrible fear.

“Something has befallen my friends!” he exclaimed, starting up from his chair. “Speak, man!”

“A terrible calamity has befallen them, Monsieur;” replied the waiter with emotion. “One of your friends is drowned; the life of the other will, it is hoped, be saved.”

“Drowned!—one drowned! Which—which do you

say it is? Which of them, I ask you?" gasped Harlowe.

"Neither I, nor the Commissary of Police, who is below, knows one from the other, so that"——

"True—true," broke in Harlowe. "I must ascertain for myself;" and, seizing his hat, he hurried down stairs, exchanged a few words with the commissary, and hastened with him to the Pomme d'Or, a cabaret just within the barrier leading to the pier.

"As I feared!" ejaculated Leonard Harlowe, as his startled glance encountered the cold, motionless features of Sidney Polwarth, which he had so lately seen aglow with lusty life. "What an accursed chance!"

Self-possessed withal, even at that moment of horror, Leonard Harlowe stepped quickly towards the corpse, and pressed back an eyelid to assure himself beyond all doubt that life was irretrievably extinct.

"Dead as Cæsar," he muttered. "Struck down, not only in the flush of life, but just as his eager hand grasped riches—fortune!"

"Everything was done for your friend," remarked the commissary, who, as Harlowe spoke in English, probably misapprehended the cause of his emotion. "Everything was done for your friend that skill and experience could suggest, though unhappily without avail. With his companion we were more successful, and you will find him out of danger. Permit me to conduct you to him."

Harlowe followed the officer upstairs, where he found Brydone restored to life, but pale, ghastly, and apparently insensible to surrounding objects.

"They are very much alike!" remarked the commissary: "Brothers, perhaps?"

"Very much alike," murmured Harlowe, more as if communing with himself than replying to the French functionary. "Very much alike: I have frequently remarked it; but not brothers, as you suppose—not even relatives. Did you find any papers," he quickly added, "upon the person of my deceased friend below?"

"None whatever; but his watch and purse have been taken possession of, and will remain with me till the formal inquiry into the cause of the accident shall have taken place: that will be to-morrow at noon precisely, when your presence, Monsieur, will be required."

"I understand. Cannot my friend," added Leonard Harlowe, "be conveyed at once to the Hotel de France? It is not far from this place to the Grande Rue."

The medical gentleman present said there could be no objection to Monsieur's friend being at once conveyed to the Hotel de France in a closed litter; and a closed litter having been procured, Brydone, who was fast regaining consciousness and speech, was carried to the hotel, and placed in bed there under the immediate supervision of Leonard Harlowe, who imposed the

strictest silence upon the patient, by direction, as he said, of the medical officer, forbidding Brydone either to speak or be spoken to.

Except that he still felt very weak, Ernest Brydone had entirely recovered by the morning from the effects of the accident that had gone so near to destroy his life, as well as that of Sidney Polwarth; and, after breakfasting, was quite ready to bear his part in the highly-important conference which Harlowe, with some embarrassment of manner, had stated to be imperatively necessary before he, Brydone, should have speech with any other person.

“A rather absurd condition, by the way, Harlowe, to be so peremptorily insisted upon,” remarked Brydone, “seeing that, except yourself, I am not acquainted with one human being in all Havre de Grace.”

“You will appreciate the importance of the condition presently. And now, merely premising that the determination which we must this very morning arrive at will irrevocably colour and influence all the rest of our days, be they few or many, I at once proceed to set forth the circumstances upon which that determination must be based.”

“A portentous preface,” interjected Brydone “especially when delivered in so tragical a tone, and by such white lips. But go on.”

“Sidney Polwarth’s death has affected me deeply,” resumed Leonard Harlowe, “and no wonder! since

with him vanish all the fine castles I have been lately building upon the foundation of his friendship and favour. Nevertheless, it will be not only possible but perfectly easy, out of this nettle pain, to pluck the flower fortune, if Ernest Brydone prove to be the man of sense and nerve I take him for."

"You compliment in riddles. Be plain and direct, let me beg of you, Leonard Harlowe."

"I *will* be plain and direct. But first, to clear the ground. Well, then, the intelligence which caused Sidney Polwarth to hurry me off to Cornwall was accurate in every particular. His grandfather, old Laurence Polwarth, repented him of his bitter enmity whilst there was yet time to make amends, and Sidney died possessed in law of an estate yielding a clear rental of five thousand a year, besides the fine old family place, and something like ten thousand pounds in the funds."

"A cruel trick of King Death to step suddenly between a man and such a brilliant, long-despaired-of prize," said Brydone.

"True; and Sidney Polwarth might have obtained with riches what some men—as you, for example—prize as highly—the hand of one of the most charming maidens that ever trod the earth to grace and gladden it—Violet Tremaine."

"Violet Tremaine! Ah, yes, I remember Sidney speaking of her. They were cousins, I think?"

“Yes, but Sidney, you must be aware, never saw her, nor she him. Here is her portrait. It belonged to old Polwarth, and I brought it over for Sidney’s delectation.”

“A very lovely girl, upon my word!” murmured Brydone, “if the limner hath not lied! Was then,” he added, “this charming cousin bequeathed to Sidney with the family estate?”

“In a certain sense, yes. It was Laurence Polwarth’s wish, strongly expressed in his will, that his grandson should marry his cousin, Violet Tremaine. I do not believe,” continued Leonard Harlowe—“I do not believe, judging by a conversation I had with her father, that the young lady would have offered any insuperable objection to the fulfilment of her deceased relative’s wishes; and she, as I before remarked, *in common with all Sidney’s relatives, has never seen him.*”

The emphasis and look which accompanied the last sentence caused a vivid flash of light and colour to flit over Brydone’s expressive features, which, vanishing as instantly, left them paler than before, as he stammered in reply,

“But what—what is all this—to me—to you?”

“It is everything to both of us, provided you have only the boldness to accept the brilliant gift which Fortune, in one of her wantonest moods, casts into your lap. Listen, before you speak again,” continued Leonard

Harlowe; "you know that Sidney Polwarth was the only son of a man who committed the very common, but not less ridiculous folly of sacrificing his position and prospects in the world to a fancy for a pretty face; that he lived, subsequently to his marriage, entirely on the Continent; and that since his death, closely following that of his wife, some seven years ago, Sidney Polwarth, the possessor of four hundred pounds per annum, which dies with him, has led a roving life in the South of France, in Italy, Germany, and Heaven knows where besides, constant to no place for three months together, and helped, of late, in the disposal of his time and cash by our noble selves. That he was consequently personally unknown to his relatives—unknown in England. Is the riddle plainer now?" added Leonard Harlowe, "or are you so dull this morning, that to *make* it plain, I must tell you in so many words, that I, this morning, informed the commissary of police that the name of the gentleman drowned yesterday evening was—Ernest Brydone!"

"Tempter! fiend! devil! how dare you propose this to me?" exclaimed Brydone, leaping to his feet, all aflame with excitement more than with anger, as it seemed.

"Ill names do not move me," coldly replied Leonard Harlowe; "neither will they be found to be of much potency in the way of liquidating certain promissory notes, falsely purporting to be payable on demand,



BRYDENE'S INDIGNATION AT HARLOWE'S PROPOSITION.

which, for the lack of something better, I have accepted from Ernest Brydone, for losses at play."

"You urge—threaten me to no purpose," presently trembled from the lips of Brydone, who had sunk down into a chair, and covered his face with outspread hands. "Discovery and condign punishment would be sure, and swift as sure!"

"Not at all; very far indeed from being sure—much less swift. I have conned the chances earnestly, deliberately; forasmuch that, as I should be quite as liable to 'condign punishment' as yourself, though playing for nothing like so splendid a stake, I do not choose to blind my own eyes to the adverse chances of so bold a throw in the game of life. Allow me to calmly recapitulate the chances, for and against, not immediate, enjoyable success—*that* is certain—but of impunity. First, Sidney Polwarth, with the exception of a few flying visits to London, has never been in England. You are like him as two peas. We are perfectly familiar with every incident of his life, and in uncontrolled possession of his letters, papers—of every article—no very lengthy catalogue, by the way—belonging to him. *You* are not personally known to a dozen people in Great Britain, out of the London gaming circles; and when leading a life of retired rurality—as I have often heard you, when suffering from ill-luck or indigestion, express a passionate longing for—at the family place down there in Cornwall—

‘With one fair spirit for your minister,’

you will be in very slight danger of being stumbled over by any of those gentry. Then I, Leonard Harlowe, stand exceedingly well—much better indeed than I deserve—with the Cornish relatives amongst whom I was born, and whom I am just returned from visiting. Accompanied by me, therefore, no question of identity can possibly arise; and you will quietly obtain a good estate and charming wife, without”——

“No! no!” hoarsely interrupted Brydone. “No; *that* would be *too* deep damnation. The maiden shall, at all events, remain sacred to me.”

“You can act as you please in that regard; at the same time you will allow me to calmly canvass that particular scruple. I would not willingly, inflict the slightest harm, or a moment’s pain, upon sweet Violet Tremaine; and should you marry her, not the slightest harm will have been done her. You will make a tender, kind husband, and as the years glide on, and Time, by brushing the bloom from your cheek, and whitening your hair, renders discovery impossible, your mutual happiness will be without a cloud.”

“A fantastic dream!” murmured Brydone, “a fantastic, mocking dream. The mirage of the desert to the wanderer dying of cruel thirst.”

“There is another aspect of this part of the subject,” resumed Leonard Harlowe, heedless of Brydone’s

interruption, "which, in dealing unreservedly with each other, it is right to glance at. Discovery, though not in the least probable, barely possible in fact, *may* by some unlucky accident ensue, in which case the fact of being the husband—the tender, loving husband of the beautiful, and good as beautiful, Violet—in all likelihood the kind and honoured father of her children—will effectually shield the offender, according to law, from the 'condign punishment' you spoke of. More, obviate any else unpleasant necessity of exposure; the estate and etceteras going, in the event of Sidney Polwarth dying childless, by the terms of the grandfather's will, to Violet Tremaine."

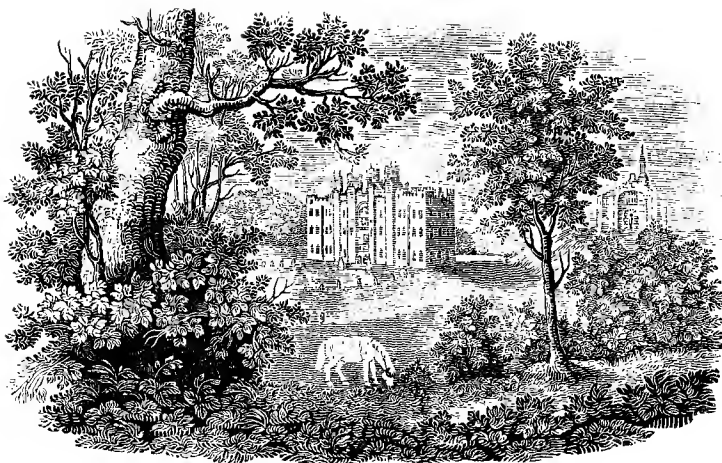
"Then they are all hers of right now?"

"Precisely: you will, in fact, marry a wealthy and beautiful maiden, for, after all, it essentially amounts to that; or, at the worst, is but a repetition of the popular episode in the domestic history of France, of which Bulwer's 'Lady of Lyons' is a paraphrase. And now," added Leonard Harlowe, rising to terminate the conference, "let me ask you to seriously meditate upon what I have said. You have just one hour to do so, as the *juge de paix* will not commence his formal inquiry into the circumstances attending poor Sidney's death till twelve o'clock. Consider not alone the richness of the prize to be had for the acceptance, but our ragged fortunes, and the almost impossibility of obtaining, amidst the scramble in this thoroughly

material age, the enjoyments and luxuries suited to our tastes and desires. And now, till twelve, adieu !”

The proces-verbal, or minutes of evidence, drawn up by the juge de paix, and deposited, with other municipal records, in the Hotel de Ville, Havre de Grace, sets forth that Ernest Brydone, an Englishman, and a native of London, aged 25 years, was accidentally drowned by the swamping of a boat on the evening of Sunday, the 19th of March, 1848, and amongst the sworn depositions are those of Sidney Polwarth and Leonard Harlowe.

The corpse was interred in the Protestant Cemetery, and on the following day the two confederates embarked, in the “ Grand Turk,” for Southampton.



ACTON COURT.

CHAPTER II.

“Thou seest me now, a man of many griefs,
Broken and bow'd to the ground. 'Twas not so once,
When sunshine fill'd all space. My spendthrift life
Foamed over and fail'd, wastefully foredone
Ere half its act was o'er.”—OLD PLAY.

VERE PRIORY, the residence of the Cornish Polwarths, and Acton Court, that of their kinsfolk, the Tremaines, are not more than a mile distant from each other; and when it is added that both Priory and Court are built upon the sites of ancient monastic edifices, the reader will at once understand that they are charmingly situated; the taste of the reverend monks in the selection of their earthly abodes being, all will admit, quite as infallible as their doctrinal directions.

Cornwall is not celebrated for sylvan beauty; still, even amidst the rough, upheaved, cumbered surface of

the mining districts, there lie scattered many an oasis, scarcely inferior to the sweetest spots in the adjoining county of Devonshire; and the vicinage of Vere Priory and Acton Court is one of them: manifestly so when wood and valley have put on their summer robes of leaves and flowers, and the winding silver river, threading its bright way through daisied mead and leafy copse, gleams and sparkles in the golden sunlight; albeit that now towards the close of this unusually bitter March, its aspect is drear and desolate, as that of the elderly gentleman who is gazing with sad eyes over the wintry without, from the drawing-room of Acton Court. A storm of snow is falling, which the fierce wind whirls in furious eddies amidst the writhing, groaning trees—sweeps into fantastic rifts in the low-lying meadows, dashes against the rattling casements, and with such vehemence in the face of the postman, who is crossing the light iron bridge over the river, that he for some moments can scarcely withstand its blinding force, and holds on to the railing of the bridge till the extreme violence of the gust is spent.

“Penson is late to-day,” murmurs Mr. Tremaine as he turns from the window with a last lingering look at the turrets of Vere Priory, which, overtopping the intervening wood, seem to his morbid fancy—a fancy shaped by circumstance and habit—to frown haughtily down upon his less lordly dwelling, as might a proud, scornful relative upon a humble, broken kinsman!

“Penson is late to-day; yet surely I need not be impatient to receive the insolent missives that every post now brings me. It is, however, mere folly to shut one’s eyes to the approach of ruin. Wiser,” he added, with a sigh, as he stirred the fire and sat down with his hands upon his knees, and his eyes fixed dreamily upon the ruddy blaze, “wiser to look it calmly in the face, and strive to discover if the hungry, pitiless fiend may not even yet be beaten back.”

As he is now sitting, the bright fire-glow shows the features of a gentleman who, though in reality not much past his fortieth year, one would suppose to be nearly half as old again as that, so deep-graven are the furrows traced thereon by the workings of ambition and care, and the soul sickness of long-deferred, finally-defeated hope.

The morning of the life thus early darkened, and verging, as it seemed, upon untimely night, was a bright and promising one. Aeton Tremaine, upon attaining his majority, found himself the uncontrolled master of Aeton Court, and an unencumbered rental approaching 2,000*l.* per annum; he was, moreover, gifted with a handsome person and vigorous health; and before his twenty-second birthday was the husband of Violet Trevillian, the amiable and beautiful girl that had been the lodestar of his young life.

Not quite twenty years have since gone over his head, and with them have passed away health, fortune,

wife; himself and only child, but for one shadowy hope to which he desperately clings, will in a few days be acknowledged beggars; and all this bitter fruit, he cannot conceal from himself, is of his own planting!

It is equally true that Mr. Tremaine has never been an evil-purposing man—that he was an affectionate husband, and is an indulgent father, and that his downward path, ending in the abyss upon the edge of which he now trembles, has been strewn with good intentions. His only, but in its result most grievous fault, has been the ambition to raise himself to an equality, at least, with his kinsmen, the Polwarths, between whom and the Tremaines there had existed for several generations a smouldering family feud—how originally kindled I know not—which the supercilious bearing of the contemporary Polwarth towards himself fanned to flame in the hot blood of Acton Tremaine.

To compass that equality with the lords of Vere Priory, Acton Tremaine engaged in various mining enterprises—costly adventures, in which the prizes are rare as they are dazzling; and spite of almost continuous losses, and the urgent entreaties of his wife, he persisted till every acre and every house he possessed was mortgaged to its full value. The ostentatiously proclaimed intention of the recently deceased owner of Vere Priory to make Violet Tremaine his heiress had for a long time kept his creditors at bay; the sudden as unexpected change of purpose on the part of the capri-

scious testator swept away that barrier, and ruin is now coming upon him like an armed man. Of Acton Court itself, he is little better than a tenant upon sufferance, notice of foreclosing the mortgages having been some time since served upon him.

There is one chance left, which Mr. Tremaine will determinately clutch at, although to do so he must trample upon pure and precious hopes, sanctified by the dying prayers and blessings of his wife. Not without remorse has he resolved to act thus; not without almost insupportable self-loathing, we may be sure, does he constantly find himself reverting mentally to his child's rare personal loveliness, her tender love for himself, her high sense of filial duty, her ductile gentleness of disposition, as so many elements and pledges of success in effecting her marriage with Sidney Polwarth—a man she has never seen—of whom he himself knows nothing save that he is rich.

Still the father will not, I predict, falter in the course he has marked out for himself—not outwardly, at least. He has squandered what should have been his daughter's heritage, and must, he argues, for her sake, as much for his own, regain fortune, even at the cost of her broken faith—her violated affections—possibly of her very life. “Fool that I am,” exclaimed aloud the conscience-tortured parent, “to conjure up such affrighting shadows. Violet—if this last hope fail me not—will be a happy, honoured wife.

Ah!" he added, clasping and wringing his hands in an agony of self-reproach, "could I but recal the past— blot out the selfish follies that—"

His soliloquy was brought to a close by a gentle tap at the door.

"Come in," he said, hastily readjusting himself, and striving to put off the outward signs of mental agitation. "Come in."

His daughter entered the room with a number of letters in her hand, and looking round inquiringly.

"Surely, papa, I heard you speaking with some one," she said, in the low, gentle voice which is so excellent in woman.

"No, my child," said Mr. Tremaine, "I was railing at Fortune somewhat more above my breath than usual; that was all. A foolish all!" he added with a sad smile, and kissing her forehead, as she sat down by his side, placed her hand in his, and with her sweet eyes looked silently up through trembling tears at her father's pale, worn, furrowed face.

"Penson has brought me several letters, I perceive," said Mr. Tremaine, glancing nervously at the large, squarely-folded sheets of blue foolscap which his daughter had placed upon a centre table. "Let be, let be for a while," he hastily added. "I, though no clairvoyant, can read the purport of their serpent sentences, without breaking the seals."

"There is one," said Violet Tremaine, "which

bears the London postmark, and," she added with a pale blush, so to speak, "the crest on the seal indicates it is from my fortunate cousin, Mr. Sidney Polwarth."

"Let me see, let me see," exclaimed Mr. Tremaine, jumping up and hurrying to the table. "Ha! here it is. You are right, my child. From Sidney Polwarth, no question."

Mr. Tremaine's shaking fingers tear open the all-important missive, find and adjust his glasses; his face, as he reads, kindles with the light and flush of fever, and a broken exclamation expressive of immense satisfaction escapes his quivering lips! He does not utter another syllable, waves his arm, imperatively commanding silence when Violet is about to speak, and as a sort of relief to his excitement, strides swiftly to and fro the apartment, perusing and re-perusing the letter in his hand. That more critical appreciation does not appear to quite harmonise with his first impression of unqualified delight. Something in the tone of the communication jars upon the ear of the gentleman—if not upon that of the father. It ran thus:—

Morley's Hotel, Strand, London,
March 29, 1848.

My dear Sir,—I hoped to have paid my personal respects to you before this; but our London solicitors and Mr. Henthredeth, the attorney, of Truro, who you may be aware is in town, are anxious that the legal formalities connected with my succession to my deceased grandfather's property (which I find,

particularly as regards the realty, to be very much larger than I had been led to believe) should be completed before I set out for Cornwall; those astute gentlemen having, I dare say, some suspicion that I shall there find an attraction which will prevent me leaving it in a hurry.

I have no doubt they judge rightly; and I assure you, my dear Mr. Tremaine, that the natural impatience I feel to find myself amongst friends and kinsfolk, dear, though personally unknown to me, has been heightened a thousand-fold by the portrait brought me by my good friend Harlowe of my charming cousin Violet, whom in a few days at furthest I hope to have the privilege of assuring with my own lips that there is one paragraph in my grandfather's will which, though only a recommendatory one, gives me more real happiness, albeit dashed and shadowed by intrusive doubts, than the clauses which confer upon me what is, after all, my rightful inheritance. With the hope, my dear sir, of shortly meeting you and Miss Tremaine in health and amity,

I am, your faithful friend and kinsman,

Acton Tremaine, Esq.

SIDNEY POLWARTH.

“A flippant, and, under the circumstances, not very decorous composition,” silently mused Mr. Tremaine, as he thrust the letter into his pocket, instead of reading it, as he at first intended, to Violet: “But Sidney Polwarth has been educated wholly abroad, and continental modes of thought and speech differ essentially from ours. He evidently writes with sincerity, a coarse sincerity, it is true,—and there is slight fear that the favourable impression made upon his fancy by Violet's miniature will be effaced or weakened by her presence.”

Slight fear indeed! One need not, to arrive at that conclusion, look through partial eyes at the charming girl, who, leaning her cheek upon her hand, gazes vacantly at the wild weather without, whilst the varying colour of her finely-turned cheek, and the timid glances, quickly withdrawn, with which she ever and anon essays to interrogate her father, show her to be anxiously pre-occupied by vague fears, associated with the letter which so entirely absorbs his thoughts.

In saying this, I do not so much insist on Violet Tremaine's personal loveliness. Beauty is sown broadcast in this country, and you, reader, may have frequently seen a form as sylph-like and perfectly proportioned as hers;—a complexion as lustrously fair; as soft, yet radiant eyes, and revealing depths as profound; hair as brightly auburn, and which the cold light of such a day as this would equally tinge with glancing gold; nose, lips, teeth, the contour of the Grecian head, to the full as perfect as Violet Tremaine's; but that which I am sure is *not* frequently seen is the ingenuous candour of expression which sheds over else mere feature beauty an inexpressible charm of sunny sweetness and gentleness, causing the beholder to feel that he must love, before he has thought of admiring her!

“Sweet Violet Tremaine” was, it will be remembered, the phrase used by Leonard Harlowe; and I have that confidence in the Divine principle breathed into

man when he became a living soul, and never wholly obliterated in the most debased natures, as to believe that if, when the mischief which Shakespeare tells us is ever swift to enter into the thoughts of desperate men, first glanced through his eager brain, he had at the same moment felt that the success of his scheme must prove permanently fatal to the happiness of the fair and gentle girl whom he had known from infancy, he would certainly have hesitated at, if not have definitively abandoned, its execution.

Now, indeed, he has no longer a hope of drawing back. He is in the rapids; and if a miracle, or what men call chance—accident—does not save him, he must on, on, on, with silently, constantly accelerated speed, till the sudden thunder and the blinding spray of the cataract announce and reveal the abyss into which he is the next moment hurled, howling!

Yes, it is the first step in the downward path which often decides for aye the future life-course; and blindly rash is he who risks that first step in the belief that he can draw back at will. If you need an illustration of that truth, look at Acton Tremaine. To compass the aim of an envious ambition, he first staked his wife's dowry, a few thousands only, easy to be replaced should he lose. He lost: could he, dare he draw back? Impossible! Pride, passion, the hell of failure, impel him on: real estate—personals that had been heir-looms for centuries, were successively risked—lost; and now, for a last

throw, he is about to sell his child into bondage; to draw and fetter her to that cruel bondage, to end only with her life, by the chords of her holiest affections!

And will it, in the terrible hereafter, think you, be an excuse for him, that he does not, at this supreme hour, which I prophesy will colour all his future life, discern the depth and blackness of the abyss into which he is about to plunge his innocent child? That the devil is cheating him with false dice, and really staking nothing against his precious ventures? Nay, my friends, it is a Nemesis commissioned from Heaven, not Hell, that commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice to our own lips.

Whilst I have been moralising, the father has matured his plan of action.

“Violet, my child,” said Mr. Tremaine, approaching his daughter and folding her in his arms with real tenderness: “Violet, my child, I am about to open my whole heart to you. Its griefs you are already partially acquainted with; but the time is come, my girl, when you must read them word by word, letter by letter.”

“Dear father!” sighed Violet, fondly returning his embrace—“dear father!”

Mr. Tremaine seemed for a moment at a loss how exactly to proceed; but presently bethinking him, he said,

“We will begin with these letters; read them, Violet, aloud.”

Violet obeyed with some surprise, her father having been always scrupulously careful to withhold his business correspondence, not from her only, but from her mother. The letters were, she found, iterations of previous demands for payment of bills, bonds, and other obligations, accompanied by menaces, in the event of non-compliance, of immediate legal proceedings. The imminence of her father's worldly ruin—till then unguessed of by her in its extent and completeness—became, as she read, manifest, unmistakable; and the sweet voice trembled, grew fainter; ceased, drowned in her sobbing tears.

“Calm yourself, dear Violet,” said Mr. Tremaine. “Delay, procrastination, has sharpened this trial, and we must be thorough now. There is another letter!”

Cologne water and a strong mental effort enabled Violet to proceed. She opened the remaining letter, and glanced at its contents before reading it aloud. A flush of surprise, scorn, indignation, which lit up her face as she read, effectually dried her tears, and lent strength to her voice.

“Reuben Bradley do this!” she exclaimed; “I could not have believed it possible!”

“What does Reuben Bradley write that should so astonish you?” asked Mr. Tremaine.

“I will read you his solicitor's letter.

“Truro, March 29, 1848.

“Sir,—I am directed by Mr. Reuben Bradley to apply to

you for payment of 2,375*l.*, the amount, including interest, lent to you by my client's deceased father, Stephen Bradley; and secured by your bond, upon which judgment will be forthwith entered up, if a satisfactory settlement be not arrived at by the day after to-morrow.—Your obedient servant,

“SAMUEL FERRAND.”

“And what, my poor girl, is there to surprise you in Reuben Bradley pressing for payment of moneys lawfully due to him?”

“I always thought,” replied Violet Tremaine, with mounting colour, “that Reuben Bradley, though from defective education somewhat uncouth, and rude in speech and manners, had the spirit of a gentleman.”

“The spirit of a gentleman!” said Mr. Tremaine. “That could not, at all events, have descended to him, like my bond, by inheritance.”

“Are there not, dear father, gentlemen in right of their own personal dignity and worth?”

“May be so; still the phrase, ‘personal dignity,’ sounds oddly when applied to the son of a Devonshire grazier. But passing that, what is there, allow me to ask, in the demand of one’s own inconsistent with the spirit of a gentleman? That silence and those blushes,” continued Mr. Tremaine, “interpreted by previous incidents, trifling in themselves, tell me as plainly as could words, that Reuben Bradley, presuming upon his knowledge of my embarrassments, has offered himself as my son-in-law. When did this happen, Violet, and why have you concealed it from your father?”

“It occurred but yester afternoon,” said Violet, “and the secret being rather Reuben Bradley’s than mine, I did not think it necessary, or even right, to irritate you by the recital of a circumstance which could have no result; and which I, myself, wished to, as speedily as possible, forget. But for this strange letter, I should feel that in saying so much I had been guilty of a gross breach of confidence,” added the deeply blushing girl. “And now, dear father, let us revert to more important matters!”

“Presently.—Did then,” persisted Mr. Tremaine, “Mr. Reuben Bradley request you not to speak of his condescending proposal?”

“Oh, dear no; he was in too mighty a rage for that. Then the whole affair was so entirely unpremeditated, and so ludicrous, that——. But, it is plain, I must tell you all about it,” added Miss Tremaine, with a quiet smile, that for a moment lightened the sadness of her face. “Well, wait till I return from giving Martha a few directions, and you shall be satisfied.”

CHAPTER III.

“ Her virtues thus became as sanctified
And holy traitors to her.”

SHAKESPEARE.

HER house affairs quickly dispatched, Miss Tremaine returned to the drawing-room, and, with no other preface than a faint blush and smile, proceeded to fulfil her promise.

“ The brightness and calm of yesterday, so strikingly in contrast with the present frightful weather, tempted me to a stroll in Lea Wood, where, at about this time, or a little later, perhaps, and as I crossed the path leading to the Priory, I came directly in view of Reuben Bradley and his huge dog Ponto, who, with his usual gallantry—Reuben I mean, not Ponto—hastened forward to assist me over the stile near the duck-pond, you know, a little further on. I managed that he should be just too late, a disappointment which greatly increased the poor man’s blushing confusion. You must have observed, papa, that although full six feet high, and stout in proportion, Reuben Bradley blushes

and trembles like a frightened school-boy, in the presence of ladies."

"Yes; of some ladies: of Miss Tremaine, to wit, I *have* noticed more than once."

"At all events, Master Bradley was much discomposed yesterday—a little flushed with wine, moreover, it struck me; and as we walked on, he began talking incoherently of Mr. Sidney Polwarth, and of something relating to that gentleman and myself, which he had heard from Mr. Harlowe when that person was here, a short time since."

"Insolent, meddling fool!" interjected Mr. Tremaine.

"What Mr. Bradley said, or more correctly insinuated, should have been of supreme indifference to me," resumed Violet Tremaine, with but poorly affected indifference of tone. "Indeed, I hardly comprehended what he *did* say, or insinuate, except that from him it was exceedingly impertinent and offensive; and, secretly conscious of the power to wound—I may confess these girlish vanities to my father—I, in the irritation of the moment, made use of disdainful words, which I regretted the moment they were spoken; and the more so that they caused poor Reuben's pent-up emotions to overflow at his lips, and an impromptu declaration was the consequence, so vehemently passionate in expression, as, combined with the surprise, to deprive me of all self-possession, and grasping my hand

in both his, and kneeling on the greensward, I don't know how long he might have continued his flaming heroics, uninterrupted by me, had not Ponto, impatient of the conference, or of his master's undignified attitude, appeared suddenly between us in the position of the dog on the frontispiece of *Punch*, just as Mr. Bradley concluded a pathetic appeal for compassion to divine or angelic me—I forget which, both perhaps—and replied thereto by a grave, emphatic *Bow-wow!*

“The effect, my dear father, was irresistible; I burst into uncontrollable laughter. My enraged lover, releasing my hand, leaped to his feet, and aimed a furious kick at Ponto, which that sagacious animal, happily for itself, adroitly avoided; not happily for its master, the unchecked impetus of whose leg overthrew his balance, and toppled him over the steep bank of the duck-pond, down which he helplessly rolled, losing his hat by the way, till he found himself floundering amidst the quacking ducks, and Ponto rushing wildly to the rescue.

“You laugh, papa, at my tame description of poor Reuben's ludicrous mishap,” continued Violet Tremaine, with as demure a look as she could put on; “my exuberant mirth at witnessing the actual catastrophe may, therefore, have some excuse. My discomfited and terribly irate admirer must, however, have supposed that I was purposely mocking at his misfortune; for hastily gathering up himself and hat, and fiercely

shaking himself, he strode off in darkest dudgeon, muttering between his grinding teeth what I have no doubt was a merciless malediction of all damsel-kind; and pursued by my uncivil merriment, which, for the life of me, I could not check, till he was out of hearing."

"It was no question, in the first flush of quite natural irritation," presently resumed Violet Tremaine, with a recurring seriousness which as instantly eclipsed her father's unwonted gaiety, "that Reuben Bradley instructed his solicitor to write this letter."

"Most likely; and Mr. Bradley, has, you must confess, therein displayed, in a very effective light, the spirit of a gentleman as it glows in the breast of a vulgar, purse-proud *parvenu*."

"He was indignant, and acted upon the impulse of his anger; but he will not, I feel confident, follow up his threat. Reuben Bradley has too sincere a regard for you to——"

"Or, at all events, for my daughter," testily interrupted Mr. Tremaine, "to harshly enforce his claim. It may be so, but his forbearance will in no sensible degree retard or lighten the disgrace and ruin about to fall upon me."

"Alas! dear father!"

"Weep not, my girl! Rather let us, though at the eleventh hour, confront, as calmly as we may, the impending calamity. You know, Violet," continued Mr. Tremaine, "that I cannot be justly charged with

excess of any kind—of having wasted my substance in riotous living.”

“Oh, no, no, no!” sobbed Violet. “No one dare accuse you of aught but—but——”

“Of aught but a too-prolonged, because ultimately unsuccessful, effort,” resumed self-blinding Mr. Tremaine, “to place our branch of the family upon an equality of fortune with its less ancient Polwarth off-shoot. Those honestly-ambitious strivings,” continued Mr. Tremaine, with strong emotion, “have reduced me to beggary—to worse than beggary. I should still be several thousand pounds in debt were every acre, every personal chattel I nominally possess, seized and sold, as—should you, dear Violet, fail me at this terrible crisis—they will be, ere many days are past.”

“Should I fail you!” exclaimed Violet Tremaine, uplifting her bowed head, and gazing eagerly through her tears at her father. “What may that mean?”

Mr. Tremaine could not withstand that look. The ancient blood of which he was so proud, blushing with conscious baseness, mantled his face with shame, and he turned hastily away. Soon, however, rallying, and urged by inexorable necessity, as he would have said—*inexorable pride* were the fitter phrase—he resumed his self-set task.

“You heard from—from Henry Grenfell as lately as last week, I think?”

“Yes, dear father,” replied Violet, with vivacity,

catching at a hope suggested by the question : “ but how can he help us in this strait ? Oh, yes, being a barrister, his counsel may——”

“ His counsel may help me through the Insolvent Court, you suppose,” interrupted Mr. Tremaine. “ Tutt, girl, your father will rather hide his shame in the grave ! That which I have to say of Henry Grenfell is this,” he continued, speaking very fast—“ he is an amiable young man, of good family, and a rising barrister ; that is to say, he is just emerging from the crowd of briefless counsel into notice, and people who ought to know speak favourably of his prospects. At present, however, he has, apart from fees, which for some years will not amount to much, only about two hundred a year, which upon the death of his mother—a hearty dame, but little on the shady side of fifty—will, should he survive her, be probably increased to a thousand per annum. He cannot, therefore, marry, except an heiress, for some four or five years to come. How manifestly imprudent, then, is it for young people, who, because they feel a preference for each other’s society—a preference which, so far as passion mingles with it, is the mere straw on fire of rash, inflammable youth—ephemeral as fierce—how mutually cruel is it, I say, for young persons so circumstanced that they cannot in common prudence be united for years to come, to bind each other to a distant, unknown future—unmindful that during the long wearying interval both, if worthy and attractive persons,

would in all probability be presented with opportunities of eligible marriage, which, but for their self-imposed fetters, they would gladly embrace!"

Mr. Tremaine here checked his flow of eloquence, and waited a few moments in expectation of some reply by Violet, whom he dared not as yet look in the face. None came, and he proceeded to the direct application of his "lover's-vows" theory.

"Taking, for example, my dear child, your own betrothment—to use a phrase which has no legal significance in this country—with Henry Grenfell, is it not, let me ask you, highly probable that with his personal advantages and fair prospects, distant though they be, he might find in the London circles to which his profession gives him the *entrée*, some fitting partner whose wealth would at once give him an influential position, and shorten by many toiling years his passage to the bench or woolsack?"

