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THE
VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

VOL. I.

BEFORE the beginning of years
There came to the making of man
Time, with a gift of tears ;
Grief, with a glass that ran :
Pleasure, with pain for leaven ;
Summer with flowers that fell ;
Remembrance fallen from heaven,
And Madness risen from hell ;
Strength without hands to smite ;
Love that endures for a breath ;
Night, the shadow of light,
And Life, the shadow of Death."

SWINBURNE'S *Atalanta in Calydon*

THE
VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

BY
WALTER THORNBURY.

O zarte Sehnsucht, süßes Hoffen,
Der ersten Liebe goldne Zeit,
Das Auge sieht den Himmel offen,
Es schwelgt das Herz in Seligkeit —
O, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe
Die schöne Zeit der jungen Liebe!

SCHILLER'S *Lied von der Glocke.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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James Ray 1596, 52 Chesham - 30.

TO

MY WILTSHIRE FRIENDS.



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THE VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

BREAKFAST AT THE VICARAGE.

It was a pleasant morning early in October, and the Reverend Edward Beauflower and his mother and sister were seated round the breakfast table.

The little village of Summerleas, nestling unpretendingly at the foot of the great range of breezy downs that runs like a backbone through the whole south of Wiltshire, looked modestly pretty in the cool autumn sunshine. The little shell-like leaves of the tall box-hedge that partly shut out the Vicarage from the road, wet with the last night's rain, shone in the sun as if they had been gilt. Some tall spindly alders that bordered a trout brook that ran on the other side of the box-hedge in Farmer Brown's ever green water meadow, shook their many-coloured leaves, and

looked for all the world like huge nosegays. High in the branch of a huge oak that rose over the tall, mossy paling of the abbey grounds a squirrel was gambolling with all the faultless grace and capriciousness of his race, while above him a wood pigeon murmured its brooding note. The wet berries of a tall mountain ash that grew near the Vicarage windows were bright as sealing-wax. The lawn, still grey with dew, was patterned here and there by such huge footmarks as once terrified Robinson Crusoe on the shore of his lonely island. A big speckled thrush, curious in the matter of worms, was busy searching for his retiring friends, while a water-wagtail from the brook side—most graceful and piquant of birds—equally attentive in his study of flies, was congratulating himself on every fresh mouthful by a flirt of the tail and a coquettish toss of the head. The martins, soon about to leave their summer-residence, were skimming backwards and forwards between the brook and the eaves of the old thatched vicarage. Altogether, it was a pretty, idyllic scene.

By the dial over the Vicarage door the hour was half-past eight o'clock. A slant line of shadow from the gnomon just crossed the motto, "Man's life is but a shadow," at the word "life." It was not cold enough yet for fires, and the urn

fumed on the breakfast table. The toast had just come in ; the tea was pouring out. Nothing could be whiter than the country bread, or more golden than the butter. Pleasant gleams of sunlight glancing from one hardly knew what point glistened on the silver, brightened the snowy table-cloth—glimmered on the ceiling—lit the covers of the books in the book-cases on either side of the fireplace, glanced on the picture-frames, and freshened the colours of the flowers in the vases by the side window.

Mrs. Beauflower, the mother of the young vicar, was a meek, placid old lady of about seventy, with good features, from which age had not altogether removed the beauty. An old-fashioned cap, with a pleated border and Quakerly lavender satin ribbons, shut in a face not altogether unlike that of Hannah More, though the benevolence was here retained somewhat at the expense of the intellect. A thrifty housekeeper, accustomed all her life to severe and necessary economy (for her husband had been a worthy, good-natured man of expensive and luxurious tastes, and not much money), old Mrs. Beauflower had grown in old age into one of those well-intentioned persecutors of servants, those worshippers of cleanliness and exhorters to saving, who, if more common, would soon drive half the

world to live in tents. But her despotism and vexatious over-anxiety were tempered by the milder and more genial rule of her daughter, Julia Beauflower, a handsome, hearty, shrewd, rather sarcastic, clever girl, who took life in a much easier way, and enjoyed it none the less ; who looked upon cleaning as a necessary misfortune, and who regarded servants as fellow-beings who were none the better for incessant scolding, and whose loss of freedom required mitigation by kindness and consideration,—as beings, in fact, who, like other women, wished to be loved, and in time to have homes of their own.

The vicar, a young man of twenty-seven, was an Englishman of the best type—not the worn-out Norman, with hatchet nose, long face, and huge thin whisker, nor the stolid Saxon, with beef in every feature. He was not one of those effeminate, mincing young clergymen who lisp out the words of Heaven, and are no more fit to grapple with the powers of evil than a spaniel is to grip a tiger. No ; he was a frank, bright-eyed fellow, strong and lithe of limb, with healthy blood beating in every vein, and sympathising with all the hopes and fears of humanity. No one could see Beauflower without envying him or liking him, his bearing was so frank, the expression of his face, though not handsome, was so straightfor-

ward, honest, and single-hearted. His hair, of an almost jetty brown (there is really hardly ever jet-black hair), was not crisp and curly, but rather hair that grew in a universal dark wave, undulating over a high, full, square forehead. His well-shaped head was well set on his shoulder, and that is of as great importance as the setting of a jewel. The irides of his grey eyes had that clear lustre and sparkle that only perfect bodily and mental health can bestow, giving those outlooks of the soul the beauty of precious stones with an inner vitality that no gems of Golconda could ever yet boast. A broad-chested, strong-armed man was Edward Beauflower ; real pure heart's blood was evidently moving in his veins, and his complexion was neither puckered nor sallowed by late hours and London dissipation. There was freedom, generous independence, and originality in every gesture ; his movements were vigorous and somewhat impetuous ; he could be choleric if his pride were roused, and his eye had a way of kindling under irritation that, even remembering his profession, was, no doubt, alarming to bullies and indolent pretenders of all kinds.

Julia Beauflower, turned towards the window, was intent on making Wasp, a little blind-looking Skye terrier, beg for a bit of toast, when her quick eye discerned a man with a leather post-bag over

his shoulder coming briskly across the little grey bridge that spanned the road to Fontford.

"Ned! Ned!" she cried; "here's the postman. Oh, I hope there'll be a letter from Amy."

The prosaic and unconscious man, "Hope's messenger and Love's," a moment after rang the bell at the back gate, and a pretty, neat maid-servant quickly appeared with the bag. Mr. Beauflower unlocked it; there were three letters—one for Julia, and two for the Vicar.

"Oh, it is from Amy, and she's coming back to-night. Ain't you glad, mamma?" Julia clapped her hands.

Mrs. Beauflower expressed a quiet and undemonstrative pleasure at the news. Amy was the governess at the Abbey.

"You have only seen Amy once or twice since she came, Ned," said Julia. "You were away last half on your walking tour in the Highlands. Oh, you have no idea what a darling she is. You can't help falling in love with her."

"Don't talk nonsense," said Mrs. Beauflower, gravely, as she buttered a piece of toast in an austere manner, "Ned looks higher than that."

"My dear Ju, I never find that men fall in love with the people they are expected to fall in love with. We are obstinate, selfish creatures, and we choose for ourselves."

“ You never like my friends,” said Julia.

“ Oh, yes, I do. I like them, but I don’t marry them. You see our ideals differ. You like a manly kind of girl, like yourself, full of scraps of the sciences — small Boadiceas. I like womanly women. I can’t bear manly women ; I hate them.”

“ And whom have *you* heard from, Ned ? Whose is that old-fashioned letter with the seal—folded, too, as big as a Government despatch ? ”

“ This document, Ju,” said Beauflower, “ is a letter from my old correspondent, Mr. Goodrick, the old West Indian gentleman I met at my cousin the lawyer’s. He was a friend of that son of Mr. Staunton, who was renounced by his father, and was drowned at sea. He has a great desire to see this part of Wiltshire. He is a great collector of pictures, china, and gems, and is enormously rich. Ju, you shall marry him ; he’s only sixty.”

“ Thank you,” said Julia, with a superb toss of her head ; “ keep him for old Miss Chivers.”

“ When does this gentleman come, my dear Ned ? ” said Mrs. Beauflower, nervously, as she began to pour out the second cups. “ Julia, your cup, please, or it’ll not be worth drinking.”

“ To-night, mother.”

“ To-night ! ” said Mrs. Beauflower, with a start. “ Good gracious, how thoughtless of you !

Why, how can we get the room ready? There are the sheets to air, and the carpet to lay down, and there must be a fire in the room, and there are the preserves to move. Ned, you *must* write and tell him Friday."

"Oh, mamma," cried Julia; "you can't put off people in that way; it'll be all ready."

"My dear mother," said Beauflower, "you are like Martha, you cumber yourself with much serving. You talk as if I had asked two regiments of the line down to Summerleas. The servants can air the sheets in two hours, and do the room in one more."

"Just what all you men say. It's always done in a moment. Everything's done in a moment! Why, it will take hours to do that room. Gentlemen never take any trouble about these things, and then talk as if it were all done by blowing upon.—Set of lazy creatures!"

"My dear mother, there's other work in the world besides giving out tea and choosing joints, useful as those occupations are. I am sure you would be soon tired if I kept bragging of every time I dipped my pen in ink, or paid a cottage visit."

"Where does this old gentleman of yours live?" said Julia.

"I forget, Ju, if I ever knew; he always writes

from the Travellers'. You'll like him, I think, because he is prepared to like Wiltshire. I want to hear of the Stauntons, whom you have a respect for; why, I don't know, for the father was fool enough to leave all his money to his steward, and the result is this unpleasant New Money, whose despotism we now groan under."

"Mrs. Harker is a woman of very high manners," said Mrs. Beauflower, authoritatively; "and I ought to know, for I once went to see George the Third at Weymouth, and old Queen Charlotte kissed me. I was only ten years old then."

"Oh, but mamma, she is so cold and proud, and self-conscious; so different from the Duchess of Downshire, you remember, that day when there was the consecration at Shaftesbury."

"Well, my dear, everything is altered. Everything is upside down, so perhaps, manners are too; but Mrs. Harker's are what we used to call high-class manners when I was young."

"Ethel is a dear girl," said Julia, by way of diversion, "but that Miss Harker is my abomination; proud, ugly thing, and putting on, too, all the airs of a queen of beauty. Do you think it possible Mr. Cantelupe is going to marry her? Why, she's much older than he is."

"That's evidently what the Harkers are driving at. There's the title, you see, Ju, and they

say the young fellow is deep in debt to Harker, and is getting every day worse. It serves him right, and yet I'm sorry for the scatterbrained fellow, for he's got good impulses, and I think his heart is in the proper place; but he's going to the dogs, I'm afraid."

"I'm so sorry," said Julia; "there is something nice about him, only he's flighty."

"He's a very gentlemanlike person," said Mrs. Beauflower; "he saw me the other day in the garden as he was passing, and he took off his hat with such an air—it reminded me of young Lord Harcourt, when the court used to be at Weymouth."

"There's the head keeper passing, Ju," said the Vicar. "Did you ever see such a perfect specimen of the small tyrant? A fellow a few years ago, perhaps, not worth a shilling. I suppose he's been ferreting in the woods—the beggar!"

The head keeper, Travers, was passing over the bridge—a tall, bony man, with long, sinewy limbs—he had a double-barrelled gun over his shoulder, and two men carrying rabbits, and some terriers at his heels. They had scarcely turned the corner of the road leading to the great gateway of the Park before there trotted by eight hunters in their body clothes, a groom to every two horses, and Paddy Blake, a ragged fellow in dirty scarlet

coat and bare feet—a hanger-on of the Cantelupe kennel—ran by the side of the first groom, exchanging banter, and patting the groom's horse with parasitical admiration.

Beauflower was standing at the window with one arm round his sister's neck when a heavy foot sounded in the hall, and a rough, gaunt, red-haired fellow, of about five-and-thirty, with an alarmed expression, looked in at the open door. It was George Dewer, the Vicar's gardener and factotum.

“If you please, sir,” he said, in the broadest Wiltshire, “Mrs. Fowler, the keeper's mother, is taken worse, Dr. Briscoe says it'll go bad with her; and if you please, sir, I want a new broom.”

“I'll go there after lunch, George; you can get a broom at the shop. Ju, dear, will you go presently and see if she wants anything?”

“And I,” said Mrs. Beauflower, solemnly, “have my work pretty well cut out, for those servants do nothing when I turn my back, and that best room, whatever you may say, will take hours.”

“Where are those photographs of the Harkers, Ju, that Ethel brought yesterday?” said Beauflower, as he strolled into the drawing-room, where Julia was now practising a weird waltz by Chopin.

“There they are, Ned, beside that ‘Wandering Jew’ of Doré’s.”

“Come and let’s discuss them, Ju, before I go off to my sermon.”

Julia waltzed round the room; then taking out the four photographs, she put them up in a row against the great French bronze clock on the white marble mantelpiece. They were not very inviting people. Mr. Harker, a self-made man, imperiously conscious of the power of new money, had a heavy-jowled, plebeian face, with small suspicious eyes, bony troubled brow, and thin, severe compressed mouth. His wife, a handsome woman, with coarse, hard, arrogant features, had a false smile, which in the thin *passée* daughter changed into a stereotyped simper, indicating a somewhat hopeless aspiration to the married state.

“I must own I don’t like them, Ju. There’s none of the old frank courtesy and quiet dignity of the old families. They are so horribly conscious of their money. They have no sympathy with the poor, and they detest the class from which they sprang.”

“Oh, I abhor them,” said Julia. “I’m quite afraid of that Mr. Harker, he looks so cruel. Mrs. Harker cares about no one who does not advance her plans. As for Caroline Harker, oh,

she's very horrid! but Ethel's a pet. Here's Ethel. I'll put her in my album—she's awfully nice."

"Yes, Ethel's nice."

Ethel's photograph showed a pleasant, handsome girl of fourteen, full of the budding beauty of a girl of that age—happy, high-spirited, with large clear eyes, and a cascade of lavish hair.

"One can hardly fancy her of the same race," said the young Vicar.

"But Amy—Amy crowns them all," said Julia, opening another page of the album, and showing a sweet, gentle face, with more of the tenderness of Imogene than the sparkle of Rosalind; a face in which the glory and hope of youth was just passing into womanhood, and a womanhood not unclouded by early care.

Mr. Beauflower looked long and earnestly, but said nothing.

"Oh, you don't half appreciate Amy's beauty," said his sister, half angrily. "I'm sure she's the prettiest girl in this part of Wiltshire, except Miss Dysart, and she's falling off. Amy is so quietly clever, too, and so unselfish; she ought to have been a Duke's daughter, not the governess of those horrid rich people. She always reminds me of the little Princess who was made a slave of."

"You want so much enthusiasm, Ju—you impetuous girl. Oh, I do think her a very nice girl—for a governess."

"For a governess? Ah! that's your pride. She's a nice girl for anything. She's a true lady whatever her parents are. Besides, isn't an artist a gentleman?"

"He may be."

"Wasn't Michael Angelo a gentleman?"

"Michael Angelos are perhaps rather scarce, now, Ju."

"Ah! the days are gone when knights married Griseldas—you'll never marry; you want such a paragon—such a rich paragon, too."

"That's not fair, Ju. I want a paragon, but not necessarily a *rich* paragon. If she were rich, I should not like her less, but I must have a lady. I don't believe in Griseldas, or Cinderellas either. An old Q. C., one of Fairfield's friends, married his cook, but I believe she drank, and I know he used to beat her."

"The brute, he ought to have been whipped. Oh, Ned, Ethel told us yesterday the archery meeting is really to take place on the 18th, we're to be asked, and the Duke of Downshire is to be there."

"Oh, indeed, we are really to be honoured with an invitation to the Abbey. How very kind

of them. They might have asked us to the swell soirée to-night."

"There's your wicked pride again, Ned."

The Vicar laughed, kissed away Julia's reproaches, and went off up-stairs to his sermon. A letter directed in a bold commercial hand fell out of his pocket as he pulled out his handkerchief. It was the letter received that morning, which he had thrust into his pocket and forgotten. He opened it half angrily. It was a reminder of an old half-forgotten debt from an Oxford livery stable-keeper, £37 10s. 6*d.* It came at a very inconvenient moment, for there was the premium on his insurance to pay, and the summer bills were not yet nearly wiped off.

Youthful follies are the dragon's teeth that in after-life rise up armed to confront us. The *Pieuxre* was upon him.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND FLOOR IN BUCKINGHAM STREET.

LONDON perhaps never wears a brighter, more smiling, quietly attractive face than on a fine morning in the early autumn. The sun, that worthy and venerable orb, not the least caring for the season being over (and it being really no matter whether there is sunshine in Whitechapel or anywhere else, when Belgravia is out of town), does its best at such times to quicken and vivify the almost sublime monotony and dulness of the great city. First it slowly rises a globe of keen purple fire that diffuses red and opaline gleams through the haze, and the murky roll of grey neutral cloud. By-and-by it launches out threateningly over St. Paul's, like a red-hot shot in a bombardment, and luckily missing the dome, it glows in a threatening way over the fair tall steeple of Bow Church. The church towers blush rosy in the cheery light; lastly, the fire-ball expands its golden petals, blossoms into

a full and more conquering effulgence, and it is day.

Pleasant then in the fuller lustre shines out every burnished door-plate and shop fitting, everything, indeed, that can reflect light outside London's three hundred and seventy thousand houses, from the golden gallery that coronets St. Paul's, to the brass-binding of the humblest cab in a Pentonville mews; across the clear dry brown pavement spread broad bars of sunshine—sunlight wavers or flickers across the walls and staircases of many dingy, forbidding chambers, and glimmers on even the most repulsive looking doors in the humblest streets. The eternal hope, joy, and gratitude of day-break comes to the old city, in season or out of season. The wakeful stirring light creeps between the satin bed-curtains of May Fair, and it also wakes the poor half-starved cress girl cowering in a Spitalfields doorway. It cannot be bought or sold, or taxed, or restricted; it is omnipresent as love, it is the same for all—thank God for that. The poor have few birthrights, but sunshine is one of them, and even Lazarus has this heirloom, for it is inalienable.

On such a morning, to be more exact, on an October morning, 1860, but later, Mr. Godfrey Goodrick, an old gentleman inhabiting a second floor at No. 30, Buckingham-street, the right-hand

side, and almost at the end as you descend the street from the Strand, opened his bed-room door, and stepping out in his dressing-gown and slippers, threw open the French window of the front room, and looked out cynically towards the broad glistening river. Here and there the umbery brown or yellow sail of a hay barge presented pleasant touches of passing colour ; now and then a bright green boat darted by quick as a dragon fly.

From the Strand came the cheerful voices of the awakening city not yet roused to the full feverish madness and restlessness of its noon-day toil. It was at once the play time and the childhood of the day ; the hearty ringing laughter of children chasing each other round the corner of the street sounded, too, pleasantly enough, blending with the gay chatter of the servants as they gossiped from door-step to door-step. The pot-boy, whistling, strung his pewter pots on his strap with a reckless clatter. The newspaper-boy jerked and rang area bells with a mischievous and dislocating violence. Drudges beat dust mats with their brooms, secretly wishing they were their mistresses. Two suspicious-looking vulgarly smart young men ogled them all as they passed up to the Strand, running their sticks along the railings as they strolled along, singing " Villikins and his Dinah." That gay militaire, the post-

man, was practising chromatic scales at the further end of the street, executing brilliant roulades, with the gayest professional self-satisfaction as he thrust in the messages of Fate into the respective letter-boxes ; a distant organ outside " the Apple Tree " in Duke-street was playing an air from Verdi's last new opera ; a cab was rattling merrily down the street ; with all these motley sounds there mingled the shrill, half-plaintive notes of, " any ornament for your fire-stoves," by no means the least quaint of London street cries ; the woman who chanted it waved as she passed her cascades of coloured paper at the window of No. 30, till the old gentleman growled and shook his head. As if to add a last touch of gaiety and hope to that pleasant fresh autumn morning, there just then came careering through the bright river-side air, level with the second-floor windows, a large white butterfly, where from, and whither bound, who could discern ? Gay, light-hearted vagrant, as uncertain of a breakfast as many an early riser that day in London, this fickle exile from the lavender and rose fields of Surrey, hovered a moment to take a rapid and unsubstantial breakfast on the bloom of a scarlet geranium, that had all the summer through fought for life against the smoke, and alighted on the window-sill of a neat but humble lodging-

house, exactly opposite the old gentleman's chambers. Presently a window sash close to which the flower stood flew up, and there looked out one of the prettiest and gentlest little faces in the world, while a little white hand, unconsciously frightening off the vagrant butterfly, removed a prematurely yellow geranium leaf with the tenderest care, and let it fall into the street like an omen of winter. It was the simplest action in the world, and yet there was such an artless grace in the way it was done, that it would have won the sourest of cynics. It certainly won the old virtuoso at No. 30. A moment after, the window was pulled down, and the face disappeared as visions do disappear.

That momentary apparition seemed to have the most remarkable effect upon Mr. Goodrick. His cold grey eyes remained fixed like those of a somnambulist on the closed window of No. 22, his thin bony hands clutched the back of a chair, his lips grew bluer, his circulation seemed almost suspended.

The impatient, careless rap-tap of a postman at his outer door aroused him, as a letter slid through the aperture of the letter-box, and fell with a dull flap into the box below.

"Ugh!" he said aloud, "old fool that I am;—why doesn't that rascal Tony bring my coffee? Yes; she is like her—very like her—same look,

same hair, only lighter, same manner, same eyes ; let's compare it—dear Josephine, my own wife, my heart's delight, forty years ago ; yes, I was happy then—I was happy then. Ugh !—well, I suppose everyone is happy once or twice in his life. Revenge is my happiness now ; that is all that is left to me. Perhaps, some day, I shall have a feast of that. Hang that rascal Tony, what a time he is.”

He rang violently at the bell for the laundress, Mrs. Harvey, and then opening a small round shagreen case that stood on the mantelpiece, Mr. Goodrick took out a miniature of a young, beautiful woman, and regarded it with a tenderness and absorption that seemed irreconcilable with such a soured, crabbed nature. The miniature was that of an exquisitely beautiful girl of about nineteen, with a blonde complexion of extreme purity, eyes of a sunny brown, and fair hair, worn in profuse ringlets of the fashion of some forty years before. A necklace of oriental pearls encircling a slender white throat contrasted admirably with a low dress of pale sea green silk, fastened by a superb opal. It was a chef-d'œuvre of miniature painting, but for a single flaw in the left hand corner where the dull background had cracked and scaled with the heat of the tropical climate to which it had been subjected.

“I must get Thorndyke to repair that—I would not have that injured for ten thousand sovereigns.” That miniature of a wife, long since dead, was the old man’s treasured relic, his amulet, his Lares and his Penates in one. Is there even an old bachelor living who has not his own dream of some face that he prays may be the first to greet him at the gates of Paradise?

“There are no women now,” he muttered; for like many solitary men he was a great talker to himself; “only hard, bold, defiant, half men, Bah! Ugh!” There was a bitter intensity in the old cynic’s “Ugh’s!” worthy of the most irritable father in old comedy, and not discreditable even to the most reserved and taciturn of Indian braves; “now and then you see a face like that girl’s just now at the window; talk to her, and you would find her a shrill-voiced, designing, artful, silly minx, perhaps going to marry that big, vulgar, giant of an Irishman I see go in there, or that little vain old wretch who comes strutting down the street with a portfolio under his arm. Pshaw!”

While Mr. Godfrey Goodrick of No. 30, Buckingham Street, remains there, bending over the miniature of his dead wife, let us take a hasty sketch of him. He was a somewhat tall wiry old man, with a lean, rather wizen face,

deeply nankeenened by years spent in the West Indies. His keen, suspicious eyes were of a cold bluish-grey that glistened like ice when their owner felt malicious. His short, stiff, stubby white hair looked dogged and obstinate; he had grey terrier-like eyebrows that were wild and bushy, and overhanging his eyes, kept them in perpetual ambush, while a projecting lower lip expressed a sour distrust and contempt for almost all Mr. Goodrick heard or saw. One's first impression would be that he was a shrewd, cynical old hunk; miserly, eccentric, rough, dogmatic, rich, and arbitrary. Not Lavater or even George Eliot herself could have discovered in a single crow's-foot or wrinkle, latent traces of the kindness and generosity of a nature that misfortune had so gnarled, and disappointment so distorted.

"If you please, sir, shall I bring up the heggs?"

Mr. Goodrick looked round testily, and slamming the miniature case, locked it, and thrust the key in his pocket, as if angry at being intruded upon at such a moment. It was Mrs. Harvey, the laundress, a tall, stout woman, with a pasty anxious looking, good-natured lazy face.

"Well, woman, what *do* you want? No cleaning here—won't allow it, so there—get along."

“If you please, sir, you rang, and if you please, sir, here’s a letter in the box.”

“Give it here. But I don’t please—don’t please at all; why do you bother me? Where’s that rascal Tony?”

“Gone to Mr. Thorndyke’s, sir, to return the snuff-boxes—told me to answer the bell if you rang. Shall I please to bring up the coffee, sir?”

“Bring it, yes—wish people would not write to me; don’t want to hear from anyone. Wine circulars, I suppose, as if I didn’t know where to buy wine, and whom to avoid if I wanted to buy; and circulars about building churches, as if there were not churches enough already.” (Here he crushed the letter into his pocket.)

Mrs. Harvey, a good sort of woman, but fussy, obtrusive, slovenly, talkative, and slightly inclined to strong drink, was retreating from the room when the firm, sharp voice called her back.

“Mrs. Harvey, what sort of people are those at No. 22?—old landlady woman and daughter, I take it.”

“Oh, you mean Mrs. Robinson opposite? quite a lady, sir—reduced—known her these twelve years—takes lodgers—husband artist, sir; clever man, sir; repairs pictures—young lady is their daughter, governess somewhere down in Somersetshire, or thereabouts—nicest little thing, sir—at

home now for a holiday—just come from Brixton, I think—hard struggle to make both ends meet.”

“That’ll do; I only wanted a single question answered, Mrs. Harvey, and then you launch out; wish you wouldn’t talk so much. Ugh!”

“I always try to do my duty and to please, sir,” bewailed Mrs. Harvey; “but there’s some people nobody can’t please, do what you will. It is not my fault, sir, if Tony ain’t as reg’lar as he should be.”

“There, don’t bandy words—get away. What’s Harvey doing?—idling, I suppose at the Apple-Tree, eh?” The Apple-Tree was a neighbouring public-house.

“Got a job, sir, this morning—carpet-beating, sir, for Mr. Bassevi, the picture dealer, in Charlotte Street, but he’s that rheumatic——”

“Stuff—drinks too much ale—met him on the stairs last night fuddled, singing, and making a noise.”

“Oh, that’s only the way he’s took; he get’s light-headed when the rheumatics——”

“Stuff and nonsense—the man was tipsy; tell him I said so; nonsense about rheumatism.”

The aggrieved woman shut the door behind her with a groan and uplifted hand at the hardness of heart prevalent that morning (she had already had an altercation with the baker about

defective weight), and determined to put on her bonnet, go to her great authority and crony, Mrs. Bisset, the greengrocer's wife up the street, discuss with her a small and strictly medicinal morning glass of peppermint, and lament the perversity and oppression of masters in general and gentlemen in chambers in particular.

The moment the laundress left the room, Mr. Goodrick went to the mantelpiece, again deliberately unlocked the shagreen case, and looked long and wistfully at the miniature, upon which the sunshine now fell, and as it glanced across it giving it an almost supernatural appearance of life.

“Yes, Thorndyke was right,” he said; “that girl is like her. Eyes the same expression—but what of that? Look closer. There'd be no likeness. Another of the old illusions. Bah!”

With a salvo of such exclamations, Mr. Goodrick generally relieved his spleen at the end of a sentence, and he uttered them as if he was going to snap at you. Indeed, nervous people often drew aside their nose as if really dreading a bite.

The old virtuoso was one of those connoisseurs who are to be met with any morning during the London season in the Print Room of the British Museum, at Sotheby and Wilkinson's book sales, or in the show-room of Messrs. Christie and Man-

son. Their forenoon occupation is, with chuckling delight or revived suspicion, to examine Rembrandt etchings through huge magnifying glasses, to open and shut with half admiration, half suspicion, all remarkable china snuff-boxes; to walk backwards from doubtful Raphaels; to slide out or close the secret drawers of inlaid cabinets; to look with curiosity for the maker's name on lustrous majolica plates. They chat with the auctioneer, they discuss dates with rival amateurs; they smile knowingly at each other; they lecture, they squabble; they know the exact date of every picture that is to be sold, where it was painted, who helped in it, where the real original is, and what the replicas fetch. They are fanatics; and fall into raptures over even Turner's most senile dreams of colour; they remember every alteration Hogarth ever made in an engraving; they glory in marqueterie, and exult in buhl; Venice glass is to them beyond jewels, and Petitot and Bordier enamels beyond fine gold. They eye the auctioneer with a sidelong magpie look of expectancy and knowing cunning; they doze while vulgar emptinesses are being sold, but wake up to life when a rare ivory or an Italian medal appears. They are generally men of taste and wealth, who hoard and accumulate with the craft of ravens and the industry of ants, enjoying

the pleasant reflection that will still hover across their minds that when they die the sale of their own effects will be held in the very rooms in which they have spent so much time, and will give extreme delight to many collectors like themselves. The only pang is to think how young Bassevi will sneer down the choicest lot, and that "envious mean rascal," old Elderton, depreciate the very tapestry he once fought so hard to get. Chelsea China, Flemish missals, Louis Quatorze snuff-boxes, Palissy ware, patinated Bronzes, Golden Darics—they will all go to wreck here, and be fished ashore by different wreckers. Sometimes they think, perhaps—Oh, that these things could be buried with us, and rot together in rusty splendour; would that cabinets would split, and timepieces refuse to strike for new purchasers; would that, like Rob Roy's purse, the great missal of 1490 would fire a pistol when opened and kill the hook-nosed Jew broker as he gloated over it, proud of his prize, but ignorant of its intellectual value.

Such at least were often the bitter thoughts of Mr. Goodrick at such times, when he reflected over the future triumph of survivors, and the mutability of human things. After all it is wholesome for almost omnipotent wealth to know that the finest collection in the world is only like

a heap of autumn leaves collected under a hedge side—sooner or later it must be blown apart and scattered to the four winds, never to come together again. Childless men like Mr. Goodrick, indeed, feel this bitterly; it is the *amari aliquid* that spoils their pleasure; to heads of families there comes, moreover, the mortification of feeling that their sons may be indifferent to the old furniture that has been the joy of their lives, or the Carlo Maratti that has been the special shrine of their devotion.

Still, in spite of these occasional nightmares (everything has its alloy), there is no doubt an exquisite delight in amassing objects of taste and *vertu*, and there will be collectors like Mr. Goodrick while the world lasts.

The old virtuoso had by this time dressed himself, with many grumbles at the delay of his servant, Tony. His costume was always the same—long blue tail coat and brass buttons, a buff marsala waistcoat, with a scarlet one beneath, the edge of which was alone visible in a border of bright warm colour; a frilled shirt front, nankeen trowsers, and drab gaiters; sharp, large, upright collars, and a bunch of heavy valuable seals just showing underneath the right-hand side of his waistcoat, completed his old-fashioned and unchangeable adornments.

The rooms at No. 30 were a strange mixture of luxury and neglect, dirt and taste. Abortive hopes and uncompleted intentions were strewn in every corner in the shape of dusty buhl cabinets, stacks of pictures, piles of portfolios, heaps of books, and chests of drawers; busts of Roman emperors, and Etruscan vases were spread along the top of a long dingy book-case that stood against the southern wall. Three curious Louis Quinze clocks of great value stood on the mantel-piece near the treasured miniature. Intermingled with these things were rough anomalous bundles of waistcoat stuffs bought at bankrupts' sales; parcels of woollen gloves from which the fingers of one or two protruded; rolls of engravings (proofs before letters) lay tumbled on side tables between dusty lamps and goblets of Venetian glass, within whose tall stems white opaque threads twined and circled. These things had been gathered together in odd lots from the mere love of hoarding, by eccentric luxury almost akin to avarice. They had been bargains, too, every one of them.

There, too, on the top of the book-case, between busts of the Cæsars; wolfish and eaglish, Caracalla with his savage Satanic frown, and Nero with his cruel and loathsome viciousness, stood tall glasses, within which coiled venomous West Indian snakes, spotted, barred, and striped by impartial Nature,

now harmless as murderers in the condemned cell, and gleaming yellow through the enveloping spirit. Immediately over the fire-place there hung a large convex mirror in a plain black frame, whose clear glittering surface watched one like the eye of a guardian spirit, or rather resembled a port-hole in the side of a vessel with an out-look of clear but colourless sky. On its pure crystal surface the buhl cabinets, the head by Titian, the studies by Eddy, the busts of the Cæsars, the glasses full of snakes, were all repeated with the keen outline and delicate finish of photographs. Capable of being seen in a thousand points of perspective, that little microcosm in glass was always pleasant to observe.

As Mr. Goodrick sat down to his solitary breakfast, with a picture catalogue lying open beside his toast, the dusty ormolu clock on the chimney-piece, where the cupids were binding Time with flowers, chirped out ten times in its playful bird-like way, as if the little singing soul of some Parisian girl were imprisoned in it, condemned by magic arts to this gay record of the passing hours. Then, instantly, as if all the clocks in the city had caught the alarm from that, out struck, clashed, and boomed all the clock towers from Westminster to Peter in Chains, from Whitechapel to Brompton.

Just then there was a bustling at the lock of the door, which opened, and in slid with the quiet assurance of an old servant, a black footman, a man of about fifty, short, rather bow-legged, and slightly bent in the back, with a good-humoured droll smile on his flat thorough negro features, and a look of droll self-importance that no snubs from his master could ever remove. The intrinsic good nature and *bonhomie* of his race had no bad representative in Tony. Pure Ashantee blood blended in Tony's veins, glowed blackly on his ebony forehead and shone upon his cheek bones and flat droll nose; there was a pleasant, honest look about the man, and the bearing of a rather spoiled old servant. By his side trotted a large Newfoundland dog, that, as soon as he saw Mr. Goodrick, came thrusting his nose into his welcoming hand with a grave and dignified pleasure.

Mr. Goodrick looked up with no especial expression of pleasure as Tony with a bow began to take down a claret-coloured spenser that hung on a nail and brush it in the dark outer passage.

"Told you not to take out Leo," growled Mr. Goodrick, as he crunched his toast quite spitefully, "when you go messages—you'll lose him next—remember that, Tony. I will be obeyed—if you want to be master, you must go elsewhere." (Tony having heard this threat some thousands

of times, it had lost some of its terrors.) I won't be a slave to my own servant, mind that. Why do you keep me here waiting for breakfast? Servants all want to be masters now. Come, sir, no lying apologies."

"No 'pologies, mas'r, and no lies," said Tony, stoutly. "Waited till Mas'r Thorndyke's young man come in, didn't like to leave the snuff-boxes with the housekeeper no 'count. Hope you go out, mas'r, for walk this fine morning. To-day 'minds me of Fair Hope. Wish I was there now, cutting pine-apples for breakfast, and old Uncle Plato picking oranges, or dose fresh little green limes for de sangaree. Mas'r, give me word, sometimes when I'm passing de barracks in James's Park, and hear de bugle, I fancy it's de conch shell blowing in our cane patches round Fairlands, just by de book-keeper's house. That, oh, that was good times, mas'r, then."

The old master's eyes kindled and seemed to expand; then in a moment the old gloom came over them, and the thick, bristly eyebrows bent down closer.

"Ugh!" he said; "nonsense, Tony; you were younger then, that's all. Don't you talk so much. Every place looks pleasant when we've left it. Never had a good night's sleep in the West Indies; might as well live inside a furnace. Don't talk

any more ; go and dust those books. Never want to see Fair Hope again. I shall never go back there, mind that ; so if you want to return, Tony, you'd better give me warning. You can go and see Jupiter to-day, if you like, and take him some tea and some snuff. Here, give me my spenser, and my hat and gloves, and my bamboo stick. I'll go and see Thorndyke. Come along, Leo."

CHAPTER III.

THE CURIOSITY DEALER.

MR. THORNDYKE'S shop, or rather place of business, half warehouse, half office, No. 16, Darnley Street, St. James's Square, was a favourite lounge of Mr. Goodrick's. There he could examine at his leisure the medals of Galeotti or Il Padovano, and could pore over Majolica and the iridescent work of Master George of Gubbio to his heart's content. Curiosity buying is not a hasty business; it requires time, patience, and the bite is often a long time after the nibble. Buying a picture is not like buying a peach: it is a matter of days, or perhaps weeks, till the mere wish becomes an irresistible craving, and the admirer grows into the purchaser.

When Mr. Goodrick was shown in, Mr. Thorn-dyke was standing at the window with his hat still on, for he had not long come in, and holding to the light a large oval dish of Palissy ware, a *chef-d'œuvre* of the potter of Saintes, which he

kept turning to different angles as if it was a prism.

The curiosity dealer was a short, neat little man, of about five-and-forty, formal in dress, with crisp, iron-grey hair, a rather pale but acute face, and small dark eyes, that when they concentrated themselves were remarkably keen and penetrating. His manner, though easy, was slightly obsequious. He welcomed his eccentric patron with a pleasant momentary smile and a shake of the hand. The smile he gave was the smile of a quiet, dry humourist, whose memory is full of odd recollections of trade tactics, subtleties, and secrets. He had evidently got something which he expected would surprise his customer.

“There,” said he, with emotion, handing the oval Palissy dish into Mr. Goodrick’s hands as carefully as if it had been a baby. “There’s 1560 work! Did you ever see such rich chocolate browns—such sharp reliefs—such a brilliant deep blue glaze? That’s the style, sir. Look at that trout and those cray-fish. There’s a fern leaf! Ask Minton to copy that. I should only like to see him.”

It was a great central dish, such as Henri Quatre may have had set before him the very night of the battle of Ivry. About twenty inches long, it was bossed with enamelled resem-

blances of fish, pebbles, lizards, snakes, frogs, shells, oak leaves, and acorns. Although a masterpiece of ingenious industry, and a fine example of a grotesque taste, it was perhaps more curious than beautiful.

Goodrick eyed it as a raven eyes a very bare bone—turning it upside down with spiteful curiosity.

“Like one in the Soulages collection,” he said. “Don’t like ’em—ugh! hate reptiles, had enough of snakes in the West Indies—detestable taste! Got that Turner drawing yet?”

“Yes. Well, I suppose it is no use trying to tempt you; you seem proof against the enchantment of Palissy. For my own part, I should like to buy acres of it—all his pieces, in short, between 1560 and 1589; and as for lustre ware, I would take all that Maestro Giorgio ever drew out of his furnaces, particularly the gadrooned.”

“Every one to his taste; but I would not pave my garden walk with it. Ugh! nasty silly stuff. Let that rascal Bassevi buy it.”

There was as much cynical intensity about the old connoisseur as there was dainty preciseness and unction, sometimes even a certain honest enthusiasm, about the professional collector.

The room was a snug, square, dingy little room, with two or three good pictures—Vandycks, Hol-

beins, and a Terburg, on the walls—two small carved ivory coffers stood on the mantle-piece, while a Diptyc and a bronze, some fine damascened armour, and a partisan chased in the Cellini's manner were placed on the window-seat. Over the fire-place hung a small medallion, carved in box-wood, and representing the head of one of the early Reformers; every fold of the fur cap, every pleat of the cambric ruff, and every curl of the moustachio, exquisitely carved, even to bear a magnifying glass. A worn and faded Turkey carpet covered the floor, and at one corner of the room there rose a huge stork of Dresden china waiting ruefully for a purchaser.

“We have to meet every taste, you know, Mr. Goodrick,” said the curiosity dealer; “we poor men cannot afford to have hobbies of our own. Oh, yes, the Turner—here it is.”

Mr. Thorndyke sat down at his knee-desk, and opened the second drawer to the right. It contained four splendid snuff-boxes, one lapislazuli and gold, a second agate, a third Sèvres, and a fourth amber. Mr. Thorndyke waved his hand approvingly at the group.

“Will not one of those win you, Mr. Goodrick?” he said. “Why, they were the gems of the Peter-sham collection. This Sèvres is a summer box; this glorious amber one is more appropriate for winter.”

“Pack of nonsense; I don’t take snuff! Where’s the Turner drawing? Got snuff-boxes enough—more after Pisanelli medals, quatro-cento bronzes and jewels now—can’t afford much.”

Thorndyke shut and locked the drawer with a shrug of his shoulders that implied utter hopelessness, and from a small portfolio produced the Turner drawing—a noble first sketch in miniature of ‘the old *Téméraire* being towed to her last berth,’—a sketch full of Turner’s finest and most truthful poetry. The subject was suggested to him by Stansfield during a water party at Greenwich at which the two painters were present. Everyone knows the picture—the little ferry tug is carelessly dragging the old phantom of the war ship to her last anchorage; the spars of the *Téméraire* stand out pale against the sky, while below the last crimson radiance of autumn sunset, the thin blue mist steals up the river and shrouds the distant forest of masts.

The sketch was full of the most noble gradations of colour, from the faintest tinge of moonlight to the last glare of the sinking ball of fire. Where the common painter struck one coarse octave Turner gave a whole gamut of notes. From blood red crimson to the palest gleam of the opal the countless tones of colour blended, developed, and interchanged.

Goodrick gloated over it; he turned it from right to left, he traced every gradation with his eye, from the clear sharp crescent of the new moon on the left, to the pure core of flame low down on the right. Thorndyke stood watching him as a man would watch a clever piece of by-play on the stage. There was a droll meditative heedfulness about his manner.

The amateur looked up, elevated his chin, raised his eyes, and shook his head backwards, in expression of profound enjoyment and admiration. Then he drew from a side pocket of his spenser a large convex glass with an ivory handle and pored over the work again. At last he looked up and patted Leo, who had come to see what his master was about.

“And yet,” he said, at last, “there are actually people—fools, who go grubbing about all their lives at Christie’s for Burgomaster Sixt’s *The Three Trees*, and Marc Antonio’s *Bras Nu*; pedantic asses who would actually sneer at and refuse this if it was offered them. Ugh! If collectors bought only what they could appreciate there wouldn’t be three pictures a-year purchased off the Academy walls.”