Mr. Tremaine could hear his daughter's breath come thick and fast, but no words accompanying, he went on:

"And as regards yourself, my dear Violet, the letter from London I received this morning places it beyond question that a splendid, and, I cannot doubt, a happy future awaits your acceptance—an acceptance which will, moreover, rescue me from ruin, our ancient name from disgrace, and in addition, realise the great ambition of my life. Your portrait, conveyed to him by his friends Harlowe, has caught Sidney Polwarth's fancy ;

your virtues, my sweet child, will speedily sublime that fancy to love—devotion. Our ancestral blood flows in his veins, and he will be eager to rescue the patrimony I have rashly squandered from the grasp of strangers. My own life-occupation thereof,” added Mr. Tremaine, “even under the happier conditions which you, Violet, can bestow or withhold by a word, will not, my broken health warns me, be a long encumbering one. But that is nothing. You will be mistress of Vere Priory, and my grandchildren will”—

The pressure of a firm grasp upon his arm, and a voice so sternly reproachful that he cannot recognise it, arrests his speech. And can it be his, till now, gentle, submissive child,—sweet, gay-hearted Violet,—who peremptorily challenges his attention, and confronts him with sad, proud eyes, in which there glows a light he had never before seen, never thought to see there! Yes! conscious rectitude and conscious shame are in presence of each other; and see how the man cowers before the girl—the parent quails before his child!

“Say no more, sir,” says the sternly-reproachful voice: “I understand it all—that Reuben Bradley’s suggestion was not, as I had hoped, a calumnious surmise. And yet I can scarcely, upon the evidence of my own senses, believe that a father counsels his child to accept such infamy, as the giving her hand to one, whilst another possesses her affections, must involve.”

“Infamy, Violet!” rejoined Mr. Tremaine, with

rally'ng audacity — “infamy in honourable marriage with a man of fair character, suitable, aye, and belonging 'o your own class in society? You speak as a child!”

“I speak as a Christian maiden should, under such circumstances, even to a father! The betrothment of which you speak so lightly was sanctioned by your approval, and consecrated by the dying blessings of my mother. I will not, dare not, violate the faith I pledged at that solemn hour, and in that dread presence, to Henry Grenfell; no, not for the wealth of worlds!”

So determined and altogether unexpected a resistance to his wishes irritated Mr. Tremaine, and he angrily rejoined:—

“This, then, is the reward of my doating love—of my constant solicitude; this the filial piety upon which a Christian maiden prides herself, to consign, for a mere phantasy, an indulgent father to destitution—to a jail!—to——

“Unjust, cruel father!” interrupted Violet, with a burst of tears, and throwing herself upon Mr. Tremaine's neck, “you torture me! Any sacrifice will I make—anything will I do—to help you, save that which my woman's nature shudders but to think of. Anything”——

“Anything except that which can alone avail to save me from a jail,” broke in Mr. Tremaine, with passionate bitterness, and thrusting his daughter from him. “A helpful, duteous child, truly!”

“Yes, both duteous and helpful!” sobbed Violet, and presently, in some degree mastering her emotion, she added: “Simple, unskilled, as I myself am in the ways of the business world, I know from Henry that the law of this country does not visit with imprisonment the man who honestly surrenders all he has to his creditors. Do you so, father. Be advised even by me. Cast behind you the demon-tempter of ambitious pride; cease to pursue the illusive phantom that has already lured you so far.”

“And work—dig—beg for honest bread!” fiercely interrupted Mr. Tremaine. “That is my daughter’s counsel, and I am grateful for it.”

“There will be no need to work or beg, surely, father; you forget the bequest secured to me by my aunt Trevyllian, over five thousand pounds in the Funds.”

“Ha!”

Mr. Tremaine had started as if suddenly smitten by a new terror, or the flashing upon his brain of a devilish thought. And what can it be that has so instantly taken all colour from his face, and which glares through his dilated eyes like a ghastly, newly-awakened fear—or, likelier, it seems to me, a suddenly conceived diabolical device for the compassing of his ends, which but a few hours previously—so swift is the rapid which sweeps him along—he himself would have shrunk from with unaffected horror?



THE ANGUISH OF VIOLET REMAINS AT HER FATHER'S REVELATION.

Whatever it may be, he cannot for a time give it shape in words; and his face is again persistently averted from that of his panic-stricken daughter.

“That bequest,” he at last says, “is so secured to Violet Tremaine that she cannot, if she would, alienate or dispose of one shilling thereof.”

“Yes, I know; but the dividend, the interest—more than one hundred and fifty pounds a year,—is, after it is received, at my disposal. Such an income will suffice for both our absolute needs as long as I require to share it with you. Not,” continued Violet, with a sweet blush, “not more, Henry thinks, than two years at the most; after which, dear father, it shall be wholly yours, and with Henry’s free consent.”

“Come closer, girl,” said Mr. Tremaine, who did not appear to hear what she had been saying; “come closer, girl, that I may whisper to you that which I would not the walls should hear. You know, Violet,” he continued, in those real, or assumed, low-beating tones—“you know, Violet, that your Aunt Trevyllian’s bequest was lodged in the Funds in the names of two trustees, Reuben Bradley and myself, and that the dividends have since been received by me for your use. Well, my child, urged, tempted beyond my moral strength by an imperious necessity, I, in an evil hour, and fully purposing to replace it, I—withdrew the whole of that trust-money from the Funds, which”——

“Oh, my father!” gasped poor Violet.

“Which,” hurriedly continued Mr. Tremaine, “which could only, you must be aware, be effected by—by—the FORGERY of Reuben Bradley’s name therefore”—

The fearful scream which echoed those terrible words seemed but to urge Mr. Tremaine to conclude what he wished to say, whilst yet his daughter’s failing senses could grasp his meaning, and he rapidly added,

“By the forgery of Reuben Bradley’s name! And now, Violet, you know all. That if the money is not replaced—full five thousand pounds, remember, and this can only be done with your aid, and by the mode I have pointed out—discovery is inevitable, and your unhappy father will be branded with infamy and lost—for ever lost!”

A fainter, sobbing scream gave assurance that his words had done their cruel work, and the next moment poor Violet lay senseless in his arms.

She was borne to her chamber, but it was long before she recovered consciousness, and then but a dim, perturbed consciousness, of which the confused, dominant idea, expressed in broken words of anguish, by looks of piteous, tenderest compassion, by bitter weeping, seemed to be that her father’s life was forfeited to the cruel law; that she alone could save him; and that her mother bade her do so, even at the cost of her own life. “I will—I will, sweet mother!” she deliriously murmured. “Father, fear not; your child will die for you!”

Mr. Tremaine could have felt no apprehension for his daughter's life, or reason, or he would have doubtless manifested great distress of mind; and the unmistakable expression of secret satisfaction, as for an achieved success, which from time to time flitted across his features, as if a mask, suddenly opened and re-closed, would not have been seen. That expression became more vivid and constant, as the strong opiates he administered calmed his daughter's nervous excitement, and gradually induced outwardly peaceful slumber. He then softly withdrew, in compliance with a message brought him by a servant, that two men, officers of the law, from Truro, wished to speak with him below.

It was several hours afterwards when the opiates she had taken loosed their hold of Violet Tremaine's faculties, and she awoke to still baffled consciousness. Instantly missing her father, she rang the bell violently, and presently Martha, the same servant that had brought the message to Mr. Tremaine, entered the chamber.

"Tell my father I wish to speak with him," said Miss Tremaine.

"He has been gone out a long time, Miss," replied Martha. "He was obligated to go," she added apologetically.

"Obligated to go!" said her mistress, with a wild, terrified stare, and clasping her burning temples with both hands, as if she might thereby grasp and still the frightful dread pulsating there.

“ Yes, miss, obligated to go, in this bitter weather, with the snow yards deep, they say, in places. Two officers of the law,” continued the loquacious woman, “ from Truro, came for master, and would not be denied. Gracious, miss,” she quickly added, “ don’t take on so ; master will, I dare say, soon be back.”

“ Did they say—did you hear—where they were taking him to ?”

“ No, miss : leastways, not exactly ; but Jane says she heard Mr. Bradley’s name mentioned once or twice.”

Violet Tremaine, who had raised herself in the bed, was struck back upon her pillow, as by a blow, at hearing these words, which, it may be here stated, involved a gross misapprehension, Jane having unwittingly mistaken the name of Bailey for the more familiar one of Bradley.

The young lady remained silent for several minutes, and then said, with a calmness of tone which both surprised and re-assured the servant, whom the previous violence of her emotions had greatly startled :

“ You may go now, Martha ; but be sure and tell my father the instant he returns that I wish to speak with him. Go, go at once ; I do not need attendance.”

Instantly, as the door closed upon the servant, Violet Tremaine sprang noiselessly out of bed, and dressed herself as quickly as her trembling fingers permitted. One only thought possessed her—that the thunderbolt

had fallen, and that only by seeing Reuben Bradley at once, and exerting the influence she knew herself to possess over him, could her father be rescued from destruction. With the cool reasoning on subsidiary matters perfectly consistent with the wildest cerebral excitement, she comprehended that the servants would, by force if necessary, prevent her leaving the house at such a time and in her actual condition, should they suspect such an intention ; and, her hurried toilet complete, she crept stealthily down a back staircase, and emerged into the bleak bitter night, unsecn by any one.

It had ceased snowing, and a clouded moon and starlight shed a dim wintry effulgence over the wide waste of snow, which the wind, still high and keen, though much less than during the day, continued to sweep into deep, treacherous drifts. The path leading to Reuben Bradley's dwelling being, however, for a considerable distance, somewhat above the general level, was but thinly covered therewith, and Violet Tremaine hastened along at a rapid pace for about a quarter of a mile. She was then in Lea Wood ; the well-known path was no longer distinguishable, and the snow at every step became deeper, deeper—presently impassible ! The maiden's factitious strength forsook her. The dizziness in her head terror heightened to positive delirium. She mistook trees for living men, and called wildly to them for mercy ! help !—thought she heard voices in

reply, mocking her, and presently, high above them all, that of Reuben Bradley, shouting to his dog. She could not be deceived in that, for Ponto's loud, familiar bark replied to his master's call, and with a cry of joy Violet Tremaine turned her feeble steps towards the spot whence the welcome sounds seemed to come, staggered onwards for a few paces, and sank, senseless overwhelmed, in a huge snow drift.

CHAPTER IV.

“L'on revient toujours,
A ses premiers amours.”

FRENCH SONG.

AT about the same that Violet Tremaine was struggling through the snow-drifts in Lea Wood, and, finally, sinking helpless therein, Leonard Harlowe and Sidney Polwarth, *alias* Ernest Brydone, were reclining on luxurious couches and smoking aromatic cigars on each side of a blazing fire, in a splendidly-furnished apartment of the Morley Hotel. There was amber and ruby-coloured wine, in richly-cut decanters, upon the table near them. The wax lights of two brilliant chandeliers, multiplied in costly mirrors, created a softly-lustrous atmosphere above and around them; and the rich damask window-curtains falling in heavy folds, amidst which the reflection of the fire flames leapt and

played, so completely shut out the dark, stormy night, that the howling March wind sounded, when listened for, scarcely louder than the sighing of a summer breeze.

They were talking too—Leonard Harlowe, much the most floridly—of the young lady whose actual condition at that particular moment contrasted so strikingly with theirs—of her beauty, amiability, gentleness, and, above all, of the confiding simplicity of her disposition, a feature of her moral portraiture which Harlowe was constantly harping upon, and unwittingly, but no less certainly, grossly exaggerating that Violet Tremaine's "confiding simplicity" must render her the facile dupe of any fair-seeming imposture.

"A dear, delightful girl!" exclaimed Harlowe, by way of prosaic wind-up of his ecstatic praises; "and you, Brydone—pshaw! and you, Polwarth, must, I am sure, secretly exult over the incomparable prize you have secured in the matrimonial lucky-bag, notwithstanding your glum, hang-dog looks."

"So you persist in saying, perhaps in thinking," replied his companion with a profound sigh, and helping himself to wine, of which he had already drunk freely; "but it is not so; and one reason, I repeat, is, that I cannot realise this sudden change of circumstances—this passing in a moment, as by a *coup de théâtre*, from penury to wealth; from the condition of a hungry

hanger-on at roulette and billiard tables, to that of the English landed gentry. The impression will not be shaken off that I am the sport of a fatastic, drunken dream, from which the rude grip of a policeman will presently awaken me."

"Stuff and nonsense, man! Your nervous system is out of order, that's all; a consequence, my dear boy, you must excuse me for saying, of over-indulgence in wine since we have been in London. A man of your temperament must not acquire that habit. It completely transforms you from the cool, reserved, impassive Englishman, which you really are, to a flighty Frenchman, when you are elated with drink; and a dull, doleful Dutchman, when suffering from the inevitable reaction. Pray you avoid it."

"I drink to drown conscience, and conscience will not be drowned—not, at least, with wine. The Thames might be more effectual."

"The devil fly away with your conscience! He did with mine long since—at least, I suppose so, though I don't remember missing it. Why, what womanish drivel is this?" added Harlowe. "The time when the suggestions of 'conscience' might have availed is past; the fifteen thousand pounds we shared yesterday as perfectly qualifying us for Newgate and the penal settlements as anything remaining to be done! What besotted dolts, then, should we be if, after incurring the penalty, we hesitated to seize the prize!"

“There is satanic truth in that, Leonard Harlowe. I suppose my letter,” added Brydone, “must have reached Acton Court by this time.”

“Mr. Tremaine must have received it long since. And, talking of that, I wish I had seen your letter. Not that I imagine you may not have expressed yourself with propriety—substantially so, at least; still, your education, my dear fellow—not in the bookish sense, that is well enough, but with reference to conventional modes of expression—is, excuse me again, slightly defective; and Acton Tremaine, Esquire, of Acton Court, though poor as Job, has the pride of fifty Lucifers.”

“The letter was well enough, I think,” replied Ernest Brydone. “It is pleasant to know,” he added in a brisker tone, “that, come what may, I shall have been able to relieve Mr. Tremaine’s necessities—with his daughter’s money.”

“To be sure you will; and that will be good policy too. Yes, and it was good policy too on your part to transmit yesterday seven thousand pounds to be placed to Sidney Polwarth’s account with the Truro bank. Very good policy. There is an imposing tranquillity of assurance about it, which to me is quite refreshing and delightful.”

“By the bye, Harlowe,” said Brydone, after a pause in the colloquy, during which both gentlemen helped themselves to fresh cigars—“by the bye Harlowe, I

have never asked you if there are any rivals in the way? Such a paragon of perfection as Miss Tremaine must surely have numerous admirers."

"She has a legion of admirers; but of favoured suitors I believe not one; though there was a talk, some time ago, that one Grenfell, a young barrister, who, I see, is picking up a few small briefs in the law courts here, was a bit of a favourite with the young beauty. He is a very slow gentleman, I have heard, and would have a very slight chance, depend upon it, were he to re-enter the field against the present owner of Vere Priory and the Polwarth estates. There, you are sighing and groaning again! Why, what on earth ails the man?"

"That ails me which wine can neither cause nor cure. I have experienced a terrible heart-quake, in a double sense, this afternoon."

"A terrible what?"

"A terrible heart-quake. I had half resolved not to mention the circumstance, as the fear it suggests is probably an imaginary one; as however, we are both in the same boat, it is only right you should be made acquainted with all the shoals and sands amidst which we are steering. But, first, has any paper, to your knowledge, in reporting Ernest Brydone's death from the *Journal du Havre*, mentioned the names of Leonard Harlowe and Sidney Polwarth in connexion therewith?"

“Not one, I am sure. The paragraph which has gone the round of the papers merely states that Ernest Brydone, a young English gentleman, was accidentally drowned in the Havre roads by the swamping of a boat under the quarter of the “Grand Turk.”

“Then fear, perhaps, has fooled me: It will be well, however, to talk the matter over. You must know, then, that during your absence this afternoon, I was looking through the blinds, myself invisible from without, at the folk in Trafalgar-square, and noticing, with a sort of languid mirth, the liberties which the fierce north-easter, that has been blowing all day, was taking with the men’s hats and the women’s skirts. Suddenly a face, which I should instantly recognise amidst a hundred thousand, and which, if it once confronted mine, with no concealing blind between, there would be an end to all our fine-spun schemes—suddenly, I saw a pale bright face turned towards the hotel—towards the very window where I stood—but this might be fancy—with a kind of inquiring, or rather recognising look, as if it said, ‘Oh, you are hidden there, gentlemen conspirators, are you!’”

“Humbug!”

“It then passed on, and disappeared round the Strand corner, and in fearful trepidation I awaited a summons by the waiter to an enlightening and decisive interview. None, however, came. She would not, it would seem, have called at the hotel.”

“She!—it was a woman, then?”

“A young woman, and a widow.”

“The devil!”

“An angel would, to my thinking, have been the fitter designation a few years since, before the slime of a demoralising profession had soiled her white wings, and smirched her young innocence and truth.”

“Have the goodness, Mr. Bry——Mr. Sidney Polwarth, I should say,” exclaimed Harlowe, with angry earnestness, “to favour me, in place of that cloudy fustian, with a few words of plain common sense. Who is this fallen angel, and, above all, in what way are you associated with her?”

“I did not say, nor do I believe, she is a fallen angel, in the slang meaning of such a phrase,” replied Brydone, with heat. “She is a ballet and pantomime dancer; her stage name, which you may have seen in the playbills, is Madame le Blanc. Really, she is Mrs. White, and has a son, who must be now nearly six years old. She is herself about my own age—six-and-twenty next birthday. As to my association or acquaintance with her, to relate that were to tear open painful wounds, which I hoped the hardening hand of time had for ever stanchèd.”

“And you are bound to do it, my dear fellow! This is no child’s game to which we have challenged Fortune, and I must know every card in the pack.”

“Be it so. Community of crime and danger gives,

I admit, a right to community of confidence. You have heard something of my supposed parentage and earlier years?"

"Yes; that you were a stray waif of the Italian Opera House, and dragged, kicked, cuffed up, by a Mrs. Brydone, one of the dressers there, who took a fancy to you, in the hope that you would one day make a figure on the stage."

"Just so. Mrs. Brydone was a rough-speaking, sharp-handed woman; but at bottom a kind, worthy soul; and I verily believe that my utter incapacity for the stage, which long before I reached my eighteenth year, had been demonstrated beyond doubt or question, helped, with rum and rheumatism, to shorten her days. If, however, I had no histrionic talent, I was abundantly endowed with the gifts which go to the formation of a skilful gamester. At seventeen I was such an adept at billiards that I beat Henry, the marker, of Regent-street. In other games, of both skill and chance, I acquired great proficiency, and early led the life and earned the wages of such adepts—profusion, excess, fine clothes; money in both pockets one day, and pockets to let, fine clothes consigned to the care of my uncle, and scanty fare, verging upon starvation, the next."

"I suppose I know all about that," said Harlowe. "The natural history of a gambler is not a lesson I stand in much need of. Come to the widow, Mr.

Sidney Polwarth, and quickly—there's a good fellow!"

"In a moment. But first touch the bell, and let us have this decanter replenished."

"Really you must not give way to that fatal habit," remonstrated Harlowe, but pulling the bell, nevertheless. "What with young widows and old wine, I shall have you sinking into a maudlin, sodden spooney in no time, if you persist in doing so."

"There is no fear of that; and, if there were, drink, to-night, I must and will. Once in Cornwall, this unslakeable fever of the heart may pass away."

The decanters were replenished, Ernest Brydone tossed off a bumper, and resumed.

"Whilst the old woman lived, I kept up a desultory, and not at all dignified, connexion with the Italian stage, though latterly I was rarely to be seen sauntering about those classic purlieus except during rehearsals, which took place at a time of the day when my own peculiar talents were seldom in requisition. It was on one of those occasions, towards the close of the season in 1841, that I first saw Laura Danvers. A very full ballet was in rehearsal, and she had come to offer her services. A girl of graceful figure, a charming face, lit up with dark, finely-expressive eyes, and framed, mantled, with a profusion of down-falling, glossy hair of the same colour, was before the *chef-du-ballet*, tremblingly, awaiting his fiat of consent or refusal. She was accepted, and continued a member of the ballet

corps till the close of the season. From the first moment I was enthralled, body and soul, to that beautiful girl! There was a sunshine in her presence which dazzled, bewildered—

“We will skip all that, if you please,” interrupted Harlowe. “First, or calf-love, has been described by Thomas Moore, and you could hardly hope to surpass his melodious moonshine. But pray proceed: Did she bamboozle you, or you her?”

“There was no bamboozling in the case,” retorted Brydone; “I do not even think she was aware of the passion that consumed me till I saw her for the last time, previous to this afternoon.”

“Pooh! She knew it as soon as you did yourself; a little before, perhaps. All girls do.”

“That may or may not be. Certainly no revealing words passed my lips till I accompanied her home at the close of the last performance that season. Laura Danvers, I should tell you, had recourse to ballet-dancing, as the only honest means open to her of supporting a bed-ridden mother, who died last year. About to leave her, and uncertain if ever I should see her again, a flood of passionate emotion, till then restrained, burst forth; and—

“Skip that also, if you love me, Brydone—that is, Polwarth,” interrupted Harlowe. “Of course, the sensible, as beauteous, ballet-dancer declined marriage with a seedy billiard-player. That is easily understood.”

“Curse your Mephistopheles’ sneers!” fiercely retorted Brydone, “I have half a mind to”——

“To do that which the much wiser half suggests had better be left undone—hallo! two more huge gulps of wine! ’Pon my word, you are going the pace—you are!”

“I *will* drink to-night, I again tell you; to-morrow sobriety and soda-water, if you like.”

“I sincerely hope you will keep your word; but you are on your knees before the divine Laura. Get up, and go on, I beseech you.”

“Laura Danvers,” sullenly resumed Brydone, “for all answer, informed me she was engaged to, and should shortly marry, Mr. White, violinist and leader of the orchestra at the Surrey Theatre. You may guess my state of mind for weeks afterwards.”

“Easily, my boy! Whirlwind!—gnashing of teeth!—drinking to excess!—neglect of all moral duties, notably those of shaving, frequent ablutions, and change of linen. Then torpor,—a long fit of blue devils, from which, Ernest Brydone at last emerges, a half-real, half-sham youthful *blasé*; perfects himself in various useful arts, finally visits Paris, and his accomplishments, happening to attract the admiring notice of Messieurs. Polwarth and Harlowe, he has the honour of being admitted to the intimacy and friendship of those distinguished individuals. So far, I need no illumination; but what connexion there can be between you and the Widow White still remains in shadow.”

“That is soon made clear. I saw—heard nothing of Laura Danvers, otherwise Mrs. White, till December last, when we were at Baden-Baden, and I had, you remember, such a glorious run of luck at ecarté with that old pompous Prussian prig, General von Ruders, of whom I won more than sixteen hundred pounds. Well, just upon the God-or-devil speed of that piece or luck, a letter, that had been a long time upon the road, reached me, by which I learnt that Laura had been for many months a widow, and at that time, in consequence of the closing of the theatres, and the long, expensive illness of her little boy, was involved in pecuniary difficulties.”

“The artful jade! No wonder you fear she has become somewhat disangelised!”

“The letter,” continued Brydone, “came to hand at a fortunate moment for the writer. The actual possession of so large a sum as sixteen hundred pounds, coupled with the old vibrating tones in which, as I read, the words seemed to address me, reviving dreams of a country cottage—love—flowers, and——”

“Moonshine! Never mind what you have dreamed—what you *did* is the question?”

“Well, what I did was to immediately sit down and write a long letter to the object of my former passion, full of vehement assurances of unchanged affection, and I know not what beside.”

“I do—bosh! I beg your pardon; proceed.”

“In that letter I enclosed a fifty-pound Bank of England note, and requested as early a reply as possible. The answer came in due course ; but a disastrous change had meanwhile come over the spirit of my dream. A run of ill-luck had set in against me. Not only the sixteen hundred pounds had vanished, but I had been obliged to give you—even you—notes of hand for considerable sums.”

“Which notes were yesterday, I am very happy to say, exchanged for those of the Governor and Company of the Bank of England. A good exchange, I say, with all respect, my dear fellow, for your well-known probity in money matters.”

“You be hanged !—Then,” resumed Brydone, “contemplated through that gloomy mental atmosphere, the Widow White, approaching twenty-six years of age, and the mother of a male cub, no longer wore the aspect of Laura Danvers, sparkling with the fresh light of but nineteen golden summers ; and the words of her reply had no echo of the old music ; in short, ill-luck and empty pockets had disenchanted me. I did not write again ; the catastrophe at Havre de Grace supervened ; the tempter, in your likeness, offered a price for my soul—and—here I am.”

“A very pretty, romantic story, upon my word !” said Harlowe, “and not badly told either, with the exception of its rather spooney tag ! But tell me, what effect did the sudden apparition to-day of Mistress

White, alias Madame le Blanc, have upon that inflammable brain of yours?"

"An effect which previously I could not have believed possible," exclaimed Brydone, with fierce earnestness; "and I was tempted to rush after her, throw myself at her feet, and make a frank avowal of my changeless love, of the accursed fetters with which I am bound—of my tortures—my despair!"

"Ah, wine! wine!" exclaimed Harlowe, "you have much to answer for—though, upon my honour, Polwarth, you were egregiously mistaken in supposing you had no talent for the stage. I declare I never heard heroics more finely spouted in my life—never! But come, leave, as Hamlet says, those damnable faces, and I add, that wild stamping up and down, and let us reason together. It is quite certain you must cease to think, or dream—for some men are apt to talk in their sleep—of this very equivocal widow. She would, you know as well as I do, spurn an offer of marriage from *poor* Ernest Brydone; and Sidney Polwarth, Esquire, of Vere Priory, is of course, far above her reach. Then—but well thought of! How is it that you seem to connect her appearance before the hotel this afternoon and our own security with the newspaper paragraph relative to the death of Ernest Brydone by drowning?"

"In this way. Madame le Blanc, or Mrs. White, has, no doubt, seen that paragraph. She knew by my letter that Sidney Polwarth and Leonard Harlowe were

my intimate associates; and having also, it may be, seen the names amongst the fashionable arrivals from France at Morley's Hotel, she might have taken it into her head to call and make inquiries."

"I see—I see! Upon my word, there is, as you put it, a very ugly likelihood that—— We must be off to Cornwall on the day after to-morrow, at the latest. Once there, and the husband, as you will be, of Violet Tremaine——"

"I would not, were choice left," passionately interrupted Brydone, "give Laura for a wilderness of Violet Tremaines, were she a thousand times more beautiful than you say she is!"

"But you *have* no choice left, my dear fellow! Please to well realise that. Your marriage with Miss Tremaine is the best moral security; in fact, the only security we can obtain that, in the event of—of an explosion, we shall not be blown utterly to the devil; and, as I have urged before, Violet Tremaine will wed, I know, a much better Sidney Polwarth than the real one. Had I not thought so, I would not have confronted the risks of our great enterprise. You will not believe, perhaps," he added, with a tinge of sentiment in his tone, no one would have suspected him of, "that I, too, have a nook of mournful memory, which some of these odd hours I may afford you a glimpse of, the undying habitant of which is a fair, lost girl, many years since in her grave, who——"

A tap at the door interrupted him, and was followed by the entrance of a waiter with a note on a salver, addressed to Sidney Polwarth, Esq.

“Brought,” said the waiter, “by one of the messengers of the Adelphi Theatre, from Madame le Blanc, who, I am informed, called this afternoon to ask if you, sir, had left for Cornwall.”

CHAPTER V.

‘A fine woman! a sweet woman!’
She might lie by an emperor’s side,
And command him tasks.

SHAKSPERE.

“JEM!” said the stylish head waiter at Morley’s, addressing the porter to that establishment, “that letter from Madame le Blanc has put the stuns upon the gents upstairs, and no mistake. Even the oldest, who looks as if he could face a loaded cannon with a lighted match close at the touch-hole without winking, seemed pretty near as much struck of a heap as the other. I wonder what that spells in English.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Jem, “the lady is acquainted with both gents, unbeknown to one another, and your delivering the billydoo when they were together has let the cat out of the bag. That’s about the size of it, you may depend.”

“I shouldn’t wonder. Handsome young woman, isn’t she, Jem?” said the waiter, adjusting his cravat and shirt collar in an opposite mirror.

“Stunnin’ Eyes that go through you like a flash of lightning; as to figure—distractin’!”

“ If she calls again, Jem,” said the stylish waiter, after a general and satisfactory view of himself, “ I should like to have a few minutes’ conversation with her. They are pleasant company, them actresses and bally-dancers, I’m told.”

“ Yes, and precious expensive company, too, *I’m* told,” remarked the porter.

“ Not, Jem,” said the stylish waiter, again viewing himself approvingly—“ Not, Jem, where they take a fancy. At any rate, I should like to have a chat with Madame le Blanc, and if she calls again, as I dare say she will, mind you give me the office quietly.”

Jem promised to do so, and waiter and porter went their several ways.

The stylish waiter had not exaggerated the effect produced upon the “ gents up-stairs ” by Madame le Blanc’s missive. A bomb-shell falling in the midst could not have caused greater consternation, and for some minutes after the door had closed upon the waiter Messrs. Brydone and Harlowe continued to stare at each other and the letter in blankest bewilderment.

Harlowe was the first to shake off the spell of mingled surprise and terror, and, seizing the note, tore off the envelope, and read aloud as follows :—

“ Adelphi Theatre, March 30, 1848.

“ Sir,—The purpose of this note will, I hope, be its sufficient excuse.

“ My name is White, although in the profession to which I belong I am known by that of Le Blanc; and you may possibly have heard that I was under an engagement to marry Mr. Ernest Brydone, whose tragical death on the 19th instant is reported in the newspapers. A letter which I received from him, dated from Baden-Baden, contained, besides a munificent gift, another proof of his generous solicitude for me, in the assurance, which now seems to have been dictated by a prophetic misgiving, that in the event of his death before he could revisit England, I should find he had legally secured to me all he was worth in the world.

“ The same letter stated that Mr. Sidney Polwarth and Mr. Leonard Harlowe were his intimate friends, and as I perceive by the public papers, that you, sir, are just arrived from Havre de Grace, I entertain a confident hope that you were with my deeply lamented friend when the fatal catastrophe occurred, and will consequently be able to advise me as to the means I should take to realise poor Brydone’s generous intentions in my favour. He had no living relative, and there can, therefore, be no claim, either in equity or law, superior to mine.

“ I propose calling on you, sir, at Morley’s hotel to-morrow, at one o’clock, unless previously apprised that that hour would be inconvenient; in which case you will, I doubt not, appoint some other and early time when I may see you upon this very painful, and to me very important matter.

“ Your obedient servant,

“ LAURA WHITE.

“ Sidney Polwarth, Esq.”

“ What an infernal fix !” exclaimed Harlowe, as he threw down the letter; “ and all through your accursed scribbling. Oh, kiss and slobber the precious scrawl

do! By Heaven, if I could have supposed it possible that you would turn out such a maudlin idiot, I would sooner have——”

“Keep a civil tongue in your head, Mr. Harlowe,” fiercely interrupted Brydone. “You were best—for, maudlin or not, idiot or not—and I must have been one to listen to your devilish counsel—I am not yet fallen so low as to tamely endure insult or insolence, especially from you. The game is up,” he added, with a kind of bitter glee, “that is quite certain; and the only move on the board left to us is at once to make a clean breast of it to the lawyers, return the money, of which we cannot have spent more than a hundred pounds, and appeal to their mercy.”

“Appeal to the mercy of lawyers, whom we have outwitted! A sensible suggestion; one result of which would assuredly be that the charming Laura—confound her!—would have an opportunity of seeing her deeply-lamented friend in the fancy costume of the Model Prison. But a truce to railing. We are both too much excited to reason coolly. Let us to bed. Night brings counsel; and to-morrow morning we shall be able to talk calmly of our position and prospects.”

This advice was too sensible to be neglected; and, eschewing further colloquy, both gentlemen retired to bed—but not, I should think, to rest.

Mr. Harlowe rose early, and while at breakfast, informed the waiter that as he was going out immediately,

he was to tell his friend that he, Mr. Harlowe, should return at about eleven o'clock.

It was past that hour when he did return, and found Ernest Brydone pale, spiritless, vainly endeavouring to fix his attention upon the newspaper, and still sitting before his scarcely-tasted breakfast! Harlowe, on the other hand, seemed to be in jubilant spirits. Not a trace of doubt or anxiety was visible in his aspect or bearing; and though it might be that that swaggering confidence was in some degree assumed for the benefit of his nervous associate, it was plain that he had fully determined upon the course to be pursued, and was prepared to enter upon and follow it up boldly—fearlessly.

“I have seen the lawyers,” said Harlowe, directly he had seated himself, “and arranged that we shall leave for Cornwall this afternoon! The express starts from the Paddington terminus at three precisely; we must, therefore, leave here soon after two, and I have ordered a cab to be in readiness by that hour.”

“Leave here at two!—and—and—” stammered Ernest Brydone.

“And bewitching Madame le Blanc will be here at one. Just so: it would be perilous to avoid her, as she might take it into her charming heed to follow us to Cornwall; and I have directed the waiter to show her into the adjoining room, where Mr. Polwarth will see her.”

“Where Mr. Polwarth—where I will see her!” echoed Brydone, with a bewildered stare.

“Nay, nay—where I, representing Mr. Sidney Polwarth for once, will see her,” replied Harlowe, with a gay, confident laugh. “You could not have sent her the portraits of your intimate friends in that infernal letter you wrote from Baden-Baden; and she has never, I believe, set her mischievous eyes upon either Polwarth or myself!”

“Certainly not, certainly not! By Jove!” added Brydone, yielding to the ascendancy of his astute accomplice!—“By Jove! the scheme seems feasible.”

“Feasible! my dear boy: it’s infallible. I have chosen the next room for the interview because I can enter it through those folding-doors, and no prying servant will consequently observe that it is Mr. Harlowe, and not Mr. Polwarth, who receives the lady.”

“That was well thought of,” said Ernest Brydone. He added, stammering and reddening, “And I—I shall be able to hear all that passes.”

“Why, yes; I fear that must be so. But have a care, my good fellow! I cannot repeat too often, or too emphatically, that our only chance of avoiding transportation for life, and attaining a wealthy, secure position, is by boldly playing out the game in which we are inextricably engaged. You will, therefore, keep stern guard over yourself, when the hallowed form that’s ne’er forgot is closeted with me a few paces off.”

“Don’t alarm yourself. As you remarked, night brings counsel, and last night—one of the most restless

and wretched, by the way, I have ever passed—convinced me that to hesitate now would be destruction. We are fastened to the stake, and must fight the course—come what, come may.”

“Bravo! There once more spoke my old friend, Ernest Brydone. And now as to details. You must look me up Madame le Blanc’s letters, and such other unimportant papers as may be placed in her hands as having belonged to her deeply-lamented friend. His watch and seal-ring should also, I think, be given to her, with the twenty-seven pounds odd which the *proces verbal* sets forth were found on his person. To which, from respect to his memory, it will be as well to add fifty pounds, as a gift from myself.”

“Not more than fifty pounds?”

“Not more, I think; and this not from any parsimonious feeling, but because a too large donation might, to a lady of such keen perception as I believe Madame le Blanc to be, suggest some notion of hush-money; or if not that—and the apprehension does seem rather far-fetched and puerile—may lead her to suppose that Mr. Sidney Polwarth is so profoundly interested, for his deceased friend’s sake, in her future well-being as to warrant a future pull at his purse-strings; a notion that might bring her, some fine day, to Vere Priory, and menace a catastrophe which nothing but taking the lady into partnership—you see I look some distance ahead—could possibly avert.”

“ You may be right, though I should like to present Laura with a much larger sum.”

“ If it should appear,” returned Harlowe, “ that Laura entertains the slightest suspicion of the truth, it might be politic, it has struck me, to woo and wed her myself. There—don’t look so fierce. I have no ambition, believe me, to be the husband of a stage-dancer, except as a less objectionable alternative than Milbank Penitentiary, with Norfolk Island in the distance. It is many years now since beauty was to me more than a fleeting illusion—a painted toy !”

“ I doubt that it was ever otherwise, notwithstanding your hint last evening to the contrary.”

“ You are mistaken. Fire once glowed beneath this marble exterior, and has left ashes which yet smoulder in the conscience-crypt, haunted, as I told you, by the image of a fair girl, who in her eighteenth summer was drowned in the waters of the Tamar.”

“ Drowned in the waters of the Tamar ?”

“ *Selj*-drowned in the waters of the Tamar. It is an old tale,” said Harlowe, with affected levity, “ of which new editions will never be wanting. Briefly sketched, it may interest you.”

“ I have no doubt that it will ; pray go on.”

“ Kate Jerrit,” resumed Harlowe, “ a slim girl of sixteen, when I first noticed her, was a native of Lostwithiel, near which resided my hypocritical hound of an uncle, an extensive dealer in mining shares, who, as

you have heard me say before, died over head and ears in debt, leaving me heir to the maledictions of his creditors, instead of twenty thousand pounds and upwards he had befooled me into expecting. Well, it chanced that I was sent upon business into Devonshire, where I met with Kate, who was then living with a widowed aunt in a hamlet on the borders of the Exe. At Lostwithiel my uncle's social status was so much above that of her relatives, that I only knew Kate by sight as a blue-eyed, bright-haired, sylph-like damsel; but where we now met the world's arbitrary distinctions were unknown, or, at all events, unheeded by us, and our companionship speedily, in the sweet season of summer, amidst the woods and flowers and streams of that most beautiful part of beautiful Devon, ripened into friendship, love, passion!—believed by both of us to be indestructible—immortal! It is, as I told you, an old tale. I returned to my uncle, confessed all, and with unfeigned earnestness requested permission and means to fulfil my promises. My uncle dissimulated, affected commiseration, said he would see Kate's friends, and the next day packed me off upon his share business to this delightful city, with plenty of money to spend. You may guess the sequel. The gross sensualism into which I, though only in my twenty-first year, plunged, nothing loth, soon blotted out poor Kate's image from my mind, and I had ceased to think of her, when the postscript to one of my uncle's letters curtly apprised

me that Kate Jerrit, who had some time before left her Devonshire aunt, was drowned—had drowned herself in the Tamar. Spite of the growing callosity of my nature, the shock was sufficiently severe to bring on a fit of illness, violent but brief, from which I arose scarcely a sadder or a wiser man.

“My name, the postscript further intimated, had not been mentioned, as far as the writer knew, in connexion with the fate of the unfortunate girl; and when I returned to Lostwithiel, at my uncle’s death, about two years afterwards, I heard nothing, and in sooth sought to hear nothing, in relation to the occurrence.—There,” added Harlowe, with brisk bravado, “you have the full, true, and particular history of a tragi-trivial, romantic episode of my early life, and we will now, if you please, talk of something more business-like and sensible. First, however,” said he, “do you, my dear fellow, look up the watch, ring, letters, &c., for Madame le Blanc, or that fair and formidable personage will be down upon us before we are prepared for her reception.”

Brydone immediately left the room, and Harlowe, having rung the bell,—promptly answered by the stylish waiter,—and ordered a pint of sherry and some biscuits, said,

“You perfectly understand that if Madame le Blanc calls, as we expect she will, about one o’clock, you are to show her into the adjoining apartment—not this

one—as I shall be busy preparing for departure, and the lady’s business is with Mr. Polwarth, not me.”

The stylish waiter perfectly understood Mr. Harlowe’s orders, and would take care they should be strictly carried out.

Brydone presently returned with the letters and other articles required, and one hundred pounds, in a handsome purse. Harlowe acquiesced without much demur in the propriety of presenting the lady with so considerable a donation, and their preparations were complete.

“We have still nearly a quarter of an hour upon our hands,” said Mr. Harlowe, helping himself and friend to a glass of sherry, “and I may as well tell you what, beside seeing the lawyers, I have been doing this morning. A little business conversation will clear our heads of the romantic rubbish we have been maundering about. To begin: I have invested approaching to seven thousand pounds in Consols, which—owing, I suppose, to the continental hubbub just now in full force—are at 82, an absurdly low figure.”

“I don’t know that. Serious apprehensions appear to be entertained that the Chartist revolution may be successful, and——”

“Your Chartist grandmother!” interjected Leonard Harlowe, with contemptuous alacrity.

“That’s all very well,” rejoined Brydone; “but the government and public papers, so far from participat-

ing your confidence, are evidently the reverse of sanguine as to the result of the great demonstration to come off on the 10th of next month."

"All bosh and bunkum, my boy! Government officials and newspaper writers are not such asses as to believe for a moment that Chuffey or Cuffey and Co., could loosen one stone of the granitic constitution of this country. They are simply making the giants for the sake of the tremendous flourish of trumpets with which they will announce their overthrow and destruction. It is quite likely that the prancing leaders of the *Times* for the eleventh of April are already written and in type."

"It may be so, but public opinion, as far as I can judge, does not support your views."

"Public opinion, my dear fellow, in eminent commercial Cockneydom, is the opinion of the *Times*. In the less distinguished circles of Cockaigne the political mental livery is *Times* turned up with *Tiser*. But for Heaven's sake, let us talk of something better worth while than the Chartist cock-a-doodle-doo."

"With all my heart. Go ahead!"

"Consols, I repeat," resumed Harlowe, "are a decidedly profitable investment at the present quotations. Besides, the investment of seven or eight thousand pounds in public securities gives a man an influential position; and you must know that I am a candidate for

the office of manager in one of our most eminent life and fire insurance offices?"

"You, Leonard Harlowe, the manager of a life and fire insurance company?"

"Yes; and why not? It strikes me that the situation will be one peculiarly fitted for the development of my peculiar genius. It will place me in the current of great commercial affairs, and if I do not turn the opportunity to some account I am not the man I take myself to be. The office," continued Leonard Harlowe, "being one of large trust and responsibility, security will be required to the extent of twenty thousand pounds; and I have taken the liberty to name Sidney Polwarth, Esq., of Vere Priory, Cornwall, as the gentleman who, from his long acquaintance with me, will not object to be responsible for that amount, and—hush—hush!"

The opening of the door and a light step in the adjoining apartment had caught Mr. Harlowe's attentive ear, and silenced his tongue. The waiter entered, and announced that he had shown Madame le Blanc into the next room. Ernest Brydone nodded approval, and the waiter withdrew.

Gathering up the papers, placing the gift-purse in his pocket, and fortifying himself with an additional glass of sherry, Leonard Harlowe, with a warning glance at his pale-faced friend, gently opened the folding-doors, carefully reclosed as he passed through them, and made

his best bow to the very interesting lady, who rose with a graceful curtsy to receive him.

“A very charming woman—no doubt about that,” thought Mr. Harlowe, and no doubt he looked it, too, for the lady blushed celestial rosy red, as, acceding to his request that Madame le Blanc would please to be seated, she said—

“I expected to meet Mr. Sidney Polwarth!”

“I am Mr. Polwarth,” said Harlowe; “Mr. Sidney Polwarth, at your service, madame.”

“I beg pardon,” said Madame le Blanc, “but I had imagined—why, I hardly know—that Mr. Sidney Polwarth was a young—a very young—man; not more than—than——”

“Than your own age, madame, and that of our poor friend?” suggested Mr. Harlowe. “That is so, though I am much oftener taken to be six-and-thirty than six-and-twenty. But Time, madame, does not deal so gently with all of us as he has with you.”

Madame smiled her sweetest smile to the compliment, and extricating a letter from her reticule, presented it to Harlowe.

“This letter, Mr. Polwarth,” she said, “will satisfy you that the claim advanced in the note I took the liberty of addressing to you is not unfounded.”

Harlowe ran over the letter, curious to ascertain all that his dangerously-susceptible friend had written.

“I did not,” he said, “require the evidence of this



MADAME LE BLANC AND MR. HARLOWE DISTURBED BY BRYDONES EMOTION.

letter to convince me that poor Brydone, whose untimely death I had the grief to witness——”

“Ah, sir!” interrupted the lady, with a profound sigh, and lifting a cambric kerchief to her eyes, which Harlowe noticed were suddenly filled with tears, which he supposed were professional.

“Yes, madame,” resumed Harlowe, “whose death I had the grief to witness, and which I nearly shared. Everything was done for him that mortal skill could effect; and there is no doubt in my mind that death had no pang so bitter for him as the thought that it separated him—not, I trust, eternally, but as far as this world is concerned—from you, madame.”

If Mr. Harlowe could have foreseen the effect of his elegiac pathos, he would rather have burnt his tongue than given it utterance. The widow burst into a flood of tears, which, whether professional or not, elicited a response—soft as a sigh—sad as a groan—from the adjoining room; which response kindled every drop of blood in his body, from the tips of his ears to the soles of his feet, to a red heat, and caused the lady to suddenly abate her weeping, and gaze inquiringly at the folding-doors.

“My—my friend Harlowe!” said that gentleman, rallying his faculties by a strong effort. “He had a strong regard for poor Brydone, and is constitutionally of a pitiful, sensitive disposition.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed the young widow, with a piercing look. “That is quite the reverse of the opinion

of Mr. Harlowe expressed in the letter before you. It is there said, you perceive," added the lady, pointing to a particular line, "that Mr. Harlowe differed from his young friend, Sidney Polwarth—I remember now how I came by the impression of your youthfulness, sir—that Mr. Harlowe differed from his young friend, Sidney Polwarth, especially by his—his—"

"By his rhinoceros insensibility to sentiment," exclaimed Harlowe, resolutely confronting, as it were, the awkward incident. "That is the phrase used, I see quite plainly, madame. It is very unjust withal—very unjust. It is time, however," continued the gentleman, still very red and savage, "that we proceed to business."

"If you please, sir."

"There is no doubt that Ernest Brydone intended that all he might die possessed of should be yours, madame, although he left no legal document to that effect amongst the papers we found, and which I now hand to you. I am quite willing, therefore, to consider you as the poor fellow's general legatee; but unfortunately, as you will find by this official certificate, attested by the French juge de paix, our friend's personals amount only to a watch, seal-ring, and twenty-seven pounds odd in cash."

"No more than that!" exclaimed the lady, in a quite common-place, disappointed tone. "The letter speaks of fifteen hundred pounds."

“It does, madame; and when it was written I think Brydone was possessed of such a sum as that. But gentlemen of his profession are, you must be conscious, subject to terrible vicissitudes; and at his death he was worth, in a pecuniary sense, just what I have stated.”

“Twenty-seven pounds odd, a watch, and ring,” repeated the lady, moodily. “That is a sad falling-off from what I had been led to expect, and scarcely required so elaborate a preface from Ernest Brydone’s friend, Mr. Sidney Polwarth.”

“Not so fast, if you please, madame. I have stated precisely what Ernest Brydone died worth; here are the vouchers. Here also is the watch, and the ring. As to the money, I, from regard to his memory—from consideration for you, madame—have determined to increase the amount to one hundred pounds, upon the distinct understanding that that sum fulfils, once for all, any moral obligation which may be attributed to me as Ernest Brydone’s friend.”

“Quite so,” replied the lady; “and I feel grateful, but at the same time humiliated, by your bounty. Still, I am obliged to you, Mr. Polwarth, and you may rely that I shall prefer no further claim in respect of any moral obligation which it might be supposed you had incurred as the friend of Ernest Brydone. Good day, sir.”

“Good day, madame,” rejoined Harlowe, bowing

profoundly, though far from feeling at ease as to the result of the important conference ; and he would have given much for a true interpretation of the equivocal smile that curled her lip as she vanished through the closing door.

He would have found that interpretation could be have, unseen, followed the lady down stairs.

Madame le Blanc was met at the first landing-place by the stylish and very obsequious waiter, whose obtrusive civilities, which she, a few minutes previously, had treated with contemptuous hauteur, were now received with winning graciousness. Stylish waiter was charmed—entranced.

“Would Madame le Blanc not wait in one of the sitting-rooms, where there was an excellent fire, till the shower was over?”

“Yes, she would wait a few minutes, if it would not be considered intrusive.”

“Intrusive! Good heavens! Madame, on the contrary, would be conferring an immense favour.”

“Will madame accept a glass of wine?” said ecstatic waiter, after ushering the lady into the proffered apartment.

“Yes, a glass of sherry, if she was not giving too much trouble.”

“How old should you take Mr. Polwarth to be?” said Madame le Blanc, as she raised the wine to her lips, addressing the stylish waiter with a look and smile

which he afterwards declared flashed through him like a couple of flaming gas-jets suddenly turned on.

“How old, madame?” replied waiter, as soon as he was sufficiently recovered,—“How old, madame? why five-and-twenty or thereabouts, I should say.”

“That is your opinion: and who, pray, is the much older tall gentleman with flourishing black whiskers?”

“Mr. Harlowe, madame, Mr. Polwarth’s friend. Mr. Polwarth, as you must have remarked, has no whiskers whatever, to speak of.”

“Exactly. Both the gentlemen are about to leave for Cornwall, are they not?”

“They are, madame; the cab will be at the door for them in about a quarter of an hour.”

“You might do me a great favour,” said Madame le Blanc, in her sweetest voice, and again cruelly turning on the gas.

“Might I, madame!” exclaimed enthusiastic waiter, with explosive energy: “Give it but a name, then, madame—give it but a name!”

“Merely to place me where I can see the two gentlemen when they go out, without being seen myself!”

“Is that all, madame? It shall be done with the greatest pleasure. This way, madame, if you please.”

In something less than half an hour Messrs. Brydone and Harlowe descended the stairs, passed quickly through the hall, entered the cab in waiting, and were

driven off to the Paddington station. Five minutes afterwards Madame le Blanc left the hotel—her fine face pale, her brilliant eyes on fire with excitement—triumph!

CHAPTER VI.

‘An honest man, close-buttoned to the chin,’
Broadcloth without, and a warm heart within.

COWPER.

THE voice of Violet Tremaine calling piteously for help should, according to all romance rules, have been instinctively recognised by Reuben Bradley. It was not so, however: that stalwart and devoted lover only recognised those tremulous cries to be those of a woman or a girl in extreme peril—quite enough to bring him promptly to the sufferer’s aid; and, recalling his dog, which upon nearing home had run on considerably ahead, Reuben hastened with his best speed to the rescue.

The dog’s instinct was keener than the man’s. Violet Tremaine was an immense favourite of Ponto’s, as she was of all other living creatures that came within the sunshine of her gentleness, and he had gone but a few yards in the indicated direction, when he suddenly sprang onwards with swift leaps—checked himself for a moment to glance round and urge his master to speed,

by giving tongue with fiercer vehemence—bounded on again, and in a few moments was scratching furiously at the snow drift into which Miss Tremaine had fallen, and tugging furiously at the skirt of her mourning dress.

Reuben Bradley was quickly up, and the next minute Violet Tremaine was lying in his arms, pale as the snow which but for his aid must have been her shroud; tranquil, silent, too, as death, but warm. “Yes, all-gracious God!” fervently ejaculated the excited young man, “warm—a-glow with blessed, blessed life!”

Whither should he convey her? Where might soonest be attained the aid so urgently required? His own home, the Grange, was much nearer than Acton Court; but ought he—ha!—well remembered—Mrs. Lister’s cottage, which was scarcely so distant as the Grange; and thither the stout yeoman, sobbing like a girl as he strode fiercely through the obstructing snow, hastened with his precious burden.

Mrs. Lister’s lowly dwelling reached, all the helps which womanly sympathy and skill could suggest, whilst awaiting the arrival of the medical gentleman, for whom her son was forthwith dispatched, were eagerly resorted to, and with such success that hardly ten minutes had elapsed when Mrs. Lister came out of the bed-room to announce that Miss Tremaine had expressed a faintly murmured wish to see her father.

“I will go for him at once,” cried Reuben Bradley, starting up. “And yet——”

“Let me go,” said a grave, musical voice, that of Mrs. Lister’s son, who had a minute before returned to the cottage—a lad of not more than fourteen years of age, though strangers, struck by the precocious intelligence of his aspect, and especially of his large, dark, pensive eyes, judged him to be considerably older. A boy, too, of a singularly reserved, almost melancholy temperament, chiefly resulting, it was thought, from a mortifying consciousness of personal deformity. Surgical unskilfulness at his premature birth had caused a malformation of his left leg and shoulder, which was not only unsightly, but gave an awkward side-long motion to his gait, which procured for him amongst the urchins and others of the neighbourhood the sobriquet of *Crabby* Lister. His mother’s sole means of livelihood was her skill in lace-making, but of late young Leonard, by going of errands—frequently important ones—writing letters, and arranging accounts for farmers, miners, and other unschooled folk, had added considerably to her means, and the mother and son dwelt together in peace, love, and—measured by their modest needs—plenty.

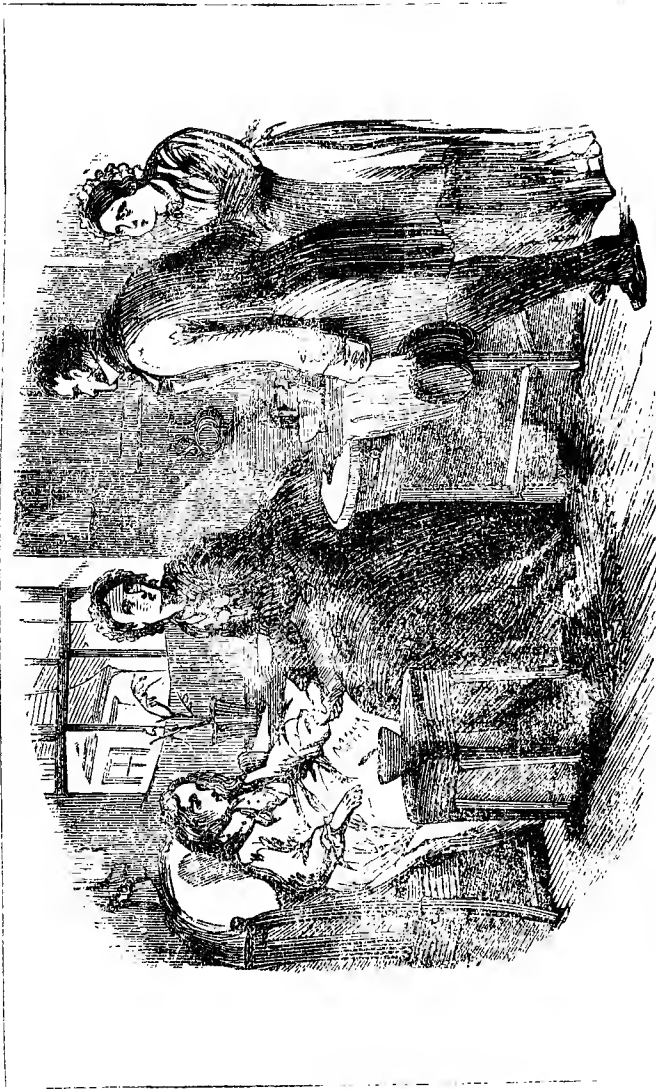
Mrs. Lister herself was a fair woman, of quiet manners and meek, dejected aspect, lightened by a kind of half fearful joy in the intellectual promise and devoted affection of her son; of such secluded habits, too, that

although she had dwelt in her present abode some nine or ten years, very few of the neighbours had ever seen her face. She had settled there at the invitation of Reuben Bradley's father, who had ever been her steadfast friend, and the son, in that respect, as in most others, followed in his father's steps.

"Will you not let me go?" said the grave, musical voice; "I know you would rather not see Mr. Tremaine."

"Leonard, you are a wizard, as I have often told you," replied Reuben Bradley; "though, as it happens, I *do* want to see Mr. Tremaine; not, however, just now, nor at his own house. So cut off at once, my lad: and, hark-ye!" he added, following the boy outside, "don't put on about the trifling service I have been favoured to render Miss Tremaine—trifling, I mean, of course, as being so easily afforded. Just say to Mr. Tremaine that his daughter fell unawares into a deep snow-drift, and is fast recovering from the effects of the accident.'

Mr. Tremaine had left Acton Court in custody of two officers of the law, in virtue of a writ of *ca. sa.*, issued against him by a creditor named Bailey. The debt and costs, however, amounting only to a trifle over fifty pounds, he found no difficulty in settling the matter with the assistance of a Truro acquaintance; and returning home with all despatch, had discovered his daughter's absence—to the servants' consternation as well as his own—but a



M. S. TREMAINE AND HIS DAUGHTER.

few minutes before young Lister arrived to announce her safety.

Dreadfully agitated, notwithstanding that re-assuring intelligence, Mr. Tremaine hastened to his child, whom he found restored to the full possession of her faculties, but so faint and weak that Mr. Perry, the medical gentleman, by that time in attendance, insisted that she should neither speak nor be spoken to—an injunction only disobeyed by the flush and smile of joy that lit up her pallid features at the entrance of her father, which flush and smile gradually faded to the compassionate expression that gleamed in her suffused, mournful eyes when she first partially rallied from the shock inflicted by the terrible revelation, or invention, of that father's criminality.

Mr. Tremaine remained with her as long as she was conscious of his presence, and then, by the advice of Mr. Perry, left her till the next day under the watchful care of Mrs. Lister. There was no danger, Mr. Perry said, of fever supervening, if proper care were taken; and strengthened by that opinion, Mr. Tremaine wrestled with the suggestions of conscience with renewed vigour and success.

He had not seen Reuben Bradley at the cottage, but Mrs. Lister had informed him of that gentleman's agency in rescuing his child from probably mortal peril, and seeing him standing uncertain, as it seemed, whether to go or stay at the spot where the paths leading to

Acton Court and the Grange diverged, Mr. Tremaine hurried towards him with extended hand, and words of grateful thanks.

“Never thank me for that, Mr. Tremaine,” said Reuben Bradley, frankly accepting the proffered hand, and heartily shaking it. “It repaid itself a thousand times over, and if any thanks are due, it is to Ponto. I have waited here,” added Mr. Bradley, “to speak to you upon quite another matter; my share in which I confess, to begin with, that I am very heartily ashamed of.”

“Say no more, my dear sir; I think I——”

“Yesterday, Mr. Tremaine,” interrupted Reuben, colouring and speaking violently—with self-contemptuous violence—“Yesterday, Mr. Tremaine, and not far from this very spot, I made a great fool of myself, and got deservedly laughed at for my pains.”

“Well, well, Mr. Bradley,” said Mr. Tremaine, good-humouredly, “such mishaps will sometimes occur.”

“It is not that,” continued Reuben; “hang it! no. It is not because I was deservedly laughed at by a gentle and beautiful maiden that I am ashamed of myself. Such mishaps, as you say, have befallen the wisest men, and will continue to do so to the end of the chapter. No, no; that which I blush for is that I, chancing at the moment when all my quills were erect, like an angry porcupine’s, to fall in with Ferrand of Truro, vented my contemptible spite by directing him to apply for payment of your bond.”

“Well, Mr. Bradley, you asked but for your due.”

“Due be d——d!” interrupted Reuben Bradley. “It was a mean, dirty action—an infernally mean and dirty action! Quickly repented of, however. I had not left Ferrand a quarter of an hour when a letter was in the post countermanding the order I had given. I did not suppose the fellow would have written to you the same evening. He is not always so expeditious, confound him! It was a providence after all,” added Reuben Bradley, “for had I not upon second, and bitterly self-reproachful, thoughts, resolved upon personally ascertaining that sleek Samuel Ferrand perfectly understood my counter-order, I should not have been passing through Lea-wood to-night.”

“You are very kind and considerate, Mr. Bradley.” said Mr. Tremaine.

“Oh, cursedly kind and considerate! So kind and considerate,” cried the excited yeoman, “that when to-night I looked upon the angel face which might have never again in this world bloomed with beauteous life, I could have shot myself to think that——. But this is crazy talk. I wish to say, Mr. Tremaine,” continued Reuben Bradley, in a calmer tone, “that I am heartily ashamed of having caused such a letter to be written to you; and although I cannot promise to burn the bond, or forego the debt, I do undertake that, till better times come round, you shall not be importuned about it.”

“Thank you, Mr. Bradley; and those better times are not perhaps very far off.”

“Say you so?” sharply replied Reuben Bradley, with a look as sharp; “Not, I trust, by the sacrifice of your daughter, hinted to me a short time since as probable by that double-distilled villain, Leonard Harlowe!—Pray pardon me, Mr. Tremaine; my speech is blunt, but my meaning friendly.”

“To-night, Mr. Bradley *cannot* offend me,” said Mr. Tremaine, “though I confess to some surprise at his attack upon the character of Mr. Harlowe; an individual who has hitherto enjoyed a reputation for strict probity and honour, wild in a pardonable sense as may have been the vagaries of his youth.”

“I care nothing for his reputation,” exclaimed Reuben Bradley; “I *know* him to be one of the most specious, black-hearted—one of the slyest scoundrels that ever cumbered God’s earth! He said—and I, though he said it, believe it—that he and Sidney Polwarth have been bosom friends and companions for years past. Birds of a feather flock together, and excuse me for saying that the bosom friend and companion of Leonard Harlowe could not be, had he the riches of a Rothschild, a fitting mate for Miss Tremaine.”

“Personal feeling,” said Mr. Tremaine, “is opposed to just, much more to charitable judgment.”

“You are in error, sir! That vain dream is past. I was mad to but momentarily indulge in it.”

“Be it so; still this, nevertheless, is a subject upon which you and I cannot confer without mutual irritation. I must, therefore, bid you good night.”

“Oh, good night, Mr. Tremaine!”

Violet Tremaine awoke calm and collected on the following morning, and early in the afternoon, by which time the snow had nearly disappeared, so fine and genial had the changeful weather again suddenly become, she, with the aid of her father’s arm, walked from Mrs. Lister’s cottage to Acton Court.

Few words passed between Mr. Tremaine and his daughter as they wended their slow way homeward. He saw, felt that, although compassion—perhaps love—for him beat as strongly at her heart as ever, respect, esteem, had fled, never to return! Another priceless treasure hazarded, lost, at the desperate game by which he was enthralled as by the fascination of madness! Useless, withal, to repine at that. Regrets, however poignant, could only throw a dreary light over the irredeemable part. And if esteem, respect, had fled, a sacred sense of filial duty and self-sacrifice remained, which would amply suffice to accomplish the great end in view. As to the rest, time had a balm for all griefs save that of poverty, and the lady of Vere Priory would yet live to smile at the recollection of the fantastic illusions that might once have lured her from a position of splendour and felicity to one of comparative indigence and rankling discontent!

That, in this self-communing, Mr. Tremaine had not overrated the strength of his daughter's spirit of filial self-sacrifice, was confirmed by her own lips before they separated for the night.

They had been sitting silently near each other in the drawing-room of Acton Court, each apparently occupied with a book—apparently only, for darkness was falling and candles had not been brought in. Already they felt as in a manner strangers to each other—that a black gulf had yawned between them, rendering impossible the fond endearments, the gushing, unpremeditated tenderesses which are the sweetest intercourse of a father with his child. Presently the twilight stillness was broken, startlingly to his nervous ear, though by a voice scarcely above a whisper.

“I am anxious,” repeated the low, sad voice, “to say a few words—a few final words, I hope—relative to the dreadful communication you made to me yesterday. Is there any danger, any immediate danger, I mean, of discovery?”

“None, Violet; no present or immediate danger, be assured.”

“What right have you to so confidently assert there can be no present danger of discovery?”

“Forasmuch that no suspicion can arise, and consequently no inquiry, unless I were declared bankrupt or insolvent; in which case it would be necessary to appoint a new trustee, and discovery would be inevitable.”

VIOLETTA'S APPREHENSION OF IMPENDING DISCOVERY



“I understand. You are quite sure that my cousin, Sidney Polwarth, will be willing to marry a girl whom he has never seen?” added Violet Tremaine, with forced, continuous calmness of tone and manner.

“I am quite sure that he will.”

“And I understood you, did I not, to say yesterday, that if it were known, acknowledged that we were contracted to each other, there would be no danger of bankruptcy or insolvency, as in that case your creditors would be willing to give time till the monies secured to you by the nuptial bond, or by Mr. Sidney Polwarth’s generosity——”

“What I said, or intended to say, was,” interrupted Mr. Tremaine, “that if you accept your cousin’s addresses, he, being already a near relative, will, I have no doubt, interpose between me and ruin.”

“That being so, time may without peril be granted to me. I have promised to save you,” continued Violet Tremaine, with hurried, quivering speech. “I have promised to save you from the frightful consequences of—of—your crime! Yes, that is the true word; and I may not, sitting in the shadow of this huge despair, palter with truth. My will, I say, is fixed—irrevocably—to save you. But I am withal a weak, feeble girl! I must have time to wean myself from precious hopes that have grown with my growth—to tear away the constraining cords, twined with my own heart-strings, of an unselfish, boundless love; and I will, with God’s help, tear them

away, though the life-blood follow—time to reconcile Henry——. O father! father!” she broke off to exclaim in a paroxysm of anguish, as she started up and hurried from the room, “you have killed your child—my heart is broken!”

The privacy of her chamber gained, Violet Tremaine threw herself, wildly sobbing, upon her knees, to pray for help and strength to bear the heavy cross that a father’s hand had laid upon her young and tender life. That prayer was answered. Gradually to Faith’s meek eyes the glory of the all-compensating future shone through the clouds of earth, and the transitory griefs of mortality exhaled, vanished in the prophetic presence of a peace which passeth understanding, and ineffable, eternal as its source.

The child thus. The father, whom his daughter’s agony of mind had greatly pained, sought strength and consolation in wine, and although habitually an abstemious man, Mr. Tremaine drank deeply that night, and was still busily drowning care, when the tiny roar of the culverins embattled at Vere Priory, and the ascent of a dozen rockets in quick succession, announced to all of Cornwall, within sight or hearing, in accordance with the programme arranged by Mr. Stephen Ayletunne, the hereditary butler at the Priory, to meet all eventualities, that Sidney Polwarth, Esq., had arrived at the halls of his ancestors.

That important event quickened the muddled mor-

bid brain of Mr. Tremaine with fresh life, and his first impulse was to start at once for Vere Priory and be the first to felicitate his future son-in-law on his arrival. Second thoughts, and a glance at the pendule on the mantel-piece, showing him it was considerably past midnight, changed his purpose, and he presently retired to bed with a confused notion simmering in his heated cranium that momentous issues would be decided on the morrow.

* * * * *

Late and unseasonable as it was when the supposed Sidney Polwarth, Esq., and his friend Mr. Harlowe, arrived at Vere Priory, Stephen Ayletunne was found equal to the situation and his responsibility. He and two or three cronies, permitted occasionally to brighten their faces at the same unstinted source that supplied his own rubicund splendour, were still up; and notwithstanding they had been for some hours merrily engaged in the aforesaid pleasant pastime, fortunately retained sufficient command over their legs and arms to fire the cannon and rockets without including themselves; whilst Stephen Ayletunne, whose serene gravity and self-possession it required an enormous quantity of Cornish ale to perceptibly fluster or disturb, was all himself, which was much—(over five-and-twenty stone), and would, had he not been with much difficulty dissuaded therefrom, have roused every man and boy, woman and girl, in the establishment to welcome home the impatiently-expected heir to the Polwarth estates and honours.

Graciously permitting himself to be at length convinced that nothing would please the young squire so much as being forthwith shown to his bed-room, Stephen Ayletunne and two wax candles (Mr. Harlowe being first briefly consigned to the care of a sub) marshalled the way to a sumptuous chamber, wherein a blazing fire had been kept up night and day for the previous fortnight, and there took ceremonious leave of his honoured and harassed young master. The personal appearance of the new squire had found favour in the sight of Stephen Ayletunne. He should have recognised him as a scion of the genuine Polwarth stock amongst a hundred thousand "furreners," whilst his resemblance to his deceased grandfather, when that honoured ancestor was in his hot youth, was, Stephen declared, quite extraordinary.

The establishment of Vere Priory was early astir on the following or, more correctly speaking, on the same morning, and Stephen Ayletunne's festive programme set a-going with great spirit. Flags waved from the battlements—cannons roared, and the village church bells rang out a deafening welcome to all comers, which, as the morning wore on, was responded to by scores of guests of all classes and degrees—gentlemen, clergymen, yeomen, farmers, labourers, miners; and so liberal was the hospitality, so potent the cheer, that the boisterous merriment, scaring away the more fastidious visitors, went on *crescendo* through the day; and

languished, died away only with the inability of the merry-makers to eat, drink, shout any longer to the memory of the past and health of the present Squire Pol'arth!

“By Jove,” exclaimed Ernest Brydone, late in the afternoon, as he and the inevitable Harlowe, escaped from the din and riot of the great hall, were taking a cooling turn through the shrubberies; “By Jove, those fellows’ heads and throats must be made of cast-iron: they swallow ale or brandy as if it was so much water. And, I say, how capitally the thing is going! Not the ghost of a suspicion entertained by any one!”

“Speak only just loud enough for me to hear; though there’s not much danger of being overheard hereabout just now,” said Harlowe. “Suspicion!” he added; “I should think not. The very audacity of the thing, as I have often told you, precludes—defies suspicion. The Cornish rural and mining mind could never in imagination raise itself to such a sublimity of moral boldness and daring.”

“Old Tremaine,” said Brydone, “was wonderfully gracious. His daughter, Miss Violet, is suffering from a slight indisposition, caused by her having been caught in a snow-storm the other day. I am to have the honour of being introduced to the lady to-morrow if she is sufficiently recovered to see company.”

“That is well. The aspect of affairs could not be more propitious; and you, my boy, are behaving admirably!”

“You think so? By the bye,” said Brydone, suddenly, “you are an Atheist, are you not, Harlowe?”

“An Atheist! why, no, I think not. I don’t see how a man whose head is screwed on aright could, if he wished, be an Atheist. But what on earth can have suggested such a question?”

“The sardonic phiz you pulled when the venerable vicar was expatiating upon the manifest providence of God, which had preserved the heir of the Polwarths in the pure faith of his fathers, cast as his lot had been for the first five-and-twenty years of his life in Popish countries.”

“It was very silly in me to pull any such phiz, stupidly as the venerable vicar may have expressed himself. As to religion,” continued Harlowe, “mine is, I believe, that of most sensible men; and as I may, by so doing, help you a little with that questioning conscience of yours, and we may as well talk of religion as anything else, I will, in a few words, tell you what that is. I have, then, *no* religious opinions in a dogmatic sense. My notions on the subject I have found admirably set forth in M. Auguste Comte’s ‘Positive Philosophy’—volumes differing as much from the poor drivel of our Hetheringtons and Holyokes as star-fire from street-mud. This positive philosophy teaches that a sensible man should neither trouble himself to deny nor affirm the existence of God or a future state, and strive only to conform himself and subjugate to his

service the tangible positive conditions by which he is surrounded. From that principle it follows, of rigorous necessity, that pleasure is virtue—pain is vice, although I admit that M. Comte's ideas of pleasure, vice, &c., differ essentially from mine. That, however, is beside the question. The principle established, that happiness in this life is the prime end to be kept in view, each person must of course decide for himself as to its practical application. A mere refurbishment up, it may be objected, of the old doctrine of Epicurus. True, but the same objection applies to all our modern moral philosophies."