“Ah! yes, I remember you’re like Mr. Ruskin, you admire Turner,” said the dealer, drily, with an imperturbable coolness and quietude, and the

catholicity of one who has no power of limiting his tastes. "Well, so do I in his best time, but when he gives us only omelettes of colours, dabs of whitewash, explosions of fire-works—no. When he produces the *Liber*—yes, certainly. His figures are sometimes lank and shapeless as dolls; he alters places; he shoots them up and lowers them down; queer sort of person, I believe, in private life, but still a remarkable man, no doubt—very remarkable man, and rather a miser. Mr. Munro is going to have that."

"Pooh! you don't understand Turner," pouted Thorndyke's strange customer; "you've too many sorts of tastes to spend much time on Turner or anyone else—it wouldn't pay you. Turner is perfect in his own way—make his steamer harder and blacker, as a young man would have done, draw all the rigging of the *Téméraire* hard as wire, where would the water and the wonderful haze be then? Nowhere. All spoiled and out of tone. Now it is a dream, and a dream by twilight. That sketch, sir, is worth a whole sideboard of gold plate."

Mr. Thorndyke smiled in an unconvinced but still courteous way. So, in the old cinque-cento jousts, a knight unwilling to unhorse an adversary would sometimes receive the blow staunchly, then toss up his spear, and turn and ride courteously

and silently past without rebuff or retaliation. The dealer still reserved his opinion that Turner's poetry might be clearer, Turner's painting more solid, and yet equally imaginative. He preferred the golden gloom and sublime glory of Titian to even the blaze of Turner's sunsets. With the fine tact of one whose business it is to please, and who has grown smoothed and rounded by collision with various tempers, he, however, turned the conversation by a single touch of the tiller.

"And how is my good friend Tony? I hadn't come when he called with the snuff-boxes."

"Almost my master now. Comes when he likes, goes when he likes. Oh, he's gone to-day to Spencer's Alms-houses, to see his crony, Jupiter."

"What, the old Trumpeter?"

"Yes—old sot, I'm afraid; but he comes from the same island, and he's a cousin of a young Creole girl Tony was once engaged to."

"Tony and romance—gracious—well—and married?"

"No—she died of yellow-fever—better for him, perhaps—wife expensive luxury—by-the-bye, how are Mrs. Thorndyke and your children? What is that medal you have there, by the inkstand—Pisanelli?"

"Yes; we're all well at Shepperton, thank you.

George has had a slight influenza, but that's nothing. We all like the place."

"Influenza,—modern name for cold in the head—contagious—cold requires nitre—nitre, sixpence—influenza requires a draught—one shilling—ugh—humbug!"

If there was anything more crushing than Mr. Goodrick's "ugh," it was his growl and snap; and nothing but his "humbug" could go beyond those.

"This medal of Savonarola is a fine one—bold, sound work—old Robinson says it is 'first-class.'"

"Bother Robinson! I want no one to tell me what pleases me. I don't want first-class, but the class that I like. Don't care for it—long-nosed Methodist—coarse caricature. Do as well myself. Give me the Malatesta medallions—Roman strength—Italian subtlety."

"Yes, they are fine; but some people like the earlier work. There's Mr. Bandinel—wouldn't look at a Pisanelli."

"Who cares about Bandinel—who made him a ruler and a judge over us? Let him buy whatever rubbish he likes. But come, Thorndyke,—there's no fooling me—what is this wonderful thing you've got for me? Come, out with it. I shan't give you more for it because you produce it with this flourish."

Mr. Thorndyke, like many honourable men, who, knowing themselves to be honest, have to bear unjust suspicions, was touchy; self-interest alone kept the spark from catching the whole magazine. Patches of hot crimson, however, appeared on his cheek-bones; he moved abruptly to the window to look out at nothing; and then went to the bell-pull to pull at nothing. By this time, it was sunshine again, for he was an equable, well-balanced man. He smiled, and, going into an inner room, opened a large iron safe of great strength. He turned, as he opened it, and said, smiling,—

“Ah, you are really too hard on me, Mr. Goodrick—really *too* hard. I never resort to tricks, especially with good things, that need no praise. Your ‘good wine needs no bush.’”

When he turned there was a small, square, silver box in his right hand.

“Oh, a jewel—that sapphire, I suppose, from the Russian collection sold the other day. Don’t care for sapphires—got a drawer full of them; or it’s the great pink diamond from the Grouchy lot—poor stone. I heard you and that rogue Bassevi were dabbling——”

“You are wrong,” said the dealer, his little eyes compressing, as if to keep in the secret; “wrong scent this time.”

“Then it’s that pigeon’s-blood ruby that was at Turner’s in Bond Street—quiet, Leo—can’t afford it—must draw in.”

“*You* draw in! You’ll have to buy this—you can’t help buying it; I have only to show it.”

“It must be a marvel—not the Pitt Diamond, eh? or one of those famous emeralds, three inches long, from the Kremlin?”

Mr. Thorndyke said nothing; but, opening the silver box, he took something from it and held it in his hand a moment to warm it. Then he raised it rapturously to the light.

“There’s a beauty,” he said, holding it up between his finger and thumb.

It was a Mexican opal, as large as a small cobnut, and of much the same oval shape. Of the species called the “noble” or “fire-opal,” it was not cut, *en cabochon* (boss), but simply polished and slightly rounded. It had less of the milky cloudy red and blue colour than the Hungarian opals display. Its partial opaqueness was traversed by gleams of internal flame of the true sunrise tinge. It was of a fine glistening orange-colour, dimmed here and there to a white opaqueness, its semi-transparence glowing, when the stone was turned, with flakes, flashes, gleams, and specks of fire. It veered into every hue of the rainbow; the glistening green of the rose-beetle’s scales shifting

rapidly into the richest violet or the purest golden and topaz lustres. It was a *chef-d'œuvre* of Nature—a miracle which science could analyse, but for which it could not account. It seemed to possess life, and to have shut up within its veins that quenchless light for which the alchemist vainly sought; for whimsical Nature had endowed the stone with the radiance and colour of the unfading flowers of Paradise.

It seemed to almost take the eccentric connoisseur's breath away. He remained silent, watching the play of light in the jewel, and walking round it, in which occupation he was gravely imitated by Leo, who, nearly tired of curiosity-shops, had been watching himself suspiciously, rather than approvingly, in a large square Venetian mirror, with a Limoges enamel frame, that stood against the wall.

"Yes," said Goodrick, nodding his head, "it is a fine stone—a splendid stone—a royal stone. Thorndyke, I have seen this stone before."

"I think not," said the still smiling dealer. "This is from the Cantelupe family jewels—Honourable Mr. Fitzegbert Cantelupe, of Swallowcliff Castle, down somewhere in Wiltshire. Young man running through everything. Mr. Bassevi is going to look at some pictures of his at Fairfield's this morning."

“My memory is pretty strong in these matters. I remember its shape, and I know all the fine opals in Europe, from the Czerwenitza at Vienna downwards. I ought, too; I’ve tramped enough about the Continent since I left the West Indies. Ah! I see you know something about opals, or you would not warm it in your hand so carefully to bring out the lustre.”

Mr. Thorndyke smiled with good-humoured astuteness, and, handing him the stone, said,—

“On a warmer day it would have showed up better.”

Mr. Goodrick glanced up through his thicket of grey eyebrows at the dealer.

“There are other secrets about the opal that you may not be so well acquainted with—eh?”

“I don’t know of any other. Jewels are not my forte. Bassevi is the man for jewels. I am only selling this on agency. Perhaps you like Harlequin opals better, with the smaller flakes of fire more equally scattered. For my own part, I prefer this rich mother-of-pearl iridescence: the partial transparency is exquisite. It looks better since I removed the setting.”

Buying and selling is like fencing; it is an art with its regular gradations, its feints, its parries, and its thrusts. Only the merest novice begins at once with the *coup de grace*. It is always

prudent to presume some capability and spirit in your adversary. Thorndyke was still flourishing his foil in the salutes and such diplomatic preliminaries. He was sometimes weeks with such amateurs as Goodrick before he could thoroughly arouse their greed of acquisitiveness. In such cases he had all the patience of an angler. He could bait the deeps and wait till the fish had grown accustomed to the place where the hook was to be dropped. Bargaining is like deer-stalking—a moment's hurry or impatience is fatal.

Mr. Goodrick held the opal close in his hand till the little chambers of air, or those little semi-fractured laminæ that gave it radiancy, glowed with the delicious rainbow colours of dew-drops in the sun; a brazen golden-red being especially brilliant, on the one side, and pale pure emerald on the other.

“Show me the setting,” he said, abruptly. “Stop—to prove to you I know the stone—I'll tell you what it is like. It is Spanish gold work in imitation of Genoese filigree, and below is a cipher—two letters intertwined—H and E. Pooh! my memory is not quite gone yet, Mr. Thorndyke.”

The dealer's eyebrows rose with surprise.

“Well,” he said, “you have certainly described the thing exactly. It is evidently the one you

mean. The setting I have left at home. You know its value then?"

"I have reason to remember this opal. Give me pen and ink. Lie down, Leo—don't whine, dog."

Mr. Thorndyke placed a blotting pad, drew a china inkstand close to it, and surrendered his arm-chair.

"Do you want an envelope?"

"No. What price do you ask for this stone?"

"Eight hundred and fifty pounds."

Thorndyke named the sum with a certain solemnity.

"No less?—that is an enormous price. It's only an opal, after all."

"No less. It's quite worth that. That is my first and last price."

"And you expect me to give that?"

"No—no. I am sure you won't."

Mr. Goodrick made no answer, but took from the pad a long piece of lilac-veined paper, which he had been signing, and handed it to the dealer.

It was a cheque for the eight hundred and fifty pounds.

Thorndyke was as much astonished as *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* when Nicole actually

lunged at him before he had prepared his parry. He had never known a first price given before. He could hardly believe his eyes. He was pleased, yet an *amari aliquid* arose in the cup; he almost wished he had asked more.

Mr. Goodrick, with a dry smile, took the gem from the box, folded it in wool and silver paper, and placed it carefully in his right hand waistcoat pocket.

Mr. Thorndyke smiled drily.

“You remind me, Mr. Goodrick,” he said, “of Peter the Great, who, when he took leave of King William, drew from his pocket a rough ruby, valued at £10,000, screwed up in brown paper, and handed it to William as a parting present. You rich men treat jewels as if they grew on every bush.”

The dealer was a little piqued at the treatment of so glorious a stone.

“It is not its value made me buy it; it was an old association I have with it. You’ve heard me talk of my old West Indian friend, Herbert Staunton—the man who left me all my money?”

“Of course I have.”

“Well, his father lived down in Wiltshire at a place called Summerleas; he was a millionaire—grandfather had been a rich alderman—Levant merchant—friend of Beckford’s. That opal was in

his cabinet. I remember seeing it when I was a boy visiting there—shown it as a treat.”

“Staunton was a great collector. I’ve heard of him. The last Mr. Staunton, I believe, left all his English property to his steward and man of business, who broke up the collection and sold most of it. I suppose Lord Mazagan bought the opal; and that’s how Cantelupe got it. I declare, by-the-bye, you’re not unlike one of the Stauntons, by Reynolds (such a Reynolds!), that passed through my hands a few months ago. It just then struck me.”

“There were some intermarriages, I believe, between the families in old times. Family likenesses, like family vices, are often hereditary heirlooms—ugh! But I must be off. I’ve to go to Furnival’s Inn to see Fairfield about some law business. I’ve got him to take an interest in curiosities, and he’s been making some inquiries for me in Paris about early French bronzes, I hear—look in at the Oriental first, and see the papers. I like to tease the fools who pretended to go out of town, and whom I’m sure to find skulking there.—Humbugs!”

Goodrick took his gold-mounted bamboo and his stick, and turned to go; then he held down his stubborn old head, as if to remember something—did remember it, and looked up, pleased.

“Ha! knew it was something—yes, I’ve got

a very precious miniature I want repaired—background cracked.”

“Well, there’s a very good man Bassevi employs—very careful. I’ll get it done for you.”

“Bassevi is no recommendation—I detest that man. I hate all Jews—sell their own mothers, as some one said to Tattersall; but if you know his work, that’ll do. Good morning. Come, Leo, old boy; now, you lazy beast.—Send me the setting.”

Mr. Thorndyke opened the door with a civility, grateful but by no means servile, and stood on the door-step and watched Goodrick turn into the square.

“Well,” he thought to himself, “only to think of that old fellow giving a big sum like that straight off. I think Bassevi will be pleased this time. People call that man a miser. I only wish there were more such misers. As they used to say of Johnson, he’s only a bear in the coat—his heart is all right. There are worse men than Goodrick, depend on it. By Jove! how he did snap at the opal.”

Mr. Goodrick entered the Oriental, his favourite club (if he had a favourite anything), with the sly malice of a man bent on rook-shooting. He was watching for a shot. A page-boy, conceal-

ing a grin, ran to help him off with his spencer, but met with no excessive gratitude.

“Gently, boy; don’t pull it in two. Here, take my hat. Mr. Hargrave been yet, Davis?—Mr. Robartes?—Mr. Willis away—yes, I know. There, that’ll do—ask for my letters, and bring them upstairs. Make haste, boy!”

Mr. Goodrick went upstairs with the methodical composure of an habitué. In the first room he entered he took up “The Armada,” a new magazine, and read half aloud and with indescribable contempt, the page at which it opened.

“Poetry—of course, lots of it—verses—rhymes—nonsense measured off into lengths. ‘Autumn, by Robert Gordon’—nice stuff. I remember that fellow’s name—like to set him down to copy Pope twenty times through—let’s see the rubbish.

‘No sound but the beech-nuts falling
Through the green and the yellow leaves;’

Remarkable leaves—ugh!—two colours at once.

‘And the lonely west-wind calling
The swallows from the eaves.’

“Yes, yes,—tol-de-rol-de-ray—pshaw! No humanity—no point—bad market-gardeners’ rhymes. Who cares about leaves and swallows—cartload of them not worth a peck of potatoes.”

“Don’t see Hargrave,” he went on. “D—— that boy, Davis,—of all pests; careless young dogs—for perfect ineptitude, commend me to club servants. Oh, yes, there is Hargrave, in his old place at the window.”

Yes, there he was, in a snug nook between a sofa and the window, looking out on the sunny side of Pall Mall. Mr. Goodrick’s crony, a retired medical man, sat in a precise, punctilious attitude, with his head on one side, his palpable wig beautifully arranged, reading the “Times” through a double gold eye-glass, which he held at an enormous distance from his eyes. He looked up faintly surprised when Goodrick touched him on the shoulder, and greeted him with the formality of the old school, a formality never laid aside even between father and son, rather repelling to us, attractive probably to the belles of 1820, and certainly not without its use in fending off bores, fools, impertinents or vulgarians. Old-fashioned as Hargrave was, he had the easy, quick, ready, adaptive manner of the true London man of the world, astonished at nothing, yet tired of nothing, which is the great distinction between the man of the world and the mere fribble or fop.

“God bless my soul, is that you?” said Hargrave, with the most calm surprise; “why, I

thought you were in Paris, at the Latouche sale. Robartes told me you were determined to have the fine Carlo Maratti."

"All he knows—hate Maratti—insipid as stewed veal."

"Have you read this wonderful leader on the Swinefield election? Really, these Radical fellows——"

"No—hm—where's Willis?—in Scotland, I suppose—artful dog that is. We must have another quartette party when we all meet again. Heard from Willis?"

"Yes, heard from him yesterday—glorious sport. Six salmon one day—smallest, eighteen pounds."

"Ugh! rheumatic work—dangerous—it'll kill Willis some day, you mark my words. I have got something to show you, Hargrave. There's Harefoot and Huskyson coming in. Here, come to the window."

The two cronies drew close to the club window, and Goodrick exhibited the opal. It shone now, after the heat of the pocket, like an emerald seen by sunset. They looked like two magpies who had dug up a buried ring and were discussing its value as an edible.

There is an ideality about all perfection, whether it be a beautiful girl rejoicing in her

beauty, a prize-fighter stripped for the battle, a flower just open to the sun, or a fine jewel glowing in the sunshine, and at once absorbing and yielding light.

Huskyson, a barrister-at-law, and a distinguished writer on that eminent Tory paper, the "Penny Cyclops," eyed the two connoisseurs askance, playing with a paper-cutter as he summed them up.

"Old beggars—both money lenders, bet a guinea. Goodrick is a miser, they say. By Jove, sir! those Radical dogs would have the clubs full of this sort of men if we did not blackball them by the dozen."

Another moment and the great partisan writer was absorbed in the tremendous question then convulsing Europe as to the boundaries of the Duchy of Schwartzpotztausend-Kranz and Oberkopfunduhrendet.

"How d'ye do?" said Goodrick, as he passed the historical student, Hargrave having now swathed himself in the expanded "Times," and with some difficulty raised one foot upon the seat of a chair. "Thought you were off to Spain weeks ago. Just the time for Spain now."

Huskyson was one of those precise prigs, with pale sharp-cut features, a rather Plantagenet nose, thin cheeks, and thin black whiskers, that seem the ideal of our modern book illustrators, but who

in modern life are as supercilious as they are detestable; feeble replicas of some good old country stock, fools ashamed of the intellectual work that is their only claim to notice, and affecting a mental superiority which could only be guessed at from its assumption.

The great journalist evidently did not like the sly sarcasm of the question. He pulled his thin whiskers to give himself time for an impromptu (how many people would make one if they had only a clear day or two), and raised his eyes to the gaselier as if it was an exertion.

“Yas,” he said, languidly, for even this creature was of the swell species, and occasionally invaded the park. “Yas; but this awful business at Oberkopfunduhrendet has kept all our staff in town. Get away next week perhaps to Lord Walkover’s—hope to. I say, you boy, wish you wouldn’t split all the paper-cutters in this place.”

“Puppy—worst sort—impertinent—he an instructor of mankind—ugh!” muttered Goodrick, as he descended the stairs. “But I winged him!”

As he put on his spencer, and stood on the steps, calling Leo, who was waiting in the street—he was not at all a dog to be lured away—the dreadful boy, Davis, darted through the heavy swing doors, holding a letter.

“Beg pardon, sir—hall-porter picked it up. You pulled it out with your handkerchief.”

“Give it here, sir,” said the irascible virtuoso, flipping it at the same moment open with his finger and thumb; “why, it’s the letter that came this morning.”

He tore off the envelope angrily, rolled it into a ball, and sent it flying down the street; then he turned back into the hall of the Oriental, and read the letter, which seemed to interest him deeply, for he read it three times over.

“Oh, he’s a reg’lar temper,” was the remark of the boy Davis to the hall-porter, as Mr. Goodrick at last crammed the letter into his pocket and walked thoughtfully in the direction of Holborn.

CHAPTER IV.

AMY ROBINSON.

WITH most mistresses the ideal of a perfect servant is a strong girl who will wear ugly caps, never go out, never wish to get married and independent, never stop working, live underground, and be perpetually willing and cheerful for eight pounds a-year, without tea or sugar. Such being the ideal, and cheerful hermits and light-hearted nuns not being often obtainable for such remuneration, there naturally results much disappointment, and hence arose many such exclamations as that "there are no servants now-a-days," "a parcel of fine, stuck up, impertinent," &c.; nor, indeed, is it any wonder that sanguine people have anticipated beatified times when we shall be waited upon by steam-engines or automaton electro-galvanic dumb waiters. Perhaps, however, till that golden age comes, and while the age of pinchbeck continues, it would be as well for mistresses to try a little forbearance, sympathy, and consideration

for young women exiled from home, sold into temporary slavery, subjected to a thousand caprices, and to a life of monotonous labour and much temptation, with certainly the lowest minimum of enjoyment, and little chance of saving enough for an honest independence at the close.

A humble approach to the grand ideal, in other words a neat little maid-of-all-work, stood, on the October morning we have already described, an hour before Mr. Goodrick's appearance in his front room, beating a door-mat vigorously with the end of a long broom. She was flushed with cleaning the door-step opposite No. 30, and really looked very pretty with her fresh country colour and her glossy trimly arranged hair. The audacious milkman rattling his nest of cans at No. 10, as if really he had never even heard of the existence of water as a diluter of the almost dangerous richness of London milk, nodded to her in a most gallant way, but she would hardly even toss him a smile.

This perhaps arose not so much from pride as from the approach of a certain blushing young man in the bluest of ties, who just then came suspiciously strolling down the street, with a square parcel under his arm, and talking to the baker who had slung down his basket of smoking bread at the door of No. 8.

He was a loosely built, spindly young man, reminding one somehow of thin overgrown asparagus, with a good-natured, not over wise look, large eyes, rather a fat, high-coloured face, and a considerable downy promise of whiskers.

Susan was evidently conscious of the approach of this young Romeo, but she chose coquettishly not to see him, and looking steadily at Inigo Jones's gateway at the west end of the street, beat still faster on the unoffending mat. Thinking it, however, cruel to let him remain there any longer colouring up to the roots of his hair, and holding out a copy of the "London Journal," she turned round with a pretty start, remarkably natural, considering.

"Oh! dear me, why it is Mr. Willoughby."

"Call me Bob, Susan; you know you promised last Sunday to always call me Bob."

"Oh, you wicked story!"