"I comprehend. You hold that a wise man will, without troubling himself with speculations as to ulterior possibilities, concern himself only with the tangible realities amidst which he is placed. It follows of course, that Shakspeare's expression,

' There's a Divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will,'

is mere nonsense?"

"Sheer nonsense, as the utterance of Shakspeare himself, but in a dramatic sense, and placed in the mouth of the dreaming Hamlet, a fine, appropriate passage. The race, depend upon it, other things being equal, is to the swift, the battle to the strong. Situated, for example, as we now are, holding the cards we do, and playing against a society chiefly made up of fools, we

must blame ourselves, not Providence, if we do not win both the honour and the odd trick. Hollo! Crabby Lister! whom are you seeking? Either of us?"

"A lady, just arrived, wishes to speak with Mr. Harlowe," replied the lad.

"A lady! What lady?"

"Madame le Blanc," said the widow, in her softest tones and with her sweetest smile, as she came full in sight round the end of a grove of laurels; "Madame le Blanc, who will be glad of a few minutes' private conversation with either Mr. Sidney Polwarth or his friend Mr. Harlowe."

CHAPTER VII.

“ Clutching the red grapes
Of passion and power—
Ah, they were wild grapes,
Cankered and sour.”

IF steel nerves and an iron self-possession are the stuff of which great soldiers are made, Leonard Harlowe should have been a general. Before the checked pulse of his companion could beat again, he had comprehended, mastered the situation, and instantly advancing towards the intrusive lady, with both hands extended to grasp hers in joyous welcome, he exclaimed :

“ Madame le Blanc ! Well, this *is* a delightful surprise ! I did not look for you till the day after to-morrow, at the earliest. Welcome ! welcome ! welcome !” he added, emphasising each repetition of the word by a distinct, hearty shake of the, in her turn astounded lady’s passive hands. “ You came to Truro by rail, of course ?” he quickly went on to say ; “ but how thence ?”

“ In a fly which two horses could hardly pull through the miry, ruddy lanes.”

“ You have, of course, directed the horses to be put up ?”

“I have not yet done so,” said the widow.

“Run, Crabby,” cried Harlowe, “and tell some of the stable-people that the horses must be taken out of this lady’s carriage, and well seen to. Be quick, there’s a good lad!”

“Madame le Blanc,” resumed Harlowe, as soon as the boy was out of hearing, in a tone of good-humoured, confidential reproof: “this is a mischievous, and might have been a disastrous, dodge of yours. You should have written to prepare us for the pleasure of your visit.”

“Mr. Harlowe,” rejoined the lady, “your brazen assurance almost takes one’s breath away. Write, forsooth! How, to begin with,” she continued, facing towards the cataleptic statue of Ernest Brydone and turning on the gas, as the stylish gentleman at Morley’s would have expressed it, so as to almost blind a fellow, “How, to begin with, should I have known whom to address:—Mr. Sidney Polwarth, or,” added the charming widow, in her most musical, caressing tones, “to my friend,—Ernest Brydone?”

“Laura!” gasped that gentleman, with a strong effort to shake off the cataleptic trance, into which her sudden appearance had thrown him, “Laura!”

“Ernest!”

“Laura and Ernest be d——d!” broke in Mr. Harlowe, impetuously. “We must have none of that nonsense here! You may frown and stare, madame; but

it's useless trying the ballet-queen on with me. The matter is too serious for mock tragedy; and if you don't wish to see your deeply lamented friend come out with the rolls, some fine morning, in front of Newgate, you will just allow me to draw this delicate arm through mine, and escort you to the Priory, leaving our dear friend here to a little cool reflection till my return, in ten minutes or less. Come, madame, there is scant time for ceremony, when the step of fate is at the threshold."

"You must have, permit me to say," resumed Harlowe, as he and the intimidated lady walked towards the Priory—"you must have, permit me to say, a singularly delicate, discriminating ear, Madame le Blanc, if, as I imagine, your discovery that Ernest Brydone was still in the flesh originated in that confounded sigh or groan of his, when you and I were playing at "cheat me if you can," in the adjoining room to his at Morley's."

"Partly so; but I was favoured with a full front view, as you left the hotel, of the young gentleman, who never went out in London except in a close cab, and with a handkerchief over his mouth, lest he might increase the cold on his chest."

"Were you, indeed! Well, it is only another illustration of the truth of Mr. Weller's dictum anent the invincibility of 'vidders.' I should have known I could not but be foiled in such a contest, cunning of fence as I

deemed myself. However, it's all for the best, I dare say ; and if not, we must make it all for the best."

"Clearly understand, Mr. Harlowe, that I will not be mixed up in any criminal transaction."

"Certainly not, my dear madame : most assuredly not : you will not, for example, have any hand in transporting our dear friend yonder ?"

"Heaven forbid !"

"I knew you would say so. And, pray," continued Harlowe, with overbearing volubility—"and, pray, how is the clever little boy I read of in one of your letters to our friend ?—high-spirited, daring as ever ?"

"My son is very well, sir : and has lost none of his buoyancy of spirit."

"Glad to hear it. You must send him at the proper age to college, and he will then have a fine chance—helped with the purse and patronage of Mr. Polwarth, of Vere Priory, Cornwall—of attaining the rank of a general of division."

"Mr. Stephen Ayletunne," said Mr. Harlowe, addressing that ancient servitor, who awaited the recently-arrived lady, just within the entrance-hall. "Mr. Polwarth requests you to conduct this lady to an apartment as far removed as possible from the noise and riot still going on; and as she proposes dining alone, that you will give the necessary orders in that respect."

Mr. Stephen Ayletunne nodded compliance, and first favouring Harlowe with a compendious wink, unobserved

by the lady, forthwith silently preceded her in the way she should go. He was gone but a few minutes.

“All right,” said Stephen. “In the blue room, north corridor, tell the squire. I say, Master Harlowe,” added Stephen, with an enlarged stare, “she’s number one! she is—and what a pair of peepers! A furrener, though, by the name.”

“Madame le Blanc!”

“Madame something, I heard before. A pity, rayther, that is though this Madame don’t look as if she was much given to frogs; but young squire having been bred among ’em, of course it’s natural, and runs in the family.”

“What is natural and runs in the family?”

“That P is the first letter of Polwarth, likewise of Petticoat, which accordingly have in my time always run in the family—*on*-separable.”

“Why, Stephen,” said Harlowe, “you look and talk I don’t know how: as if you were quite obfuscated, either by ale or the lady.”

“The lady,” rejoined Stephen, “is, as I told you, in the blue room, north corridor; and as to the ale, it is neither here or there; neither is obfuscated my complaint, which is in the kidneys: so there you are wrong. But this is what I do say, that young squire shows the true breed, except in one thing.”

“And what may that be, Stephen?”

“He’s weak in the top, Master Harlowe. A real

Pol'arth, born *and* bred, could take his three bottles without knowing of it, whereas young squire is shy at facing more than one ! That's a terrible falling off, that is ; but, of course, it's all along of the furreners, and there's hopes, consequently, that he'll improve and do the family credit yet "

"With your aid and example, I have no doubt that he will. And now a serious word with you, Stephen. This visit of Madame le Blanc must not be talked of. It might else reach the ears of Mr. Tremaine, for example, and——"

"And of Miss Violet," interrupted Stephen Ayletunne with a knowing tap of his forefinger upon the huge carbuncle which answered for nose. "A word to the wise is enough. There's a good deal, as you say, Master Harlowe, in every thing ; but I must begone, or the rantipole rascals yonder will roar the roof down upon their heads. One word," said Stephen, turning back, under the impulse of a sudden inspiration : "Couldn't I say Madame was a Lunnon niece of mine, in which case I could myself show her about the house and grounds, promiscuous-like ?"

"Get along, you old scant-grace : I'm ashamed of you, positively."

"And now," soliloquised Leonard Harlowe, as chuckling Stephen Ayletunne disappeared—"Now for my dear friend in the shrubbery. Upon my word, I begin to find that a man might be more pleasantly, if

not more profitably employed than in nursing fools. Well, it is the grand game, after all; so I must e'en have patience, and quietly shuffle the cards."

"Why, where the plague has our bewitched friend hidden himself?" mentally exclaimed Harlowe upon reaching the spot where he had left Ernest Brydone, and not seeing him there or thereabouts. "Surely, he has not—By Jupiter, there he is, down upon his face yonder, in the wet grass."

"Why, Mr. Polwarth, what cold-catching craze is this? Pray get up; a stranger would suppose you were either mad or drunk!"

"I am both mad *and* drunk," shouted Brydone, springing to his feet: "Mad and drunk with rage, with hatred, contempt of myself, of you, of all the world."

"The divine Laura inclusive, of course?" suggested Harlowe.

"I will fling off at any risk," persisted Brydone, with gathering fury, "this accursed night-mare devilry, this huge, bewildering, hideous lie, which chokes, strangles, maddens me. This moment will I confess all to Laura, and be guided by her counsel!"

"As you please! If wilful will to water, wilful must drown! Still it seems to me rather paradoxical that so inflamed a lover should be anxious to consign his too charming Laura to the custody of the police."

"Consign Laura to the custody of the police! What new deceit is this?"

“The lady will find it to be a new and very disagreeable fact, should her dear friend evince a determination to realise his implied and senseless threat. You surely, Ernest,” added Harlowe, with angry seriousness—“you surely, Ernest, cannot take me for so simple a gaby as to permit you, by the easy contrivances of a traitor’s infamy, to rob me of fortune, and hand me over to penal slavery, whilst you escape scot-free! No—no, my man, I shall be swifter, more effective, deadlier than you; and unless this mad humour passes, and I have an assurance that you will not again give way to such traitorous fancies, you shall see Laura’s delicate wrists encircled with iron gyves, before we are two hours older.”

“Laura’s delicate wrists encircled with iron gyves?” echoed Brydone, with but poorly assumed defiant firmness. “Do you think to frighten me by such a straw-stuffed scarecrow as that?”

“Straw-stuffed scarecrow, do you say? Consider it more heedfully, my boy, and you will not fail to discover that the fierce talons and cruel beak are terribly real! Your clever Laura has owned to me that she knew it was Mr. Harlowe with whom she had an interview at Morley’s, during which she recognised the plaintive moan of a despairing lover, falsely reported to be drowned; and knowing that, she, as *you* know, received one hundred pounds of our ‘borrowed’ moneys: to-day she arrives at Vere Priory, addresses you as Mr.

Sidney Polwarth in the hearing of Crabby Lister, a lad with ears as sharp as her eyes. She is now dining in solus state at the Priory,—I having previously engaged on your behalf that her son shall receive a superior education, and when he has attained the proper age, a cavalry commission. If these little items, cleverly coloured and strung together, will not convict the Widow White of criminal collusion with us, you were really drowned at Havre de Grace, and it is the real Simon Pure, or Sidney Polwarth, I am, for the hundredth time, holding solemn and most wearisome confab with—that's all!"

"Harlowe," said Brydone, "you are an absolute fiend!"

"An absolute *friend*! You are right; the best you ever had: one who persists in buckling fortune to your back, spite of your silly, spasmodic efforts to cast off the precious prize."

"Rather say that you persist in fettering me to perdition. Accursed bondage!" cried Brydone, with angry bitterness, "every effort to escape from which serves but to show how hopelessly I am emeshed."

"We will not dispute about words. Call high social position and a splendid revenue accursed bondage, if you please to do so. Meanwhile, instead of standing here a mark for curious eyes, let us walk slowly towards the Priory, calmly discussing, as we go, our real position and prospects, which also involve, as I have clearly explained, the future of Madame le Blanc."

“I am not insensible,” presently resumed Harlowe, “to the painful sacrifice which, even for the sake of the charming widow herself, you are compelled to make in avoiding, *for a time*, her society. I always knew, or at least I always believed, you to be a man whom *la grande passion* would, when your time came, seize and hold with a gripe of steel, though I knew not then, that you, as well as I, had taken the disorder early, as we did the measles, when it is rarely dangerous, and never fatal, except to wretchedly sensitive organisations. I can therefore fully appreciate the extreme agony which, as you expressed it, the sudden tearing open of old, partially-healed wounds must—”

“Will you be kind enough,” interrupted Brydone, “to tell me, without further preface, what point of the devil’s compass you are now veering to? Soft-sawder and sentiment are not in your line, and from such a source are quite thrown away upon me, weak, gullible, as in some respects I may be.”

“Without further preface then——”

“That which I wish especially to understand,” again interrupted Brydone, with rekindled passion, “is, by what fatal necessity, I am to be coerced into the commission of the gratuitous crime of marrying Miss Tremaine, since not one shilling will accrue to either of us therefrom.”

“The motives for that marriage have been admitted by you to be plain and peremptory, insufficient as, read by

the light of Laura's bright eyes, they may now appear. Once for all, however, and to end all dispute upon the subject, I beg to say, that it would not suit my book, if it would yours, that the reputed proprietor of the Polwarth estates should espouse Mistress White."

"Would not suit *your* book!"

"Would not suit my book : and these are the reasons why. First, my share of the ready cash we have divided is nothing like sufficient compensation for the risk incurred to obtain it; the circumstances surrounding and controlling you are totally opposed to any scheme of steady retrenchment, and you will find that the rental of the estates, large as it is, will scarcely more than suffice for the expenditure required to maintain the jovial profusion and lavish hospitality held to be inseparably associated with the dignity of a Polwarth. Clearly then, you cannot hope to furnish me, or provide yourself, with such a sum in ready available cash, as prudent men, delicately circumstanced, will always keep ready for a rapid bolt. Secondly, and lastly, I had 'an opinion,' taken in London as to the precise legal operation of old Polwarth's will, and found, according to the *dicta* of two eminent counsel, that an erroneous interpretation, as I suspected, had been given to certain prolix, wordy clauses thereof. The Polwarth estates go absolutely, it seems, at Sidney Polwarth's death, to Violet Tremaine, should she survive him ; and not, as supposed, only in the event of your dying—of his dying—without

legal issue;—an arrangement intended probably to enforce the old fellow's wish for the union of his grandson with that young lady. I do not say that you or I might, upon reading the long, verbose instrument, clearly arrive at that conclusion, but it is that come to by Sir Fitzroy Kelly and Mr. Bramwell, whose 'opinion' was placed in my hands a few hours only before we left town. You now perceive that your union with Miss Tremaine will not be, as you feared, a *gratuitous* piece of villany."

"I perceive nothing of the sort. What the fiends would it be to me if Miss Tremaine should possess the entire land of England, when my share thereof is limited to about six feet by two?"

"Now that, I must say, is very unkind; especially towards Laura, whom you are bound to handsomely provide for:—after what mode, of course, she herself may hereafter suggest, when you see her, as you, no doubt, frequently will, in London. Not hereabout, by the chaste goddess Diana—not hereabout, either before or after your marriage with Miss Tremaine."

"Curse your glozing, serpent tongue! It stings,—blisters my brain!"

"Pooh! it extends and clears the mental horizon, you mean: peoples it, moreover, with charming images, which, if you are not false to yourself, will grace and beautify the long golden years of a not only prosperous, but love-lit future."

The flushed features and burning eyes of Ernest

Brydone were averted from the wily, inexorable tempter, as he murmured:—

“Harlowe, you play with devilish skill upon my weaknesses,—passions! Still I do not perceive the sequence of your argument, as to how the—the—”

“As to how your money-means will be increased by marriage with Miss Tremaine? Thus-wise: You will not be able to raise, upon the security of your life-interest in the Polwarth property—leaving yourself a sufficient revenue—anything like the sum required for a flight-fund, as contemplating a possible contingency, we may call it. But once married to the heiress-apparent, there would be no difficulty in doing so, as your wife’s consent could, no question, be easily obtained, the ostensible object being the relief of her father, which, to a certain extent, must be carried out, he being, as I hear, far more deeply involved than I had supposed.”

Brydone made no reply, and Harlowe, satisfied that the coward-conscience of his facile dupe and accomplice was once more scared and coaxed, for a time, at all events, into submission, said, with restored gaiety and good humour—

“And now, my dear fellow, let us go into the house: you to resume the honours of the great hall, I to have a very amicable and very thorough understanding with the beauteous widow, who must, I think, return to London forthwith.”

“I will see Laura before she leaves,” said Brydone,

quickly: "if only for a few minutes, and in your presence."

"Agreed,—with those limitations. The scandal of her visit I suppose I must take upon myself. Well, I would do more than that for a friend."

Some two hours afterwards, Ernest Brydone, who by that time had, with the help of drink, worked himself up into a fever of jealous rage, which fortunately his few remaining guests were in no condition to critically scrutinise, was beckoned from the banquet-hall by Leonard Harlowe, and informed, in a whisper, that Madame le Blanc was about to leave.

"The fly which brought her from Truro is getting ready," said Harlowe, in compressed stern tones, corresponding with the expression of his face, "and I have agreed to accompany her, the more distinctly to mark, in the eyes of curious observers, her peculiar intimacy with your humble servant. Oh, don't be jealous of me!" added Harlowe, with petulant bitterness. "So fierce a slip of Satan is no more to my taste than I am to hers. I have conquered her, notwithstanding."

"Conquered her! You have ——"

"Conquered her—yes! Ask her yourself, if I have not: here she is:—And now, madame—now, sir, be pleased to speak as softly, briefly, and as sensibly as under the circumstances can be expected.—By Jupiter, the man is crazed!"

Ernest sprang towards the lady, fell on his knees

and embraced her's with delirious passion, then started fiercely up, partly at her entreaty, partly from shame at exhibiting such emotion in the presence of Harlowe.

Her excited features manifested, he noticed, extreme disquietude, and there were traces of recent hot, fiery tears upon her cheeks. As evidently, too, her passionate, impulsive spirit had been mastered, subdued, by the stronger, subtler mental power of Harlowe, upon whom her flashing glance rested fitfully, with an expression of both hate and fear.

“Mr. Harlowe,” she said, “has grossly misunderstood the purpose of my visit here: but that may pass for the present. He has convinced me that you and I, Ernest, have no longer any choice but to submit our wills to his will; a hard condition, which I have accepted, chiefly for your sake.”

“Say but the word, Laura,” exclaimed Brydone, with quivering rage. “Say but the word, and I will brave every thing! defy—spurn—spit at this coward, who has presumed to——”

“Hush! hush! my friend,” interrupted the young widow, “your head is in the lion's mouth, mine also, he would fain make me believe; and possibly the blind iron law might—Be that, however, as it may, you, Ernest, shall never be jeopardised by any act or hint of mine, of that rest assured. And now, my friend, farewell!”

“A trifling business-form must, if you please, be first gone through,” said Harlowe, “namely, the signing of this paper by you, Madame le Blanc, if your right hand is not quite devoured, and by you, Mr. Sidney Polwarth.”

“I had forgotten,” said the widow; “give me the pen.”

“Mr. Sidney Polwarth first,” said Harlowe. “It is a memorandum,” he continued, in reply to Brydone’s muzzy, questioning stare, “setting forth that Sidney Polwarth, alias Ernest Brydone, agrees to pay Laura White, otherwise Madame le Blanc, widow, an annuity of four hundred pounds, with remainder to her son.”

“You shall sign no such paper, Laura,” exclaimed Brydone. “Never, by Heaven!”

“She must and will sign it,” returned Harlowe, to the full as fiercely, “or an hour shall not have passed before both of you shall have bitterly repented the refusal to do so—bitterly, as then unavailingly, have repented of that refusal. My mind is made up, my purpose clear,—the mode of action prepared, and the result certain.”

The vehement but unstable wills of Brydone and the youthful widow and mother, once more yielded before the hard, resolute audacity of Harlowe; the document was subscribed and sealed in due form, consigned to the safe keeping of Harlowe, and the widow received a cheque upon the Truro bank for half a year’s annuity in advance.

“Have you mentioned the arrangement regarding my son?” asked Madame le Blanc.

“No: but I will now do so. London, I have reflected,” said Harlowe, “is a place where not only evil counsellors abound, but where a lady who had been over-persuaded to act rashly, treacherously, might easily conceal herself, when to find her might be a pressing necessity. It has therefore been settled, with a view to mutual confidence, and for the boy’s advancement, that Madame’s son shall be placed by me, as his guardian, and with, of course, his mother’s privity and assent, at Dr. Boothby’s admirable school, near Truro. I shall thus hold a pledge of Madame’s fidelity,—chiefly because I or others shall always be sure of ultimately finding her.”

“You will come often to see the boy?” said Ernest Brydone.

“Madame proposes,” interrupted Harlowe, “to reside in Cornwall, an arrangement to which I do not object.—Now, Madame, if you please; the carriage waits.”

* * * * *

Ernest Brydone was gradually reviving from the sullen dreamy torpor into which he had sunk, when Harlowe shook him roughly by the collar, and demanded in a hoarse, fierce voice, “if he meant to lie droning and snoring there all night?”

Brydone, considerably sobered by his dozing unrest,

jumped up, fully awake, and gazed wonderingly at the intruder.

“What is the matter?” he exclaimed, “What has driven all the colour from your cheeks?” “Or is that deadly pallor merely a reflection of the moonlight——?”

“Moonlight be d——d! Have you any wine here?”

“Yes, I believe so. Ayletunne, I think, brought in some. Oh! there it is—on the table, yonder.”

Harlowe seized the decanter, and applying it to his lips, drank long and eagerly.

“I am better now,” he presently said: “My blood circulates freely again.”

“And the colour returns to your face: you looked strangely just now.”

“It would be strange if I did not. If I am not labouring under some unaccountable hallucination,” said Harlowe, feeling his own pulse, “or febrile excitement of an extraordinary kind, I have to-night seen with mine own bodily eyes,—seen—the—

“Seen what?” exclaimed Brydone, impatiently.

“Seen the pale, sweet face of her—of Kate, who some fifteen years ago, as I told you, was drowned, self-drowned in the Tamar.”

CHAPTER VIII.

“When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think
I should live to be a married man.”

SHAKSPERE.

THE dwelling of Reuben Bradley, known as the Grange, presented to a fanciful mind a strong resemblance to its habitant and proprietor. A firm, capable, substantial building, originally devoted to business purposes only, but with the acquisition of wealth gradually modernised and transformed into the fitting abode of a country gentleman. The stucco of gentility, in both instances, but partially concealed, however, and from superficial observers only, the solid granite which it overlaid: and beneath the wrappings of wealth and growing importance of the dubious ‘Squire,’ the stout heart of the genuine yeoman beat as healthily, and with as warm a sympathy for the lowly and oppressed, as when he and his father were toiling up the steep and slippery ascent to opulence, which, with industry and integrity for guides and helpers, was at length achieved.

The beatings of that stout and kindly heart were just now hurried, intermittent, feverish : this was clearly apparent from Reuben Bradley's flushed, heated features, and the restless impatience with which he fidgeted about the spacious, handsomely furnished dining-room of the Grange ; now reconnoitring, through the French windows, the long dull road to Truro, now stirring the already roaring fire,—next seating himself and snatching up a pipe, an old habit he could not forego, and after a few spasmodic puffs, laying it down again,—signs of mental disturbance which at length excited the solicitude of Ponto, who, rousing himself from a luxurious snooze before the fire, got upon his legs, and stretched and shook himself into an attitude and expression of concerned expectancy : without result, however—the master's nervous irritation were beyond the scope of canine sympathies, and that fact ascertained, Ponto, with a short, reminding bark, intended to signify that he was at home if wanted, again resigned himself to soft repose and semi-somnolency.

I doubt, moreover, that Reuben Bradley could himself have given a very clear analysis of the disturbing emotions by which he was agitated.

Commiseration, inflamed by passion, it may be thought, for Miss Tremaine, who there was no longer a doubt was destined by her father to be the wife of Mr. Sidney Polwarth ; a man for whom Reuben Bradley,

felt an unmitigated abhorrence, scarcely less intense than that in which he held his associate, Harlowe.

Yes, sympathetic commiseration for Miss Tremaine had unquestionably a powerful share in exciting Reuben Bradley's mental disquietude,—but not, I think, sympathetic commiseration inflamed, gangrened, by the selfishness of passion. That, as he had told Mr. Tremaine, with stricter truth than he himself was perhaps aware of, was a vanished dream; so entirely so, that he now frettingly awaited the coming of Mrs. Lister, who since the accident in Lea Wood, had been staying with Miss Tremaine, to ascertain if a letter had been forwarded to Henry Grenfell, apprising him of the menacing turn of affairs at Aeton Court; a duty which if longer delayed, he had half resolved to take upon himself.

In sooth, Reuben Bradley's devotion to Miss Tremaine partook rather of the chivalrous enthusiasm of a feudal retainer for his high-born lady, than the passion of an ardent young man for a beauteous, obtainable damsel; which means that it was far more a devotion than a desire—a worship than a hope, that he felt he might as well, in Helen's words, have

“Loved a bright particular star
And thought to wed it.”

And it was, no doubt, the secret, stinging consciousness of extreme disparity of personal condition, which gave irritating force to Violet Tremaine's involuntary merriment, when the impulse of a partially vinous

inspiration betrayed him into an attempt to give utterance to his enthusiasm by the common places of ordinary courtship.

That loyal devotion to refined and regal beauty—regal in the sense of graciousness—had been deepened, within the last twenty-four hours, by a curt note, from Mr. Tremaine, requesting Mr. Bradley to bring his bond to Acton Court, in order to its being paid and cancelled.

This was a proof that Mr. Tremaine had received earnest-money in the matrimonial bargain he had entered into, rendering it more doubtful than before that Henry Grenfell would succeed in defeating a purpose by far too matured.

Reuben Bradley had consequently requested Mr. Ferrand to bring over the bond; and it might be in expectation of the lawyer's arrival that the irascible proprietor of the Grange took such interest in the road leading to and from Truro. Yet that could hardly be the case, forasmuch that Ponto, had he the faculty of speech, could testify that the long, dull line of road had been for the last fortnight the object of his master's favourite contemplation.

Was it perchance that at a considerable distance on that long dull road, a pretty ready-furnished cottage, the property of Reuben Bradley, and lately let by him to a singularly interesting stranger, glinted through the trees by which it was screened from the highway; and that its smoke could, especially on so clear a day as

this, be seen gracefully curling above their sunlit tops? Positively I think so; and, moreover that Reuben Bradley's, moody meditations would, freely rendered, read thus:—

“A very fascinating woman; there is no gainsaying that, whatever may have been the circumstances that have led to her intimacy with Polwarth, and placed her under the domination of that prince of rascals, Leonard Harlowe. It is certainly no concern of mine, yet, for the life of me, I cannot guess at the nature of the ties that bind her to those fellows, except they be the easily supposable ones,—which even Ferrand admits to be out of the question. For Sidney Polwarth she seems to feel a kind of pity, dashed with contempt—pity and contempt for a man worth ten thousand a year! It is a strange puzzle, though, of course, nothing to me, except as a matter of curiosity—natural curiosity, the lady being my tenant. A remarkably bright handsome face, one must confess, an April face, now clouds, now sunshine. A loveable face, too, even, though perhaps not so beautiful as Miss Tremaine's:—not such a seraphic smile; but much warmer, plays about one's heart like summer sunlight: complexion not so fair, transparent, nor lips so delicately chiselled—lips to kiss, though, by George; and as to figure—Ah, Mrs. Lister, here you are at last; take this chair by the fire, and then tell me the news?”

“I have very little news to communicate! re-

sponded a mild patient voice, in unison with the mild patient face of the speaker. "Merely that the letter to Henry Grenfell, which has taken so long to write, was posted yesterday."

"Call you that 'merely!'" exclaimed Reuben Bradley. "It will nevertheless suffice to baffle the iniquitous marriage plot. I at least hope so."

"I have no such hope," said Mrs. Lister. "Miss Tremaine, though more than kind, and to a certain extent confidential with me, is very reserved upon that topic; but I am convinced, by a number of trifling circumstances, singly considered, that nothing can prevent her marriage with Mr. Sidney Polwarth. An overwhelming necessity of some kind has compelled Miss Tremaine's consent, and that consent will not be withdrawn."

"The overwhelming necessity is that of paying her father's debts,—an exigence which, I trust, Henry Grenfell will succeed in persuading her she ought not to yield to. Then Mrs. Grenfell—who, I see by the papers is arrived from abroad, at Bath—is said to be rich, and may be induced to assist in smoothing difficulties."

"You cannot shake my conviction, Reuben, that the death alone of one of the parties could frustrate the proposed union. And that," added Mrs. Lister, "may happen; for sure I am, that the springs of life in Miss Tremaine are greatly weakened, if not, as yet, fatally so."

“Sweet, gentle lady!” exclaimed Reuben Bradley, with bitter indignation. “Should she die, her father, in the sight of God, and of all justly-reasoning men, will be her murderer!”

“The intercourse between father and daughter,” remarked Mrs. Lister, “is very cold and constrained: different as day and night from what I am told it used to be. Mr. Tremaine, I have more than once observed, cannot look his daughter fairly in the face. There is a strange mystery in the affair.”

“You are right,” exclaimed Bradley: “and in fact, since Sidney Polwarth’s arrival, there seems no end to mysteries of one sort or another: I hate mysteries!”

“And of those mysteries,” said Mrs. Lister, “I have a strong suspicion that the smooth-spoken, intriguing young widow holds the threads.”

“Smooth-spoken, intriguing young widow!” echoed Reuben Bradley, with a tone and air intended to express a strong mental effort at guessing whom such a description could possibly apply to, and which, but for his flaming blushes, might have been more successful.

“Do you perchance mean the lady who has taken that cottage of mine? If I thought,” he added, getting up and gazing quite fiercely in the direction of the said cottage—“if I thought, which I cannot think, that that lady was mixed up with any humbugging plots and mysteries, I’d soon give her notice to quit: she is but a tenant-at-will, you know.

“I do know that, and I wish I also knew that she is not already tenant-at-will of the large, warm, and else-unoccupied heart of the son of the best and truest friend I ever had in the world. Unoccupied in a serious, substantial sense, I mean,” added Mrs. Lister, “as my woman’s instinct! long since discovered to be the case: That would be a tenancy I fear, at her will, and notice to quit on your part but matter for her mirth.”

“My dear Mrs. Lister, how can that discreet sensible head of yours entertain so preposterous a notion? What! a stranger, with no introductions of any worth?

“Always excepting two brilliant laughing eyes.”

“A stage-dancer, as she herself ingeniously confessed——”

“A pretty foot and graceful carriage not requiring to be ingeniously confessed.

“Now really, Mrs. Lister!—Well remembered by-the-bye,” added Reuben Bradley: “Has Harlowe ever caught a glimpse of your face, since the night when its sudden apparition through a gap in the hedge scared him for some minutes into a belief that a visitant from the world of spirits confronted him?”

Reuben Bradley had effectually changed the subject of conversation. The half-serious, mirthful twilight, so to speak, vanished, and the old sadness fell, like a veil, over Mrs. Lister’s pale, pensive features.

“No,” she said, “not since: he believes, I have

heard, that he was deceived by a chance resemblance : and when he returns from London, I shall take care, whilst he remains here, which will not be for long, they say, to keep myself more strictly secluded than ever. If, indeed, he does not permanently quit this neighbourhood, I must," she added.

"That you shall not do," exclaimed Reuben Bradley : "a pretty thing, indeed, that *you* should hide from him." "Let him but dare molest you !"

"Nay, I fear not that, but——"

"Tell me, mother," interrupted Bradley, seating himself, and taking her hands in his : "You know I have always regarded you as a second mother, obstinately as you persist in refusing to permit me to act towards you, in some degree, as a son in my circumstances ought——"

"You would not take from me, Reuben, the dignity of independence ! You know, I have faithfully promised, that neither I nor my son shall know want as long as you live."

"Oh, yes, you have promised that, to be sure ; and a wonderful fat promise it is ! However, it's of no use harping upon that old grievance. Do you, I was going to ask, when something put me out,—do you feel any lingering regard for that scoundrel ? Would your mind hearing he was hanged ? That's coming to it."

A bright hectic passed over Mrs. Lister's brow—passed over and left it calm—colourless as before.

“The heart, it has been truly said, knoweth its own bitterness,” she presently replied; “and be you, blunt, but ever kindly-meaning, Reuben, assured, that the heart—a woman's heart, if not a man's, also knoweth, that in the sealed and secret depths where once— But this,” Mrs. Lister, added, breaking off abruptly, “this is a forbidden topic: one upon which I may not, will not question myself.”

“As you will. There is, however, another question which I *must* ask:—“Does your son know that Harlowe is his father?”

“Oh no, no, no!” sobbed poor Mrs. Lister. “Of this I had myself thought to speak to you, Reuben, to whom alone, shielded by the life-sorrow known to, appreciated by you, I can speak thereof without sinking with shame. When,” she resumed, as soon as her agitation permitted, “when your father, Reuben, saved me from the fearful sin of suicide—from more than suicide—for my boy was born a few hours afterwards, he, when many months subsequently, reason came back, and I knew how deeply I had been indebted to his and your good mother's fostering, parental care, counselled me—your mother counselled me—to assume the name I bear, and carefully conceal from my child the knowledge of its mother's frailty. I have followed that

counsel, and Leonard believes himself to be the legitimate son of a father long since dead, who deserted me soon after marriage. The subject is never alluded to by either of us—and, Oh, I could not now bear to read in his tender loving eyes, the knowledge of his mother's shame! You, Reuben, cannot, I am sure, wish that I should."

"I wish you should! What the deuce can you take me for to imagine such a thing? I wonder if old Ferrand means to be here to-day, or not," violently added Reuben Bradley, jumping up from his chair and turning once more to the window, through which he could not for a time see very clearly: but the obscuring mist was not upon the glass.

"It's just upon dinner-time," continued the master of the Grange; "so that if he comes at all, we shall soon get a glimpse of his precious phiz. Ah! there, by Jove, comes the old four-wheeler. I judged he'd time it to a nicety. Don't hurry away, my dear Mrs. Lister; stop, and take a bit of dinner with us."

Mrs. Lister excused herself. She had promised Miss Tremaine that she would return to Aeton Court early in the evening, and she had household offices of her own to despatch meanwhile.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Reuben Bradley and Samuel Ferrand—a man of large frame and massive head, the informing soul whereof was imperfectly interpreted by a pair of vulpine, yet good-natured eyes,

and a mouth of which the lines of quiet humour greatly improved the expression of the face—sat down to dinner, which important affair concluded, the cloth was withdrawn, “materials,” were placed upon the table, Mr. Ferrand helped himself to a pipe, filled it with his host’s first-rate tobacco, lit it, and having drawn a few satisfactory whiffs, said,—

“Appearances are seldom to be trusted, I am aware; still I could not have believed without ocular proof that such seemingly robust health as your’s, Master Bradley, was so entirely a deception.”

“What do you mean by deception?”

“When,” continued Samuel Ferrand, “when a young fellow two yards in height and one in breadth, or thereabout, sits down to a roast quarter of lamb, spring chickens, a milk-fatted corned leg of pork, asparagus, cauliflower, green peas, new potatoes,—all from his own farm (though we are not yet out of April), preserved Apricot tart—you have promised me that recipe for the last five years,—finishing with a prime ripe Stilton,—you are right in saying that the droppings of the ale cask is a much greater improvement than any wine,—the whole washed down with genuine home-brewed,—I say, that when a young fellow of your weight and inches sits down to such a dinner as that, and eats no more than a sickly school-girl, if so much, there must be something radically wrong in the system, somewhere. Grief, we know, puffs a man up.”

“There, shut up, do!” interrupted Reuben Bradley. “You have brought Mr. Tremaine’s bond with you, of course.”

“Of course. Please to take notice,” continued Mr. Ferrand, who did not appear at all desirous of a precipitate move, “please to take notice, Master Bradley, that I will not act upon any instructions, whether oral or written, from you to threaten proceedings in case of non-payment of rent on the twenty-fourth of June, now next ensuing, by the lady at Rock Cottage.”

“What *are* you chattering about? Surely the ale cannot have been too strong for that bull-head?”

“My reason for giving that notice is that as you were mightily inclined to throttle me for having, by your order, written threateningly to Mr. Tremaine; you would be likely, were I to menace Madame le Blanc, to actually do it right out.”

“This jesting is very ill-timed, Mr. Ferrand,” cried Reuben Bradley. “You are here on business, I believe! Were you not,” he added, with abating sternness, “the very old friend you are, such folly would anger me.”

“It would be anger thrown away, Master Bradley. Come, sit peaceably down for a quarter of an hour: we have quite that to spare, and I have several odds and ends of matters to turn over with you in a quiet way. One is, that I am uncommonly glad there is no chance of you and the elegant Miss Tremaine coming together.”

“Are you?”

“Fact, as I’m alive : I should not have posted that letter in such a hurry, had I not hoped it might help to put a spoke in the wheel. The young lady,” continued Mr. Ferrand, hooking one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, stretching his legs luxuriously before the blazing fire, and blowing a tremendous cloud—“the young lady is made of much too refined porcelain clay, to kindly amalgamate with such mere earthenware fellows as you and I. You would always have been in a twitter, lest you should hurt her feelings, or wound her pride,—something like Ponto here, picking his steps amidst a lot of costly china and glass, and fearful every moment of unawares putting his foot in it. No, no : Miss Tremaine, amiable and beauteous as she unquestionably is, would never do for you. Neither, Reuben, do you want a rich wife, having plenty of money yourself, nor a girl of high connexion—high connexion, except as means of enabling a needy husband to get on in the world, being, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, an unmitigated nuisance. The wife you want, Master Bradley—I can see her now, as plainly——”

“Eh ! Where ?”

“In my mind’s eye, Reuben. The wife to suit you, I say, must be a frank-hearted, joyous-tempered person,—a handsome young widow, we’ll suppose——

“Pshaw !”

“I merely *suppose* her to be a handsome young widow, with a laugh like music, who would not for

once in a way mind roughing it for dinner, as we have to-day, nor object to your smoking a pipe afterwards—you don't always content yourself with twisting an empty one between your fingers,—might perhaps fill it herself, and might have a pair of sparklers at which, if a match wasn't handy, one might light it. Not a bad chance likeness that, for a fancy sketch—eh, Reuben Bradley?"

"Have done with banter, old friend; and if you will talk of the tenant of Rock Cottage, at least talk sense and sincerity. Has, for example, your wonderful sagacity discovered anything decisive concerning that fair dame?"

"Yes, something very decisive: to wit that her intimacy with Leonard Harlowe, a gentleman whom I would give something to be able to count up quite correctly,—to wit I say, that the fair dame's intimacy with Leonard Harlowe is founded upon and cemented by mutual, and I believe changelessly sincere——Reuben, lad, this tobacco of your's doesn't draw so well as usual; or perhaps it's the pipe?" added Mr. Ferrand, deliberately filling another.

"Curse the pipe!" exclaimed Reuben Bradley. "Go on, will you?—you old aggravating son of a gun!"

"In a minute, Master Reuben! Let me see, where was I? Oh, I remember,—respecting Mr. Tremaine's bond, which——"

"Confound you, no! That Madame le Blanc's intimacy with Leonard Harlowe is founded upon and

cemented by mutual, and you believe changelessly sincere something."

"What an attentive hearer you are, and what a fine memory you possess, Master Reuben: I only wish the venerable vicar could say as much for you when you attend church; there might be hope then of your better edification than——"

"Have you a mind I should set Ponto at you?" savagely interrupted Reuben Bradley. "I will, if you go on in that way."

"Don't flurry yourself, Master Reuben; we shall come to it directly, never fear. I was saying, you reminded me, that Madame le Blanc's intimacy with Leonard Harlowe is founded upon and cemented by mutual and changelessly sincere—fear and aversion."

"Oh!"

"Ha! that vexes you, Master Reuben. You would have everybody in this fleeting vale of tears regard each other with loving-kindness and sympathy; a most praiseworthy feeling, but——"

"Don't, old fellow! If you do, I'll shy this de-canter at your head, as sure as you are alive!"

"Oh, this hot, impatient youth!" exclaimed Mr. Ferrand, with an appealing glance at the portrait of Reuben's father, suspended over the chimney-piece. "Could you, could either of us twenty years ago have anticipated it of him? Well, it may be better not to draw the cord too tight, so, I proceed seriously."

“Madame le Blanc and Harlowe regard each other, I have said, with mutual fear and aversion; and from various hints and oddments carefully put together, she, I am equally sure is under the iron thralldom of the gentleman, to escape from which she would risk, sacrifice much, everything, in fact, except that by which she is held in bondage, videlicet, her son.”

“May it not rather be that she is held in thrall by the consciousness of having committed some offence cognisable by the law, which Harlowe could at any moment invoke to crush her?”

“That is so natural a conjecture that it at once forcibly suggested itself to my mind. And I still think it touches the difficulty nearly; with this difference, that the offence, whatever it may have been, was Harlowe’s, not her’s, and that she, knowing the desperate, unscrupulous nature of the man, fears that rebellion on her part would be revenged upon her son.”

“Revenged upon her son! Surely the law, if appealed to, is strong enough to protect both her and him from a million of Harlowes, desperate, unscrupulous as they might be?”

“No question of that; but how to impart that conviction to a nervous, and possibly in some way compromised woman, who dares not, as I know, seek counsel of a man of law, is the difficulty.

“What do you imagine to be the nature of the bond-secret?”

“With respect to that, I confess to being completely at fault. Many conjectures have passed through my mind, but left no trace of truthful likelihood. There is nothing perfectly clear to me in the matter, save that she believes herself to be in Harlowe’s power, and that vengeance upon her child is the sword suspended over her head, in readiness to strike, should she but attempt to escape from it.”

“You still firmly believe in the lady’s moral guiltlessness?”

“Most firmly; and I can see through shams as well as most people. It is true that when, for a brief space, she is able to throw off the burden which oppresses and weighs her down, a strong love of admiration,—coquetry, perhaps, though certainly not of a hateful type,—and a keen sense of enjoyment, sparkle in every curve and dimple of her bright, handsome face; but the searing finger of guilt has not, I will be sworn, traced the faintest line thereon.”

Reuben Bradley sighed profoundly, but nevertheless said, and with unmistakable sincerity, that he was rejoiced to hear Mr. Ferrand say that, adding—

“That is a pretty little boy of her’s. I thought he was to be placed at Dr. Boothby’s school?”

“It was so proposed; but there will be no vacancy, it seems, till after the midsummer holidays. Meanwhile, he has taken a great fancy, I hear, to Crabby Lister, in whom, through you, I suppose, the mother

has great confidence. Crabby takes him to the Priory sometimes," added Mr. Ferrand; "and I was both amused and interested the other day, when I chanced to be there on a matter of business, to notice how keenly-observant, precocious, meditative Crabby was at Polwarth's demeanour towards the child. He was satisfied, too, I think, by that scrutiny, that the notion which had flitted through his brain, as it had through mine, was unfounded."

"You have no misgivings upon that point?"

"None;—not the shadow of a misgiving. I have been favoured, you must know, by an inspection of the widow's certificate of marriage, and that of her husband's death, together with a number of unquestionably genuine letters, which shew that they lived very happily together. In fact, the lady greatly interests me, and, in spite of appearances, I have formed a very high opinion of her. Had I not done so, I should not have spoken as I have of Madame le Blanc—or, rather, of Mrs. White—to your father's son."

"I know that—I feel that, old friend!"

"Well," said Mr. Ferrand, rising "thy pipe and the decanters being out, we had better, perhaps, be moving."

"Ah! to be sure. There is the bond to see about; I had almost forgotten it. Mr. Tremaine will be expecting us by this time."

Pleasant, the reader who takes an interest in the

simple-hearted yeoman would have found it, to observe the kindly, respectful, and entirely unservile greetings, which met him from humble people, as he and his friend Ferrand passed by on their way to Acton Court, the "God bless you, Master Bradley!" being as much, or more vividly the expression of the speaker's eye, than were the words. This was not a new feeling on the part of the toiling dwellers in the neighbourhood. From the time the Bradleys settled at the Grange,—some twenty years previously,—it was there that honest indigence, undeserved calamity, knocked with the full assurance of receiving, not merely material aid, but kindest sympathy and counsel. Vere Priory might be a more favourite house of call to the professional mendicant, but the really afflicted in health or circumstances turned trustful eyes instinctively towards the Grange. The unanimous verdict of the country-side pronounced Reuben Bradley to be as good a man as his father, and poor folk hoped that his wife would be as sweet-spoken and kind-hearted as his mother.

There was no fear of a reversal of that verdict; but whether the "hope" would be realised would have received affirmation or denial according to the good or ill-opinion which lookers-on might entertain of the lady who, strolling through Lea Wood, with a little boy gambolling by her side, came suddenly within view of Reuben Bradley and his attorney-friend, eliciting the ejaculation, "Ha!" accompanied by a deep blush, from

one gentleman, and that of "H—e—em!" emphasised by a sharp look from under the pent-house brows of his companion, from the other.

Madame le Blanc was also surprised,—and pleasantly so, it would seem, by the tremulous blush of warmth and light which kindled her pensive countenance as she returned the salutations of the gentlemen. Tears in her voice—tears in her eyes—imparting a diviner, more spiritual radiance, made poor Reuben Bradley's heart beat tumultuously, and gave a nervous energy to his hand-grasp, which had, perhaps, something to do with the lady's deepening colour and penetrative smile.

"May I have the honour of escorting you home?" exclaimed Reuben Bradley, with spasmodic hurry. "I was going your way."

"H—e—m!" ejaculated Mr. Ferrand, louder than before—"H—e—em!"

He "h—e—em'd" to deaf ears. The lady, with a frank, condescending grace, which, had his heart been still in his own possession, would have carried it off unresistingly captive, had instantly accepted Reuben Bradley's arm, and he, utterly oblivious of Mr. Ferrand and all things concerning him, was already marching off in triumph with her towards Rock Cottage,—Ponto gambolling in front with the pretty boy, with whom that sagacious quadruped had already struck up an endearing acquaintance.

Mr. Samuel Ferrand, finding himself thus unceremoniously ignored, stepped briskly after them, grasped the gentleman by the arm, and said :

“ You had better, Master Bradley, take this document with you, as I must be jogging homeward. There will be no need of my assistanee in receiving your money, as the acquittance is written upon the back of the bond, and you will merely have to affix your signature. Good day, Master Bradley! your servant, Madame Le Blanc !”

It was not much more than a mile thence to Rock Cottage ; yet it was full two hours afterwards, and the earlier stars were looking forth, when Reuben Bradley repassed the spot on his way to Acton Court to receive payment of his bond. It is necessary that we precede him there by a few minutes.

CHAPTER IX.

“*Facilis descensus Averni.*”

MR. TREMAINE had expected Reuben Bradley much earlier at Acton Court with his bond, and the delay had greatly irritated his daily more and more irritable and moody temper; the slightest contrariety now sufficing to throw the once equable, placid-minded Acton Tremaine into transports of rage.

Wonderful, perplexing to himself, was the change that the few weeks which had elapsed since that confession to his daughter had wrought in him: he seemed to literally breathe an atmosphere of self-abasement: Violet and he rarely met save at meals; and her sad silent submission as to an inexorable destiny; her lingering affection for him, wholly divested of respect; her pity tinged with contempt, as he interpreted it, exasperated, almost maddened him, and he felt that unless a change took place he should come to hate her,—yes, come to hate his own, his only

child! No marvel that he, at times, almost doubted his own identity with the free-soul'd, if rashly-venturous Acton Tremaine that accusing memory mirrored to his mental vision!

Ay, but a change,—an all-atoning change was certainly at hand,—had already dawned upon his troubled, harrassed life. His young kinsman, Sidney Polwarth, was the most liberal of relatives, having advanced already over four thousand pounds, and moreover, agreed to raise a large sum upon the security of his own estates, the more effectually to extricate his future father-in-law from pecuniary difficulties. That surely was legitimate cause for self-gratulation! Well, hardly so. Young Polwarth's generosity seemed rather to proceed from a carelessness about money, than the frank liberality of a kinsman, heightened by love for his cousin Violet.

He, Mr. Tremaine, had been grossly deceived,—why, he could not imagine,—by that portrait-pretence. Sidney Polwarth had seen Violet but twice or thrice, and evidently felt for her no warmer sentiment than respectful indifference. The terrible price he had bound himself to pay for extrication from debt and disgrace was accepted; but not valued, apparently at a pin's worth!

“It will be sternly insisted upon, nevertheless;” thus ran on the current of the distempered soliloquist's bitter musings: “Harlowe laid that distinctly down;

one reason being the clause in that accursed Will, as alleged to have been interpreted by Sir Fitzroy Kelly and Mr. Bramwell; which opinion, if really given, I do not believe to be worth a rush. Violet inherits only if Polwarth dies childless. Had it been as Harlowe affects to believe, I would have endeavoured to tide over my embarrassments until she came of age, and have then obtained her consent to raise money upon the reversion. Useless to snatch at that broken reed, which failing, as it assuredly would fail, might fatally compromise me with my facile, careless young kinsman.

“To be sure the usurers who are to advance the money upon the Polwarth and Tremaine estates, insist upon having Violet Tremaine’s security; but that proves nothing: Polwarth may die without legitimate issue, and then, no doubt, the estates go to her. Let me read the fellow’s letter again :

‘Albany Chambers, London,
April 26, 1848.

“My dear Sir.—Your statement, received yesterday, that the debts which must be liquidated amount, mortgages inclusive,—to thirty-eight, instead of twenty-nine thousand pounds, your previous estimate; if you are to be effectually relieved from your embarrassments—greatly alarmed me. The difficulty is, however, I am happy to say overcome, and eighty, instead of seventy thousand pounds will be advanced upon the accepted securities.

“Those securities, as I before intimated, include that of Miss

Tremaine, whose signature, she being the reversionary legatee is declared to be indispensable. The necessary deeds are in course of preparation: I shall take them with me to Cornwall, and it will be my duty to see them formally signed and attested, which done, the gentlemen with whom I have been negotiating will immediately hand over the needful.

“The terms are high, yet, under the circumstances, the precarious state of the money-market included, not, I think exorbitantly so. What with bonus, commission, premium and insurance,—the annual interest will not be very much short of six thousand pounds!

“The position of your affairs, however, and the pressure of a large amount of post-obit bonds, given, as I explained to you, by Mr. Sidney Polwarth, upon the splendid expectancy happily realised, would render the acceptance of still more onerous conditions, imperative. I write by this post to Mr. Sidney Polwarth, and beg respectfully to subscribe myself,

“Your obedient servant,

“LEONARD HARLOWE.

“P. S. The kind interest which you have been pleased to evince in my own humble fortunes, induces me to believe that you will hear with pleasure of my success in obtaining the, to me, lucrative appointment (£800 per annum) of Managing Director to one of the most eminent and old-established Life and Fire Offices in the United Kingdom. The election came off yesterday. L. H.”

“That which amazes and puzzles me,” mentally resumed Mr. Tremaine, “more even than that a young man who till lately had no reasonable prospect of

inheriting his grandfather's property, should have been able to raise large sums upon post-obit bonds,—a capital bargain, as things have turned out, the neck-or-nothing speculators in such securities must have made,—is that the people who are going to advance the eighty thousand pounds, don't inquire whether Violet Tremaine is of age or not; and that Harlowe who does know she is a minor, and her signature, consequently, not worth a straw, completely overlooks that ugly fact.

“It is, to be sure, the lenders' business to test the value of their securities, and if they do not raise the objection, why—— What am I dreaming, maundering, about? Do I not know, that should Violet's signature prove to be an indispensable condition for obtaining the money, I have myself erected an insuperable bar to the attainment of that signature?”

“Damnation! how strangely things turn against me!” murmured Mr. Tremaine, rising from his chair, and paeing to and fro with restless perturbation: “About a fortnight since, when Violet suggested that that infernal five thousand pounds might possibly be raised upon the contingent reversion of the Polwarth estates, I was at pains to explain to her that not being of age her consent and signature would be worthless in law. And, of course, now to ask her to aid in raising money by the fraudulent signing of her name, as if she were legally competent to do so, would be

useless, absurd! She would cut her right hand off first.

“What then is to be done? One might, to be sure, without the incurrence of much peril—Arch-fiends of crime!” exclaimed the agitated gentleman, wildly clasping, with outspread hands, his flushed and throbbing temples: “ye are indeed swift as deadly in suggesting a dark purpose, and the means of its accomplishment! Can it be possible, that what even but a few days since seemed a crime but to feign the commission of, is now grown familiar to my thoughts; is contemplated by me as a possible, a committable deed! To be sure,” he reflected, after a while, during which the “arch-fiends” had succeeded in somewhat calming his remorseful emotion, “to be sure there would be no real harm done: the genuine securities would be ample; and Violet, upon the attainment of her majority, could——

“Ah, Mr. Bradley, you are come at last? Creditors are not usually so tardy.”

“If by creditor you mean one who is anxious, or desirous to receive payment, I am not a creditor of yours, Mr. Tremaine.”

“You are very kind, Mr. Bradley, and I am happy to see you in such a fine state of health. I never remember to have seen you looking so blythe and hearty.”

“I have been dining with Samuel Ferrand, and as

the decanters do not stand idle upon such occasions, my face may wear a redder hue than usual. He intended to have come with me, but something or other put it from his mind."

"A humorous, and withal, shrewd, clever fellow is Samuel Ferrand. I would rather take his opinion in a difficulty than that of the fussiest big-wig in London."

"You, Sir, I am sorry to observe are not looking well. Quite the contrary."

"You are right, Mr. Bradley; I am *not* well: very far, indeed, from well. This putting one's house in order," added Mr. Tremaine, fretfully pushing away a pile of papers upon the table he was seated at, "this putting one's house in order, which you know all about, is a harassing, depressing business; it smells of mortality."

"Smells of mortality!"

"That seems an odd, but is not, I think, an inappropriate expression. These papers are, for the most part, melancholy mementos of withered hopes, extinct ambitions, dead and buried projects. This bundle, for example, records the hopeful birth, the struggling life, and sudden death, without hope of resurrection, of an enterprise, to help, nurse, and dandle which into healthy maturity, the money secured on the bond given to your father was borrowed. In this very room—he sitting about where you now sit—

we discussed the probabilities of success, and I succeeded in convincing him that they were greatly in my favour, yet it proved one of the most disastrous of my many disastrous undertakings. Thus you see these memoranda are, in serious truth, the epitaph, variously written, of a wasted, mis-spent life, and exhale from every line the odour of the mocking, remorseless, all-devouring grave."

"That is a doleful way of putting it," said Reuben Bradley. "I hope there are yet many happy years in store for you,—and yours."

"I hope so too, although at times, and to-day especially, my spirits flag forebodingly. But I have no right to bore you with these melancholy megrims. You have brought the bond, as I requested?"

"I have; but permit me to repeat, Mr. Tremaine, that I have no wish to receive payment."

"I am obliged to you, but this debt must be cancelled. There is the exact sum, interest included, as stated in Mr. Ferrand's letter. Please to ascertain for yourself that it is correct."

The bond paid and given up, Reuben Bradley was about to leave, but Mr. Tremaine insisted that they should crack a bottle together for lang syne.

"We are still friends, I hope, though no longer debtor and creditor. I suppose, by-the-bye," added Mr. Tremaine, "that you will soon lose your interest-

ing tenant of Rock Cottage, now that Mr. Harlowe has obtained a lucrative situation in London?"

"I am not aware that the movements of the tenant of Rock Cottage depend upon those of Mr. Harlowe;" replied Reuben Bradley.

"But, indeed, they do! Madame le Blaue and Mr. Harlowe are contracted lovers, and *should*, my kinsman Mr. Sidney Polwarth informs me, have been married some months ago."

"Your kinsman Mr. Sidney Polwarth lies like a rascal!" exclaimed Reuben Bradley. "And you may tell him I say so," added the fierce yeoman, enforcing his words by a heavy blow upon the table with his clenched fist.

"Hey-day! here's a fresh hare started! Are you quite serious?" added Mr. Tremaine with smiling inquisition, and shifting the table-lamp so as to obtain a clearer view of his auditor's face. "Yes, upon my honor, profoundly, savagely serious! A mad world this! Aye, and another illustration of the great master's knowledge of the human heart; Romeo's passion for Juliet having, I remember, been kindled at the burning ashes of his love for disdainful Rosalind! Not that you, Master Bradley, are exactly a Romeo—or——. Still a mad world withal: I comprehend it less and less every day that I live!"

"I speak plainly enough, I hope, to be comprehended," rejoined Reuben Bradley, with unabated

eholer: "I say, that if your kinsman Polwarth says, or intimates, anything to the prejudice of ——"

"Hush! hush!" interrupted Mr. Tremaine. "Is not that the sound of earriage wheels?"

Reuben Bradley being on his feet stepped quickly to the window and looked out.

"A post-chaise furiously driven is coming up the avenue towards the front entrance;" said he.

"And brings, I fear, a personal answer to letters posted yesterday;" exclaimed Mr. Tremaine with sudden trepidation. He rang the bell violently.

"Neither Miss Tremaine nor myself can be seen this evening by any one that may call," said Mr. Tremaine, addressing the servant who answered the summons. "You understand me," he added peremptorily; "We can see no one this evening!"

The servant had hardly left the room, when the post-chaise stopped at the front entrance of Aeton Court. A loud knocking and ringing pealed through the house, presently followed by an angry altercation in the hall dominated by the fierce tones of a stranger, who was presently heard to exclaim—

"Mr. Tremaine is in the library! I saw his shadow on the blind; and I *will* see him!"

The library door was flung open, and the entrance of a tall, gentlemanly-looking young man was simultaneous with that of the remonstrating servant. The stranger's dress was travel-stained and disordered, and

his countenance and demeanour manifested extreme excitement.

“Leave the room,” said Mr. Tremaine to the servant. “By what right,” he added, the moment his order was obeyed, “by what right, Mr. Grenfell, do you thus forcibly intrude upon my privacy? Pray remain, Mr. Bradley. This unpleasant interview *shall* last but a few minutes; and I wish to speak further with you.”

Those bold words ill matched, Reuben Bradley thought, with the trembling lips and frame of him who uttered them. Henry Grenfell had fallen into a chair, rather than sat down upon it, and partly from exhaustion, partly from a wish to in some degree master the violent emotions by which he was agitated, before trusting himself to speak, did not immediately reply by words to his questioner.

“By what right, I again ask,” said Mr. Tremaine, gathering courage from the seeming want of it in the intruder, “do you, Henry Grenfell, presume to thus rudely force yourself upon my presence? To-morrow I shall be ready to afford any explanation to which you may be entitled—but this evening—”

“The right,” interrupted Henry Grenfell, with impetuosity, “the right of a man to at once confront and wrestle with him who menaces his peace—or life! But I purpose to speak, if it be possible to do so, calmly—discreetly.”

“I am glad to hear it: though the beginning pro-

mises badly in that respect. In plain terms then, and avoiding small heroics," said Mr. Tremaine, "you wish, I suppose, to ascertain from my own lips whether the determination some time since arrived at, and formally announced in the letters which you no doubt received this morning from me and Miss Tremaine, to forthwith break off the rash, ill-advised engagement, that—"

"Rash, ill-advised engagement!" broke in Henry Grenfell: "It was the foreseen result,—the natural consummation of an intimacy dating from mine and Violet's earliest years! Ill-advised, too! Dare you say that of a solemn contract consecrated by the approval and blessing of one whose clear prescience—whose calm gentleness of wisdom—none so well as you, taught by the sad consequences of having refused to be guided by that clear prescience, that calm gentleness of wisdom, should be able to appreciate?"

"I want none of your heroics, I repeat, Henry Grenfell;" hotly replied Mr. Tremaine, as if with an effort to subdue his own agitation by noise and bluster. "They may answer very well for an address to a jury in the first breach of promise case you are retained in; but they are quite thrown away upon me. My decision—Violet's decision is taken; and nothing shall change it!"

"Say not so;" rejoined Henry Grenfell with self-enforced calmness. "My words have, I fear, smacked

too much of reproachful bitterness. I would, however, confer with you, in all kindness and respect. Since I left town, I have been schooling myself to speak with calmness, and if I offend, do you, Sir, attribute that offence, not to deliberate purpose, but to the passionate ebullition of a young man, who, at a crisis in his life, the issue whereof will influence for good or evil all his future days, cannot sufficiently master the emotions which distract and almost madden him."

"Go on, sir; have your fine speech out," said Mr. Tremaine, folding his arms, and doggedly settling his features into an expression of stolid, scornful defiance. "Only, as a favor, please to remember that rhetoric is never so effective as when condensed and brief. Mr. Bradley, I again request you to remain: nothing that can possibly pass between me and Mr. Grenfell, need, after what has come and gone, be hidden from you?"

"I quite agree in that," said Henry Grenfell, promptly. "My profession," he resumed, after a moment's pause, "my profession gives the practice and the power of reading the minds of men through all the masks of expression which they may assume; and I detected beneath the cold, smooth formality of the letter I have received from you, a latent, irritating sense of the tyranny of circumstances compelling you to adopt a course repugnant to your wishes,—to your better nature."

“My better nature is much obliged to you, Mr. Grenfell; but for all that I—”

“I beseech you to hear all I have to urge,” interrupted the youthful barrister, “before you finally decide: I am not, you are fully aware, ignorant of the unfortunate pecuniary position in which a succession of baffled enterprises has placed you; and I can appreciate the humiliation, the anguish, which the passing of your ancient patrimony into the hands of strangers would inflict upon you. Bitter humiliation! intolerable anguish! against which, Violet’s marriage with her wealthy cousin, can, you believe, alone shield you.”

“Go on, Mr. Grenfell; you state a case prettily enough.”

“I wish, Sir, to place what I have to say before you clearly and unreservedly. Having fairly appreciated the adverse circumstances pressing upon you, I make this proposition. Your hereditary property valued at twenty-five years’ purchase, is worth, we will say, twenty-five thousand pounds, though it would certainly not fetch that in the open market at present. Now, I happen to know a gentleman who has a large fortune to invest for a minor, and he will advance that sum on the estate, my personal security being added thereto, at three and a half per cent. interest; binding himself not to recall the principal till the child of whom he is guardian shall have obtained his majority—about seventeen years hence; by which time there can be

no reasonable doubt, I—your daughter in fact—would be able to take the mortgagee's place; and to make all sure, I propose to forthwith insure my life for that sum. The twenty-five thousand pounds," continued Henry Grenfell, "will, I know, from what you have confided to me in former conversations, be quite sufficient to liquidate all claims against you; and the transaction will be unknown to any one in Cornwall—except ourselves."

"Twenty-five thousand pounds!" murmured Mr. Tremaine, in a musing tone. "Twenty-five thousand pounds would still leave—still leave—"

"Would still leave you destitute of a sufficient income, you apprehend?" interposed Henry Grenfell, misunderstanding Mr. Tremaine's meaning. "You must reckon, remember, the difference of interest between three and a half, and five, six, seven per cent. which you now in reality pay. There is, moreover, her Aunt Trevelyan's legacy, the interest of which Violet has for a long time purposed making over to you. Then," added Henry Grenfell, with a modesty and confusion remarkable in a barrister, "Then, as my mother, with whom I have been for some time in communication upon the matter, has agreed to increase my income upon my marriage to eight hundred a year, I—we, that is, shall be able to spare, without inconvenience, the savings I have already set apart, —about fifteen hundred pounds

only, — and which cannot be better employed, than in freeing and improving your daughter's heritage."

The earnestness, the generosity, the shrewd counsel of the young barrister touched even the habit-hardened nature of Mr. Tremaine; and for a few moments he seemed to waver in purpose. Only for a few moments, which sufficed to remind him that twenty-five thousand pounds would not free him from debts amounting to nearly forty thousand, exclusive of what he had already received from Sidney Polwarth. The insufficient, condescendingly-insolent proposition must be therefore instantly rejected, though not ostensibly for the true reason. Before he could speak, Reuben Bradley interposed with—

"And it may perhaps help to make matters smoother, Mr. Tremaine, if you take back your money, and I take my bond; which I will give a written undertaking not to enforce for ten, a dozen, or twenty years, for that matter."

"You are both very condescending, very generous young gentlemen, no doubt," said Mr. Tremaine, with all the coldness and contempt he could assume, "but I am not, I trust, fallen so low as to accept the charity of any man, however condescending and generous he may be. Mr. Grenfell," he added, "you but waste words and time in seeking to change my fixed purpose. The affair is irrevocably decided; and in September

next Violet Tremaine will, nothing loath, give her hand to Sidney Polwarth."

A cry of dismay and rage, the fiercer for the stern mastery over himself he had with difficulty maintained, burst from Henry Grenfell, and he rushed towards Mr. Tremaine, as if—it for a moment seemed—about to assault, to bodily grapple with him. The insane impulse, if it existed, was checked in time, and the excited lover's fury found expression in a tempest of mingled vituperation and entreaty.

"Is this, well done, Henry?" interposed a sweet, low, voice, at a slight pause in the word-storm. The young man's vehement tones had reached the ear of Violet Tremaine, and she had silently entered the apartment accompanied and supported by Mrs. Lister. "Is this, well done, Henry?"

"Violet," exclaimed the half frantic lover, bursting into tears with the sudden revulsion of feeling, "Beloved Violet!" He had fallen on his knees, and seizing her hand, devoured it with passionate kisses.

"Think you, Henry?" said, sighed rather, the pale drooping lily, as in her fragile loveliness and lustrous purity she seemed to be; "Think you, Henry, that this calamity would have befallen us if words of entreaty could have averted it? Do not weep, your tears will deprive me of the slight strength I still possess—Water—a glass of water, Mrs. Lister—I—I do not feel well! Thank you,—I am better now.

Go, Henry,—go away. I dare not leave you together. We shall, by God's mercy meet, I trust, in Heaven,—but never, never more," added Violet Tremaine, with a hysterical burst of grief, as falling upon his neck, she embraced him in her clasping arms; "never, Henry, never more in this world!"

"Take her away, Mrs. Lister," said Mr. Tremaine; "She has been poorly lately, and excitement overcomes her."

"Behold your work, inhuman father!" exclaimed Henry Grenfell, as articulately as his choking sobs permitted, and pointing to the pale, fainting girl, as she was borne out of the apartment by Mrs. Lister. "Look there,—look there! O cruel, cursed chance! O woful, blighted life!"

"Let us go," said Reuben Bradley, huskily, and urging Henry Grenfell forcibly towards the door. "This is no place for honest, Christian men. The very air seems thick and foul with shameless cruelty and wrong."

Henry Grenfell yielded mechanically to the impulse of the indignant yeoman, and they reached the hall together, just as a gentleman alighted from a tilbury, and entered the house.

"That is Mr. Sidney Polwarth," exclaimed Reuben Bradley, unthinkingly; and before he distinctly comprehended what was passing Henry Grenfell had rushed in his frenzy upon the new-comer: exclamations of rage and astonishment were interchanged;

there was a brief struggle, and Ernest Brydone was flung, stunned and bleeding, upon the floor.

“This is madness!” cried Reuben Bradley, recovering his presence of mind, and laying violent hands upon Henry Grenfell. “Come away,—come home with me. Mr. Polwarth,” he added, addressing the gaping servants, “will always know where to find this gentleman.”

The injuries inflicted upon Ernest Brydone were not serious; and quickly rallying from the dumbfounding surprise caused by the unexpected suddenness of the encounter, he desired the servants to make no noise or fuss about the matter; and having washed his face and rearranged his apparel, quietly made his way to the library, chatted awhile with Mr. Tremaine, inquired after his cousin's health, and took cheerful, careless leave.

Mr. Tremaine was, however, soon informed of what had taken place, and the intelligence appeared to interest him greatly.

“Blows interchanged between two proud hot-headed young men,” he muttered, musingly, “must, if there be no interposition of officious friends, lead to a duel—a duel with serious intent, in which case, Grenfell being, as I know, a crack shot with the pistol, my young relative will run an ugly risk of losing his life. *Tut—tut*,—a silly speculation, and, moreover, unkinsmanlike,—unnatural!”

The next day Mr. Tremaine kept house strictly, and no rumour of a hostile encounter reached to disquiet him till late in the evening, when Mrs. Lister's timid, frightened face made its appearance at the drawing-room door, and he heard from her that a duel between Mr. Grenfell and Mr. Polwarth was arranged to take place in a field close by Pendrell's Folly, at seven o'clock the next morning. Pendrell's Folly, it may be well to mention here, was an excavation made by a speculator of that name, in search of mineral treasure, which at a considerable distance down had been abruptly terminated by the sudden falling in of the ground whereon the miners stood, disclosing an abyss many hundred feet, it was conjectured, in depth, into which all but one of the workmen had been instantly precipitated, and whence it had been found impossible to recover their bodies. The place had been since fenced round with a wooden railing.

"How have you acquired this information?" asked Mr. Tremaine.

"It has come to my son's knowledge," replied Mrs. Lister: "how, I cannot say, but there is not the slightest doubt of its correctness."

"Your son, commonly called Crabby Lister," remarked Mr. Tremaine, "a sharp prying lad, I hear; and it is very likely, therefore, that he is right. Set your mind at rest, Mrs. Lister," continued Mr. Tremaine. "The duel shall be prevented; but as I am a

relative of one of the combatants, it will be better for his reputation's sake, that I should not appear in the business. Do not mention it to Miss Tremaine," he added, "it would alarm her to no purpose, and I would advise you, now you have placed the affair in my hands, as a magistrate, not to acquaint any other person with your apprehensions. It might lead to a change in the plans of the duellists, that would render my interference futile."

Mrs. Lister promised obedience, curtsied, and withdrew; whereupon Mr. Tremaine scribbled, directed and sealed the following note:

"Acton Court, April 28th, 1848.

"My dear Sir,—Reliable information has just reached me that a breach of the peace is contemplated by Mr. Grenfell and my kinsman, Mr. Polwarth, in consequence of a dispute that occurred between them yester-evening. The duel is to take place, I am informed, to-morrow morning at seven o'clock, at a place near Pendrell's Folly. Will you have the kindness to take prompt and effectual measures to prevent the contemplated crime and folly.

"Yours faithfully,

"ACTON TREMAINE."

"To Arthur Selwyn, Esq."

"Saddle the pony," said Mr. Tremaine, to the servant who answered his bell, "and take this note to Mr. Selwyn, the Magistrate. Merely ring the bell, knock, drop it through the door into the letter-box, and

come away immediately, as it requires no answer, and you have another ride before you to-night."