The pawnbroker and picture dealer's young man, emboldened by this appellation, smiled profusely, and said, pathetically,—

"Susan, may I call you dear?"

"No, I don't think I shall let you; you don't deserve it."

"Oh, do!—and, I say, Susan, I've got a little lavender-water for you—you won't be angry with me for bringing it. I wish it was something better.

I wish I was as rich as master, Susan, and I'd buy you such a stunning brooch I've been looking at round the corner."

"Don't be silly, Bob, talking of such things. You know I saw you talking to that ugly dark girl at No. 4, on Tuesday night when I went to the 'Apple Tree' for beer."

The tall young man was eager in his explanations and assurances. Of all the girls he had ever seen, he had apparently never disliked any one so much as the girl at No. 4.

"Oh, yes, I dare say," said Susan, with extreme hauteur, as they say in fashionable novels. "Oh! yes, I'm to believe everything, of course; and what's that 'London Journal' you've got there? I dare say that's for some minx or other. Oh! don't tell me."

There was the making of a coquette about Susan, but indeed it required no great strategy to out-general young Mr. Willoughby. Still, love is not a question of intellect, and courtship is a pretty thing even when a shambling pawnbroker's assistant is the Romeo and a little maid-of-all-work the Juliet.

Bob then produced the latest number of the "London Journal," and glowingly eulogised the thrilling story of the "Red Diamond, or the Skeleton in the Closet," especially where (as he

eloquently pointed out) Sir Algernon Fitzherbert Goswald confronts the wicked Duke of Mountgarret Chesney, and accuses him before his proud minions and pampered menials of bigamy, arson, poisoning, felony, treason, bad language, and strong drinks.

Could it be wondered at, owing to the interest of the story, the cheek of Romeo and the cheek of Juliet almost touched each other, or that, perhaps just to steady himself, Bob tried ineffectually to slip one hand for an instant round the little trim waist of the pole star of his young affections?

“How can you?” was Susan’s remark at this audacity. “There’s Mrs. Harvey, at No. 30, looking at us.”

Bob asserted that no human being, from the Lord Chancellor downwards, could have resisted such a temptation.

Just then a bell upstairs rang, rather sharply, twice.

“Oh, good gracious, Mr. Willoughby!” said Susan, dropping her broom in her consternation; “there’s missus, or Miss Amy. Give me the messages. Is that picture for master?”

Bob, with several surreptitious compliments to Susan, hurriedly explained that it was a Vandyck from Mr. Bassevi—there was some foliage in the background to paint in.

"It's such a stunner," was Bob's critical comment.

The door closing on Bob after a hurried and rather unceremonious adieu, Bob strolled in a melancholy, banished way to his prison behind the counter of the tyrant in Charlotte Street.

Almost the moment the door closed, a burly, roughly dressed giant of a man in a wide-awake—Leviathan as to chest, Behemoth as to head—strode up and beat on the knocker with a self-important devil-may-care air that all but indicated his nationality. There was a redundant strength about the man (his very sneeze was an earthquake), and he stood there like a tamed Hercules in modern dress.

The door opened and Susan's smiling face appeared inquiringly and greetingly, for she recognised a friend of her master's and an *ami de la maison*.

"Why, it's Major Donovan!"

"Susan, mavourneen," said the by no means diffident visitor, with a vulgar gallantry, and in a slight brogue evidently a long time alienated from Ireland. "Is your mather in? Where is the old boy? I must see him," and the enormous being flourished a small black thorn-tree, which he called a stick, as if he had been the champion of a thousand faction fights.

“He’s upstairs, sir, in his room, painting, till breakfast is ready ; you can go up.”

The invitation was wasted, for the broad-shouldered man was already shouting Robinson, and striding up two steps at a time.

“Well, he do take liberties,” said Susan, saucily ; “one would think the house was his own ; but there, he brings master work, and he’s no pride about him.”

Major Donovan, or, as he called himself, “the real O’Donovan,” if he had his rights, and the family property in Galway, was one of those mysterious adventurers only found in great cities ; he had dabbled in several professions, he was a good practical though ungrammatical linguist, a man who had travelled, a projector, a go-between for patrons and artists, and a hanger-on and sort of odd man at Government offices, for he had mysterious claims on the Ministry. The major was as well known at artists’ taverns as in Whitehall ante-chambers. Reckless, impulsive, clever, rather too fond of the bottle, generous when he had it, a lively sponge, he was ready at a moment’s notice to go either and establish an agency in Samarcand, or to sell a picture for a poor artist. There was no knowing what he had not been, certainly a private in the Artillery, then a police inspector at Bombay, then the head of the

detectives at Alexandria, next a pamphleteer on scientific questions, then a commission agent at Beyrout, lastly sub-consul at Smyrna, everywhere bragging, fighting, trading, with great self-satisfaction, but no very remunerative results. He was cunning under the garb of chivalrous impetuosity, brave although a boaster, inventive and clever although ignorant, a man, in fact, not fit for our tame modern civilisation, a Berseker in broad-cloth, a backwoodsman in a chimney-pot hat. It was a shame to trammel such a man in the subtle cobwebs of later civilisation, and with the mean complications of neediness. He should have been at one of the outposts of the world, a picket against the Comanchees, a sentinel against New Zealand rebels. He was one of those robust, fiery, untiring natures, that is only really alive when at work and in danger. Poverty only made him shifty and insincere. Under Cortez he might have won victories and founded settlements.

Add to this mental character a broad, coarse red face, with prominent cheekbones, good but rather squat features, a broad bumpy brow, keen restless lion's eyes, and crisp full red whiskers, and you see the major.

He beat at a back-room door on the third floor till it opened, and a little trim old-fashioned man with a square gilt eye-glass hanging by a

broad black ribbon round his neck, put his head out with a sort of dreamy inquiry.

“Robinson, my boy, how are ye?”—the major’s manner was Irish, and so was his accent, but he used hardly any Irishisms, for, to express it in his eccentric way, “he had only been to Ireland to be born,”—“Robinson, my boy, how are ye? How goes on the great work? Nearly ready to astonish the Academy, eh? I have got a message for you from Bassevi. Wonderful head that Bassevi—conducts a gigantic business as if he was playing an organ—he wants that Vandyck, Lady Dorothy Neville, I think he called it, done soon, and the copy from Moreland pushed on, for the Manchester man. And how’s the wife, and Amy too, the little Blush Rose, as I call her, how is she, eh? May the sunshine follow her all her days, for she deserves it, the little beauty!”

There was a love of Irish hyperbole about this giant, and a kind of rough poetry, with a slight undercurrent of Celtic insincerity, for this fine generous fervour cannot be perpetually kept on hand without some sacrifice of reality, and the Irishman and the Frenchman both suffer occasionally from this drawback.

Mr. Robinson was a dapper little, seedily neat, elderly man, short, vain and exacting, with good but small and rather pinched features, and some

of the obsequiousness and mechanical politeness of the quondam fashionable drawing-master about him ; he was a wearer at all times of a tail coat and shoes. His thin, soft brown hair, now rather scanty, was drawn in careful threads over his bald head in a way that showed the man who had been a dandy in his youth. He had the quiet low voice of a self-absorbed enthusiast accustomed to dream away hours by himself, and the cold punctilious formal manner of the second class old school which aimed at a polite equability, and did not by any means pretend to any great sincerity. When he spoke Mr. Robinson had a way of sliding out one leg and waving his eye-glass with his right hand, and while he was speaking he was in the habit also of drawing himself up and straightening his back in a youthful way as if age was really a mere assumption of his, and a thing to which he could no longer by any means submit. On the point of his great picture his fixed idea was almost a monomania. Mr. Robinson was a little selfish, vain to the extent of disease, a tuft hunter if he had had the opportunity, but industrious, simple-hearted, attached to but rather afraid of his wife, and devotedly fond of his daughter.

“Major Donovan,” he said, floridly waving the coloured easel on his left thumb, and slipping the

brush dexterously into his left hand in order to get his right free for shaking, "I am delighted to see you; take a chair. I hope my people did not keep you waiting, as they are sometimes in the habit of doing with visitors,"—Mr. Robinson always called Susan "my people,"—"and my wife and Amy are, I believe, not down yet." He always "believed" when he really knew all about it, but it sounded grander, and was a flourish of the old school. "Here is the picture the boy brought this morning, and a very charming thing it is. How I wish my old master Etty could see it."

It was certainly a beautiful picture of womanhood—golden curls clustering round a pure young face, a graceful pride and a proud grace was glowing in the candid brow, and shining from the rich brown eyes; the girl in the yellow and black dress was one of Vandyck's happiest efforts. Lady Dorothy was a true Cavalier lady; a Gainsborough beside it would have looked fluid and flimsy, a Lawrence painty, affected, and meretricious, most modern portraits like mere vulgar sign-boards.

Robinson was enthusiastic, but also patronising, which took away the charm from his enthusiasm, and rendered it ridiculous. He walked up to the picture menacingly; he receded from it scientifically. He waved his eye-glass at distant doubtful parts, he waved his hand across dubious

shadows, he touched strangely-placed lights with his wet finger ; he did, in fact, all he could to scientifically explain away and destroy his own intuitive pleasure.

The Major followed these gestures as provincial Rosencrantzes follow with awe those of a popular "star" Hamlet. Donovan did not understand all the manœuvres of the critic, but he respected his science, he felt that he saw more in the picture than he (the major) could or ever would ; and, having some reverence, he revered him, therefore, as the savage with the bow respects the man with the rifle,—as an ant probably respects the acrobatic accomplishments of the grasshopper.

"Painted with a charmingly light hand, but not pearly enough in the shadows, not so fresh as Etty—oh, no, no, no. Very charming, though ; very charming, indeed, and in a fine manner. There's a young lady, sir !"

So saying, the old gentleman threw out his foot, waved his eye-glass, and bowed to Lady Dorothy as if she had been a living duchess queening it in Belgravia, and had daughters old enough to want lessons in sketching.

"I suppose I mustn't see the great work," said Donovan, longingly, pointing to an easel covered with green baize.

Mr. Robinson shook his head gravely and solemnly.

“That picture,” he said, “is the work of twenty years. It shall never be seen by eye of man till it is seen by the Hanging Committee of the Royal Academy. I refused even to let Mr. Bassevi see it. They, sir, shall be the first to lift the veil. That work will revolutionise modern art. I would not let my own wife see it, major—no, not if she went on her knees—no, nor Amy.”

Mr. Robinson's faded blue eyes grew quite inflamed at the very sound of a footfall approaching the veiled image—the dream of his life. After all, it was only what schoolboys call “a try on” of Donovan's; he never expected to be allowed to see it. Why, even the great Mr. Bodger, R.A., who employed the little man to paint the replicas of his great historical pictures, had never seen it.

“I'm expecting an appointment at Pernambuco every day now,” said the major—who was always starting somewhere, but never went, and backing out of his misguided request—“saw Baring yesterday morning—promises the thing shall be done for me, but the devil of it is that I shall have to abandon the scheme of the steam-battery that I'm now laying before the War Office. Only imagine, my boy, in ten minutes pouring in

on the head of an advancing column eight tons of grape, three tons of canister, four casks of shrapnel, six hundred and seventeen round shot, and nineteen congreve rockets."

"Good gracious!" said Robinson, drawing back as if he was in full view of the steam-battery, and it was getting the steam up; "why, I should really think no body of men could bear up against such a fire."

"Sir, I don't want 'em to do so; I won't have 'em do it," roared the exulting major. "It is just my plan that they shouldn't. The nation possessing my patent will rule the world at high pressure, —will rule the world at high pressure."

Repeating a sentence, the major had long ago found, made it go further, and gave it a tone of sincerity.

"The question now is," he continued, "whether I should accept three hundred a year at Pernambuco, or restore England to the rank of the first military power in Europe."

"I never knew you had devoted so much time to the study of artillery. How did you find time with your great commercial transactions in Alexandria?"

"Find time! Time, is it? Ha! get out of that, Robinson. Didn't I superintend the Sultan's gun-foundry at Samarcand for ten years?" (The

O'Donovan had spent so many ten years in different branches of study that, by the lowest calculation, he ought to have been at least a hundred years old.) The major became Irish directly he was irritated, and he was rather easily irritated. “ ‘Donovan, my boy,’ the Pasha of Egypt used to say, ‘you’ll build a cannon some day that will help me to blow all the Arabs in Arabia into smithereens. Mashallah!’ ” (It was a remarkable fact, Mr. Donovan’s Arabs always talked like Anglo-Irishmen.) “ ‘I will, your Highness,’ said I, ‘if I can only chase out those sacred pigs of Frenchmen that interfere with what they don’t, and never will, understand.’ ‘And bedad,’ says the Pasha then and there, ‘That, Mr. Donovan, is jist what the Frenchmen say of you Irishmen.’ Well, I was going down the steps of Shoobra just after, when who should I come across but one of Lesseps’ gang, so I up with my stick, and says to him, ‘You sacred pig, if you talk of me to the Pasha disrespectful,’ I said, ‘I’ll go bail I’ll knock the head off ye, big as it is ;’ and with that I up with my foot and kicked him down from the steps of the Palace. Well, when I met the Pasha the same evening, says he to me, ‘Donovan, you blackgyard,’ says he, ‘what the divil is this you’ve been doing to the Frenchman ?’ says he, and then he laughed, the old craytur, till he showed every

one of his false teeth. I heard all the harem laughing, too, behind the lattices as we took our coffee, and that same night he gave me his favourite chibouk, set in diamonds, and worth, at the lowest figure of computation, eight hundred and thirteen pounds English money. Bassevi has it now. You can see it, man alive. Bless ye, I would not tell you a lie."

Robinson was a good listener, and in the greatest good faith continued touching the flank of a white horse in a copy he was making of a Moreland, "Interior of a Stable," heightening the light on the flank with minute specks of pure flake-white from a little snow-heap on his palette. Moreland was only fit to wallow with the swine, but he painted a white horse as gloriously as Wouvermans, and he could steep his pigs when he chose in the fluid gold of Cuyp.

"Coming nicely together, isn't it?" he said, circling his hand over his copy as if he was winding up a clock. "But I grudge the time, for I ought to be at my great picture."

The major thought the work admirable, much better than the original. (He was, indeed, just then intent on an ultimate loan of five shillings, and wished to lubricate the whole world and Fortune's wheel in particular.)

All at once he broke into a violent exclamation.

He had, in fact, almost forgotten to tell Robinson that Mr. Bassevi wanted him to go with him at twelve to a lawyer's in Furnival's Inn, and there report on some pictures, chiefly Rubens' and Jordans, upon which some young man of fortune down in Wiltshire wished to have a considerable sum of money advanced. Bassevi would call for him. Pictures had once belonged to Bassevi himself, he believed.

The poor little drudge of the great curiosity dealer sighed. The year was wearing, and there was another day lost from the great picture that was to convulse the art world. He dashed his brushes together in a vexed way, drew in a white hair with a light rapid dexterous touch, and then twirled his eye-glass with one finger as if it was a joint roasting. Some great diplomatist decided that Louis XVI. was an "imbecille" from the way he used at levées to keep changing from one foot to another. Such inconsequential mutations show nervous indecision as much as speech can do. That twirl of the eye-glass would have ruined Robinson for ever in the opinion of Lavater.

Robinson had had his share of independence and of better days. In early life he had been a successful drawing-master in a certain Anglo-French circle in Paris, and he had then been extravagant and a dabbler in rouge-et-noir. Now he was the

slave of a London picture-dealer, a pawnbroker, and a money-lender—one of those devil-fish of civilisation who float about in dark corners, waiting to twine their poisonous antennæ round their unsuspecting victims, eager to drag them down and prey upon them.

Struggle with Bassevi? why, Robinson could no more struggle with such “a pieuvre” than a squirrel could struggle with a rattlesnake, a linnet with a kestrel, or a gudgeon with a fisherman! He could not live without Bassevi. The great work was not saleable yet. That done, then—then—he might respectfully decline to perform any more drudgery degrading to his talent.

“It is rather inconvenient, really very inconvenient—very,” he said, “but I suppose I’d better go. I know Bassevi values my opinion. If I’d time I’d go round to Mr. Bodger; but he’ll be busy, and so——”

All these struggles of irresolution were summarily put an end to by the sudden appearance of a pretty little face through the door that just then darted softly open, pressed by a little white hand that lingered on it. It was the young lady whose face at the first-floor window had that morning so attracted Mr. Godfrey Goodrick.

She was, indeed, not unworthy of contemplation, for all the purity and grace of English girl-

hood adorned her every look and word. She was taller than Scott's Amy Robsart could have been, yet not so tall as to be masculine.

“In her large eyes the thoughts lay clear
As pebbles in a brook.”

There was that glow about her soft hair that seems as if it is lit by internal sunshine—fairy sunshine, that never fades, or chills, or dims, but is always as a coronet and aureole around the brow that boasts such a garniture. For proud Cleopatras the dark majesty of raven-black hair, but for such a pure, loving face as Amy Robinson's, golden-brown locks were the fittest diadem, and they seemed that morning to adorn her like so much royal gold and jewels. Her plain, white morning striped dress—striped lengthways with thin purple stripes—was simple almost to excess in its spotless neatness: but then it had been put on and it was worn with an instinct of grace that is, with some women, an innate faculty, their birthright—and with such women the simplest ribbon becomes a magical cestus of Venus with resistless spells of its own to attract and to detain.

There was about Amy Robinson all the elastic joyousness of early youth, and the serenity of innocence; a lightheartedness as of the bird, the squirrel, the fawn; the song of one, the happy restlessness of the second, the buoyant playful-

ness of the third. She was mercurial from excess of life ; as incapable of receiving a shadow of sorrow as a sunbeam. Time shook his hour-glass in vain at her. You might as well have thought to hear a flower preach to you on death as have expected Amy to utter a cynical thought, treating the world as an unhappy place, or nature as a theatre the scenery of which has grown stale and wearisome, and the actors of which are all—according to some disagreeably wise men—either contemptible or despicable. She moved through the dream-world of her youth like a summer cloud. She enjoyed mere living as the woods and flowers do life. She never brooded over the past or the future. She sailed down the great swift stream of time bright and gay as a bubble, whatever dead men, broken wrecks, or buried treasure there might be hidden below the waves.

She was quite unconscious of her beauty and her grace, or, if conscious of either fairy gift, she only delighted in them because they made others happy, and herself welcome. They were, in fact, to her only a part of the atmosphere of general happiness that surrounded her.

“Papa!” she said, in a soft, rich, rather low, yet bright and merry voice ; so perfectly harmonious, yet neither metallic nor forced, that it irresistibly reminded one of the blackbird’s best notes, and by

no means of the public singer's strained falsetto. It was a voice that poured forth softly, freely, without any inflection being given to it by affectation; it rose full, pure and clear from the heart, and was delightful to the ear. "Papa," she said, "mamma has made the tea."

The major was exuberant in his gallantry; his wideawake flapped about, he doubled and redoubled his enormous body, he kissed his hand. His redundant Celtic nature overflowed into metaphor.

"May I die with my shoes on," he said, laughing, "if I didn't think it was just a dancing sun-babe coming gliding into the room, and now I see—see it is Miss Amy Robinson. I wish I had any everlasting flowers to strew at her—her feet! Bedad! poor devil that I am, I only wish it was all Covent Garden I had to strew, and she was Duchess of Bedford."

"'Pon my word, major, you'll make Amy quite vain. But you Irishmen are always so gallant! There was Lord Portrush, when I was in Paris, he and old Lord Mazagan drove the best horses in Paris ——"

"Percy!" It was somebody speaking rather beseechingly from below.

It was Mrs. Robinson calling supplicatingly for breakfast.

"Now, dear papa, come," said Amy, with a pretty tyranny, "take my arm; or the tea will get quite cold. Oh, you naughty papa, you know you promised mamma not to paint again before breakfast."

"Only putting in a high light, dear,"—stooping to kiss her white forehead. "Major, of course you'll breakfast with us; pray precede us."

If old Robinson had been in the workhouse he would have haggled over the forms of etiquette with the beadle; this formality was the chief ornament of his shallow impulsive little mind.

"Bedad, I've had breakfast an hour ago," said the major, "but I don't mind just joining your circle over a cup of tea; then you'll go to Fairfield's about those pictures of Bassevi's."

Downstairs they went, Amy laughing, the old artist chatting in his chirpy, abstracted sort of way, the major superbly polite.

"It's a matter of day and night work, Major, to get my picture done," said Robinson; "works like that require many changes before they reach their perfection. The ideal moment comes only now and then, and this picture restoring eats into one's time sadly."

"Take comfort, Robinson; take comfort, man," said the major, stopping on the last step, and waving his large red hand. "Look at me! here

am I with a system of artillery that would make England the mistress of the whole visible universe, and yet I have to go begging about—like an odd man that runs errands at a club—for Bassevi! Oh, Donovan! Donovan! Providence doesn't do the handsome thing by you at all. And here's the missus, 'pon my sowl, looking as much like a duchess as ever, and presiding at the taypot like the Empress of China."