The man left the room, not, perhaps, remarking how deathly-pale his master looked, and how his hand trembled, as he gave him the note: a glass or two of brandy brought back colour to the white face, strength to the yielding nerves; and it was in echo, as it were, of the quieting suggestions of the archfiends we once before heard him apostrophise, that Acton Tremaine whispered to himself, "Who can tell—who can know that I accidentally overheard Selwyn's groom tell another that his master left Cornwall for London yesterday morning? Nobody! Happen then what may, my reputation is safe; and for the rest, I have neither incited to, nor sanctioned the duel."

CHAPTER X.

“A man so various, that he seemed to be
Not only one, but all mankind’s epitome.”

DRYDEN.

THE reader is aware of Harlowe’s success in securing the managing directorship, so eagerly desired by him, though precisely to what end it may be doubted that he himself knew. Like Iago, who, when the plot which is to compass the destruction of Othello first dawns upon his brain, exclaims—

“—— I have it—but confused!
Knavery’s plain face is never seen, till used.”

He was conscious only of a long-contemplated, determined purpose—in his case that of making haste to be rich, though by what exact mode, by what practicable short cut he should seek to reach the glittering goal, he could, I think, at that time have had no distinctly-defined idea. He knew that such a position would place him within reach of immense sums, afford faci-

lities for a grand Napoleonic *coup*, which he might or might not, according to circumstances, avail himself of, but farther than that he saw not clearly.

One resolve had settled itself firmly upon his scheming brain, namely, that having dared the penalty of crime, his own share of the plunder, acquired at such fearful risk, should be large, ample, sufficient, if possible, for a life of luxurious opulence; and feeling, as he necessarily did, that his adventurous path lay over fragile ice, flawed probably in a hundred unsuspected places, beneath which were infernal depths, his impatient spirit was busied incessantly with various, but as yet inchoate, schemes for achieving an early, great success, and securing himself—the prime consideration—in safe, unmolested possession of his prize.

California—revolver—bowie-knife, lawless California, whither so many desperate adventurers were hurrying, and where a man with abundant means, and endowed with the art of winning mob-popularity, might not only scrape together fresh wealth, but confidently defy legal pursuit, unless backed by an army, had for some time grown into distinctness in his mind as the sensuous paradise to which he would, one day, take flight, and, above all, *timely* flight: he must look well to that!

Still, as a matter of taste and convenience, he would prefer not to be ostracised, as it were, by criminal justice from civilised countries. Paris, for example,

was a capital he especially delighted in; and as he felt a growing confidence since his intimacy, and confederate transactions with Mr. Tremaine, that prosecution would not follow detection of the Polwarth imposture, he mentally determined that he would, if possible, obtain his ends without rendering himself still further amenable to penal consequences, and it was quite as much in groping preparation, so to speak, for the attainment of that end, as for the furtherance of his election as Managing Director, that he sold his consols, at a fair profit too—and invested the proceeds in the shares of the company whose confidential officer he aspired to be.

First, however, to be Managing Director; and that he found was a step in his career very difficult to achieve, aided though he was by such potent recommendations as the possession of shares to the amount of 7,000*l.*; and the guarantee, admitted to be unexceptionable of a wealthy country magnate of ancient family, to the extent of 20,000*l.* Candidates for the post were numerous, and it tasked all the resources of Leonard Harlowe's astute duplicity to gain over a sufficient number of the directors to assure his election.

Wonderful, it was afterwards remembered, was the adaptive talent displayed by the bold-witted, unscrupulous man in his canvass of the directors,—talent that exerted in legitimate pursuits could not have failed in overtaking and binding Fortune. There was

not one gentleman upon whom he waited that he did not impress with a high opinion of his business ability, and honest, straight forward simplicity of character. And this not by much speaking,—vain self-display,—but chiefly by respectful intelligent listening to the various crotchets, financial, speculative, and spiritual, of the oracles whose favour he solicited: and with such tact and cleverness did he play his part, that albeit no two directors, should they by chance have compared notes, could have convicted him of double dealing, or an approach to it, it was not the less true that every one of them believed Mr. Harlowe to be a man exactly after his own heart, and his own way of thinking upon essential points.

Mr. R——, for example, an eminent evangelical gentleman, was satisfied that he was strongly imbued with vital religion, and might, under judicious guidance, one day become a shining light at Exeter Hall. B——, a diseased-livered, and French-invasion-ridden old Indian general, of pugnacious temperament, remarked that Mr. Harlowe had more sensible notions of what was required for the military defences of the country than any civilian he had ever met with; whilst G——, an inconvertible-paper-money maniac, was heard to say at his club, that should a completely satisfactory, overwhelming reply be ever given to Sir Robert Peel's sophistical, aggravating question, "What is a pound?" it would be done by the Com-

pany's new managing director. So on with others; and Mr. Harlowe gained his object by the nearly unanimous suffrages of the Direction.

He was forthwith installed in office by the retiring Manager, a worthy, methodical septuagenarian, who had held the post for nearly forty years. Of late, as the shadows of a near and tremendous Future gathered and darkened about him, Mr. Kirwan's mind had assumed a strongly devotional bias, inducing him to adopt and enforce a practice of doubtful utility, all things considered,—that of commencing the day's business with prayer, which the clerks were compelled to attend under the implied penalty of dismissal.

Well, on the first morning of Leonard Harlowe's official attendance at the office, he arrived in time to join in that religious exercise; and you and I, reader, who know the man, can appreciate the impious audacity which prompted and sustained him through "one of the most impressive prayers I have ever been privileged to hear," to quote the words of the gratified ex-manager, at whose hesitating suggestion the blasphemous mockery was perpetrated.

If any man, then, can hope to win the tremendous game to which he has challenged Fate, it should be Leonard Harlowe; and already, as the day wore on, and the large transactions of the establishment passed his fascinated vision, success appeared certain, the goal to be won—fortune chained to his footstool;—his func-

tions and authority as Manager, virtually placing the whole convertible floating capital of the Company at his disposal. Still, it behoved him to be wary, circumspect; there might be secret checks, concealed precautions against fraud, as yet unknown to him; he must not therefore be precipitate: wisely and slow; they stumble who run fast; and unless a premature explosion, which was not likely, threatened to take place down there in Cornwall, there was no motive for precipitation. The perfect confidence of the Directors must be conquered: then, indeed, and he hoped without attainment of felony, life's great game would be won; and the world, (which as readily bows down before a molten Wolf, as a molten Calf, provided it be of gold,) at his feet.

And there could be no question that his success, in conquering that perfect confidence, would be swift and complete. Witness, for example, his speech at the Company's anniversary dinner, on Saturday, the 29th of April, four days after his appointment to office, so savagely commented upon by those who heard and applauded it, when read by the light of subsequent events.

“The dinner,” says the report, “was of the most sumptuous description, reflecting the highest credit upon Messrs. Staples, of Aldersgate-street, by whom it was supplied. After the usual loyal and other appropriate toasts had been done honour to, the health

of the newly-appointed Managing Director was proposed by the venerable gentleman, who, after many years of faithful service, retires from that confidential post. Mr. Harlowe, in acknowledging the compliment, spoke as follows :

‘ Mr. Chairman, and Gentlemen,

‘ I trust that my future conduct in the honourable position to which you have raised me will better express my deep sense of your generous kindness, than could mere words, however eloquent and sincere (hear, hear.) To deserve that generous kindness, to justify the flattering anticipations my venerable friend, if he will permit me to call him so, although our acquaintance is but of yesterday, has been pleased to express in my regard, I feel that I have only to walk, humbly and firmly, in the light of his example ; and with God’s help and blessing I will do so (cheers.) And now by your favor, Mr. Chairman and gentlemen, I would offer a few remarks upon the deeply-interesting topics briefly alluded to by previous speakers (hear, hear.) Gentlemen, I have been much abroad, and have had better opportunities, than most Englishmen, of studying the inner workings of political and social life on the continent ; of marking the set and drift of the turbid tide of popular caprice, which, swollen and lashed by sudden tempest into ungovernable volume and violence, now threatens to sweep away, in its blind fury,

every throne in Europe, save that of the great and gracious Lady who reigns in the heart of every Englishman worthy of the glorious name. (Loud cheers.)—The question, then, which spontaneously arises in the mind of every serious, reflecting man is this: to what paramount cause or causes is this diverse spectacle to be attributed? In this country, order, hand-in-hand with freedom; on the continent, anarchy and absolutism obtaining the mastery by turns: to-day an imperial soldier ruling by naked force, to-morrow the less preferable tyranny of a republic, so called, but more properly an interregnum between two despotisms enlivened by the guillotine (Great cheering). Well, gentlemen, the riddle is easily unravelled; the *mot d'enigme*, a household holy word, namely, the BIBLE! (Loud cheers.) Yes, gentlemen, that you are not the serfs of a successful soldier, or the bondsmen of the more ignoble domination of a sanguinary, unreasoning mob; that you are, in short, freemen and not slaves, you owe to the great, the glorious fact, that the governmental and social edifice of this kingdom of Great Britain is based upon sound scriptural religion. (Great cheering.) Another word and I have done. The gentleman who returned thanks for the army, seemed to be of opinion, that the invasion of these islands might be within the propagandist programme of the present Provisional Government of France. Gentlemen, I know those magniloquent statesmen

well, Albert (*ouvrier*) inclusive; I have had opportunities of observing them closely, and for the life of me I cannot feel in the least afraid of anything they may do, or attempt to do. (Hear, and laughter.) This, however, may be mere obtuseness on my part; but that which I am certain of is, that commercial enterprise has not weakened the military energies of this warlike isle (Cheers); and, desirous as I may be to see the defences of the country placed in a more efficient state (Hear), confident I am, that should the sad necessity arise, this mercantile people, this nation of shopkeepers, would again successfully evoke the lightnings of Trafalgar and the Nile (Cheers), fix again Waterloo's red bayonet (Immense cheering), and triumphantly vindicate the classic land of civil and religious BIBLE-liberty from the assaults of whosoever may have the audacity, or the folly, to assail us. (General cheers, during which Mr. Harlowe sat down.) ”

But for the duty of faithful portraiture, as incumbent upon the domestic as the state historiographer, I should have hesitated to transcribe the foregoing irreverent, audacious rhapsody, as coming from such lips it must be considered. Still let the excuse that may be urged in Leonard Harlowe's behalf be given for what it is worth: This—that he did not desecrate sacred names and associations from mere wantonness,

or take positive pleasure in doing so. It was done purely and simply to obtain the good opinion and confidence of gentlemen whose coffers had excited his cupidity. Leonard Harlowe's assumption of fervid piety and patriotism, was, in sooth, merely a means to an end; a charge to which, perhaps, as many as two or three other eloquent gentlemen in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland may be obnoxious.

Mr. Harlowe reached his chambers in the Albany as the clocks were chiming twelve; and not having been there since he left at an early hour of the morning, a number of letters awaited his perusal. Feeling both tired and excited, he determined to defer reading them till the morning, contenting himself, for the present, with a glance, as he put off his clothes, at the superscriptions and post-marks.

"Two," muttered Harlowe—"two from Brydone! What fresh whimsy can have seized him, that he should write by two successive posts to me, I wonder? One from Squire Tremaine—business, of course; and one from Madame le Blanc, filled, no doubt, as usual, with threats, entreaties, maledictions! That forward baggage, Jane Gibson, Madame's servant, favours me, too, with a second letter within about a week. Quite a Cornwall gazette, altogether, to which, when my eyelids are less heavy than they are just now, I must pay due attention. Meanwhile, I bid my noble self

good night, with hearty congratulations upon the extremely well-spent evening just passed."

Mr. Harlowe's serene satisfaction did not outlive a first glance at Ernest Brydone's first-posted letter. It announced the duel arranged to come off at seven the following morning; and, from the reputation of his antagonist as a first-rate shot, the probability that it might terminate fatally for the writer. "In the event of a fatal result," added Brydone, who evidently wrote under great depression of mind, "two letters which I have just finished will be delivered to their respective addresses, but not, as the directions peremptorily command, and as I have made Aylctunne comprehend thoroughly, till after the funeral. One, to Mr. Tremaine confesses everything; the other is for Laura, and as far as my testimony may avail exonerates her from complicity in our crime. Should I fall, the news will be immediately telegraphed to you, so that you will have plenty of time to make such arrangements as you may deem expedient. Even if I survive the duel I intend making a clean breast of it, and defying the consequences. Rely upon it, Harlowe, there is no incentive, no goad to remorse and repentance so effective as the shadow cast before of approaching death."

A savage curse surged through Harlowe's clenched teeth as he threw down the letter, snatched up, and tore open the second, from the same person, in which

he read, with a feeling of immense relief, as follows:—

“Half-past 7 A.M., April 29, 1848.

“My dear Harlowe,

“I scribble a few lines, which I shall despatch by a man on horseback to save the post, to say that the duel has come off, and that I winged my antagonist at the first fire (broke his pistol-arm) without receiving the slightest hurt myself, though Grenfell’s bullet whistled unpleasantly close past my right ear. Huzza! I am in the highest spirits; and the first thing I shall do after sending this off, will be to burn those two letters. You know the old rhyme,—

‘The Devil was sick, the Devil a monk would be!
The Devil got well, the Devil a monk was he.’

“Just my case.

“Your’s in high feather,—S. P.”

“Weak, changeful fool;” muttered Harlowe, after a thoughtful, anxious pause; “to rely upon whom were as rash as to play with fire in a powder-vault! I must, it is too plain, hasten the fruition of my plans. That is a great misfortune. Still I must not, will not remain one moment longer than is absolutely necessary at the mercy of such a capricious, unpurposed popin-jay as Brydone already proves himself to be.

“Now for Madame’s letter—

“Hoity-toity, this *is* a screamer! You will not, madam, eh? positively *will* not, come what may,

permit the marriage of Ernest Brydone with Miss Tremaine to take place! Her you *will* save from such abhorred pollution, of course, in order to marry Ernest Brydone yourself! We shall see all about that, fair lady! And it moreover strikes me, more forcibly than ever, that I shall be compelled to take that pretty boy of yours into closer custody. I must think further of that. And now what sayeth Squire Tremaine?"

"The terms are usurious, and the annual interest will not leave Polwarth, even under an improved management of the estates, more at the outside than five thousand a year!"

"Quite true; and there is another and much more alarming aspect of the affair, which I had not before seriously considered; namely, that should a discovery take place before the marriage, this enormous mortgage could be got rid of by prosecuting, and only by prosecuting, Brydone and myself to conviction!"

"By Heaven——Well, but the marriage will, *must* take place. Shadows avaunt! Let me read on:—

"It is, however, Hobson's choice, and the affair must proceed. I could have wished that Miss Tremaine's signature was not indispensable; but as the lenders attach such importance to it, they doubtless suppose her to be of age; and if the money cannot be obtained without, it will be well that you remain silent upon that head!"

"Ho! ho, Master Tremaine, you *are* there, are you!"

Do you know, my good gentleman, that a letter from you, containing such a hint as that, may, in the fullness of time, become of invaluable importance to a particular friend of mine—one Leonard Harlowe?

“Hallo! What the devil’s this?”

“P.S. Reuben Bradley was with me on business, last evening but one, and as sure as you are alive that stalwart swain is deeply, seriously smitten with the interesting young widow at Rock Cottage; though whether the gentleman’s passion is responded to by that witching and wily lady, I cannot say.”

“Wh—ee—ee—ew!” A prolonged and by no means cheerful whistle, simultaneous with a hot flush, which darkly crimsoned his thunderous visage, was Mr. Harlowe’s instantaneous comment upon Mr. Tremaine’s ominous postscriptum.

“By heaven!” he presently went on to, mentally exclaim, “By heaven, this throws baleful light upon passages in that woman’s letters which I had differently interpreted. I imagined, her scornful vituperation of Ernest Brydone, her contempt for the cowardice which permitted *me* to hold *her* in bondage, was but the shrill falsetto of a loving woman, sharpened, with reference to Miss Tremaine, by jealousy! And she, the while, is angling, successfully angling it would seem, for Reuben Bradley! Should she succeed in placing herself and son under the marital guardian-

ship of that doughty, many-acred yeoman, the game would certainly be up,—and I ——.

“I counted, too, upon her regard for Brydone; which twig, if it has not yet snapped asunder, will not, we may be certain, bear much strain upon it. To be sure, the cursed meddling woman has sworn never to place him in peril. Sworn! bah! A rotten rope to hold by, that. Let me see; perhaps Jane Gibson’s missive may afford some hint in the matter.

“Ditto repeated. The same story!”

“The rich Mr. Bradley, of the Grange, is uncommonly sweet upon Madame, and it’s my opinion that something serious will come of it.”

“I must be off to Cornwall with all possible speed, that is quite clear. The ice is cracking beneath my feet precisely where I deemed it strongest, and it behoves me to promptly, warily as promptly, get my golden wings prepared for flight! Yes—yes, I will see Swanstone to-day, though it be Sunday, when, by the bye, it may be as well to begin working the hint in Tremaine’s letter by apparent candour with reference to Miss Violet’s age, which he, I am quite sure, knows all about as well as I do. Slight circumstances weigh heavily sometimes in very difficult conjunctures; whilst, as to her signature, that will, I know, be peremptorily insisted upon. And now, thoughts, to gravest, solemn council!”

At about half-past four o'clock in the afternoon, Mr. Harlowe alighted from a cab at a house on Stamford Hill, the private residence of Mr. Swanstone, solicitor, of Lincoln's-Inn-fields, and intermediary between Mr. Harlowe, authorised agent of Messrs. Polwarth and Tremaine, and the parties who were to make the large advance that had been negotiated.

Mr. Harlowe pleaded, as an apology for calling on a Sunday, the necessity of acquainting Mr. Swanstone at once with Mr. Tremaine's objection to making his daughter a party to the deeds in preparation.

"Business," said Mr. Harlowe, "would have prevented me calling at your office to-morrow, until late at all events, to make this statement. There cannot, I apprehend," he added, "be any insuperable objection to compliance with Mr. Tremaine's request, the security being ample, and Miss Tremaine, moreover, it is my duty to apprise you,—not of age."

"Every objection, Mr. Harlowe," replied the lawyer. "True, Miss Tremaine, the heiress, whether presumptive or apparent, to the Polwarth estates, cannot as a minor—I was aware of that circumstance, though you have done quite right in mentioning it—cannot subscribe covenants which a court of law would enforce; but our reasons for insisting upon making her a party to the deed, are moral rather than legal. We have made inquiries, and are satisfied that the young lady would, under no circumstances, repudiate

her signature, or take shelter under the law from obligations she had voluntarily incurred for the legitimate purpose of relieving her father from his difficulties.”

“In that case, it is useless to argue the matter further. When will the deeds be ready?”

“On Wednesday, at the latest. You will take care, Mr. Harlowe, to see them executed and attested in due form?”

“Of course—of course.”

The conversation then diverged to other topics. Mr. Swanstone incidentally mentioned, that the Chairman of the Insurance Company had spoken of him, Mr. Harlowe, in the highest terms; and his, the Chairman’s compliments, were known to be as rare as they were precious. Other courtesies were interchanged, and Mr. Harlowe took leave, with the understanding that the deeds should, if possible, be ready on Tuesday evening, so that he might leave for Cornwall early on Wednesday.

Mr. Harlowe’s next visit was to a lawyer of a very different social and professional status from that of Mr. Swanstone. He found Mr. Bunt at home, but was not immediately recognized by that person;—perhaps, in consequence of the dinginess of the apartment in Cursitor-street, Chancery-lane, where he was received.

“Saunders!” echoed the attorney, “I have some recollection of the face, but not of the name.”

“Don’t you remember that I once introduced a

Mr. Garrett to you, for whom you brought an action against a nobleman upon some bills of exchange, alleged, by the titled acceptor, to have been given for gambling debts."

"Oh, yes; I remember the action very well; and, as I said, your face—but not the name of Saunders. We need not, however, waste words about that. Your business with me, now, is the important consideration."

"It is a peculiar one Mr. Bunt," said Harlowe, "and, as upon the former occasion, I am merely the agent of another. It is thought desirable that you should take the opinion of eminent counsel upon an A and B case which I am to explain to you."

"Very good, Mr. Saunders," said the attorney, seizing a pen and a sheet of paper. "And now, if you please, your A and B case."

"Shortly it is this:—A and Company are partners and shareholders in a considerable mercantile concern. B is also a registered shareholder and therefore partner, and moreover a salaried servant of said Company. Query:—Would the abstraction of Company's funds, passing through B's hands in his capacity of salaried servant, render him liable to an indictment for felony?"

Mr. Bunt carefully wrote down the case as dictated, and then looking sharply up in his visitor's face, said—

“A queer case for counsel! Queer, I mean, in its being an A and B case. It shall of course, be submitted to counsel,” added Mr. Bunt. “Whom do you wish me to lay it before?”

“The counsel most likely, in your judgment, to give a sound opinion. The cost is, no great object. Here is a sufficient sum, I suppose, in advance?”

“Quite sufficient. When will you call for the opinion, or shall I send it to your address?”

“I will call for it on Tuesday evening: it can, of course, be obtained by that time!”

“No doubt of it: neither,” added Mr. Bunt, “have I much doubt of what the opinion will be, although on questions depending upon judge-interpretation of the *lex non scripta*, that is, the common or unwritten law; there is always risk of error. A man cannot, I apprehend, be criminally indicted for robbing himself. It would, however,” added Mr. Bunt, with another keen, peculiar look at his client, “be entirely safe, and come to the same thing, if it is a banking concern, and the confidential clerk could lend the money to a confederate customer at the bank, not worth powder and shot? Still, in the other hypothesis, no criminal prosecution, would, I think, be successful.”

“That is my friend’s opinion,” said Harlowe. “You will explain to counsel, that the opinion is required by gentlemen, who, if the law authorises them to do so, purpose instituting a prosecution?”

“Certainly—certainly. We quite understand each other, Mr. Saunders,” replied the attorney.

Mr. Harlowe called at the appointed time in Cur-sitor Street, paid for, and pocketed the opinion, which, upon reaching his chambers, he found to be a confident one, that under the recited circumstances, and if no forgery had been committed, an indictment for felony could *not* be sustained against the offender.

Early the next morning, Mr. Harlowe, having obtained a few days' leave, for the purpose of settling some private affairs in the country, previous to taking up his permanent abode in London, left for Cornwall, taking with him the deeds he had undertaken to see formally executed;—the ex-managing-director having kindly undertaken to officiate in his absence.

CHAPTER XI.

“Now, all’s cock-sure.”

MASSINGER.

Late in the evening of the same day, Leonard Harlowe waited upon Mr. Tremaine, at Acton Court.

“I have called,” said Mr. Harlowe, after the customary salutations had been exchanged, “at Vere Priory; but your kinsman, Mr. Sidney Polwarth, is not yet returned from a dinner party at Sir William Trengony’s, and as my stay in Cornwall must be brief, I have brought the deeds with me, which you, sir, approving, may be signed and sealed at once.”

“To be sure. Do they insist upon my daughter’s signature?”

“Spite of all I could urge, that cannot be dispensed with.”

This announcement, Harlowe remarked, had a singularly-disturbing effect upon Mr. Tremaine.

“It is exceedingly vexatious! Miss Tremaine is

unwell, peevish, unreasonable, headstrong;” said Mr. Tremaine, in a voice rising in angry petulance with each successive epithet. “The foolish duel you have, no doubt, heard of, and which I sought, but failed, to prevent, has agitated, distressed her.”

“Miss Tremaine is not seriously unwell, I hope?”
“O dear no! Megrims, principally—girlish humours and wrongheadedness, for which marriage is a sovereign remedy. And I may tell you, Harlowe, for Polwarth will be sure to do so, that the all-sufficing ceremony is to take place precisely this day fortnight, by special licence, in this very room.”

“I am rejoiced to hear it,” said Harlowe, “the more so that I understood it was deferred till September next.”

“Well, it was; but impatient of the delay, especially since Henry Grenfell’s re-appearance in the neighbourhood, I, alleging a sudden and menacing crisis in my affairs, succeeded in obtaining her assent—a coyly-reluctant assent, of course—to a strictly-private marriage, on the day I have just named. You perceive, now, the imperative motive I have in not letting her know that I am about to receive a large sum of money.”

“Not very plainly. If Miss Tremaine reads the covenants of the deeds, she will see that the lion’s share of your part of the loan goes to pay off mortgages and liens on your real and personal estate, and that

not more than about 6,000*l.* in cash will come directly into your pocket."

"That would avail nothing;" replied Mr. Tremaine. "They are not, of course, aware that Violet is a minor?"

"I should have apprised Mr. Swanstone of that important fact, but for the express injunction to the contrary in your letter."

"Ha! They insist that Violet's signature must be affixed?" iterated Mr. Tremaine, with a kind of gloomy abstraction.

"Look at the body of the deeds, sir; Miss Tremaine's name occurs with yours and Sidney Polwarth's in every covenant."

"D—the deeds! There will be a tremendous scene before she signs;" added Mr. Tremaine, fixedly regarding Harlowe.

"One that perhaps you would not wish a stranger to be present at?" said Harlowe.

"Precisely: can that difficulty be avoided?"

"Why, yes: I can, of course, take your word for the genuineness of the signature?"

"Right: but must there not be *two* witnesses?"

"We can afterwards get John Martin, your groom, to witness your own execution of the deeds, and only you and I shall know that he did not also see Miss Tremaine affix her signature."

"True, true—I am obliged to you, Harlowe. Your

politeness will facilitate the affair; for to tell you the truth, you, for some feminine reason or other, are just now one of Miss Tremaine's antipathies."

"I am grieved to hear that, particularly as I greatly admire and respect Miss Tremaine."

"The marriage once accomplished, Violet will, no doubt, be herself again. I shall not be long absent," said Mr. Tremaine, folding up the two deeds with shaking hands. "Pray make your yourself at home," he added, motioning to the decanters, "whilst I am gone."

"Do not fear for that. By the way!" exclaimed Harlowe, "you will not forget that Miss Tremaine must go through the form of placing her finger on the seals, and repeating the words, 'I deliver this as my act and deed.'"

"Certainly; certainly: I shall not be long gone;" replied Mr. Tremaine.

Harlowe's gesture and glare of triumph, as the door closed upon the nerveless gentleman, were those of a fiend clutching a lost soul.

Half an hour elapsed before Mr. Tremaine returned. "All right! all right! at—at last," he stammered, as he placed the unfolded deeds before Harlowe, and watched with flurried eyes that person's careless glance at the signatures.

"Quite so," said Mr. Harlowe. "And now if you will ring for the groom, this signing and scaling may be concluded at once."

“You are wanted to witness with me your master’s signature to these documents,” said Harlowe, addressing the groom, John Martin. “Now, Mr. Tremaine, please to sign your name here, and here: Now your finger on the seal; ‘I deliver this as my act and deed.’ Very good. Signed, sealed, and delivered in our presenee,” Harlowe added, taking a pen and subscribing his name. “Martin, you must write your name under mine; here, *and* here. That will do. You can go now.”

Mr. Tremaine’s colourless visage regained its ordinary hue, as Harlowe folded up and placed the deeds in his pocket. Then seating himself and swallowing a glass of wine, he said—“And pray what is the arrangement with respect to my share of the loan?”

“Directly I return to London, which I purpose doing on Friday, the day after to-morrow, summonses will be taken out before a judge to stay all proceedings against you with respect to mortgages, liens, etcetera, upon payment of debts and costs. Those debts and costs paid, the balanee will be forwarded to you through Hoare and Co. The same with Mr. Sidney Polwarth.”

“That is a very proper arrangement.”

“The further sum which your kinsman is to hand over to you is, it is well understood, eontingent upon the marriage taking place.”

“That is perfectly understood;—and the marriage I repeat will take place on this day fortnight.”

“And I repeat that I am delighted to hear it. I propose the health of the bride and groom, wishing they may live long and happily together.”

“I pledge you. This arrangement must, however, be kept strictly secret, or I know not what may happen to baulk our hopes. I contrived, before mooting it to Violet, to pick a fierce quarrel with Mrs. Lister—fierce on my part that is,—not her’s, poor, timid creature; and well I did. Just look at this note, addressed to Miss Tremaine by the widow at Rock Cottage,—curse her meddling, jealous impudence, which I was fortunate enough to intercept.”

Harlowe took the note handed to him, and read aloud as follows:—

“Rock Cottage, May 1st.

“Respected Lady,—It is rumoured that you are to be morally coerced into a marriage with Mr. Sidney Polwarth. Let me beseech you, by all that is sacred, not upon any consideration to submit to so heinous, so cruel a sacrifice. The consequences would be frightful, with no compensating advantages whatever, either to you or yours. A dreadful menace forbids me to be more explicit; but this, dear lady, I solemnly promise, that if you will let me know when the proposed marriage is to take place, I will, should I find it impossible otherwise to prevent it, defy that menace, and save you from a fate worse than death; happen what may to me or mine in consequence.

“As a pledge that you will not fail to give me timely notice

of the contemplated legal iniquity, be pleased, instead of writing, as I doubt the fidelity of my maid-servant, to tie, at about eleven to-morrow morning, the red tassel-line of your bed-room window-blind, in a bow. I shall pass by, and seeing that, shall sleep in comparative peace till I hear from you.

“Your honest well-wisher.

“LAURA LE BLANC.”

“The jealous termagant!” exclaimed Harlowe, with but slight and quite unnoticed betrayal of the alarm excited by the perusal of the note. “Legal iniquity too! It is fortunate, however, that she was so considerate in her rage as to admit that the marriage would be a legal one; you might else have suspected that Mr. Polwarth was bound to her by stronger ties than a love-lien, long since worn through, and snapped asunder.”

“I might have entertained such a suspicion,” said Mr. Tremaine, “had I not felt a perfect conviction that no gentleman in Mr. Polwarth’s position, and emphatically no kinsman of ours would incur the penalty of bigamy! Especially,” he added with some irritation, “Especially in order to contract a marriage, wherein the worldly advantages are all on the bride’s side; and for which bride the bridegroom does not affect to feel any very enthusiastic devotion.”

“Mr. Sidney Polwarth,” said Harlowe, “is, till after long acquaintance, very undemonstrative; but your rebuke is just. Whatever the frantic jade might

have stated, such a suspicion could not, as you say, have been for a moment entertained."

"Assuredly not. What effect such a communication might have had upon Miss Tremaine in her present mood," continued Mr. Tremaine, "it would be difficult to say; fortunately, I not only intercepted the note, but contrived to tie the bow as required, and from another window, saw the lady, stroll carelessly by, recognize the hoped-for sign, and pass on her way rejoicing. The ambitious widow," he added, "must be content with Reuben Bradley, of the Grange, instead of Sidney Polwarth, of Vere Priory, should that inflammable greenhorn continue in a wooing humour."

"Are there indications that he will do so?"

"So I hear; but it may be only idle gossip. But, by-the-bye, didn't I understand that the lady was a fancy of yours?—Are you off? Well, adieu: I shall see you to-morrow, of course. Meanwhile, do not, let me beg of you, Harlowe, forget for one moment, that silence is essential to success."

"I shall be dumb as stone. Good night, Mr. Tremaine."

"No prosecution," chuckled Harlowe, as he walked towards Vere Priory. "No prosecution in any event, for our doings in re Polwarth, as long as this precious forgery of Miss Violet's name is forthcoming; a forgery so easily provable by asking that conscientious young lady, on her oath, if she signed the deeds, or

authorised any one to sign them for her! Ha!—ha! old boy—we have you now upon the hip! Our affairs, positively, begin to look up; in city-phrase; and, if that infernal widow can only be kept quiet till after the marriage has been accomplished, she will, I cannot doubt, be easily bribed, or bullied into ever after holding her peace. It is highly probable she may not hear of the wedding till it is too late to cry out; but it is possible she may, and the result of that would be, though no prosecution were instituted, to effectually spoil me with the Life-office. Yes, I will take the pretty little boy's personal security for his mother's good behaviour, and that done, sleep in spite of thunder! I want time!—time!—time!—to heavily freight myself for the Californian voyage, and time, if possible, I *will* have!”

Ernest Brydone was rejoiced to see his zealous clever friend; much more so to hear that his share of the loan would be handed over to him—so at least Harlowe said—almost immediately.

He had been drinking freely, a habit that had grown upon him apace, or he might not have been so indiscreet as to suggest to his keenly-observant friend, by the display of so much eagerness to obtain possession of funds he had no present need of; that he, Ernest Brydone, contemplated absquatulating with that large sum, accompanied, possibly, by the fascinating Laura,—a conjecture which reflection confirmed, or, at

least, placed among the possible eventualities against which Mr. Harlowe had to arm himself.

In this instance Mr. Harlowe's suspicions pointed towards, but exaggerated the truth. During the now brief and rare intervals of calm reflection, permitted by the dissipated life to which he had surrendered himself, the dread consciousness that he was standing on the brink of a terrible abyss, into which the merest accident might at any moment hurl him, was ever present to the mind of Ernest Brydone, and he had become nervously impatient for the actual possession of such a sum of money as would enable him at the first faint *sough*, as seamen say, of the approaching storm, to flee with the swift wings which gold can always purchase.

But in other respects, Brydone's mental horizon was not so clear. That Laura would accompany the "moral coward," as she had been pleased to designate him, he more than doubted. That, however, could be no reason for not looking to his own safety, forasmuch—

"That a lover forsaken,
A new love may get,
But a neck, if once broken,
Can never be set."

Finally, the hazy purpose of Ernest Brydone was to flee, if flight were necessary, with as much money as he could lay hands upon; otherwise to marry Miss

Tremaine; and, by making her the best, kindest, most deferential husband in the world, avert the worst consequences of an always possible discovery, re-enact, in short, with variations and new scenery, as Harlowe had once remarked, the Claude Melnotte drama, and with, he trusted, as happy a termination.

Madame le Blanc was not, as Harlowe knew, an early riser; and as, before encountering her, it was desirable to have a conference with Jane Gibson, he found his way to Rock Cottage by seven o'clock in the morning.

Jane Gibson, a pertly-pretty damsel of some twenty years of age, was in the act of thrusting open the parlour shutters as he came up; and her fresh saucy face shining in the rosy light of a cloudless morning of May, looked so very attractive as it peered through the flowering hyacinths in smiling recognition of the new comer, that he could not forbear kissing it; so, at least, he said, in reply to Jane's—

“La! Mr. Harlowe, what a man you are; you always take one upon a nonplush so. What, again! O, for shame!”

“May I come in?” asked Mr. Harlowe, after a while.

“To be sure,” said Jane Gibson, tripping to the door and opening it. “Madame won't be up these two hours, and every thing is nice and ready for breakfast, as, of course, I've been expecting you to call

betimes. Did you ever see such impudence? Now, really, Mr. Harlowe, you are *too* bad."

"That is a present for Madame, I suppose," said Jane, with a sauey pout, as she seated herself at the breakfast table, set out for two, and nodded at a paper parcel.

"It is a silk dress," said Harlowe, untying the parcel. "How do you like it?"

"O, what a love of a silk! But what is the use of my admiring it, if it's for somebody else?"

"You know, very well, it's for you."

"Oh, thank you! Yet when shall I be able to wear it?" added the damsel, with sudden demureness, and an unsuccessful effort at a conscious blush. "Not, certainly, whilst I am a servant."

"I thought," said Harlowe, evading the question; "that you would prefer a dress to the present of jewellery you hinted at in one of your letters?"

"Not to a ring," softly replied Jane, and in despair of a blush, concealing the want of it by bending down and stroking pretty puss. "Not, as the song says, to a plain gold' ring."

If the damsel's sharp eyes had been directed, at that particuar moment towards Mr. Harlowe, instead of pretty puss, and she had, consequently, observed that gentleman's stare of contemptuous astonishment, there would have been an explosion, judging from her reception of what he mildly *said*.

“There is no fear, I should suppose, Jane, of your obtaining that peculiar article in very good time.”

“I should *suppose* not, too!” retorted Jane. “Why there’s Tom Dawkins, a master waggonwright with two men already, and no doubt a servant of-all-work some six feet high without shoes, who would jump out of his skin to be allowed to put one on my finger, and, I think, he shall too! Oh, if there’s one thing I hate more than another,” said the irate damsel, seizing the poker and assaulting the fire with illustrative energy. “If there’s one thing I hate more than another, it’s flatterers—and cozeners—and deceivers—and LIARS!” added Jane, aiming triumphantly a vicious poke at an obstinate lump of coal. “Yes, *liars* is the word I’ve been looking for—liars ! !”

Mr. Harlowe looked as might a member of the House, whose over-ardent expressions having been taken too literally, was anxious to explain that he really meant nothing of the kind.

“Madame le Blanc will hear, if you speak so loud,” suggested Mr. Harlowe.

“And then ?” retorted Jane, confronting the gentleman, with the poker in her hand. “And then ?”

“Oh, nothing, then, that I know of; except that I do not wish all the world, and particularly Madame le Blanc, to hear what Jane Gibson and Leonard Harlowe have to say to each other.”

“Say on, Mr. Leonard Harlowe.”

“To begin with, then; how has Madame been going on of late?”

“Weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth, and screeching in her sleep that some one was murdering her brat of a boy, has been going on of late. She’s crying herself downright ugly,” added Jane Gibson.

“That would be rather difficult, I should suppose.”

“You should *suppose* that too, should you, Mr. Leonard Harlowe?” flung back the indignant damsel. “I shouldn’t! Madame le Blane is not the only handsome woman in the world, whatever you—and two or three fools besides—I was going to say, but I won’t—may think.”

“That she can’t be, as long as Jane Gibson is in it,” said Harlowe, who was taken completely aback by the girl-woman’s familiar virulence, based, he saw, upon supreme conceit, inflated by windy compliments on his part of her attractions, and a strong notion that the confidential terms which they were upon with each other, had, or would, in some way, place him completely in her power.

“There you are with your flattery and deceit again, Mr. Leonard Harlowe,” replied Jane Gibson, in a mollified tone, however, and restoring the poker to its natural pacific position.

“Now, my dear Jane, be reasonable,” said Har-

lowe; "you have, I am sure, much to tell me, and you know how important it is for me to be made acquainted with all that passes here."

"Of course I do; who should, if I didn't? Stay a moment;" added Jane.

She then softly tripped out of the room, and upstairs, ascertained that Madame le Blanc and her son were still asleep, and took the liberty of locking the landing-place door upon them.

"Mother and son are safe, for at least another hour to come," said Jane Gibson, as she resumed her chair. "So now, what have you to say, Mr. Leonard Harlowe?"

"Nay, what have you to say, Miss Jane Gibson?"

"Why, for one thing, that Madame won't have either to meddle or make, bind or find, with young Squire Polwarth. She's as mad as fire with him, and won't even take in his letters. Though, after all, it can, *we* know, be only acting; which, of course, comes natural to her."

"Only acting, you may be sure."

"Unless she thinks to catch Mr. Reuben Bradley in the parson's net?"

"Mr. Bradley cannot be serious in his attentions to Madame le Blanc, an entire stranger to him?"

"Can't he though? Let me tell you, Mr. Leonard Harlowe, that *all* men are not deceivers; and, for one, Mr. Bradley is not. As to being a stranger, that may

be an advantage. New brooms sweep clean—and she will him, as clean as a smelt, or I'm preciously deceived."

"What proof have you that Mr. Bradley is courting Madame le Blanc for a serious purpose?" asked Mr. Harlowe.

"All men that *are* men!" was the sharp rejoinder, "court for a serious purpose when they *do* court. And as to Mr. Bradley, I will be upon my Bible oath that his is honest courtship."

"How have you made yourself so sure of that?"

"I'm going to tell you how. Madame has had long conversations lately with Mr. Bradley and old Ferrand the lawyer, but as she is about the artfullest woman I ever heard of, in a place where it was impossible to hear a word that passed."

"What place is that?"

"The common up yonder, and at about the centre of it is the place where they have held their confabs. Warn't that artful?"

"Very. How then have you managed to get at Bradley's secret?"

"I am coming to that. Last Sunday evening as ever was, Crabby Lister brings Madame a note, and delivers it into her own hand without giving me a chance of glimpsing it. That's Crabby's way, always, and as for pumping him you might as well ask a milestone to lend you a five-pound note. Howsomever, I

caught a glimpse of the seal, afterwards, and saw that it was from Mr. Reuben Bradley."

"Few girls have eyes so sharp and bright as your's, Jane?"

"I am glad you think so, if you *do* think so."

"Positively I do: but, pray go on."

"Well, thinks I to myself, they'll be coming to points now that there's black and white for it; and sure enough the very next morning, Monday morning, you know, Madame comes down a full hour before her time, and says to me, Jane, says she, you were wishing for a holiday to go and see your friends at Truro, and you had better take it to-day."

"Much obliged, Madame," says I, "at what hour can I leave?"

"Directly after breakfast" says she. "There is enough cold lamb for our dinner, so that I can very well dispense with your services till the evening."

"Accordingly," continued Jane Gibson "I put my things on and left the house at about eleven o'clock, having first pulled down the front parlour and kitchen blinds, which I should have to pass in coming back again."

"I see. Well?"

"Well, if it is well, I had kept watch for about an hour, and was getting tired and cross, when lo! and behold Mr. Reuben Bradley comes over the fields towards the cottage, knocks, and is immediately ad-

mitted. It took me some time to get back again unobserved, softly lift the hatch, and find out where the loving couple were—at least one of them is desperate loving, and that, perhaps, is how it generally happens. I am before my story,” added Jane Gibson, “as I should have told you that Crabby Lister had called in the meantime, and gone out with the little boy.”

“They are almost inseparable, I have been told?”

“Why, yes, so far that Madame won’t trust the child out with anybody else; nor with him, I fancy, as long as you remain in the neighbourhood. I verily believe,” added the young woman. “from some little odd-come-shorts I have overheard, that she is afraid you will either murder, or kidnap her boy!”

“Absurd! But she *is*, you know, a very fanciful woman.”

“That is quite true. Let me see, where was I? Ah, I remember, creeping like a mouse up stairs to the bow-window sitting-room, where I heard Madame and Mr. Bradley, sobbing and raving, raving and sobbing at a fine rate. I got upon a chair in the passage, peeped through the little borrowed light into the room; and wasn’t there a scandalous sight to see.”

“A scandalous sight!”

“I should think it was, indeed! Mr. Bradley, a young, well-looking, fine-grown man, worth thousands a-year, they say, and no end of houses, and horses, and oxen and sheep, prancing distractedly about the room,

and begging and praying a painted actress to be his wife, and the painted actress,—though I don't say she paints now, and if she did, an inch thick, she'd cry it all off again as fast as it could be put on—and the painted actress, I say, refusing to have him at any price, though, as it seemed to me, she'd have been precious glad to be able to say 'Yes,' constantly, as she whimpered 'No.' Dear me, Mr. Harlowe, you look as skeared as if Mr. Bradley had been courting the woman you wished to make your own wife!"

"Nonsense, Jane! What reason did Madame give for refusing so advantageous an offer?"

"I could not make that out quite clearly. She said, she did not think he ought to have made her such an offer; which was true enough; she being, for the present, though innocent as an angel, of course, suspiciously circumstanced,—an offer which, were she to accept, he would, she feared, hereafter, bitterly repent of: That's truth again, thought I, if Old Scratch said it. Then there was something about a dreadful vow, and a terrible dread she felt of the consequences, should she break it. And what seemed oddest of all, though I couldn't catch what led to it, she solemnly declared that Squire Polwarth should never marry Miss Tremaine, which seemed to quite cheer up poor Mr. Bradley, who is to find out and let her know when it is likely to take place; although he *must* know, spite of her cussed artfulness, that she only wants to break

off that match, to marry the young Squire herself!"

"Quite right, Jane, that is her mark; no doubt of it."

"Yes, and a mark, that, please goodness, she shall miss. Well, at last they shook hands, she crying like the rain, and as much as he could do to prevent himself from following suit with a regular roar; then down he plumps upon his knees, says they part the best of friends, and slobbers and kisses her hand, as if she were a born lady! Though that's not much to be wondered at," added Miss Jane, bridling and tossing her head, "when he sees she's got a servant who is the daughter of a respectable master-tradesman, and worth, I may say, and no great brags either, a hundred trumpery, tawdry stage-players!"

"But you, Jane, did not come here as a common servant."

"Common servant! I should think not indeed! I didn't go to a regular boarding school two quarters running for that, I hope."

"Certainly not. And how did the affair terminate?"

"By my getting off the chair as fast as I could, and just managing to get out of the house, closely followed, but unseen, by Mr. Bradley, owing, no doubt, to his wiping his eyes with a handkerchief all the while."

"What kind of a woman is Crabby Lister's mother?" asked Harlowe, breaking a silence of some minutes.

“A quiet-spoken, fair woman; very good-looking if she did not muffle herself up so; and not more, I should think, than two or three and thirty years of age.”

“I must call upon her. She is quite a confidant, I hear, of Miss Tremaine’s, and may afford a valuable hint or two.”

“You will not see her if you call. She left home for several days, Crabby told me, only last evening.”

“Indeed!”

There was another and longer pause, and then Harlowe said hastily, “I don’t think I need wait to see Madame le Blanc. If I go now she won’t know I have been here, will she?”

“Why, of course not. But why not see her?”

“Why not see her, you ask?” said Harlowe, as he rose and put on his hat. “Well, if you must know, my pretty Jane, because I have been sworn at Highgate.”

“What! You’ve sworn enough, goodness knows, to my knowledge. But what is being sworn at Highgate?”

“That question, my girl, shows, as plainly as your rosy face, that you are not a cockney. The oaths taken at Highgate are—first, never to drink small beer when you may get strong, unless you prefer small beer to strong.”

“Stuff! Folly!”

“Secondly, never to kiss the maid when you might kiss the mistress——”

“Upon my word!”

“Unless you like the maid best,—which happening to be my case, most decidedly,—I have the honour and pleasure to——”

“Don’t! Go along with you! I shall, of course, see you again before you leave Cornwall?” added Miss Jane Gibson.

“Certainly. That is a question which answers itself. Good bye, my dear Jane?”

“Good bye!”

Not long afterwards Mr. Harlowe knocked at the door of Mrs. Lister’s humble dwelling; it was opened by her son.

“I wish, my good lad, to have a few minutes private conversation with you,” said Mr. Harlowe.

“Walk in sir,” was the reply, “I am at your service.”

CHAPTER XII.

“’Tis sport to see the Engineer
Hoist with his own petard.”

SHAKSPERE.

THE conference between Mr. Harlowe and young Lister must have been an important and interesting one, judged not only by the length of time it occupied, nearly two hours, but by the excited aspects of both boy and man, when it was about to terminate.

“You are sure that you perfectly understand me,” iterated Mr. Harlowe, for the twentieth time at least. “That I merely wish to obtain possession of the child for a few days, as a pledge that his mother, Madame le Blanc, shall not make a fool of herself, in a matter which concerns me nearly.”

“I perfectly understand,” replied the lad with a sinister smile, as Harlowe could not help feeling it to be: “Perfectly.”

“Above all that I do not propose to harm the child in any way,—not in the slightest degree.”

“That you do not propose to harm the child in any way, in the slightest degree,” repeated the boy: “I well understand.”

“That being so, here is the first instalment of the reward I have promised;” said Harlowe, emptying a purse upon the table.

“The silver purse, too!” exclaimed Crabby, with a look of greed. “The purse to hold the money!”

“If you wish it, yes: take it.”

“Thanks!—thanks!” said the lad, replacing the glittering treasure in the purse.

“The hour, remember,” said Harlowe, “when you are to have the boy at the Coppice, near Pendrell’s Folly, is twelve, precisely, to-morrow!”

“Twelve precisely to-morrow: I thought you said eleven just now,” said Crabby Lister, dubiously: “Please, sir, to write down the hour and place: my memory is excellent for every thing, except hours and places?”

“Give me a scrap of paper then?”

“I haven’t any paper, sir: here is pen and ink.”

Harlowe tore off part of an envelope he had in his pocket-book, and wrote on it the words, “Twelve o’clock, Friday: Pendrell’s Folly.”

“The moment the child is in the post-chaise with me,” Harlowe went on to say, “you will hurry off with a note I shall have in readiness for Madame le

Blanc; a note, assuring her that no harm will befall her son. This is of vital importance!"

"Of vital importance: you said so before, sir. I shall not fail you."

"That lad's face has always strangely interested me," thought Harlowe, after leaving the cottage, "and but for ocular proof, I would not have believed it could wear the fierce, truculent expression I saw glare out of it just now, particularly when I mentioned the reward. Happily, I have made him perfectly comprehend that I would have no harm come to Madame Le Blanc's son; or positively I should not know what to think! But sudden wealth,—and the reward, to him must be wealth,—affects both boys and men strangely: gold is a delicate touchstone of character."

Mr. Harlowe had much to see and arrange that day. He rode to Truro, and engaged a chaise and pair, to be at Vere Priory as early as eight o'clock on the morrow: took leave of Mr. Tremaine, with a promise to be speedy with the settlement of the loan affair: called upon Reuben Bradley, whom he did not see, but did Mr. Grenfell, who he found was quite sufficiently recovered from the hurt received in the duel, to go out, though, of course, with his arm in a sling. Mr. Grenfell received him with haughty coolness, not cared one pinch of snuff for by the visitor, who after a few words took equally cool and haughty leave.

Subsequently Mr. Harlowe saw Miss Jane Gibson

and succeeded in smoothing down that damsel's still ruffled plumes; spoke to Madame le Blanc at the window, but declined an interview, which would be sure to end in bitter, profitless words: if, however, she had any message to London, whither he was off by eight o'clock the next morning, he should be happy to be the bearer thereof.

The evening, extending far into the night, was passed in carouse with Ernest Brydone; and precisely at nine, Mr. Leonard Harlowe started, *en route*, as it was supposed, for London.

Harlowe's personal share in the abduction of the child was thus arranged:—He was to return by a circuitous road at the appointed time, to within a few hundred yards of Pendrell's Folly—a place so out of the way and lonesome that days together frequently passed without a human being going near it. Should it, however, happen by any chance that some one should be there, and disposed to interfere, Mr. Harlowe had his story ready—namely, that the child was his own illegitimate son whom he was forcibly carrying off from the custody of an abandoned mother, and whom he would not again surrender to her, unless compelled to do so by judicial process.

The letter prepared for Madame le Blanc was reassuring, apologetic, and, in her regard, hopeful, though expressed in guarded terms. The marriage she so vehemently objected to was, he assured her,

virtually given up; that, by carrying off her son, he wished to assure himself of her fidelity to the solemn promise she had made—for one month longer only—by the end of which his friend, and her friend, and himself, would have left the country, and her child would be restored to her safe and sound; if, however, she proved faithless—would *not* keep silence—there was no vengeance so cruel that he could not perpetrate in punishment of her perfidy.

Crabby Lister was to explain that the child had been forcibly taken from him; and as the explanatory letter would be delivered at the same time, Leonard Harlowe nothing doubted that, however the mother might writhe under the afflictive stroke, *fear* for her boy would keep her dumb.

An excellent plot, and sure to succeed, did no unforeseen circumstance occur to baffle, confound the excellent plot! And one of those baffling circumstances was, quite unsuspected by the plotter, surging into view before the indignant eyes of Stephen Ayletunne, at the very moment Mr. Harlowe took his departure from Vere Priory.

The post from Truro had just been delivered, and, according to Mr. Ayletunne's invariable practice, the address of each letter was minutely scrutinized by that inquisitive personage. One letter upon this occasion attracted his unmitigated attention, addressed as it was, in a female hand, to John Gubbins, Under

Groom at Verc Priory, and bearing the Truro post-mark.

Now Stephen Ayletunne had conceived a fierce dislike of said John Gubbins, who was consequently under notice to quit, and this, for the sufficient reason, that he, John Gubbins, had had the unparalleled audacity to aspire to the hand of Mary Ayletunne, Master Stephen Ayletunne's pretty niece, living with her widowed mother at Truro. Stephen had pronounced a peremptory veto against the 'low' match, and as his always freely-drawn purse-strings rendered him all-powerful with the widow, John Gubbins's under-groom pretensions were inexorably extinguished.

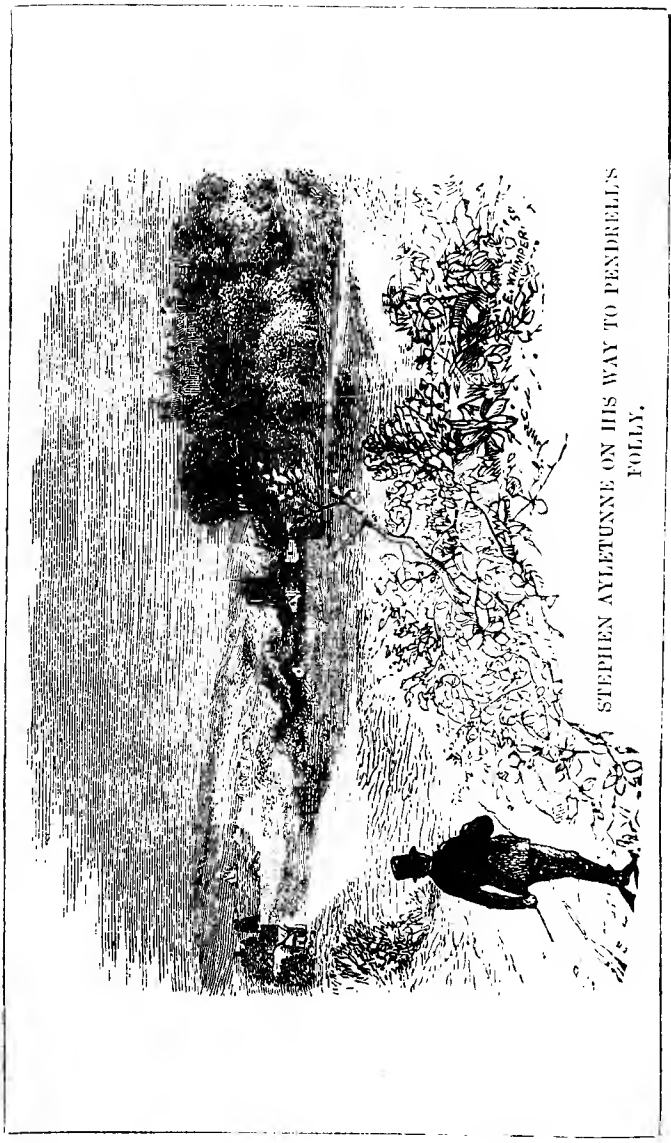
So Stephen Ayletunne had been told; but this letter, directed, he was sure, in Mary's hand, would enlighten him upon that point, could he but get a peep at the contents.

Curious! It came open spontaneous, Master Ayletunne declared, in his hand. The wafer insufficiently wetted on one side had not adhered, and without fear of consequences he might make himself master of the suspicious correspondence. He did so, and through glaring spectacles read as follows:—

“Truro, Thursday Afternoon,

“May 3, 1818.

“Dear John,—This comes hoping that you are well, which, thank God, it leaves me at present: never better. And to



STEPHEN AYLETUNNE ON HIS WAY TO PENDRELL'S FOLLY.

say that I shall slip out to-morrow, and, if you are constant and true blue, and can get away, which of course you will somehow or other, we shall have a precious laugh at my old hunks of an Uncle, who wants to trample his own flesh and blood, or least ways his own brother's, under his great splay gouty foot, and a pleasant meeting.

"The quietest place, dear John, I can think of is close by Pendrell's Folly, where I shall be to-morrow within a few minutes either way of twelve o'clock; and not doubting to meet you punctual there,

"I remain, dear John,

"Yours till death doth us part,

"MARY AYLETUNNE."

Mr. Stephen Ayletunne's outraged mind was at once made up: he would return that letter himself to the insolent baggage that wrote it; drop down upon her at the very moment she was expecting "dear John," and though, being a girl, he could not unfortunately give her a real taste of his splay gouty foot, he could at least drive the shameless hussy home, and hand her over to maternal discipline.

It was barely half an hour's walk from Vere Priory to Pendrell's Folly, and the intervening hours having, at last, slowly limped by, Mr. Ayletunne set off with fierce determination for the appointed rendezvous, and arrived, himself unseen, within view of the spot at about five minutes to twelve.

His rebellious niece was not yet there, but Crabby Lister and Madame le Blanc's little boy were

playing together close to the wooden railings. The little one was lying on the grass in a recumbent attitude, and Crabby was frisking about in what seemed a state of extraordinary excitement: presently he looked round eagerly in every direction, and Ayletunne thought for a moment he had caught sight of him: but that, the terrible occurrences of the next few minutes proved to be mere fancy.

Suddenly, seeing as he must have supposed the coast clear, Crabby Lister threw himself upon the unfortunate boy, grappled, struggled fiercely with him. Confused cries, then screams arose, and, horror of horrors—a glittering knife gleamed in Crabby Lister's hand—was raised and driven with a yell of rage, into the writhing body of the child—again raised, dripping with blood in the bright sunshine, and again driven home by the frantic young assassin!

Panic-stricken for some moments by the horrid sight, Stephen Ayletunne, at length regaining courage and presence of mind, rushed with loud outcries towards the scene of the frightful tragedy; unheard, however, or at least unnoticed by Crabby Lister, who, before he could get nearly up, had dragged the body of the murdered boy through the broken railing and cast it into the black, fathomless depths of the Folly!

That done, the wretched murderer glared fearfully around, and recognized Ayletunne; and at the same moment, Harlowe, who, prompted by the same motive

as the steward, had hurried forwards from an opposite point, and alas! as fruitlessly!

Young Lister, easily eluding Ayletunne's clutch, ran side-long towards Harlowe, who, aghast with horror, and, no question, with terrible if vague fears for himself, seemed rooted to the ground, since all hope of preventing the bloody deed had passed away.

"I have done your work;" exclaimed the boy in palpitating, under-toned accents, though Ayletunne heard them plainly enough. "And—now—now, to reach the chaise. Quick! quick! don't you see that man?" he added, pointing with his hand towards, but not daring to face, Ayletunne.

"Done *my* work, accursed murderer!" gasped Harlowe with quivering lips. "What can you mean by giving utterance to that hellish lie?"

"It is you that lie," fiercely retorted the lad. "You want, do you, now we have been seen, to cast it all upon me, perhaps?—But you shan't.—Come, come," he added, glancing anxiously at Ayletunne, who had also come to a stand-still, irresolute what to do or say; "there is yet time to reach the chaise, and escape!"

"Loose your hold of me, wretched boy," exclaimed Harlowe, rousing himself to confront the peril in which he found himself involved. "Ayletunne, do you take this young villain into safe custody: I—I shall, of course, be forthcoming when my evidence is

required:" and he turned to hurry off in the direction of the chaise in waiting for him.

Young Lister, spite of his physical deformity, leaped after him with the bound of an enraged panther, and clung to him with a determined hold, shouting, yelling rather, the while, "Help! Help!—help to stop him, Mr. Ayletunne! He tempted, bribed me to do it! The reward is in my pocket. Help! Help!"

Those frantic outcries were heard by a gentleman of the neighbourhood, a Mr. Warrender, that chanced to be riding near the spot, and who immediately galloped up.

"What is the meaning of this strange scene, Ayletunne?" asked Mr. Warrender.

The coming up of Mr. Warrender had ended the struggle between Harlowe and Crabby Lister; the man recognizing the folly of attempting to get away; the boy, that the prompter of his crime, as he alleged, could not escape; and Ayletunne regaining his speech and wits, briefly related what had occurred.

"What proof have you," asked Mr. Warrender, addressing Crabby Lister, "that this gentleman, Mr. Harlowe I believe, incited you to commit this dreadful deed?"

"Plenty of proof," replied Crabby Lister, with fierce vindictiveness. "This is the purseful of money he gave me as earnest. His initials are stamped on the clasp of the pursc. And here, in his

own handwriting, is the hour and the place appointed;" he added, handing to the questioner the scrap of paper bearing the words 'Twelve o'clock, Friday, Pendrell's Folly.' That," said Crabby Lister, "was written that there might be no mistake as to time and place, where the chaise, which you can see yonder through the trees, was to be in readiness to take us off to London; and but for you," he added, savagely regarding Ayletunne, "we should have been safe off, and nobody the wiser by this time."

"Still, I cannot comprehend," said Mr. Warrender, "what possible motive Mr. Harlowe could have for taking the poor child's life?"

"Jealousy! Vengeance!" replied Crabby Lister. "To be revenged upon his mother, who is going to marry Mr. Reuben Bradley. Send for Madame le Blanc, at Rock Cottage; she will tell you of motives enough!"

"You comprehend, of course, Mr. Harlowe," said Mr. Warrender, "that you are in custody, and must be taken forthwith before a magistrate?"

"I do," gloomily replied Harlowe, "and that either I am the victim of a deadly animosity for which I can assign no cause, or of a fatal, inconceivable misunderstanding."

"Who is the nearest magistrate, Ayletunne?" asked Mr. Warrender.

"Mr. Tremaine, of Acton Court, who is now at the Priory; he arrived there just as I left."

“ We will proceed to Vere Priory at once, then,” said Mr. Warrender.

They did so; Stephen Ayletunne, who seemed to have forgotten all about his rebellious niece, having first rigidly scrutinized the actual spot where the murder was committed, and picked up amongst the rank grass the bloody knife, and the unfortunate child’s hat.

The dreadful news spread with such celerity, that by the time they reached the Priory a small crowd of amazed, exclamative, in some degree menacing country-folk had gathered around. Reuben Bradley, white with consternation, entered the court-yard, accompanied by Mr. Grenfell, at the same moment as the prisoners; and after listening with suspended breath to Harlowe’s hurried version of what had occurred, said in a voice almost choked with emotion—

“ Were you, Harlowe, the veriest villain that ever breathed, there is a circumstance, as yet unguessed of by yourself, in connection with this dreadful crime, which would make me pity you from my inmost heart.”

“ What circumstance as yet unguessed of by myself?” demanded Harlowe.

“ That question cannot be answered now,” replied Reuben Bradley, “ you will know what I mean, unhappy man, too soon.”

“ That which utterly confounds me,” whispered Reuben Bradley to Mr. Grenfell, as they ascended the

stairs, "is that young Lister should have been tempted by any conceivable bribe to commit such a crime. I could have pledged my life for that remarkable lad's strict, incorruptible rectitude."

"Professional experience has taught me," said Henry Grenfell, "that the most innately depraved beings are frequently the most impenetrable and specious. Poor Madame le Blanc," added the barrister, "is doubtless informed by this time of the terrible catastrophe?"

"Yes, before this;" replied Reuben Bradley with a nervous shudder. "But that I knew that, I should have gone to announce the frightful tidings as gently as I could myself."

No hall of justice or of doom, could have presented a more morally impressive aspect than the brilliantly furnished drawing-room of Vere Priory during the oppressive silence that succeeded the confused tumult of astonishment and dismay which ensued upon the entrance of the prisoners and their captors. All the servants of the establishment, and as many strangers as could force an entrance, driven back to the doorways by the authority of Stephen Ayletunne, formed, as it were the background to the terrible picture of which Harlowe, Crabby Lister, Ernest Brydone, and Mr. Tremaine, the pallid face of each presenting a varying but distinct impress of terror and bewilderment, were the prominent figures.

Mr. Tremaine was so unnerved that he could not undertake the brief, formal examination, necessary to justify him in issuing his mittimus for the safe keeping of the prisoners till the next day, when they would be taken before a petty sessions of magistrates; and Mr. Grenfell volunteered to put the necessary questions, which, with the answers, Mr. Warrender took down in writing.

The evidence already known to the reader was shortly taken: the knife, the child's hat, the purse, the torn envelope, were produced, and Henry Grenfell was about to ask Harlowe if he wished, at that stage of the proceedings, to make any statement, when the piercing tones of a woman's voice and a sympathetic murmur amongst the crowd of "The poor mother!" arrested every tongue, and one might say every pulse there.

Another minute, and Madame le Blanc rushed in a state of the wildest distraction into the room.

"My boy! my child! Where is my child?" screamed the frantic woman. "Who has invented this hideous lie to torture—madden me? You, Harlowe,—you inhuman monster!" she continued, springing towards and grappling him in her insane fury, "you, accursed villain, have done this! but only,—only," added the unhappy lady, her rage changing in a moment to humblest suppliance, "only, I know, to frighten—to terrify me! You have concealed, hidden.

my pretty boy from me—nothing more. Say, only say that: I know, I am sure you have; but say, confess that, good, kind Mr. Harlowe, and the rack shall not wrest your secret from me.”

“I swear to you, by all that men hold sacred,” said Harlowe, with earnest solemnity, “that I would rather have struck at my own life than at your son’s. The crime, the infernal crime, is solely that young miscreant’s.”

Madame le Blanc loosed her hold of Harlowe, and glared round upon the circle of white faces that surrounded her, with blank, unreasoning terror, as if her reeling brain failed to grasp the huge, black despair that pressed it down.

“And my kinsman, Mr. Sidney Polwarth,” said Mr. Tremaine, soothingly, “will answer for it that Mr. Harlowe is incapable of the atrocious crime imputed to him.”

“*He* answer for his fellow-villain!” shrieked the distracted mother, with instantly-recurring fury. “He is no kinsman of yours, old man! Sidney Polwarth was drowned, drowned, I tell you, at Havre, and he, Ernest Brydone, that trembling caitiff there, the gambler, swindler, Ernest Brydone, has conspired with this villain, this assassin Harlowe, to personate your drowned, dead kinsman. Ah! wretches, murderers, that blow strikes home! This,” added the frantic woman, “this is the accursed secret, revealed to me

by accident, that kept me in vile bondage, destroyed my peace, and has now slain my son, my darling boy, my only child—my hope, my life. O God! God! take me in mercy also.”

Hysterical passion, sobbings, faintings, followed, till the unfortunate lady's physical strength wholly gave way, and she was borne in a state of insensibility to a sofa near an open window by Reuben Bradley.

Madame le Blanc's revelation excited, it will be readily believed, as intense astonishment in the minds of the general auditory as dismay in those of the detected conspirators. Brydone was completely overwhelmed by the suddenness of the blow, and, to Mr. Grenfell's stern query as to the truth of what they had just heard, made a full confession, concluding with an appeal for mercy; a redeeming point of which confession was, that it fully exonerated Madame le Blanc from more than accidental, compulsory complicity in the imposture.

Harlowe's indomitable, elastic nature, though for a moment yielding to the force of the stroke, quickly recovered its defiant energy. With regard to the conspiracy, he had, he knew, and Mr. Tremaine's vague bewilderment and fear confirmed him in that conviction, a sufficient safeguard from penal consequences in the deeds in his pocket. But this accusation of murder, so persisted in by the boy Lister, was a frightful danger,

with which he must at once and resolutely cope. To Henry Grenfell's question, therefore, he coolly admitted the personation, by his accomplice, Ernest Brydone, of the deceased Sidney Polwarth. But," he added, "with respect to the infamous charge fabricated by——"

"Ha! he denies it still, does he?" interrupted Crabby Lister, who had hitherto kept silence, though he seemed to be much agitated and distressed by the mother's frantic grief. "Well, then, I have another and more convincing proof to offer. I have left it at home," he added. "They will find it in my bed-room; here is the key."

"What will they find in your bed-room?" asked Mr. Grenfell, as he gave the key to a servant.

"What will they find? Why the boy to be sure; Madame le Blanc's son; the boy you thought was murdered,—alive! alive! and well as I am," shouted Crabby Lister with a burst of triumph. "Ha, I was sure I should make Madame speak! Forgive me, dear lady," he added, sidling up to the sofa where lay Madame le Blanc, still partially insensible. "Forgive me, dear lady, that for your own sake, for that of good Reuben Bradley, for gentle Miss Tremaine's, I have caused you such cruel suffering. She hears, but comprehends me not. No matter! she will presently revive to all-compensating peace and happiness."

The dumb amazement produced by the lad's astounding outburst was broken by Stephen Ayletunne:

“Why, you twisted little limb of Beelzebub!” exclaimed that important gentleman: “Did I not see you with my own eyes stab the poor child twice with that bloody knife, and fling the corpse into the Folly?”

“You saw me stab a nicely-got-up-effigy of the poor child,” replied the exultant Crabby, “within which I had placed a small bladder of sheep’s blood! And look you, Mr. Ayletunne,” continued the voluble lad, finding that no one else had yet found his tongue, “You are very clever, but you aint all the world. That letter I watched you read this morning was written by me, not Mary, in order that either you or John Gubbins should be on the spot to see what was going on.”

Simon Ayletunne’s comprehensive, though speechless appeal to the human race, as far as the human race was represented in that room, to witness with him against the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds going on around them was, together with the silent stupor of the Court of Appeal, cut short by shouts from without, speedily echoed within doors, of “It’s true! here comes the boy! Huzza! Three cheers for Crabby Lister” — and the like — presently followed by the entrance of the astonished and hardly-awakened child, whose supposed death had excited so much pity and consternation. The messengers had found him sound asleep on young Lister’s bed, and had with some difficulty aroused him, as the sleeping-draught which Crabby had contrived to administer was calcu-

lated to keep him in profound slumber two or three hours longer.

I pass briefly over the restoration of Madame le Blanc to consciousness—to a joy wordless, unspeakable—her departure with her recovered treasure, accompanied by Crabby Lister, trembling, exulting, laughing, weeping, all in a breath, like the loving, simple-hearted, high-soul'd lad, he really was. Those and other correlative details need not detain us from following the progress of the drama, the action of which appears to be as yet but partially evolved.

The drawing-room was at length cleared, at Mr. Leonard Harlowe's demand rather than request, (so boldly, spite of all that had come and gone, did he carry it,) of everybody except Mr. Tremaine, Mr. Grenfell, Reuben Bradley, and, of course, himself and Ernest Brydone.

“I have suggested that none but sure friends should be present for the next few minutes,” said Harlowe, “in consequence of your threat, Mr. Grenfell, to give Brydone and myself into custody for what you are pleased to call, and what I dare say the law is pleased to call, conspiracy!”

“There is no doubt that you are both liable to the charge of felonious conspiracy,” said Mr. Grenfell; “not the shadow of a doubt.”

“Just so; nevertheless you will think twice before doing that, one of the sure consequences of which will

be, that this gentleman, your father-in-law that is to be, would stand in the same doek with us."

"How—what can the insolent varlet mean, Mr. Tremaine?"

Mr. Tremaine, whose burning eyes were rivctted upon Harlowe's face, did not answer.

"You, Mr. Grenfell," resumed Harlowe, "ought to be well acquainted with Miss Tremaine's signature. Does this resemble it, because—"

"Let them go, let them go!" exclaimed Mr. Tremaine, starting up. "Go, go, go;" he added, with wild, impatient gestures.

"Mr. Harlowe, you, and this person will retire into the next room for a few minutes;" said Mr. Grenfell.