Mrs. R. had by no means the mean servile air that might have been expected of a keeper of humble lodgings in a small street out of the Strand. There was a calm self-possession about her words and movements that indicated an indelible recollection of better days. There was about her pleasant face that introspective and abstracted expression that in gentle natures betrays the existence of some calmly borne but indelible sorrow. There is nothing so touching as this calm hopelessness of the future. No mean greediness or suspicion had given the hungry, restless expression of those vices to her gentle, rather sorrow-stricken features. With a larger mind than her vain little husband's, she had learned the necessity of directing him without acquiring a love of power or the wish to be a capricious dictator that women sometimes acquire in such cases of inverted rule. She bore her somewhat sordid

life without fretful regrets. The self-sacrifice of her patience was not less great because it was incessant. She had discovered long ago that the insolence of lodgers, the imprudence of her husband, the anxieties of a small uncertain income, were the spectres with which she had had ever to battle; and a sense of duty and a love for her daughter were the talismans of her daily life. Sorrow had refined her character, and she concealed all traces of grief under the equability and cheerfulness of her tranquil, serene, but by no means phlegmatic nature.

“Oh, the major is so poetical this morning, mamma,” said Amy, running into the room, and stroking down the silver grey hair on her mother’s forehead; “he has been talking such charming nonsense.”

“He’s a wicked flatterer, Amy; don’t you believe him. Percy, my dear, you know you promised me you wouldn’t paint before breakfast.”

“Major Donovan,” said the artist, “will you take some toast. I suppose you know Amy goes back to Wiltshire to-night. Amy, dear, please ring for Susan, we want some more toast.”

The major plunged violently and aggressively at the bell. “She mustn’t go,” he said, still holding the bell. “My dear Mrs. Robinson, we really can’t spare her—it’s as bad as it would be

if any spalpeen cut off London's supply of gas, but there is one consolation——”

The major uttered these last words with an oily and artful languor. “And what is that?” asked Mrs. Robinson, laughing at Amy.

“Why, that she is sure to marry some millionaire; oh, musha, sure she'll have all the millionaires in Wiltshire at her feet.”

“How can you talk so, Major Donovan,” said Amy, with a slight blush, beautiful as the first tinge of day-break. “I wish you wouldn't tease me so. Oh, dear me, how sorry I am to leave dear Buckingham Street, and go back to that grand house and the stiff horrible life.”

“But you like Miss Chivers, dear?” said the mother, bending fondly towards her daughter.

“Oh, yes; then there are those nice kind people, the Beauflowers, and I love them.”

“Mr. Beauflower is the clergyman,” explained Mrs. Robinson.

“Don't like clergymen, sly lot,” said the intolerant major. “When I was in Alexandria and head of the police, there was a missionary there who used to smuggle gunpowder. Well, one day one of the men comes to me and tells me the missionary had offered him so many sovereigns to let this powder pass. Now, no one ever bribed my men, because I always offered them twice as

much as the bribe to tell me, so I says to my man; 'Ibrahim, you take the money and pass the powder; the night it is to pass tell me.' Well, when the night came, what did I do but surround the house and stop all the powder; so I got the powder, you see, Mrs. Robinson, and the rascal's money too. I never saw a man draw so long a face as that man did when I told him what I'd done and what a fool I'd made of him. That's the way I used to treat 'em, Miss Robinson."

"You must have had a tremendous life of it there," said Mr. Robinson, quietly spreading his toast. "Alexandria is full of refugees and bad fellows from Italy, and everywhere."

"What did I care for divil a one of 'em. Hadn't I my revolver and my big stick? I did 'em a good turn, too, for before I took up the affair, the Pasha used to make a sweep now and then and clap a dozen or so into sacks and throw them into the bay—lots of ground sharks in the bay,—no joke."

"Oh, how horrible—how very horrible!" cried Mrs. Robinson and Amy, both together. "Oh, don't talk of such dreadful things, major."

"Stay as you are just one moment, Amy, don't move your hand," said the old artist suddenly, as a little fleck of sunshine glanced across the room and flickered across his daughter's cheek and her

uplifted hand. "That's a lovely effect, observe that, Jinny. Major, isn't that like Gainsborough's Lady Lyndoch. I'll make a note of it."

"I can't really hold the cup like this any longer, papa," said Amy piteously, after some minutes. "It tires me so. There is that strange old gentleman opposite going out with his beautiful dog. I wonder who he is? Susan says he's a miser, and has whole rooms full of jewels and books, and pictures, and things he never uses."

"Money-lender, for a thousand, old rogue," said the major, who had been looking out surreptitiously from behind the window curtains, "or a receiver of stolen goods—perhaps in with the swell mob, just the sort of man. Sure, I know all their tricks. Divil doubt me."

"Oh! but he's such a nice respectable old gentleman," said Amy, "only rather cross looking sometimes; and I've seen him at the door scolding the poor laundress. He's got an old black footman, hasn't he, mamma? such an oddity."

"By-the-bye, major, have you had any more adventures with the swell-mob?" said Robinson, with the air of a sharp man who is drawing out a humorous companion.

"I have too, bedad," said the major, who was devouring his second breakfast with infinite complacency. "A party of them got hold of me the

other day near London Bridge. I was in a rough pea coat, and they took me for a returned digger, or something of that kind. First one came up and asked me the way to the Borough, then another joined us quite unexpectedly. Nothing would do but they must treat me. Said I, 'Of course let every one pay for himself.' 'Stuff and nonsense,' says they; so I let them order and they gave me a first-class dinner and plenty of wine, and then they proposed skittles, and wanted to go to an alley. 'No, no,' says the first man, 'we're very comfortable here, let us stop here quietly, and have a game of cards.' Then they began rapping out telegraph signals on the table with their knuckles in the thieves' way. Rat, tat, tatta-tat tat—'He's a green horn, pluck him at once,' 'All right,' and so on. I could hear it all. When they'd done, out came the cards, I refused to play—didn't seem to see it. Then they began to bully and hustle and talk big, and ask who was going to pay for the grub and the drink. 'Those who ordered it, I suppose,' said I, and began to feel in my waistcoat pocket. 'Hit him in the eye,' said one; 'Knock his head off,' said another. I didn't say anything, but I just pulled out this little revolver that I always carry about with me, and laid it on the table before me. 'That's the friend who pays for me,' said I, and in a moment

(you should have seen them) out came their money, and off they trotted like so many rabbits. Bedad, it was the best joke."

"Served the wicked creatures quite right," said Mrs. Robinson and Amy both together, as Mr. Robinson rose and prepared to start.

"Oh, what a clever man Major Donovan is, mamma; what a wonderful traveller he has been; and what odd things he has seen!" said Amy, laughing, and clapping her hands from sheer joy of life, as the major, convoying little Mr. Robinson, emerged from the front door and bore up the street towards Bassevi's.

"He is a *very* extraordinary man," said Mrs. Robinson, drawing the curtain back to watch them. "I hope he will get the grand government appointment he seems so sanguine about; for he has been such a good friend to your father, Amy. Dear me, how I wish he had even half the major's energy."

CHAPTER V.

NO. 5, FURNIVAL'S INN.

FURNIVAL'S INN fifty years ago was a very different place from what it is now. There was no intensely respectable clerical hotel there then. The Yorkshire interest had not then been enlisted for the present grand but rather sombre caravan-serai, nor had it sought dangerous refuge among London lawyers; no gilt-figured clock emblazoned the north side of the parallelogram of the enclosure; no aerial gilt weather-cock arrow then hovered between four letters and coquetted with them all by turns, fickle lord of that little alphabetic harem; no formal houses with sham Greek pilasters, and heavy cornice supporting nothing but itself, then existed; but in their stead there were old gable ends and red tiled humpy, shaky roofs, and queer tumble-down dens approached by rat-eaten, dingy stairs, with dirty balustrades; and smoke-stained, ink-splashed landings; lit by dark lantern windows, crusted black with the

filth of centuries. Spiders' nests of places those old London chambers were, fit only for suicidal Chancery maniacs to inhabit, and chosen lairs for low chicanery and subtle roguery. Hidden in them that worthy and inseparable couple, John Doe and Richard Roe, employed themselves in bleeding to death the spendthrift gull, in torturing the widow and stripping the orphan. Honesty, however, sometimes found its way to these scarecrow places, and planned, and wrought to countermine Messrs. Doe and Roe, by sound logic, searching truth, and keen analysis, and so within the little space the old battle of Good and Evil, Light and Darkness went on, as there still goes on that great campaign that began at the Creation, and will end only with the Judgment.

The old inn, in a word, like the new, had its good and its bad tenants, who paid their rent with more or less punctuality; but it had not that flock of eleemosynary vagabond pigeons that at present frequent the little enclosure, and return to Guildhall nightly to sleep under the Lord Mayor's protection. The old residence of that good knight, Sir Richard Furnival, boasted a quaint old chapel not unlike a barn that had tried to turn itself into a greenhouse; and to crown all, possessed a real mulberry tree—yes,

a real tree, with the big purple fruit and the flapping generous leaves of its class. This tree might have been, and probably was, one of those trees that lawyers and gentlemen of James the First's time planted here and there in London to humour the whim of that fussy, pedantic, and disreputable monarch to encourage silk-worms in England. The great mulberry garden, planted on what is now the site of Buckingham Palace, was probably only a more courtly way of paying the same flattery that the solitary tree did its best to express amid the discouraging gloom of that strictly legal and more eastern atmosphere.

Mr. Peto, forty years ago or so, ruthlessly swept away with the besom of improvement all these picturesque materials; introduced an hotel, with great stucco pillars and green blinded windows; and built the present large and spacious chambers that now face each other with defiant dulness and formal respectability. The inn is now as unromantic and straightforward as the fourth proposition of the second book of Euclid. The involved passages, the rat-haunted lofts, the bill-discounters' dens and pitfalls, are all gone. Thriving lawyers and wealthy city men now live where sordid pettifoggers once wove their poisoned nets, their parchment strait waistcoats, and their foolscap and red tape handcuffs.

So in that great shifting dream which is called London the dissolving views come and go.

It was through the rounded archway opening from Holborn into this inn, that exactly as St. Andrew's clock struck on the October morning already so favourably mentioned, Mr. Godfrey Goodrick passed. There was a character about his walk, which was unhurried, yet testy, decisive, and rather defiant. His low-crowned regency hat, his claret-coloured spencer, his watch seals, even his drab gaiters and gold-headed bamboo were all worn or carried with a choleric contempt for juvenile remark or street criticism that betrayed a wealthy, eccentric, travelled man, to whom even London prejudices were provincialisms to be philosophically despised and disregarded as far as temper would allow.

The tall thin, sour beadle in the gold-laced hat and Noah's ark greatcoat, who was stooping to pat a dog, rose and bowed in a quick professional way as Goodrick passed. He was evidently an habitu  of the inn. A flock of rather dingy pigeons, whose breasts, however, glimmered with mother of pearl colours, emerald, and rose, in the sunshine, was feeding just beyond the shadow of the east side, round a hansom cab, the one-eyed driver of which was flinging them a generous handful of oats from the nose-bag that hung below his airy seat.

The birds flew up with a rush and a flacking noise when the old West Indian approached, and bore off with a circling sweep towards the hotel door, as if it were merely some enormous dovecot, then suddenly changing their minds they wheeled to the north-east, and rose to the great cornice ledge, which is their favourite perch, till it was safe to return again and hover round the philanthropic cabman, who had his one artful eye steadily fixed on his volatile pensioners, who were, indeed, admirers of cabmen, a class, perhaps, not sufficiently appreciated by the world.

“If I were Peto, I'd poison all those birds,” thought Goodrick, amiably, to himself; “they're enough to frighten a spirited horse.”

He looked round just when the cabman, tired of the public dinner at which he had been requested to preside, flacked his long whip with a dexterous and winding curve, and the crack of a double-barrelled pistol. The frightened birds, rising with a sound of wings, tore away a second time up the inn towards the statue, almost knocking off the hat of the irritable old virtuoso.

It seriously put him out, for he struck at the last bird spitefully with his stick, but not successfully. The cabman swung his leg over his perch, and winked at the beadle, as much as to say, “I say, *there's a temper!*” An errand boy,

waiting for a brief at No. 6, began to whistle pigeon calls, and improvise in a loud voice the following beautiful distich from the London street boys' *Anthologia*—

“ Oh my,
I wish I had 'em in a pie ! ”

This, after the fourteenth time of singing, growing rather monotonous, the minstrel boy was advised by the gay cabman to “ shut up ” which, however, he refused to do, and finally being sent away, departed to disseminate his poetry through Holborn, Chancery Lane, and the Temple.

Mr. Goodrick never hurried, he despised the fuss of the age, associating it with reckless greediness, and an insane thirst for sudden wealth. He exulted almost arrogantly in being slow and equable—a formalist, as old men generally become. Mr. Goodrick had his regular system of procedure at every house he was in the habit of visiting. At the doorless entrance to No. 5 he therefore drew out a large bulky gold hunter's watch, with a brown face, and compared it with the clock at Wood's Hotel. He then deliberately scraped his shoes, rubbed them on the mat, took off his right doeskin glove, ascended the stairs, and knocked a formal, particular knock—as studied as if it had been part of an overture.

Almost immediately the door started open, and a pert, fresh-coloured, good-looking boy, neatly dressed, presented himself. He was one of those alarmingly smart and acute lads, peculiar to the offices of London lawyers, whose sauciness is only kept down by the fear of instant punishment, and who find a vent for their restrained spirits in surreptitious fights, pitch and toss, and performance on tin flageolets. This was a new boy, and he did not know Mr. Goodrick.

“Mr. Fairfield at home, eh?”

“Nyo, sir.”

“Well, then, I’ll come in and wait. Mr. Hill in?”

“Yessur, but busy, sir; what name, sir?”

“Hang the name; I’ll come in and sit down till he can see me.”

“Beg your pardon, sir, what name? no one without name, sir.”

“You impertinent scoundrel, don’t keep me here all day; let me in.”

“Beg pardon, sir—Mr. Fairfield’s orders.”

“My name’s Goodrick.”

“Let in Mr. Goodrick directly, you sir,” said a little neat old clerk, who just then came bustling from an inner room. “How dare you make all this commotion, Willoughby, and behave impertinent to a gentleman, and a client too?”

How dare you, sir? Do that again, and off you go this very day. Go back to your work, sir, get on with that agreement. This way, Mr. Goodrick. Mr. Fairfield will be out directly. He's just now engaged about some valuable pictures and rarities. Get a chair directly, Willoughby."

You may generally know by the servants of a house what the master is. Shopmen and clerks are true weathercocks to show how the tradesman is conducting his business, or the professional man his profession. Impudence is the servant of Arrogance, and Insolence of Pride. Mr. Hill, or "Old Hill," as he was generally called in Chancery Lane and its vicinity, was a little grey neat man, with a nankeen-coloured face, and a pleasant, quiet, formal, precise manner, neither servile nor obtrusive. He had two jokes, two amusements, and one idea. The two jokes related to sayings of Adolphus and Bell, two counsel celebrated in his younger days; his two amusements were his daily paper over his daily chop at the "Cheshire Cheese," and a game of chess once a week with a brother clerk at a coffee-house in Catherine Street, near Drury Lane; his one idea was business. His two favourite books were Chitty and Tidd. He passed through the archway from Holborn every morn-

ing at nine to the moment, and had done so for twenty years, except once, when his only brother died. As for leaving business, he was not particular about that, and when he did so, he generally took home a deed or a lease to beguile the time. The country he despised, finding trees absurdly like each other, and fields painfully monotonous. His rare holidays he had been known to spend at Westminster, where he once heard a third very good thing, but somehow or other it slipped out of his memory. A narrow-minded, good, faithful old soul was old Hill, as ever put pen to parchment, and even Law had not one whit spoiled his honesty or hardened his heart. He was like one of those large old-fashioned silver watches, not showy, but still lasting, to be trusted, and, although somewhat ungainly, keeping uncommonly good time for all that.

Mr. Goodrick, appeased by a person so congenial to him, took the proffered chair, and inquired about Fairfield and his recent trip to France.

Old Hill, perched on that "coign of vantage," his hard, lofty, and shiny stool, turned, with his pen behind his ear, from a policy of insurance that he was reading through, to glance with benignant shrewdness through the inky rails of his enclosure at the illustrious visitor, every

moment or so, according to his habit, putting up the middle finger of both hands to slightly readjust his large silver spectacles. They did not always want adjusting, but old Judge Park, a friend of old Mr. Fairfield's years before, had been accustomed to do it, and it had struck old Hill as an agreeable diversion to conversation, and as a mark of buckling to the matter in hand in an honest and determined way. It was to him exactly what adjusting the visor used to be to the knights of old.

He spoke in a low voice, and was mysterious and confidential: "Most clever, energetic man, Mr. Fairfield, to be sure. Went to Paris about a factory: the title was doubtful, and Messrs. Fox and Shekall were giving us a good deal of trouble about it, as they always do about everything. We worked on behalf of Bird and Anderson, who wanted to buy the place. Will you believe me, sir, in three weeks Mr. Fairfield disentangled the whole affair, drew up the requisite papers, in the French language, for the transfer, and established a sound title. Sir, Mr. Fairfield, mark me, will become a great parliamentary lawyer; he has the true head for it. Sir, you could trust him with anything. I know what men of business are, and I say it boldly, he's A 1 among them."

Old Hill was not usually talkative, but he had so warmed over this eulogy of Mr. Fairfield that he got quite hot, and his spectacles becoming vapoured, he took them off and wiped them carefully with a bright yellow handkerchief, with his side eye steady on Master Willoughby, who was watching a sly opportunity to get a Negro song-book from under the enormous scarlet mountain of a London Directory.

Goodrick listened with evident approval, for his wiry brows moved in a pleased way, but he would not show it, and he griped his mouth to keep the smile down.

“All very well, Hill,” he said; “he’s working hard perhaps now, but how will it end? The ship is in the builder’s yard still—how will it sail? I’ve seen so many men of promise in my day—two-thirds turned out addled at last. Don’t believe in human nature any longer—bad lot—all promise, no performance. The only man I ever praise is my old friend Hargrave, because I can look back thirty years and never remember a bad thing of him. Knew him at Jamaica. But then, Lord, I never tried his friendship much, never put any tension on it—it mightn’t bear it. He is useful to me and I to him, that’s all. Ugh! self-interest, that’s the only bower-anchor of friendship—don’t tell me. Bah!”

Old Hill was no metaphysician : he was satisfied with his own study of life. He drew back his forces, therefore, wouldn't fight it out (clients don't like contradiction), and kept one eye on the incorrigible Willoughby and another on the red label at the back of "Fearne on Contingent Remainders," that lay between the pouncet and the wafer box.

The office was not an apartment peculiarly gratifying to the senses, and old Hill now relapsing into perusal of an indenture on half an acre of innocent-looking parchment, with great twisty Gothic letters and a bit of tinsel, gay as a salmon-fly, in the left-hand top corner, Mr. Goodrich had time to discover how little food there was for his artistic and cultivated eye. An uneven ceiling cracked into giant profiles, and smoked brown with the flare of gas ; wainscoted walls of a uniform dingy drab, here and there splashed with ink, as if some lawyer had once blown out his brains, and had left an ineradicable stain ; tiers of black square tin boxes, labelled in gilt, "*In re* Dodswell," "*In re* Shepherd," &c., as so many family vaults of extinct fortunes and decayed happiness ; rows of bill-files, covered with thick dust, horrible from its loathsome palpability ; on the mantelpiece a broken pewter inkstand without a lid, three rusty pens, a Post

Office Directory, a faded Clergy List, a letter-weighter that would not weigh, and an almanac with days for certain trials ticked off in red ink.

Altogether a repulsive scarecrow place, sufficient to frighten away persons venturing for the first time on the edge of that terrific whirlpool, Law!—that all-swallowing vortex hard by, men say, to the Rapids of Beggary and the terrible Niagara of Death and Ruin! Why are not lawyers' offices painted with Pompeian frescoes and made gay and sparkling, like the hells of Baden? Whoever sets a cruel iron trap without strewing at least a few fresh green leaves over the greedy teeth? Is it not because the litigious gull is so foolish a creature that it requires no art to attract him. Attract, indeed! Why, not all the bayonets in the world could keep Hatred and Avarice from gaining access to the Inns of Court, for have not Avarice and Hatred been the lawyers' clients ever since there were lawyers?

Such were some of the old cynic's thoughts, as his eye glanced over the various objects in the room, the red wafers like drops of clients' blood, parchment—the skin of calves that have been flayed, the red tape like red surgeon's bandages. These bitter thoughts (and perhaps a sufferer at cards has a right to be bitter when he hears dice rattle) were suddenly interrupted by the glass

door of Mr. Fairfield's back room being flung open, and a fresh, vigorous voice, pleasant in its inflexions, shouting :

“Mind, Hill, the assignees *In re* Halftide v. Joslin cannot sell the house without permission from the Court of Chancery ; and, Hill, send Willoughby directly to Fox and Shekall's for that marriage settlement.”

“One moment, if you please, sir—just one moment, Mr. Fairfield,” said old Hill, waving his pen over the rails of the enclosure ; “here's some one wants to see you, sir.”

Old Hill considered this way of surprising the clever lawyer as an exquisite touch of humour, and he secretly chuckled over it for some time after between the pauses in reading the will of a City banker who had had the luxury of dying that week actually worth “a plum.”

In an instant the busy man had darted out, closed the door behind him, and seized Mr. Goodrick's hand.