"With pleasure, sir, merely remarking, before we do so, that I am in possession of a letter from Mr. Tremaine, urging me to conceal from the gentlemen who were to advance those large sums, that Miss Violet Tremaine is a minor."

When they were recalled to the drawing-room, only Mr. Grenfell and Reuben Bradley were there.

"Under all the circumstances," said Henry Grenfell, "there will be no prosecution on the part of Miss Tremaine, the deeds in your possession being, of course, given up."

"This you undertake, upon the honor of a gentleman," said Harlowe.

"I do: with respect, however, to the security given,

to a Life and Fire Assurance Company, with which you are connected, I can give no undertaking."

"For certain legal reasons, known to me, I have no fear on that head," replied Harlowe. "And now how many hours' law will you give us?"

"How many hours' law, Mr. Harlowe? Really your effrontery staggers—confounds me!"

"How many hours' law," repeated Harlowe, "before you write to the Life and Fire Assurance Company apprising them of the turn of affairs here?"

"It will be necessary that a letter be written without delay: To-morrow, in my opinion, though there is no legal obligation to do so?"

"There will be no letter written *before* to-morrow!"

"Certainly not; that I promise you."

"I am satisfied; and now, Brydone, get your portmanteau packed, and I will give you a lift in the post-chaise, which no doubt is still in waiting for me."

"There are certain formal admissions that must be signed first, Mr. Harlowe."

"Certainly Mr. Grenfell, we are at your service in that respect."

"After which, *I* wish to have a word with you, Mr. Harlowe," said Reuben Bradley.

"With all my heart; twenty, if you would rather, Mr. Bradley."

That word with Reuben Bradley had shaken Harlowe's nerves more than all the occurrences of the

previous ruin-crowded hour. This was apparent to Ernest Brydone, as they left the Priory together, in the direction of the post-chaise.

“ I thought,” said Brydone, “ that the reaction must come at last. You seem as much beaten now as I was an hour since !”

“ By nothing resembling the same cause, Brydone. You will hardly believe it,” added Harlowe, “ it is so devilish odd,—but, that—that boy,—young Lister I mean, is—is my own son !”

“ What !”

“ Yes, my son ; though he doesn't know it even now. Deuced queer, isn't it ?” said Harlowe, with a spasmodic effort at indifference of tone,—“ d——d queer, one might say. His mother's was the face I saw that night. Kate Jerrit, you know ; who was thought to have been drowned,—self-drowned in the Tamar. D——d queer, eh ?”

“ Queer ! It takes one's breath away ! Do you seriously mean that——”

“ Go on, Brydone, alone !” exclaimed Harlowe, with abrupt interruption.

Ernest Brydone stared, not only at his companion, whose agitation appeared to have suddenly reached a climax, but around, to discover the cause of such unwonted emotion. He saw nothing ; and Harlowe repeating his wish to be alone for a few minutes with angry emphasis, Ernest Brydone walked on.

The long, narrow opening in Lea Wood, upon coming in a line with which the steps of Harlowe had been instantly arrested, was not within Brydone's purview, or he would have seen in the distance three persons in seemingly earnest colloquy;—a man, a boy, and a woman, recognised by Harlowe to be Reuben Bradley, Crabby Lister his own son, and that son's mother, who had been brought back to her home, much sooner than she intended by the terrible rumour that had reached her.

At that sight a flood of emotion welled up from the parched and arid depths of Harlowe's world-withered soul, which, the moment he felt himself alone and unobserved, overflowed in passionate fiery tears! Yes, memory—imagination helping—he recognised, from behind the tree against which he leant as much for support as concealment, the soft dove-eyes, the sweet placid face, the palely-golden hair, of the Kate of his early youth and love; nay, by heaven! so completely, as he gazed, did the old time flow back upon him, that he fancied he could distinguish her voice of music floating towards him with the perfume of the flowers, the woods, as when he strolled with her by the Exe in the same sweet season of the spring. And presently,—could it be illusion?—the song she had sung to him on the evening of their final parting,—often since heard in his dreams, sounded in his tranced ear,—

“Return, O my love, and we’ll never, never part,
 Whilst the moon its soft light shall shed ;
I’ll press thee to my fond and faithful heart,
 And my bosom shall pillow thy head.”

Yes, illusion in a material sense,—the chords of memory struck by thy good angel, Harlowe, who is making one more, one last strenuous effort to save thee ! Listen, Leonard Harlowe, if thou wouldst not perish utterly, to the suggestions that, evoked by those awakening chords, flit across thy throbbing brain, whispering that forgiveness, loving forgiveness, awaits thy acceptance ; that ere one could count a hundred, thou may’st be clasped to the tenderest, faithfulest of human hearts ! One strenuous effort and the victory is won,—the evil past, a night-mare dream, the very memory of which will gradually vanish in the pure light of a redeemed, renovated life. The conflict is between penitence and pride,—angel and devil ! It is over : pride and the devil have won !

The struggle, though sharp and fierce, was not of long duration, since Ernest Brydone had not reached the chaise more than ten minutes, when he was joined by Leonard Harlowe, whose suave calmness appeared to be perfectly restored.

“And what do you purpose doing ?” asked Harlowe, as the carriage drove on.

“An emigrant vessel, I have ascertained, sails to-morrow for America, from Plymouth. I shall take a

berth in her. It might be wise in you to do the same."

"I am not of that opinion. There are a few trump cards left in my hand yet, and I shall, as I have often told you I would, play the game thoroughly out. The hour of decisive victory often strikes amidst and silences the clamours of anticipated defeat—as witness Marengo and Waterloo: and to-morrow will be my Waterloo!"

CHAPTER XIII.

“C'est la fin qui couronne les œuvres.”

“To-morrow will be my Waterloo!” Yes, and as the train swept on towards London, Harlowe was studying the situation, the opposing forces, and adverse possibilities, as eagerly as did the renowned chieftains that for the first time on that memorable day confronted each other.

The doings and discoveries at Vere Priory would, he knew, occupy a prominent position in the columns of the morrow, Saturday's, Cornwall papers, possibly in those of Devonshire; but there being no post-delivery in London on Sunday, it would not be till Monday morning, in all probability, that any one connected with the Assurance Office would obtain an inkling of what had occurred, unless, of course, by some unlooked-for accident, which must be risked. He, Harlowe, should then have all day Saturday to labour in, undisturbed,—seven precious business-hours,

which for once must be made to do the work of seventy. Sunday also would be his; and as early as eight o'clock on Monday morning the steamer for Chagres would leave the Southampton Docks. Supposing, therefore, that Mr. Grenfell's letter or a tell-tale newspaper reached a Director by the very first post on Monday morning, and decisive measures were adopted without one moment's loss of time,—a most improbable postulate,—the telegraph's wings of fire would still fail to overtake the fugitive.

Moreover, if the unlooked-for accident, admitted to be an element in the calculation, did occur, and he should be arrested, he had—no forgery being chargeable—but contracted a large debt; and when the disagreeable process “of paying back,” had been enforced, the produce of his new shares would still remain, and he should be no worse off than at the present moment.

As to criminal proceedings upon the Sidney-Polwarth security-bond, that, especially now that Brydone had mizzled, was, he for several reasons knew, quite out of the question; besides, the Company in the case supposed, that of “paying back,” would have lost nothing.

“It will be a Bridgenorth election, then, all on one side:—heads *I* win,—tails *you* lose!”—and with that comfortable conclusion simmering at his heart, Mr. Harlowe drew his comfortable cloak well about

him, his travelling-cap well over his ears, and sank into tranquil slumber, to obtain which in the world of the romancist, a clear conscience is held to be indispensable ; whereas a *callous* conscience, in this actual prosaic region of conflicting moral forces, will often answer the purpose just as well, for a time.

The new Managing-Director and ex-Managing Director met at prayers on the Saturday morning, and soon afterwards parted with mutual compliments and felicitations, Mr. Harlowe remaining in sole command of the establishment.

The seven precious hours must have been diligently employed, since Mr. Harlowe, upon quietly counting his acquisitions, in the privacy of his lodgings in the Albany, found himself, the produce of his own shares inclusive, in possession of rather more than thirty-six thousand pounds—a sum far short of what he had once hoped to appropriate, but not unsatisfactory, all circumstances considered.

Sunday passed quietly over. In the evening Mr. Harlowe called in upon one of the directors, took a cup of tea *en famille*, accompanied the lady of the house and her daughters to church, returned to his chambers ; and having given a brief intimation that he should again be absent on business for a day or two, called a cab, and reached the Vauxhall station of the South-Western Railway in comfortable time for the last train to Southampton.

The steamer for Chagres left the docks punctually at eight; at twenty minutes to nine, by Mr. Harlowe's watch, rounded Calshot Castle, and that gentleman's sanguine temperament, no longer depressed by the shadow of a fear, lifted him at once into the seventh heaven of assured wealth, and all that wealth brings.

A fool's paradise, Leonard Harlowe, cool, clever fellow as you are! The "accident" you had taken into account *has* occurred. By seven o'clock this morning, one of the directors, least friendly to you, was roused from his bed by an officious friend, who brought him the *Cornwall Gazette*, and, correlative information, otherwise obtained, of your Saturday's official doings. Prompt measures were immediately resolved upon. The telegraph has ascertained that you have embarked in the Chagres steamer; and further reported to the zealous director that the *Wonder*, a fast Channel boat, having just come in from Jersey, and not yet blown her steam off, could, if required to do so, overtake the Chagres steamer. An order to that effect has been transmitted; and a few minutes after you rounded Calshot Castle, the *Wonder*, with an officer on board, was steaming out of the docks in confident pursuit.

The result justified that confidence: Leonard Harlowe was brought back in custody, and on the following morning appeared at the Mansion-house, before the

Lord Mayor, to answer the grave charge of robbing his employers.

The court was crowded, and it was evident that both bench and audience had fully made up their minds as to the guilt of the prisoner, before a word of legal evidence had been adduced. The facts were freely admitted; but the barrister, instructed by Mr. Bunt (who, by-the-bye, manifested no surprise at recognising in Mr. Harlowe his old client, Mr. Saunders) scouted the notion that, in law, the prisoner had committed a felony; the offence did not, moreover, he declared, amount legally to an ordinary breach of trust. He argued to the winds.

Another tribunal, the Lord Mayor said, must decide the validity of that plea; and the prisoner was fully committed for trial at the Central Criminal Court, bail being refused.

Worse! To the application of counsel, that at least the moneys known to have been obtained by the sale of shares indisputably the prisoner's own should be restored to him, the London solicitors to the Polwarth family, though admittedly without instructions for the moment, opposed themselves, upon the ground that those shares had been purchased with funds obtained by a felonious conspiracy. The objection was sustained. "Not one penny of the plunder," said the Lord Mayor, "shall, with my consent, be given to enable the prisoner to defeat justice, by means of legal quibbles."

Mr. Bunt was especially disgusted with that decision ; and although, at the time, he made no reply to his client's suggestion that he, himself, should advance the necessary funds, upon the understanding that he would be repaid three-fold, upon his, Harlowe's acquittal by a tribunal, uninfluenceable by Mansion-house law ; the astute attorney, after two or three days' reflection, aided and swayed by the diverse opinions that were flying about amongst the profession, as to the legal guilt or innocence of the prisoner, made up his mind to run no risk in the matter, and a letter to that effect was written and sealed, when some one tapped hesitatingly at the office-door.

“ Come in ;” said Mr. Bunt.

A woman closely veiled, accompanied by an oddly deformed lad, entered, in compliance with the invitation, and the former placed a letter, directed to James Bunt, Esquire, attorney-at-law, upon the desk.

“ You are that gentleman, I believe ?” said the woman.

“ Yes, Ma'am, I am. Upon my word, a most satisfactory letter,” added Mr. Bunt, whose gray eyes fairly glittered with delight as he read. “ An entirely satisfactory letter !” and in the fulness of his satisfaction, he could not refrain from reading it aloud :

“ The Grange, near Truro,
May 11th, 1848.

“ Sir,—I have to request that no expense be spared in defending

your client, Leonard Harlowe, against the very serious charge he has to meet. As the verdict will turn upon a purely legal point, you will please to engage the very ablest counsel in his behalf. I enclose a cheque, on account, for one hundred pounds, and any further sum required will be paid to your order, by Messrs. Hoare and Co., who are instructed to that effect by my bankers at Truro.

“ I am your obedient,

“ REUBEN BRADLEY.”

“ There is something delightful!” exclaimed Mr. Bunt, fingering the cheque as if he meant that, as perhaps he really did, “ There is something delightful in this manifestation of friendship under difficulties. You, Madam — a cheque for a hundred pounds has done more since William the Conqueror than change Ma’am into Madam!—You, Madam, are, I presume, a relation of my client’s?”

“ No, sir, I am not related to Mr. Harlowe. May I ask if you are certain that he will be acquitted?”

“ Certain, Madam? Well, I am certain he *ought* to be acquitted. To be quite candid with you, my client, a gentleman every body admits of vast capacity, has perhaps taken too comprehensive,—too broad a view of the law in such cases; not allowing as men of narrower, more technical minds would, for the eccentricities of that very sinuous rule of right, *the lex non scripta*. In more familiar phrase, he has, it may be, sailed a *little* too close to the wind. Then the endless

stories published by the newspapers of that Cornish, Polwarth business, excites such a prejudice against him, that it is fortunate the defence will not be addressed to a jury. The Directors too, whom Mr. Harlowe tickled so delightfully, are wild with rage, and will move heaven and earth to ensure his conviction."

"Alas! there is no hope then!"

"O, my dear Madam, very far indeed from being no hope. Furnished as I now am, with the sinews of war, I should make a good fight of it, were your friend's case much less hopeful than it is: with Hoare & Co. at my back, if I don't pull him through, I shall be astonished, that's all."

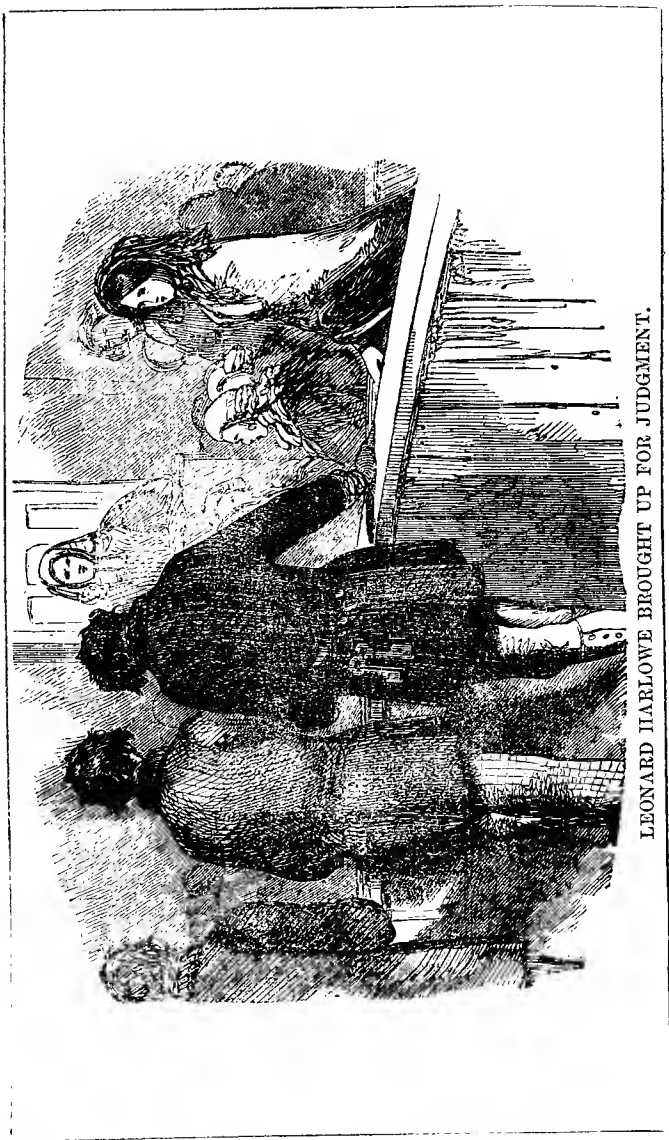
Upon the trial, a first-rate bar appeared for the prisoner, and the technical answer to the indictment for stealing a cheque, the property of his employers, the Life and Fire Assurance Company, was put with such force, that the presiding judge intimated that he also was of opinion that the facts disclosed did not warrant a conviction for felony. He would, however, consult his learned brother; and upon returning into Court, said, that his learned brother was inclined to differ with him; and he suggested, therefore, that the jury should return a verdict of "Guilty of stealing a piece of paper;" and the legal question could be afterwards raised before the whole of the judges. This was assented to; and the jury returned their verdict accordingly.

Again, a long, laboured argument before eleven judges, the result of which was, that five of their lordships held that the conviction was bad, six that it was good, in law. Conviction affirmed.

During the ensuing sessions Leonard Harlowe was brought up for judgment, before the same learned judge that tried the case. His lordship said his own opinion remained unchanged ; but, as a majority of the judges had decided otherwise, he was bound to give effect to that decision. Technically, the prisoner had been found guilty of stealing a piece of paper, but substantially, of robbing his employers to an immense amount. The sentence would therefore be commensurate with the real magnitude of the crime—that of twenty years' transportation !

Fire leapt from Leonard Harlowe's eyes as the terrific sentence passed the judge's lips, and words as fierce would have followed, had they not been checked by the agonising cry of a woman. Instinctively Harlowe recognised that voice, and turning eagerly towards the spot whence the cry proceeded, he saw once more the sweet, pale face that had startled him in the neighbourhood of Vere Priory ; and there too, was his son—his son, passionately sobbing, as he helped to assist his mother, who had fainted, out of the hot, stifling court.

“The prisoner's wife and son” ran in a pitying murmur through the auditory. Harlowe himself



LEONARD HARLOWE BROUGHT UP FOR JUDGMENT.

seemed paralysed—awed by the sight, much more than he had been by the judge's sentence; the fiery defiance—disdain, one might almost say, for he firmly believed, as thousands of others did and do, that a majority of the judges had wrested the law to his destruction—faded from his face—tears welled up into his eyes, and he seemed about to make an appeal for mercy, when, at a gesture from the judge, a policeman grasped him rudely by the arm—"Now, then; come along, sir; and at once."

Leonard Harlowe then would seem to have finally lost the game; and that strong, rebellious soul of his, fettered by its earthly adjuncts, must even submit in sullen despair to the doom which has passed against him.

There is one meek and gentle being in whose woman's heart hope is not yet extinct. Prisons, she knew, even model ones, yielded sometimes to golden keys, and Reuben Bradley's purse was always at her command. The task was, however, an arduous one, and could, it was soon apparent, never be accomplished, save, it might be, by her son's remarkable readiness of resource, and swift-eyed, bold, instinctive sagacity.

Nearly eight months of patient, unwearied persistence was rewarded at last; and, on a bitter scowling morning, in the winter of 1849, the neighbourhood of Pentonville prison was thrown into a state of great excitement by a rumour that Number 36—Harlowe,

the notorious criminal connected with the Life and Fire Assurance Company—had escaped !

True, though hardly credible, that the scientific safeguards designed to prevent the possibility of such accidents should have been successfully broken through. The startling intelligence was forthwith conveyed to every police-station in the metropolis and its vicinity, and telegraphed to the outposts, with a minute description of the escaped convict's person.

Policeocracy was in a state of bilious fermentation at finding itself so audaciously outwitted ; and the eructations of its more immediately-concerned members, as the day wore on, and no hint of recapture or hope thereof reached them, became exceedingly coarse and offensive.

The escaped convict the while was passing slowly, openly, under the very noses of the angry and astute police, in plain, full view of their lynx eyes. That was Harlowe in the costermonger's coal-cart, and but for the silent system enforced at the model prison, the officers usually employed there might have recognised his voice, even in the rather feeble cries of "coal," "coke," with which he solicited the custom of petty purchasers of those articles. The face of the man, to be sure, was grimed with coal-dust, and further shadowed by shaggy, unkempt black hair, and a slouching, battered hat, rendering it perhaps unrecognisable by the keenest of detectives ; and moreover,

the fellow in the cart was much stouter than the convict, who, it was well known to the boy squat down in front and driving, and to that boy's mother, had been fast wasting to death, with consuming remorse and rage.

Nor could the police have possessed much facility for recognising undisguised faces, if those who sauntered unregardingly past the nerveless trembling woman, who seemed about to fall with every step she took,—were in court when Leonard Harlowe was sentenced. A remarkable face too, and if recognised by the police, they would only have had to mark the direction of the tearful, flurried eyes, which saw nothing in the crowded City-road, but that costermonger's coal-cart, some three or four hundred yards a-head of her; and Number 36 would speedily have been restored to his solitary, model death-cell.

Telegraphing to the sea-ports was labour thrown away. The lad who had conceived, elaborated, and so far carried out the plan of his father's escape, was not to be caught in such a common trap as that. A cottage on Kelvedon Common, Essex, with about an acre of market-garden ground, had been purchased at the Auction Mart for John Turner; legal possession had been given to his representative, and now the said John Turner, with the key in his pocket, was on his way to Kelvedon Common. The out-of-the-way cottage once reached without having left a betraying

trail behind, there would be slight danger of re-capture. John Turner, unless he chose to do so, would not see half-a-dozen strangers in as many months, and labourers about there, who seldom saw a newspaper or heard one read, would as soon think of suspecting the Rector of egg-stealing as a man that had given 200*l.* for Fern Cottage, of being an escaped convict.

There it was arranged that John Turner should delve in his garden, and get himself into healthy condition again; by which time a paragraph inserted in one or more of the New York papers,—a part of the plot confided to Mr. Bunt,—purporting to be a detailed account of the arrival in the Empire City, and departure westward, of the notorious swindler Leonard Harlowe, having found its way back to England and English journals, the eagerness of police pursuit would at once abate, and by proper management, John Turner, alias Leonard Harlowe's actual escape from the country, might be safely accomplished.

Crabby Lister, as it will be as well to still call him, was fearful of the possible treachery, under the temptation of a considerable reward, of one person unavoidably cognisant of the coal-cart part of the affair; and extremely anxious therefore to reach the place where his father would leave him, and in another disguise, proceed alone. For that reason he rejoiced when the scowling sky broke into a fierce snowstorm, affording an excuse to the coal retailers of hurrying

home for shelter. Forthwith plying the whip with great energy, Crabby quickly gained the high road of the open country, where thanks to railways and the bitter weather, there could be nothing seen as far as the eye could reach before and behind, but the coal-cart, which, when about two miles beyond Ilford, drew up under the shelter of some trees, and Harlowe proceeded to don his new disguise, that of a farmer of a humble, but respectable class, for which all appliances had been provided, even to the stout crab stick and enormous silver watch.

That effected, the father and son embraced each other with passionate effusion, and a whispered message of contrition—gratitude—the heart-stricken man dared not say more—was sent to her who, though by that time several miles behind, was still coming after them, battling with, and scarcely feeling the storm in her state of feverish disquietude and all-mastering anxiety to see the poor hunted fugitive within reach of the haven prepared for him, before she again turned her weary steps London-ward.

Harlowe proceeded on foot, of course, towards Romford, and his son sharply turned off with the cart towards the left, so that should treachery place the Police upon the track of the coal-cart they would still be baffled.

So concluded Harlowe and his son; but the lad's mother upon reaching the spot where the separation

had taken place, perceived a danger they had not thought of. The cart-ruts through the snow, turning to the left, were visible enough; but so, alas! were the man's footprints commencing there and leading towards Romford!

What could be done to efface so obvious—so unmistakable a trail! Nothing, except to obliterate those footprints by her own; brush them as she went along into indistinctness as the imprints of a man's tread;—a slow, laborious task, but, nevertheless, set resolutely about by that weary, feeble woman, and persisted in till she thought the connecting track was sufficiently broken; and she, moreover, was approaching roadside houses, whose inmates by noticing such odd doings, might, if questioned, prove more fatal directing-marks than the footmarks themselves.

Harlowe stopped at the "Ring of Bells," Romford, for refreshment. His strength was but factitious; sustained by the wine and spirits he had taken: he had besides been kept awake the whole of the previous night by the knowledge that his escape from that living tomb would be effected soon after daybreak, if at all: it is not surprising, therefore, that, after taking tea, he fell fast asleep with his head upon the parlour table, and remained so till roused by the waitress, who reminded him that he had not paid his reckoning.

The girl's face wore, it struck him, a kind of quiz-

zical, contemptuous expression, and, when after settling with her, he looked into the glass over the mantel-piece, he saw plainly enough what had excited her disdain and suspicions. His wig had got awry, revealing the close prison tonsure of his hair; and, in going out, he saw the waitress intently perusing a Police-placard that had been left at the house, containing a minute description of, and offering a reward of one hundred pounds, for the recapture of the escaped convict, Leonard Harlowe.

Terribly agitated, the unhappy man hurried away, and by the gas-lit window of a druggist's shop, reperused the written directions given him by his son. These were that he was to proceed on the High-road from Romford to Brentwood till he came to a white-painted windmill within about two miles of the latter place, where he would turn off to the left, pass through the hamlet of South Weald, then cross Squire Travers's park, emerging from which, a directing-post would point the way to Kelvedon Common, and once there he could not fail to recognize Fern Cottage from the sketch given him; he had the key, might enter unseen and would find everything necessary to his comfort prepared for him. Altogether the walk was about eight miles, and after turning off by the windmill, he would probably not meet a single human being. Hope, courage, as he read, came back to Leonard Harlowe's heart, and he hastened onwards.

The evening was a changeful one; dark, broken clouds chased each other swiftly over the face of the sky, and when Harlowe reached the Windmill, the full moon which had climbed high up by then, one moment shone out with undimmed brilliancy, and the next was blotted from the heavens, as it were by the dark masses of cloud.

The white, high road was completely deserted: he had not met one person, but after turning up the narrow winding road leading to the hamlet of South Weald, his fearful car seemed to catch doubtful, indistinct sounds of hurrying footfalls,—footfalls upon the yielding, unechoing snow,—whether before or behind him he could not decide; whilst the tall shadows of the trees suddenly flung across his path by the abruptly reappearing moon seemed for a horrid pulse-beat to be men starting forth to capture him.

As he neared South Weald Church the sound of hurrying feet—and *behind* him—grew into distinctness. Looking back he saw no one; but the road was so sinuous that the pursuer might be within twenty yards, and yet invisible.

He had reached the hamlet, which was as silent as a desert, or a village of the dead, when the pursuing footfalls coming upon hard ground, were distinctly audible. Whoever it might be was near at hand, and running! Harlowe stopped undecided whether to flee or to conceal himself. The next moment a woman

shot into view, gesticulating wildly, and with only breath sufficient to brokenly ejaculate—

“Fly—run—gain the park; the police—the police are upon you.”

He obeyed, and, nerved by terror, sprang forward at a rapid pace. Vainly, his hour was come! Two police officers, set upon his track by the waitress at the Ring of Bells, caught sight of him, and followed with redoubled energy. The foremost was within thirty yards when Harlowe’s foot slipped, and though he did not fall, his speed was checked, and, before it could be regained, his foe had grappled him. Again, despair lent him strength, and the man was dashed upon the ground with stunning violence.

The second police officer, a slighter man, hesitated to close with him, and Harlowe darted towards the steps leading over the high paling into the park; gained, mounted them; when the officer, seeing he would else escape, raised, levelled a pistol, fired, and Harlowe, tossing for a moment his arms in the air as if to preserve his failing balance, fell with a loud cry prone upon his face!

The game was at length played out, and he had—lost!

The red life-stream stained the snow upon which he lay extended, his head supported by one faithful unto death.

“Kate—beloved Kate!” said the dying man, “can you forgive me?”

“Forgive you, Leonard! I would die for you!”

“Does a priest live here about?” feebly murmured the moribund; “I thought once when—when I—I was at Rome, that if—if ever ——”

A strong convulsion shook his frame, and stilled his speech: another followed—another; and Leonard Harlowe was, as men say, no more!

By a somewhat remarkable coincidence, Acton Tremaine, Esquire, of Acton Court, died within twelve hours of Leonard Harlowe;—died of a humiliated, cankered spirit. The proud man had never held up his head since the disclosures at Vere Priory.

* * * * *

More than five years have passed away when the curtain again rises upon the last recorded phase of this eventful history.

The scene is the dining-room of the Grange to which the reader has been already introduced; the time, after dinner; and those present are Reuben Bradley, Mrs. Bradley, Lawyer Ferrand, and a charming little girl in her fourth year, seated on Reuben Bradley's knee, and whose baptismal name, it seems, is Laura. Pontic is also present, in luxurious case before the blazing fire, for, though the month is April, the air without is keen as well as bracing.

Servants have just placed decanters, glasses, and

tobacco upon the table; and the lady of the house, having filled Reuben Bradley's splendid meerschaum with her own fair hands, is mixing him a tumbler of hollands and water, as she only can, precisely to his taste.

"I repeat, Madam," remarks Mr. Ferrand, renewing a conversation which the entrance of the servants had interrupted, "I repeat to you, Madam, that it was I, and in this very room, that first convinced Master Reuben there that he was never, in a likely sense, attached to Miss Tremaine; and that it was uncommonly lucky for him there was no chance of his being tied up to such a superfine, dainty piece of goods."

"Superfine! dainty!" exclaimed the lady; "those terms, allow me to say, Mr. Ferrand, are singularly inappropriate to Mrs. Grenfell, who is about the most natural and gentle, as well as charming, angelic woman in the world."

"Just what I said: far too angelic and heavenly for such a mere earthly chap as Reuben. The wife for you," said I, "is the young widow yonder, at Rock Cottage; that's the armful for a stout, hale yeoman like you. And I was right, Reuben—eh, boy?"

"Right as the Bank of England! Here's your health, old fellow."

"Not," continued Mr. Ferrand, "that I didn't see the first time you flashed upon him, that it was a

decided case of spontaneous combustion ; and no wonder, for, though provided with a three-score damper, I was near catching fire myself, and ——”

“There, do hold your silly tongue, Mr. Ferrand,” interrupted Mrs., or, as from habit, she was usually called Madam Bradley. “Come Laura,” she added, “the carriage is, I see, brought round, and we have no time to spare. I shall call as we return at the Priory. Stephen Ayletunne brought me a note this morning from Mrs. Grenfell, requesting to see me.”

“Have not the children got the scarlatina, or something?” asked Reuben, anxiously.

“No ; nothing of the sort. Violet, the eldest girl, is suffering from a cold ; nothing more. Good day, Mr. Ferrand. You won’t forget to take the parcel of books to Dr. Boothby’s for Robert?”

“Certainly, Madam, I will not forget. When, may I ask, does your son go to Harrow?”

“After the next vacation. By, by, Ruby : yes, Ponto, you may come to. We shall be back to tea.”

“It’s pleasant, looked at from a philosophic and friendly point of view,” observed Samuel Ferrand, a little peevishly, “but, abstractedly to a batchelor, if he be sixty-five—aggravating. Do you think now, Reuben, that Mrs. Grenfell would kiss her husband before any body—even old Ferrand?”

“I neither know nor care, if she would or not.”

“But I know she would not. It’s not etiquette.”

“Not delicate?”

“Not delicate be hanged! Not etiquette, I said, which is quite a different thing. It’s the natural state of life, no doubt,” resumed Mr. Ferrand; “and if I were only fifty instead of sixty-five, and Mrs. Lister had not turned Papist, hang me if I would not make her Mrs. Ferrand!”

“That you could never do.”

“Well, I could try, at all events. And I say, Master Reuben, you have often said you would tell me how it was that queer perversion came to pass.”

“You shall hear her own account of it, as set forth in a letter to Laura,” said Reuben Bradley, rising, and going to an *ecritoire*: “I shall find it here, I think. Yes, this is it. I will read it aloud, as I can make out the hand better than you.”

“It thus came about, my dear Mrs. Bradley. For many months after Leonard Harlowe’s death, my mind was in a state of pitiable distraction, and the giant horror which incessantly haunted me with afflictive images of eternal retribution, was the state of sin and impenitence in which I believed he had passed from mortal life. Excellent Protestant divines visited me, but they were too honest to suggest a hope they did not feel. As the tree falls, they told me, so it must lie for ever, ever, ever! One afternoon a Catholic priest attached to Moorfield’s Chapel, who had heard of my affliction, called, and, at his request, I related the exact circumstances attending the poor hunted fugitive’s death. To my surprise, he assured me that some words Leonard had

uttered expressive of a wish to see a priest, had made him, in a sufficient sense, a member of the Roman Catholic Church! That touched me faintly; but when the good man went on to quote the passage in Maccabees, 'It is a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins;' and showed to me that it had been in all ages a Christian doctrine, that faithful members of the Church, who themselves lead pure and holy lives, can help the sinful departed with their prayers, a new light seemed to break in upon my troubled soul. I joined the Catholic Church, and gradually that which at first was a trembling, doubtful hope, grew, widened, brightened into a living, fervid faith, which has not only placed a lamp in that poor, contemned outcast's grave—depriving it of all its gloom and terror, but has shed a cheering, and, I humbly trust, a sanctifying influence over my own life. I can bear now to hear Leonard Harlowe's name scoffed at by worldlings; for I utter it to saints—to angels—to the omnipotent God himself,—and in my inmost soul believe that all-gracious answers are vouchsafed to me; and oh, when I hear the Priest say, 'The prayers of the faithful are requested for the repose of the soul of Leonard Harlowe, whose anniversary occurs about this time,' and I know that, from thousands of pious hearts, prayers for mercy to the lost one, as I once feared, will ascend to Christ, my heart swells with an ecstasy, a rapture, that words are all too weak to describe. And thus it was, my dear Mrs. Bradley, that I became a Papist."

"Well," remarked Mr. Ferrand, "she has not the less right to her own opinion because it does not happen to be mine. Crabby's articles will soon be out, won't they?" he added.

“Not for a twelvemonth to come. He’ll make a clever lawyer, they say.”

“I have no doubt he will, and — Oh, by George, I forgot to tell Mrs. Bradley that her former servant, Jane Gibson, and for his sins no doubt, poor Dawkins’s wife, has been brought to bed with twins again—I almost believe for the third time.”

“Dawkins must be getting a family about him in a hurry, if that is the case. He is prospering in the world, I hear.”

“Why, yes; if a man with such a spitfire shrew for a wife can be said to be prospering. From morning till night that woman is reading the riot-act, either to Dawkins himself, the workmen, the poor drudge of all work, or the children; her tongue is never still. But I ought not to say anything against Mrs. Dawkins: she is one of my compensations.”

“One of your what?”

“My compensations. That is to say, when weighing a batchelor’s life against Reuben Bradley’s, or Mr. Grenfell’s, I place her in the opposite scale as a possibility that might have fallen to my share, and matrimony kicks the beam instanter. It is said,” added Mr. Ferrand, “that she at one time angled for poor Harlowe, and I don’t know whether of the two alternatives — Pass the hollands, Reuben, will you?”

“Which two alternatives? What on earth are you thinking about, old fellow?”

“ Well, I hardly know : marriage *versus* model-prisons just —. Poor Harlowe ! he had some fine qualities.”

“ Yes, fine, but misdirected qualities. Man, however cannot judge man. There are many things should be taken into account which we cannot see ; and if we did, could not appreciate.”

“ Quite true—

“ Then at the balance let's be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What's done, we partly may compute,
But know not what's resisted ?”

“ That,” said Reuben Bradley, “ may not be law, but it's gospel.”

“ True ; and let him that is without sin cast the first stone.”

“ AMEN !”

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