“What, Mr. Goodrick,” he said, “I am so glad to see you—only back from Paris on Wednesday—divorce case—not been home yet—so dreadfully busy, or should have called at No. 30 long ago.”

The old man, without at once rising, took Fairfield's hand quietly, and, holding it, eyed the worn-looking lawyer as a recruiting officer might

inspect a promising would-be recruit when he had nearly got his number; half-liking, half-indifferent, cynical, suspicious, half-inclining to the applicant, and no more.

“I’m going down to Wiltshire to-night, Fairfield. Your cousin Beauflower has asked me so often that I mean now to give him a lesson, and show him how troublesome an old man can be. I want to see those Wiltshire people he boasts of. My old friend Staunton once lived down there.”

“I am so glad,” said the hearty lawyer; “I like Wiltshire. Beauflower will be so glad to welcome you. They’re such good-natured people down at Summerleas, you’ll soon like them as well as I do.”

“I never expect much, Fairfield. I’ve seen too much of the dark side of human nature, the usual meanness, envy, hatred, all uncharitableness, I suppose—ugh—that one finds everywhere under different shapes. Men of sixty and men of thirty think differently about most things.”

“Of course they do, naturally,” said the young lawyer. “Let us have our illusions, pray; let us be in the sunshine as long as we can——” Just then the door opened, and a boy thrust in his head.

“If you please, sir, Mr. Bassevi and Mr. Robinson have come about these pictures.”

“Oh, yes; bring them in—show in the gentlemen. Please to stop,” he said, turning round to Mr. Goodrick. “I want your opinion on these pictures.”

Mr. Goodrick gave a reluctant consent, and stopped. Bassevi was his special abhorrence.

Mr. Bassevi and Mr. Robinson entered—the picture-dealer and his drudge. The former was a surly, ill-dressed man, with a gross brutality of manner that tried to pass itself off as honest frankness. He wore a rusty-brown paletot, buttoned up to the throat; dingy plaid trousers; his white hat was greasy; his neckcloth a mere wisp of purple; his hair was long, dusty, and neglected. There was about him a look of ruffianism and avarice, and he kept his dull eye fixed on the little artist with an air of threatening not unmingled with anxiety.

“Good morning,” he said, “Mr. Fairfield; morning, Mr. Goodrick. Well, about these Roobenses. Mr. Cantelupe wants, I hear, to dispute my price, and leaves it to you to arbitrate. I’ve brought Mr. Robinson here, a well-known restorer, to depose to their value. He’s not seen them before, and his judgment will be impartial.”

“Mr. Cantelupe certainly objects, Mr. Bassevi, to the high price originally charged by you for these pictures,” said Fairfield. “Boy, bring them in.”

The three enormous pictures were brought in *seriatim* by two of the clerks, and placed against a bookcase at the further end of the room. Bassevi went up to the first, and ostentatiously removed the green baize that covered it. It was a large, coarse, glossy picture, meretriciously coloured, representing “The Triumph of Bacchus;” the figures podgy and vulgar, the colour detestably hot and overdone.

Fairfield glanced at Goodrick, but the old connoisseur gave no signal of approbation.

The second picture was a “Judgment of Solomon,” equally cumbrous and unfeeling; the third, a Classic Battle.

“There,” said Bassevi, “there’s pictures something like! There’s genius, Robinson! Dirt cheap at two hundred and fifty each. Roobens never did a thing with a bolder hand than that.”

“Bold enough,” growled Goodrick.

“Well, Mr. Robinson, what do you think of these works?” said Fairfield.

The little artist was in a state of nervous excitement, playing with his eye-glass, advancing

and receding to the Rubenses, and touching them with his wet finger in an uncomfortable way, that implied extreme irresolution.

“Now, Robinson, did you ever see Roobenses more worth the money?” said Bassevi. “Ain’t they reglar gems of hart? Look at that woman’s profile! Here’s colour, too, about the flesh of this Bacchy! Now then, my man, tell them what you think.”

“Mr. Bassevi,” said Robinson, slowly and reluctantly, “they’re bold pictures, sir, in a large style; but, to be conscientious, they should be called, not Rubens, but ‘the school of Rubens.’ Excellent imitations of Jordaens, I should term them; their value about ——”

“Fourteen pounds each,” said Goodrick. “To ask more than that is a robbery. They’re mere furniture pictures.”

Bassevi was thunderstruck. His drudge turned against him! his paid adviser faithless. Chaos had come again. He expected a dishonest backing up of everything he said; here was rank mutiny. Fairfield, unable to repress his amusement at the rascal’s discomfiture, burst into a hearty laugh.

Bassevi scowled, grew pale, bit his lips, and flung the baize covering back again over the pictures.

"They're worth all the money I asked," he said, savagely, "and I'll set the lawyers on my young spark; they cost me all I asked."

"Then you'll not take them back?" said Fairfield.

"Certainly not; see you d—— first. I sold them fairly, and I'll have my money."

"What price should you fix on them, Mr. Robinson?" said Beauflower.

Robinson hesitated, and looked deprecatingly at his enraged partner.

"I would rather not say, but certainly more than this gentleman (looking at Mr. Goodrick) suggested—a good deal more."

"But still not half so much as Mr. Bassevi here asked?" said Fairfield.

"Not quite so much. Well, I had rather not mention the sum I should fix. Prices of pictures are fancy prices."

"Mr. Bassevi, we shall fight this question for our client. We refuse to pay you the sum you ask." Fairfield said this firmly. "We will not let our client be plundered."

"Plundered?" shouted the picture dealer. "Take care what you say!"

"Yes, plundered! You ask ten times their price for these pictures of the school of somebody; we refuse to pay it. There!"

"Inferior specimens of the school of Rubens," said Robinson, blandly.

"You old fool, you be quiet," said Bassevi, grasping the poor, meek little man roughly by the arm; "you've said quite enough for one day. We'll go."

"But, Mr. Bassevi, my dear sir," said the little man, deprecatingly, "you asked for my real conscientious opinion, I give it, and now you're annoyed."

"*Your* conscience!" said Bassevi, contemptuously; "*I* like that. You who live by painting copies to be sold as originals! you who paint half Bodger's historical pictures! you talk of conscience! You can't afford one. The fact is, I don't believe you know a Rubens when you see it, and I was a fool to ask your opinion. You'll have no more work from me, old fellow; and as for you, you lawyer, mind I mean to have this money—every penny of it."

So saying, with sundry threats, curses, and adjurations, the amiable picture dealer put on his dirty hat, drove it over his eyes with a violent blow, and strode out of the office, slamming the door furiously behind him.

"That's one of the carrion crows preying on our young spendthrift," said Fairfield to Goodrick; "but he shan't plunder him any more, if I can

help it. And we have to thank you, sir," he said, turning to Robinson, "for your very honest opinion about these pictures."

The little artist seemed very far from elated at the strong approbation he had attained. He blew his nose nervously, looked at the pictures anxiously, shook his head, and turned rather pale.

"It's a very serious thing, gentlemen," he said, "to me. I'm a struggling man, and Mr. Bassevi sends me a good deal of work—portraits to retouch, and old masters to repair, and I'm afraid I've offended him. It'll be a loss of a hundred a year to me."

"If you're useful to him, Mr. Robinson," said Fairfield, "there's no fear he'll leave you."

That comfort was too late. The old artist sank down on to a chair close to the pictures, and sluggish tears stole from his eyes. Then he rose, gathered up his hat and faded umbrella, gave another melancholy glance at the detestable causes of the day's misfortune, wished Fairfield good morning, bowed to Mr. Goodrick, and left the office.

Before he had got to the outer door a hand touched him on the shoulder. It was Mr. Goodrick.

"Mr. Robinson," said he, "call upon me some day; there is my card. I shall have some work

in which you can, perhaps, help me. There, no thanks. I live opposite to you in Buckingham Street. Good day."

Before the artist could turn to thank him, Mr. Goodrick had gone back into the office and closed the door after him with a slam that echoed through the passage.

CHAPTER VI.

THE JOURNEY DOWN.

THE 4.15 train was nearly ready to start from the Waterloo station. A nimble porter was already springing from carriage roof to roof dropping in the lamps, for it would be dark before the train reached Salisbury. The earlier passengers were busy buying the evening papers or the latest magazines ; the later passengers were nervously getting their tickets or seeing to the labelling of their luggage. In a few minutes the bell would ring, the white flag wave, and the train would launch forth swift as a cannon-shot upon its long journey.

Three minutes before the booking-office doors closed, an elderly but alert man, followed by a black servant, passed through to the platform, and made his way to a first-class carriage.

"Tony," he said, looking out of window the moment he had gained the carriage and closed the

door; "see all the luggage in safe—is it all labelled 'Slobury?'"

"Every single one. And have you got all your things, sir? Never mind me. Your umbrella, and your bamboo, and your——"

"Going on?" said the guard. "Take your places. What class are you, my man?—second class. And have you got your ticket? Now, then, my good man, take your seat or you'll be left behind. Where are you for, sir?" (This was addressed to the first-class passenger.)

"Slobury."

"Slobury—right."

Andover,—Basingstoke,—a cluster of red-roofed houses,—a grey arch or two in ruins,—heath, ploughlands, where the rooks stalked about and paced gravely. Gradually wider fields where bleating sheep were penned. Then, as the country grew wilder and villages fewer, the passengers who got in at the quiet stations became redder of face and louder and more provincial in voice. Wideawakes became more popular than hats as the train got nearer to Wiltshire, and country women with bundles were conspicuous features at the station platforms. Sheep and corn seemed the chief subjects of conversation now.

Presently a tall, keen grey spire rose above some rank water meadows that had little gardens sloping

down to them. That was Salisbury. A banging of doors, a clatter of hearty country voices, the jangle of a bell, and again the train dashed forward, eager to reach the borders of Dorsetshire. Then small stations, glimpses of grey ranges of breezy down with calm green meadows below, and solid stone cottages with snug thatched roofs, and elm-shadowed lanes and orchards. Then it grew dark, and the train threaded viaducts and dived into tunnels that were wrapped in a dream-like mystery. A star came out, and sparkled above Slobury, and instantly as it did so, as if in answer, a lamp changed colour at the second arch on the Salisbury side of the town, a bell rang, and the train shot in.

“Slobury! Slobury!” shouted the porter.

“Here, you sir, let me out,” cried the irritable voice of some one tapping violently at the window of a first-class carriage.

The porter wrenched the stiff handle round, and released the irascible passenger.

“Why the d——, man, ain’t you quicker?” said the passenger. “Do you want me to go on to Exeter? Any conveyance here from Summerleas?”

“Not that I know of, sir,” said the porter, rather ruffled by the tone of his interrogator.

“Where the d—— is that Tony?” said Mr.

Goodrick, dragging down from the step of a second class carriage Tony, who, but half awake, had just aroused himself to a sense of his situation. "Here, guard, there's a portmanteau and a hat-box of mine. Tony, you rascal, run and get out the luggage, or I'll pack you off to-morrow morning."

"Would you be kind enough to help me down," said a soft little voice from the darkness of the carriage next to that from which Tony had emerged; "it is so very dark."

The old West Indian was cynical and rough, but he was a gentleman, and he could not resist the appeal of such a voice; so he put out his hand, received a soft little pressure in return, and helped down in the dim light a young lady with the voice whose tones had arrested him.

"I have one square box," she said, "and I'm so afraid they'll take it on. But, I'm so sorry to trouble you."

"No trouble, madam," said Mr. Goodrick. "Here, guard, this lady wants a square box."

"What name?" said the guard impatiently, turning his lantern on the luggage that strewed the platform.

"Robinson."

"Don't see it. Must be left behind. Couldn't have been properly labelled. Can't stay here all night."

“Oh, dear, dear! it's a large, square black box. Indeed it was properly directed. It is very important to me.”

“Tony, you rascal,” said Mr. Goodrick, taking the warmest interest in the subject, “look about for this young lady's box. Get into the van there. Help the porter to look, d' ye hear? Some one of you bring a light.”

When the guard came up and flashed his lamp upon the group, Mr. Goodrick recognised to his infinite surprise and pleasure the face he had seen that morning at the window opposite his own.

“I felt sure I had seen you before,” he said to the young lady. “I live opposite you in Buckingham Street.” Miss Robinson, for there is no need to longer disguise it was Miss Robinson, at once recognised him, and thanked him shyly for the trouble he was taking.

“So, you see I'm a neighbour,” he said pleasantly, and in a way that quite reassured her.

But there was no black box; and the guard, furious at losing five minutes more, and the train already late, slammed the doors of the van, blew his whistle, leaped into his carriage, and the next moment the ruthless train, with a gleam of lamps, disappeared in the darkness.

“Oh, what shall I do?” said the young lady,

wringing her little hands, in the prettiest form of unaffected despair. "What shall I do?"

"I should telegraph to Salisbury, Miss, if I was you," suggested the porter.

"I will see to that," said Mr. Goodrick. "Here, my dear young lady, pray accept an old gentleman's aid. We'll soon recover this box. It has been put out at Salisbury, I dare say. Careless villains."

"Oh, it is so very, very kind of you," said the lady who owned the box.

In a few minutes the telegraph needles at the Slobury station began to tattle, and soon brought back word that the box had been left at Salisbury and should be forwarded by the first train in the morning. Mr. Goodrick, warmly thanked, took his leave.

The porter, sent by the young lady to the Railway Hotel for a fly, soon after brought back word that they had only one fly in, and that was engaged by a gentleman going to Summerleas. If she liked he would go and ask the gentleman to give her a seat. He was an old gentleman, and alone.

As she still stood irresolute and rather forlorn, a fly drove up with gleaming lamps. As it stopped at the station door, a voice called from the window—

“Pray, my dear young lady, accept a seat in my fly. I find we are both going the same way. Tony” (to a servant on the coach box), “get down, sir, directly, and open the door for this lady.”

The young lady stepped in, with warm expressions of thanks, and Mr. Goodrick expressed the pleasure he felt in assisting her. He grew indeed quite gallant on the subject. He seemed charmed by the tones of her voice and her gentle sensible manner. Presently, as the fly toiled up a steep hill out of Slobury, passed through the straggling main street, and emerged into the open country road, Mr. Goodrick became more silent.

“Pray excuse me,” he said to his companion, “if I am silent now. The place I am approaching arouses many old recollections of a dear dead friend. They come upon me faster and faster.”

The young lady made such an answer as amiability and politeness required. She had observed as she sat quietly in one corner of the fly the uncontrollable agitation of the old gentleman.

Every cottage that he passed he gazed after from the window as if he was parting from the dearest of relations; every turn of the road he eyed with curiosity; every path or road that led from it he surveyed as if he was expecting to meet some one at every corner.

Then the road passed by a lodge and went

down hill through a dell thickly shadowed with trees. Presently it grew lighter. They were in Summerleas Park. By the dim light of a moon in her first quarter they could see a lake on which countless wild fowl were stirring, uttering strange calls, sounding rather unearthly at that time of night.

“Stop,” cried Mr. Goodrick to the driver, thrusting his head suddenly out of window. “I’ll walk now for a bit, just to stretch my legs. You drive along after me. Good-bye for a minute or two, my dear young lady—au revoir.”

Shutting the door of the fly as he got out, Mr. Goodrick walked forward at a smart pace, till the shrubberies of a large mansion being past, the Abbey itself, blazing with light, came suddenly into view, looking like a great illuminated vessel at anchor. The cold night air from the lake blew fresh, the dying leaves of the chestnuts rustled above Mr. Goodrick’s head. He stood for a moment gazing at the house, then suddenly he gave a deep groan, and fell forward upon his face on the grass.

There was a scream from the fly, a shout from Tony, and the next moment Tony, in an agony of distress, was bathing his master’s temples with water from the lake.

The young lady, too, had come to his assistance,

and was bending over him. The moonlight was upon her face as Mr. Goodrick, slowly recovering, opened his eyes, and fixed them upon her with an earnest surprise.

“For a moment,” he said, “I thought I was in heaven. Thanks for your aid, my dear young lady. Yes, I felt giddy. I shall be well in a moment. Tony, help me to the fly, I can walk now.” (Then they got in.) “Drive on slowly, coachman. I am afraid I alarmed you,” he said, turning to his companion. “It was a mere giddiness; quite over now. I am so sorry. Driver, go slowly through the lodge gateway.”

“Has your governor ever been here afore?” said the driver to Tony. “I never seed him in these parts. How did he know about a gateway as ain’t in sight. Often taken giddy in that way?”

“Neber been here before,” said Tony. “Speck he guessed most big houses have lodges.”

“Are they all black where you come from?” said the driver, thirsty for information about the dark races.

“All more or less darkish,” said Tony; “the sun been so hot out there for several years now.”

“West Injies or East Injies?”

“West Indies.”

The driver relapsed into silence after this. He would like to have asked if you could get to the

Indies by land, but he was afraid he might be on the wrong track.

“Who lives at that big house we passed?” said Tony.

“That house? Why, Mr. Harker—succeeded to all Squire Staunton’s property—used to be his steward, and no more account than you or me. Bullying sort of man—hard to the poor.”

As he said this the driver gave a vicious cut to his horse as if to visit on him the sins of Harker.

A few minutes more and the fly passed under a great black archway, which echoed as the fly rumbled over the stones beneath it. Then a sharp turn to the right over a little grey bridge under which a brook murmured, and the fly drew up at a garden door. In the moment’s lull of stopping the owls could be heard hooting to each other to the left in the Abbey woods.

“This is the Vicarage, sir,” said the driver, getting down and opening the door of the fly, having first given a wrenching pull at the bell. A moment after a pleasant hearty looking young clergyman came out and greeted Mr. Goodrick.

“My dear sir, how are you? What, and Miss Robinson! and how do you do? Welcome, welcome back to Summerleas.”

“This gentleman, Mr. Beauflower, lives opposite

papa and mamma, and was kind enough to give me a seat in his fly as there was no other at the inn," said Miss Robinson. "How are Mrs. Beauflower and your sister?"

"Very well, thank you—quite well."

"I have been proud to escort so amiable a young lady," said Mr. Goodrick.

The luggage was soon taken down and the flyman paid; Mr. Goodrick lifted his hat with the most approved gallantry of the old school, Mr. Beauflower bowed in his best manner, and the fly drove off to Summerleas Abbey.

"Well, we are delighted to see you at last," said Edward Beauflower; "you're our prisoner at last."

"Ah! you'll be glad to get rid of me. I'm a queer three-cornered sort of person, erratic in my movements, and full of suspicious fancies. Well, and how do you get on?"

"Oh! we go on vegetating here. We have our troubles and our pleasures."

"Tony, take care of that hamper of wine!" said Mr. Goodrick, turning sharp round on Tony, who was struggling along laden with luggage up the the gravel walk that led to the front door of the Parsonage; "always bring my own wine, Beauflower," he said. "Don't like your hot country

sherry and your sweet port. You mustn't let your pride be hurt."

"Well, I did think we could find you a glass of wine," said the clergyman in a slightly vexed voice; "but as you will. I daresay you London club men get particular. We're no great connoisseurs in wine at Summerleas. Mr. Harker's the man for wine."

Beauflower's mother and sister met them at the hall door. The mother, the pleasant old lady, fussy and cheerful, the sister, the handsome sensible girl, somewhat sarcastic, yet really more warm-hearted than she allowed herself to appear. Mr. Goodrick was grandly ceremonious to both ladies.

"You'll have to put up with very humble accommodation in our poor little cōttage," said Mrs. Beauflower; "if it had only been my husband's rectory in Worcestershire, where we had ten bedrooms and——"

"I shall be very comfortable, madam, no doubt. It is the size of the welcome, not the size of the house, I regard."

"Oh! we shall all do our best, mamma, to entertain our distinguished visitor," said Julia Beauflower, with laughing stateliness; "I suppose he does not expect to find a palace."

"That girl's got a temper of her own," thought Goodrick, "I can see."

“Cross old bachelor,” thought Julia, “square-toed and punctilious. I’ll tease him. And yet, I suppose, there’s something nice about him, or Edward would not like him, or ask him down.”

“Very distinguished manners, Mr. Goodrick has,” said Mrs. Beauflower, when she was alone with her daughter, making the tea; “seen very high society, no doubt. I really think he’s rather like Sir John Cripps, my dear, who proposed to me, you know, the day I had accepted your dear papa—just his bow.”

“I like easier manners myself,” said Julia. “Who on earth wants a minuet bow now a days; besides, how he looks at one from under his eyebrows. I feel as if I was being tried for my life.”

“Ah! you’re very young, my dear,” said Mrs. Beauflower, with a dignity that was beyond logic, “you’ll cling to old times, my dear Julia, when you get as old as I am.”

“What a charming little girl that Miss Robinson is,” said Mr. Goodrick, as he sat down to tea in the place of honour, “so simple, so unaffected, so unlike the young ladies of the present day (Miss Beauflower, you must excuse an old cynic), she did not know me, but I recognised her in a moment.”

“You recognised Amy!” exclaimed both the ladies.

“How curious, your knowing Amy Robinson,” said Mr. Beauflower; “well, that is surprising!”

“Yes; she is the daughter of a poor artist and picture restorer who lives opposite me in Buckingham Street, and I got the situation down here for her through a Mr. Thorndyke, a friend of mine, a dealer in curiosities, but the family never knew it; the young lady, however, knew me by sight, at least she recognised me at the station at Slobury.”

“Is the tea as you like it?” said Mrs. Beauflower, in her good-natured, old-fashioned way.

“Quite, thank you, madam; but would you allow me to ring for Tony, he knows how to bake the sort of toast I like. I taught him.”

The ladies looked rather nettled at this, each in her way; but Mr. Goodrick was imperturbable, so Tony was rung for, and the directions given with the utmost nonchalance.

“What a remarkable valet!” said Julia Beauflower, sarcastically.

“Do as you like,” Beauflower said, “never mind my womanfolk, and Julia’s fling at Tony. Don’t you let Julia despotise over you. She is a Semiramis by nature.”

“I a Semiramis!” said Julia, with a toss of her fine head.

“Of course we must fight for our frontiers,”

said Mr. Goodrick ; “ every one in a new place does that, you know, ship or camp, shop or college. All I can say is, that if I am victorious, Miss Beauflower, I will be merciful.”

“ There, Julia ! now you say something pretty,” said Edward Beauflower, passing his cup for a third time, “ promise to be generous in the hour of victory.”

“ I promise nothing,” said Julia, saucily ; “ if the enemy is hard to beat he must expect severity. A city that holds out long must expect to be sacked.”

“ There is likely, mother, to be incessant sparing between Julia and Mr. Goodrick, I can see. They are both keen in seeing other people's follies and inconsistencies, and they are both rather merciless. Ju, you'll die an old maid, now mark my words ! ”

“ At all events, I'll not marry a man without sense,” said Julia. “ Ned, please to ring the bell, not for that horrid black creature, who reminds me of a Thug, but for Mary.”

“ Another fling at Tony, Mr. Goodrick,” said her brother. “ You must put down this tyranny ; Tony shall be protected. Tony is a good Friday.”

“ Horrid creature ! ” said Julia, with a malicious shudder, her pitcher-shaped earrings dancing as she tossed her pretty head, which, bound up

trimly with bands of hair, looked rather Greek in shape, and decidedly intellectual.

Just then a blast of a horn sounded through the village, and there came the rattle and grind of wheels and a shout of wild and rather tipsy laughter.

“Good Heavens, what is that?” said Mrs. Beauflower.

“I feel almost sure that must be some of the Cantelupe party coming back from Codford races,” said Beauflower. “Oh, how fast that young fellow is coming to grief. It’s a pity too, for he’s a generous fellow, if he was in good hands.”

“The sooner he drives to ruin the better, if the drag’s off,” said Mr. Goodrick, bitterly. “That spending money is a form of madness.”

“Oh! he’s not a bad young fellow,” said Beauflower, “not by any means bad; but he’s got into bad hands.”

“Talking of squandering money,” said Mr. Goodrick, “are you ladies judges of jewels? I’ve got a fine opal here that I lately secured, and which I think you will admire.”

“Oh! it is beautiful,” said Julia Beauflower, as she held the opal up to the light, in which it glowed with all its harlequin colours. “It is fit for an empress; just look, mamma!”

“Very beautiful! It reminds me of an emerald old Lady Cantelupe used to wear,” said the old lady. “Ay! what a beautiful woman she was! His Majesty, George the Fourth, once said, ‘if there’s a woman in all England born to be a queen, it is Lady Cantelupe.’”

“Rather a pity to keep it in a cabinet,” said Julia Beauflower; “really it should be one of the Crown jewels.” The old collector was pleased. He warmed the opal, he held it in various directions to evolve its colours. Then he replaced it gravely in the silver box.

“I have,” he said, “one more treasure which I always carry with me from old travelling habits; it is a blue diamond, that once belonged to the Potemkin collection. It cost me four thousand pounds. It is worth ten. It is of the finest water.”

“Oh, do let us see it,” said Julia, her eyes sparkling with curiosity and delight.

Mr. Goodrick opened a small shagreen case, and drew out a large diamond, which from its soft lined case shot out keen rays of light. “There,” said he, “there’s a splendid fellow; shines as lustrous as the Hope diamond, and is not much inferior to the Regent. The Pitt has points of superiority, but the Queen has nothing approaching it except the Koh-i-noor. I have its whole

pedigree from the time it left Brazil. It's known to the Dutch diamond merchants as the Rostopchin diamond, and it was secretly sent to Amsterdam when the French entered Moscow. There, ladies, is what would buy honour, virtue, honesty—anything. Here is the essence of money. See, when I screen it, it shines like a little lamp.'

"Oh, how beautiful!" said the ladies.

"Well, I can go out," said Beauflower, philosophically, "any morning, and look at a tree with dew on it in the sunshine, and enjoy the lustre just as much. The rain-drops sparkle just as well, and I have no fear of losing them, and no power to buy them."

"Wait till you get a pretty wife and want to adorn her," said Goodrick, "then you'll find that women generally prefer diamonds to dewdrops, and would throw you over for any one who could give them most rank, wealth, and flattery. This stone, which weighs twelve carats, is supposed to have been cut from the celebrated blue diamond which was stolen from the French crown. But, Lord! what is this to the Nassuck diamond, which was as big as a walnut and weighed eighty-nine carats!"

"Or the Koh-i-noor," suggested Edward Beauflower.

“ Well, that is nothing to the Maximilian, with its one hundred and thirty-nine carats, or even the Orloff with its one hundred and ninety-three.”

“ Oh ! you rich people, don't talk about these things,” said Julia Beauflower, “ it makes me envious and discontented. I shall say good night now, or I shall be dreaming of diamond-mines and thieves for hours.”

“ Miss Beauflower, you have not the spirit of a true connoisseur,” said Mr. Goodrick, “ the beauty of this diamond is evidently not fully appreciated by you. I was going to tell you about the discovery of an Indian diamond-mine—most singular discovery—but I shall now be silent, just to tax your curiosity.”

“ Oh, do tell me, do !” It was the prettiest entreaty, but the old connoisseur was obdurate.

“ First victory to Mr. Goodrick. Julia, you are defeated.”

Julia was saucily indignant, would not make a second request, and swept out of the room.

CHAPTER VII.

SUMMERLEAS.

SUMMERLEAS was a pleasant little Wiltshire village, nestling confidingly in one of the folds of that long range of wild open moorland that stretches from Stonehenge to the very borders of Dorsetshire. It was a mere cluster of little thatched grey-stone cottages bordering two or three sunken green lanes, that led from the upper Downs to the post town of Fontford. There were sloping fields rising all around the village, with a little fringe of fir plantation here and there, outposts, as it seemed, of Mr. Harker's coverts. There were no buildings of more architectural pretension than labourers' cottages at Summerleas, except a few small shops, a blacksmith's, a gun-maker's, and two farm-houses. On rising ground behind Mr. Beauflower's vicarage, stood the church, a little cruciform building, of a very distant century, with a squat square tower of such extraordinary strength, that it seemed as if

intended as a fortress or shelter against sudden forays, or as a safe store-place for church plate in those times of intestine war that disturbed the reigns of the early Norman kings. Whether its monastic builders really planned it for such purposes we do not know, but certain it is that no mangonel or catapult of the fourteenth century could have made much impression on the massive broadside of that old Wiltshire church tower. Time had, however, done by slow sap what its fiercer onsets had long failed in accomplishing. Long nights of blustering tempest, long winters of bitter frost, furious days of lashing rain, hundreds of years of storm, had at last achieved their tardy victory. The faithful mortar, so long invincible, had at last crumbled out of many of the joints, and a threatening rift on the south side of the tower, just over the little gable of the porch, was now held together by a large rusty X-shaped clamp, that seemed single-handed to be the only mainstay of the old time-worn building, and to alone save it from falling in an avalanche of stones upon the heads of the congregation. Nor was this the only inroad Time had made upon its stubborn old enemy, for at the east end, under the Early English window, an ivy stem, years ago a thin green pliant stalk, harmless and fragile, had wormed its way between the stones

till it had grown as thick as a man's arm, and become part and parcel of the wall it was doomed some day to force, like a crow-bar, inwards. Many influences, indeed, were at work to effect the destruction of that old church (a type in some respects of the Church of England itself) from the winds that raved round it nightly, to the starlings that loosened the spongy moss that bound its tiles together. Dissenter or sceptic, they were both busy at destruction, each after his kind ; while the moths fretted the pulpit-cushion, the dry rot ate into the chancel roof ; and so, imperceptibly, yet surely, the ruin went on.

What a type of English permanence and stability is one of these old country churches, sunk deep amidst the graves which for generations have been rising around it, as generation after generation of ploughmen and shepherds have succumbed, more or less reluctantly, to Death's command, and have been engulfed in Death's garner. Many pass to and fro under that dark yew-tree, but all meet at last under its boding shadow.

"You must really see our little church, Mr. Goodrick," said Mr. Beauflower, the morning after his guest arrived, "and I and Julia will be your cicerones." Clergymen always delight in showing friends over their churches, as much as country

gentlemen do in showing friends over their improvements.

“I’m quite ready,” said Mr. Goodrick, rather enthusiastically for him; “true, I had some letters to write—but they can wait.”

“Oh, pray finish your letters first, Mr. Goodrick,” said Julia, in her hasty way.

“Oh, no; they can wait, Miss Beauflower. I am quite at your service.”

It was a fresh autumn morning. There had been rain in the night, and the sky was clearer and purer for it. A blackbird singing in one of the great elms, was pouring forth notes glowing, mellow, and worthy of spring. The dew was diamonding the laurel and aucuba bushes, and sparkled cold and bright upon the autumn roses round the porch. Just as the vicar, his sister, and guest stepped out upon the lawn, the postman, with his budget slung round him, came striding over the little grey bridge opposite the vicarage.

“Oh, here’s the postman,” cried Julia, and clapped her hands.

The man touched his hat to Mr. Beauflower, as he passed over the bridge; the next moment the housemaid came out with the bag, Beauflower unlocked it with a little brass key he carried in his pocket, and took out three letters, two for his sister and one for himself.

His own was directed in a bold business-like hand. He turned rather pale when he saw it, opened it with nervous haste, and thrust it into his pocket.

“No bad news, Edward?” said Julia.

“No—only a business letter; and who are yours from, Julia?”

“One from that dear Miss Chivers; the other from that stupid dressmaker at Salisbury—she can’t match the Irish poplin; but there, what’s the use of telling you silly men?”

So Julia betook herself to her mother, and the two women plunged into a deep consultation. As they stood there, several of those market-carts covered with barrel-shaped awnings jangled by on their way to Slobury; and from several of these hearty greetings were shouted to the Vicar, who returned them with cheery affability. Next trotted by on a big black cob a thin old farmer with a frosty face and a look of great good-nature mingled with shrewdness.

“How do do, Muster Beauflower?” he shouted in broad Wiltshire. “You’ll be glad to hear wheat’s down again.”

“Glad of it, Mr. Brown. Hope Mrs. Brown is quite well.”

“She’s tidy, thank you. Comes back to-day by the *dree* (three) o’clock train.”

“They’re a nice hearty people down here,” said Mr. Beauflower; “very straightforward and sincere. And now for the church. Julia, bring along our reluctant sight-seer.”

There is always something rather weird and solemn in opening the door of an empty building, and more especially so the door of a church—a vague sort of feeling pervades one that if the door was only thrown open very suddenly one would come on a procession of fairies doing penance, or a witch in ambush, or mass being said by monkish ghosts. But ever as the bolts creak back and the sunshine streams in, the enchantment flies. Ghosts are never to be taken by surprise.

In her Beatrice way, rattled on Julia Beauflower as her brother unlocked the door with a large official-looking key, and the three entered.

“There is a tradition among us clergymen, Mr. Goodrick,” said Beauflower, “that when a rector tolls the bell on induction, the number of times he tolls foretells the number of years he will hold the living.”

“Pooh!” said Goodrick, “I have no belief in any superstitions. Tony, I believe, has some respect still for Obi women; and they used to say he had a fetish, a cockatoo’s feather, and a snake’s head that he very much venerated; but I really believe it was a libel.”

“It is no nonsense ; it’s quite true,” said Julia Beauflower, jealous in the cause of superstition. “There was Uncle Robert at Telford ; he tolled four times. We sat at the vicarage window listening to him and thinking about the belief ; well, he lived only four years and a half.”

“The post hoc, but not the propter hoc—he died after the bell-tolling, but not in consequence.”

“Ah, you have no faith, Mr. Goodrick.”

“No, and least of all in what I see.”

The little church was dusty where it was not damp, and damp where it was not dusty. The matting in the aisles was ragged in places. The few cushions were mouldy. The tables of Commandments and the Creed, painted on one of the walls, were blurred and cob-webbed. The rudely carved doors of the pews were rickety on their hinges. The chancel ceiling was cracked. The stones of the chancel pavement were broken and uneven. The parish was evidently not enthusiastic about church decorations. There was very little of ruined splendour about the building. Even the founder’s tomb against the chancel wall was a mere flat low stone monument, jagged and fretted by time, and without either recumbent figure or inscription. There were no grand alabaster figures there with hands closed in eternal supplication. No Crusaders, with

fixed calm stony faces, submitting with proud patience to their doom—no heraldic blazonry of gold, sable and gules—nothing but that one blank solemn, mysterious, and desolate tomb.

But above it there was a sumptuous modern mural monument supported by small fluted Corinthian pillars of white marble, edged dolefully with black after the old dismal country fashion. It was to the memory of

HERBERT STAUNTON, Esq.,
Of Summerleas Abbey,
For many years M.P. for North Wilts,
Died Nov. 13, 1844. Aged 74, &c. &c.

Then came a long Latin inscription enumerating Mr. Staunton's many virtues, his generosity, benevolence, and public spirit.

"Really an old hunx, as I have heard," said Mr. Beauflower.

"I have heard quite the contrary," said Mr. Goodrick, gravely.

"*You* have heard?"

"Yes. That gentleman's son was my great friend in Jamaica; there is his monument."

Mr. Goodrick pointed as he spoke to a small mean marble slab below the monument first described, on which was the following inscription:—

To the memory of
HERBERT STAUNTON, Esq.,
Who was drowned at sea off the Pearl islands, the 3rd of June, 1830.
Aged 30.

Mr. Goodrick stood contemplating the two monuments, with one hand over his mouth, and he did not speak for several minutes. Then he said,—

“I feel a great interest in this little church, Beauflower. I have heard Staunton describe it so often, when he was talking of the scenes of his boyhood. These open pews in the chancel, that old shaky carved pulpit, the squire’s pew there to the right—they all seem as familiar to me, as if I had known them myself years ago. You know that feeling that sometimes comes over one, as if the place you were in and the people you are talking to for the first time had been known to you before?”

“Oh, yes; isn’t it curious,” said Julia Beauflower. “Why is it?”

“Well, metaphysicians have discovered several grand reasons for it,” said Mr. Goodrick, with a smile; “but none, I fear, that render it much clearer to ordinary people like you and me, Miss Julia. But where’s Beauflower?”

Beauflower had strolled out of the church, and just then stood leaning against the rusty railings of one of those huge prison tombs that disfigure country churchyards. It was the tomb of a former vicar—a Reverend Mr. Bennet, who had died in 1745; it stood near a little side-door leading into the chancel, blocking up one of the

small loop-hole windows. He drew from his breast-pocket the letter the postman had just brought, read it twice over, sighed deeply, and slowly replaced it in its envelope. The letter was a dunning one for money, interest on a sum borrowed many years before at Oxford, at an exorbitant rate of interest. It was a stern, pressing business letter, and not to be evaded.

Mr. Beauflower was not a rich man. The only son of a Wiltshire vicar, he had been sent early to college, and had there had the misfortune to get into a silly fashionable expensive set, whose expenditure he had been obliged to imitate. He had left college encumbered with debt, the interest on which had swallowed up all his ready money. Strict economy alone had enabled him to keep his head above water. He was like one of those men that the cruelty of old times condemned to imprisonment in a room which slowly filled with water, the only escape from which was incessant toil at a pump—a moment's relaxation or despair, and the prisoner was drowned. Just then the sky seemed darkening round the Vicar. Where should he turn for help? Yes, he would write to Fairfield, and get him to appeal to Messrs. Fox and Shekall, and beg for time—a week or two—time to turn round—a respite—till he could get a cheque. Who could he ask for money? Once the

thought flashed across his mind of asking his rich visitor, but that he instantly dismissed. He did not know enough of him. He had no right to ask him. No. He would not ask him, come what might.

Just then a little country cart with a white awning jogged up the road, and stopped at the Vicarage gate. A thickset greasy-looking man in blue jumped out in front, and led the cart up the glebe meadow towards the back door. The meadow lay on the other side of the churchyard wall, and the butcher's eye caught sight of the Vicar as he came up the field. He at once left his cart, and came towards the Vicar, smiling obsequiously, and in a sidling, false way that betokened mischief. The Vicar slightly coloured.

“Good morning, sir. Fine morning, sir.”

“Good morning, Mr. Pitts. Got any beef to-day?”

“Don't kill beef till Saturday, sir.”

“How's business?” This was a fatal question, it gave the opening to the enemy.

“Very slack, very slack; business is desperate bad to be sure. Hardly ever remembers it so bad.”

“Indeed! I'm very sorry to hear that, Mr. Pitts.”

“Well, business is plaguy bad, to be sure, and—

"I beg your pardon, sir," the butcher had taken three steps from the Vicar, he now turned again; the Vicar, too, had turned away, and was almost at the church porch, where Julia was calling him. Mr. Beauflower suspected evil and coloured again.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Pitts, coming close up to the churchyard wall, and speaking in a familiar yet confidential voice which implied a consciousness of power and a certain equality; "but you couldn't oblige me with ten pounds on account? I am going to Salisbury this afternoon; and I've got a heavy sum to pay for sheep to Mr. Harker's bailiff. It would be very acceptable."

The demand was very inopportune, could not have been more inopportune. It was for that reason that pride instantly induced Mr. Beauflower to pay the ten pounds at any sacrifice.

"Wait a moment," he said, "and I'll get you the money. I meant to have paid you before."

The butcher had not expected to get the money. It was merely what he called "a try on." He was pleased, and could not help showing it offensively.

Mr. Beauflower, as he walked to his vicarage side by side with the butcher, reflected with what cruel virulence such a man as Pitts would spread

the report of his want of ready money; dwelling to the servants at every house at which he stopped on his fears that the Vicar was "coming to grief," and lamenting how hard it was to get any money out of him.

"Next week would do," Pitts, with a rather coarse kind of good nature, said, as they walked together, Mr. Beauflower silent and pre-occupied. "Should be sorry to put you to any inconvenience, sir; your money's always good, though the bill has been running six months over. I no doubt could scrape up money enough. Every one is short of ready money sometimes. If it is more convenient next week."

"It is not at all inconvenient to-day. I would rather pay you now; the bill has stood already longer than I intended."

The proud, sensitive man in that three minutes' walk suffered more than a man bound by Indians and waiting to be scalped. The butcher's pity was hard to bear; he had no doubt heard from the Slobury baker and the Bibury brewer, perhaps that very morning, that money was hard to get at Summerleas Vicarage.

The butcher, with many apologies for his boots, clumped into the Vicar's study, received the ten sovereigns, gave a receipt with much patronising solemnity, and pocketed it with much inward

chuckling. How people talked ; the Vicar paid readily enough, he only wanted pressing, it seemed. He should report that to-night at the Peal of Bells.

As he took up his hat, and left with many thanks, Mr. Beauflower rested his head on his hand, and, as he locked his desk, said to himself :

“Yes, it is a hard struggle, but I will ask Mr. Harker to advance that money. He is a vulgar, purse-proud man, but he will not refuse, for it is a small sum, and the security is good. I shall treat it lightly, as a mere momentary convenience, a mere saving of time ; he will take it as a man of the world does such things, and refuse at once or consent graciously.”

Comforted with this hopeful view of things, Beauflower rejoined Mr. Goodrick and his sister. Julia was eager to communicate the last atrocity of her new enemy.

“Oh, Ned, only think what this dreadful person says ; he declares that travelling is pleasant, only because it changes one's annoyances.”

“Well, and is not that a sufficient motive for travelling, my fair enemy?” said Mr. Goodrick, resolutely.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEW MONEY.

WHEN Amy Robinson's fly drove up the long winding road leading to Summerleas Abbey it became, before it had gone half a hundred yards from the spot where Mr. Goodrick fainted, entangled in a string of carriages forming a procession which had evidently one common purpose. There was an evening party, that was evident; the gravel crunched and ground under the innumerable wheels that came faster and faster; lamps gleamed on the glossy leaves of the arbutuses and laurels in the shrubberies, and, as the long line of vehicles every now and then halted (there being occasionally a dead lock, indicated by the signal hand of the footmen, who watched the interests of the coachmen in a sort of temporary first lieutenant capacity), there came from the carriages in the immediate vicinity of the little governess the sound of cheery and merry talking; she caught glimpses, too, did our little

Cinderella, of bright necklaces glittering head-dresses and spangled fans, and of white-gloved hands resting on window-ledges. Dignified and portly members for the county and justices of the peace displayed large surfaces of white waist-coat and placid faces, epicurean, contented, and slightly selfish.

“Dear me, how very unfortunate,” thought Amy, “just to arrive the very evening of a party. How can I creep in unobserved? Oh, how I wish I was a mouse, and could slip between people’s feet, and get up to my own bedroom, where that kind creature, Mrs. Spelman, the housekeeper, would get me some tea.”

But there was no such lucky chance. Remorselessly, just after Lord Mazagan’s carriage, the Slobury flyman, careless of appearances, drove stolidly forward under the huge Grecian portico, to the indignation of three conspicuous footmen in light drab livery and crimson breeches. Contemptuously one of them threw open the door, and, seeing who it was, merely said, “Oh, it’s you, Miss,” in an injured way received one or two of Miss Robinson’s small parcels, then hurried off to help a large party of ladies out of a stylish close carriage that just then drove up.

“Allow me,” said a stalwart young fellow, with a handsome flighty expression, who had just

alighted from a brougham, and helped Amy to descend.

Amy bowed, and, paying the driver, was about to hurry in, feeling what an incongruous figure she was among all the grand people in full dress.

"Here, this won't do, Miss," said the driver, cruelly seizing his opportunity. "What's this? What, one shilling for three miles?"

"You've been paid at the Vicarage," said Amy, almost crying with vexation, for the footman and the young man were both listening. "I need not give you anything; that gentleman, indeed, told me not by any means to give you anything."

"He be blowed," said the driver; "I drives two fares reg'lar dree miles; two fares when I was only hired for one; I expect my three bob."

"Now then, move on, flyman, you're keeping several carriages waiting; no wrangling here, the lady has paid you."

"Lady arn't paid me, and I don't go till she does," said the fellow, who had been drinking; "who are you, I'd like to know, turning up your nose at an honest man than ever wore plush? Though I do drive a fly, I'm not going to be put upon either by you or your master."

"You fellow, move off," said one of the footmen before alluded to; "come! or we'll have you took up."

“I'll have you taken down ; you don't think I care two straws for you or your master either—we all know him. He was a servant once himself, we all know that. What right has he to be proud ? He's only a hupstart. Who are you a-moving on ?”

“Oh, pray give him this,” said Amy to one of the footmen, trembling with horror at the scene that had ensued. It was half-a-crown.

The gentleman interfered. “No,” he said, “by Jove, no, the fellow shan't have anything.”

Then he stepped up, six foot of him, to the driver, who still continued his objurgations. “If you don't get on your box, and shut up, you fellow,” he said, “and drive off directly, by Jove, sir, I'll make you ; you shan't insult this lady—you'd better think twice about it. I hit rather hard, they tell me, from the shoulder.”

The man eyed his antagonist from top to toe, then sullenly got up on the box, and submitted to his audience that perhaps two shillings wouldn't hurt the young lady.

The officer took out a shilling, and gave it the man. Then the fly drove away, Amy stopped for a moment to thank her champion, and then glided away up stairs.

“How do you like that girl ?” said the champion to a friend still more flighty than himself ; “governess, I suppose ?”

“Rather like her,” said the friend; “but no go about her—looks like a milliner; hasn’t two ideas, I should say—not my style. Will be awful slow to-night here. I wish we’d kept at loo. What sort of a fellow is Harker—a cad?”

“Well, rather a cad, but he lends a fellow tin, and doesn’t press a fellow; old bird wants me to marry her daughter—lots of mopuses, but I don’t seem to see it. Suppose you have her, Jack?”

“Thank you; won’t deprive you of such a chance. I say, Cantelupe, I wish we could have a smoke without smelling of it; by George, wouldn’t you like a smoke?”

“Rather.”

Two ladies met Amy on the stairs. The elder stout, with large, hard features, and hard, cunning eyes; the younger, bony, shrill-voiced, rather red in the nose, and much over-dressed. It was Mrs. Harker, and the eldest Miss Harker.

“What, Miss Robinson!” they both exclaimed; “why when did you return? Oh, how fortunate; for we want you to play while the charades are doing. You’re not tired?”

“Oh, not at all; only a little headache,” said Amy, with a slight shudder; “and that will soon go off with some eau de Cologne.”

“Mr. Harker thought it hardly worth while having a professional, besides we felt sure you would

come. Ah! you missed the carriage—really, the servants were too busy. We felt you would be sure to get a fly. You won't be long dressing—will you?"

Amy said she would not.

"Spelman will bring you a cup of tea and a biscuit, and you'll dress and be down directly. Father and mother well, I hope?"

Poor Amy! They had no heart for her fatigue.

"Hope you enjoyed your holidays, Miss Robinson?" said Mrs. Harker.

"It was a short time, and it passed very quick; but, yes, I enjoyed it very much."

"And come back, I trust, with renewed vigour to your duty?" said Mrs. Harker, with a high moral tone.

"I'm come back quite happy to do my duty," said Amy. "Can I see Ethel?"

"Ethel is down stairs; I'll tell her you're come," said Mrs. Harker, as she swept out of the room, followed by the thin daughter in blue.

Presently Ethel burst into the room, a hearty, pretty girl of fourteen, her warm toned brown hair streaming down her back. She was delighted to see Amy, and, holding her hands, loaded her with boisterous kisses, laughing all the while; she was full of news. Mamma had got a pony to match the cream-coloured one;

the medlars were ripe; the Beauflowes were expecting a visitor; there was to be such fun with the charades; old Bennet's son had been taken up for poaching.

Amy listened with interest.

“And they say, too, Mr. Beauflower's going to marry one of the Miss Stillwells of Compton-Deverill?”

“What! one of those horrid gaunt girls? Well, I don't admire his taste.”

“And that is all you have to say, Amy? Why, I thought you would be vexed?”

“Why should I?”

“Oh, I don't know?” said the laughing girl, “if you don't; but he has beautiful eyes—hasn't he?”

“Really, Ethel, I never studied them.”

“Ah, but they are bright, now, ain't they?”

“Ethel, you goose, don't talk such nonsense.”

“Well, I won't ever marry any one, no, that I won't, who has not got black (Oh, such very black) hair, and blue (Oh, such blue) eyes, like Mr. Beauflower's; he must be a general or a prince, and ——”

“Ethel, what spirits you're in to-night; I see you want me back to keep you in order, you little scatterbrains. Now, dear, run down and ask Mrs. Spelman to send up me a cup of tea; I'm so tired and thirsty.”

Ethel ran off like a lapwing. The housekeeper, a cosy, fussy old body, came up with it herself.

"Why, my dear child?" she said; "I am so glad to see you back; and how were papa and mamma, bonny? But you look pale, dear: now you ought to go to bed, and not sit up any more—ought n't she, Miss Ethel? Is the tea nice? I made it myself; and there's a piece of thin toast coming, it not being good to drink alone, as Lady Blanche used to say. My dear, we've been so successful with the preserves. What, you're not going down again to-night?"

"I must."

"Well, that's too bad. My dear, you ain't fit for it. You look quite worn. Doesn't she, Miss Ethel?"

"Oh, it's cruel, very cruel, of mamma," said Ethel.

Poor Amy!—in a few minutes she had dressed, and was down in the drawing-room. Quietly she threaded her way to the piano, unnoticed, and waited there till the first charade was ready. In the meantime Mrs. Harker had given her directions when to begin and what to play.

The room was very hot where she stood, and the crowd was great. They pressed closer round her. Her head began to swim. Just then Mrs. Harker fixed her stern, steely eye upon her as the

signal to play the accompaniment to the first charade. Suddenly her head sank—there was a crash upon the keys. Poor Amy Robinson had fainted.

“Who is it?—what is it?” everybody cried, straining their necks to see—even the charade performers broke up the scene and crowded forward.

“Was there ever anything so provoking?” said Mrs. Harker, in her dry, unrelenting way.

“What is all this about?” said a coarse, blustering voice, as a man pushed his way through the crowd in an authoritative way; “why don’t the charades go on? good gracious me, why doesn’t the performance proceed?”

It was Mr. Harker who, pompously making his way through the ring of spectators that surrounded the fainting girl, scowled angrily when he discovered the cause of the confusion, and saw Amy Robinson pale as a corpse being supported by two ladies, while the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe, who had manifested great anxiety on her behalf, was emerging from the opposite side of the ring with a doctor whom he had been to seek in some other part of the room. The medical man felt Amy’s pulse.

“Mere fainting fit, Briscoe, I suppose?” said Mr. Harker.

“Yes; she will soon recover, it is only fatigue;

but she must not remain any longer in the hot room."

"She must come back presently. We rather want her services at the piano."

"No ; she really must not try to play to-night again," said Dr. Briscoe, somewhat drily, for he saw at once the coarse unfeeling nature of the man he addressed, yet did not wish to irritate him. Then he turned to Amy, who was slowly recovering, and looked alarmed and distressed at being the centre of a crowd of staring spectators. "Do you feel better, Miss Robinson ?" He said this in a gentle and friendly tone.

"Oh, yes, Dr. Briscoe, I'm much better, thank you."

"I'm awfully sorry to see you so ill," said Mr. Cantelupe.

Just then Miss Harker appeared on the scene smilingly ferocious at the interruption of the evening, at the interest exhibited by young Cantelupe, and at a governess daring to break down in health at the very moment her services were specially needed.

"You'd better get into the fresh air," she said to Amy, in a sardonic whisper ; "you're quite well now."

Dr. Briscoe offered Amy his arm, which she accepted.

“It’s a doosed deal too bad treating the poor girl that way,” thought Cantelupe. “I’m sure from her look the old bird has been bullying her.”

Amy quite recovered in the cooler air of the hall.

“I must not leave you,” Dr. Briscoe said, “my dear Miss Robinson, till you tell me you feel quite yourself. Did the heat oppress you? Did you feel fatigued?”

“I only came back from London this evening,” said Amy, in her gentle, uncomplaining way, “and I suppose the journey tired me. I did not feel anything till the moment I began to play.”

“Mrs. Harker is a severe disciplinarian,” said the doctor, smilingly; “and, like most hardy persons, has a way of almost resenting any one about her being ill. Pardon me, as a friend, dear Miss Robinson, if I beg you not to over-work. Take plenty of exercise and oxygenate the blood on those grand broad downs of ours.”

“And how is she now, Doctor?” said Miss Harker, who came gliding between the scagliola pillars like the ghost of somebody’s youth, and looking harder and sterner than ever.

“Oh! I’m quite well again, thank you,” said Amy.

“Yes? then you’ll play for us presently? I don’t like asking Mrs. Grafton to play *all* the

charades in, though she is such a dear, good-natured creature."

"Oh! I certainly will try," said Amy, with rather a quavering voice.

"No; come, on that I put my decided veto," said the doctor, buttoning his coat fiercely over his breast. "Miss Robinson must not play again to-night!"

"But, Dr. Briscoe, do let me!"

"You do not enter that room again to-night," said the doctor, firmly.

"Why, Dr. Briscoe, you are quite a tyrant!" said Miss Harker, sarcastically. "You must think women are very poor weak creatures. Fainting is nothing—why everyone faints."

"I mean to be a tyrant in this case. Miss Robinson must not play again to-night. She is tired with her journey."

Mrs. Harker just then appeared inquiringly at the door of the drawing-room, glanced round the hall, then darted on the group.

"Miss Robinson," she said, "I'm so sorry, but you really must come and take the piano, if you are better, for Mrs. Grafton is getting tired. You are quite well now, my dear—come! Good gracious me, what are girls made of now to think so much of a little faintness! Why, when I was young, if I'd made so much fuss as you have, I

should never have heard the last of it. Come, girl!"

"I must really enter my protest," said the old doctor, firmly.

"Oh, nonsense, doctor! I insist upon it. We can't get on at all without musical introductions; and one can't ask one's own guests to play the piano all the evening. Mr. Harker is very much put out about this delay. He is such a business man."

"I will go at once. I'm sure I shall not feel ill again," said Amy, but with rather a piteous look—a look that would have softened any heart but Mrs. Harker's.

"Well, I can only continue my protest," said the doctor, looking down sternly at his boots. "You are in your own house, Mrs. Harker, but I must be pardoned for saying that I think you are displaying a decided want of feeling in thus pressing Miss Robinson to do what may be injurious to her, and if any illness ensue from her disobedience to my wishes as a medical man, I shall certainly lay those results at your door."

Mrs. Harker only shrugged her shoulders, laughed in a hard, metallic way, and smiled at her cast-steel daughter.

"Oh! I will answer for the consequences, Doctor Briscoe. There will be no second scene, I feel sure, Miss Robinson, I see you are now convalescent.

I shall feel much obliged by the young lady resuming her seat at the piano!"

"Stuff and nonsense," she said to her daughter, as they returned to the drawing-room, "people are better for rousing—that girl is a mass of affectation. She is as artful as she can be. As for Doctor Briscoe, he had better remember that there are other medical men in Wiltshire. He is evidently getting on, or he couldn't afford to be so independent. Pretty pass governesses are come to! We shall have scullery maids fainting next, and footmen going to bed when they have a headache. A pretty pass indeed!—and the salary we pay her!"

Poor Amy! she braced herself to the effort, walked boldly to the place of torture, and began to play.

"If that girl dares to faint again," Mr. Harker said in a whisper to his wife, as he watched Amy with the look of a detective, "I'll give her notice to-morrow; I will have my money's worth out of those I employ. No cats here that don't catch mice. How badly she plays—no vigour about it at all. Go and tell her to be lively or she shall hear of this to-morrow. A governess, indeed, give herself airs! Well, I'm sure! Still, at all events, she saves a band!"

"What a charming girl your governess is," said

Lord Mazagan, at the same moment to Mrs. Harker, as the fourth charade began; "and what taste she has in playing! She must be a great acquisition to your daughter."

"She sadly wants manner," said Mrs. Harker, drily; "and her French is very imperfect. We are not altogether satisfied; but we might do worse. You know manner is of *such* importance. I only wish we could have got Lady Clackleton's governess, she was a treasure—four languages—harp, piano, and teaches drawing!—always cheerful, only asks thirty pounds the year; and never cares about going out of doors, being subject to lumbago."

"Dear me, *what* a treasure! But then, Lady Clackleton is a person of great tact—such wonderful tact. The governess, I hear, has a son who was a Mormon and an advertising tailor, and that prevents her asking more. People did not like a governess with a Mormon son who was an advertising tailor, so they made her change her name."

Dr. Briscoe left the Abbey that night secretly furious at the Harkers' vulgarity and cruelty.

"The air positively smells of money; and everything so bran new, and so vulgarly and ostentatiously costly. *Oh!* that Mrs. Harker, she is a Tartar," he thought to himself as he drove home.

‘She has no more heart than a fossil fish; and is trying to hook that young fool for her daughter! I do firmly believe she would have seen that nice gentle girl drop dead at the piano, and only have been vexed then that the party should be interrupted. Well, give me the old money: and that Harker, too, is not a happy man, I’m sure, with all his wealth. If I was a young fellow now, be hanged if I would not propose to that Miss Robinson to-morrow. That is the sort of girl to make a good wife—no nonsensical affectation about her!’

CHAPTER IX.

RIDING TO COVERT.

IT was a pleasant autumn morning, and Summerleas looked at its best. The trees in the clear sunshine were like huge bouquets, with their varicoloured leaves. There was the squirrel playing graceful antics on the large beech-tree that hung over the Abbey park wall opposite the Vicarage; his gambols expressed all the fun of fairyland, and all a child's delight in mere existence. The sounds from the fields and farmyards; the defiant crow of the monarch of the dung-hill, the chuckling grunt of the pigs, the neigh of the horses, the grotesque laughter of the turkeys, —all blended into a sort of pastoral symphony, expressive of quiet country happiness. Such unconscious concerts only reach certain favoured ears. Nature, lavish of skyey splendours, aërial music, and a thousand such innocent delights, is careless of audience and of spectators. For her great theatre the old scenes are every

spring repainted. Constant in her love for the old enchantments, infinitely varied, infinitely monotonous are her wonders, the dawn's roses to-day kindled and glowed with the same tint which once flushed over Eden, and to youth and happiness, to-day they seemed as beautiful.

Nothing could be more calmly cheerful than the little Wiltshire village. Every now and then the sound of a gun-shot rung through the Abbey woods. The keepers were out ferreting, plough-boys were shouting to each other from the high fields towards the Downs, and from the Vicarage lawn their teams could be seen pacing down the long dark furrows. Every now and then a white-awned market-cart jogged over the little grey bridge. The roads were hard and dry with the cold north wind, and over them little gusts of dead beech leaves now and then rustled wildly, as if in search of the parent tree that had cast them off to seek their fortunes. A thrush on the highest airy twig of a big elm, from which the leaves drifted in soft golden rain before the wind, mistaking the season, began to flute his longings for spring. In such places one forgets that great cities exist, as one forgets the great restless sea that once vexed its heart out upon the white cliffs that are now downs. Swift the cloud shadows passed along the white roads; a few minutes ago

they were miles away upon the Downs, and now they are crossing the Abbey Park, on their way to catch the 9.30 express train at Slobury. Sounds for the ear, light for the eye ; the morning brought in countless innocent delights for those who loved the simple pleasures of the country.

The Vicarage looked very pleasant in the autumn sunlight. It was a square solid building of grey stone, which the grey and orange blots of lichen had crusted with a mottle of grave warm tints, brightened round the basement and under the drawing-room window by the crimson berries of some dark netting evergreen.

Nature, to the pictorial eye, had "carried through" a gay colour, as Mr. Robinson would have said, first by the great scarlet bunches of berries on a feathery mountain ash that grew by the garden-gate, and secondly by the red drops on a thorn tree that guarded a side-walk. The long roof of cosy thatch gave the house the look of an ark, and an air of comfort and shelter that no red-scaled armour of tiles or hard blue mosaic of slates could ever have conveyed. In front of the little green stage of lawn rose a thick bushy hedge of box ; beyond and over that the eye passed readily to the little grey bridge, the straight road on into Dorsetshire and the side road to the left leading to the great archway that opened into Mr. Harker's

park ; just beyond, a by-path led to some poor people's houses ; while to the right there flowed a brook well tenanted by trout of fair size and excellent flavour.

Mr. Beauflower and his guest were out for a walk in one of the high fields at the back of Brown's Farm. All round them spread green acres of turnips and bristly acres of stubble, as far as the fir plantations on the opposite side of the village ; and from one spot they could see the great archway, built from a design of Inigo Jones by the first Squire Staunton about 1750. It looked from there like the gateway of a toy-house. Turning your back to that, you saw, about a mile away, the long blue waves of the Upper Downs, crested here and there with fir covert. A slight frost lay in a silvery curd upon the broad turnip leaves, on the flakes of the fir trees, and on the blades of the rank grass in the dark shadows under the hedges. They put up some partridges as they walked towards a bridle road that led close to some bean stacks on high ground commanding a fine view of the Downs.

As they stood there enjoying the landscape, they saw some hounds and two whippers-in pass through the gateway, and turn towards the Downs and the road to Winterbourne.

“ That is another form of folly,” said Mr. Good-

rick, in his dry, bitter way, "inventing an excuse for mad riding and injuring one's tenants' land. If I was a farmer, I would dig pit-falls for the fools—ugh!"

"Well, now, I don't go as far as you do," said his companion. "In moderation, I hold hunting to be a fine manly exercise—quite a training in hardihood for our country gentlemen; it braces the nerves, and teaches promptitude, *sangfroid*, and presence of mind. I was fond of it before I took orders, and I confess my heart beats faster even now at the sight of a scarlet coat; but who are these two coming? Why, it's Dr. Briscoe, I declare, giving himself a holiday, and young Cantelupe. The meet to-day is at Winterbourne."

In a minute or two more the horsemen rode up. Dr. Briscoe was on a safe cobby horse, fit for his age and weight, and Cantelupe bestrode a superb hundred-guinea bay hunter that seemed to disdain keeping pace with his humbler companion. They stopped and greeted the young Vicar.

"We had quite a scene last night at the Abbey," said the Doctor. "That nice little girl, Amy Robinson, fainted at the piano. She was tired, just come in from a journey, and that old Turk, Mrs. Harker, would make her play the

openings to some charades in the most crowded corner of the room. A good, brave little creature she is."

"It was an infernal shame, by Jove," said the young Honourable, and quite earnestly for him. "People ought to have hissed. Awful shame! She is really a charming girl! I know a fellow who's awful spoons on her."

Mr. Beauflower was much interested, but rather vexed—he hardly knew why, at the young spendthrift's expressions of sympathy.

"It was a monstrous shame," he said, "but that Mrs. Harker, with some good qualities, is as hard as the nether mill-stone. She has no mercy. I am going to the Abbey to-day, and I shall see if Miss Robinson is better."

"I gave it her well," said the Doctor, laughing. "O, I told her a bit of my mind. She ought to have married a slave-driver. She thinks every one is cast iron, like herself."

"Have a cigar, Beauflower," said the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe. "You'll find this a first-rate weed; imported direct for me."

"I have given up smoking."

"The deuce you have! Oh, I could never do without my smoke; but I've limited myself now, old fellow, to fourteen a day. What do you think of my new horse? Gave a hundred sovs. for him

last week to Lord Doddlington. He takes his fences like a bird."

"A beautiful creature," said Cantelupe's quondam tutor; "but a large price."

"A pot of money; but you must give a pot if you want to show the way across country. Can't get the real thing cheap, and, after all, what is a hundred? But I must push on; I shall be late. By-bye. Do you remember how rusty you used to cut up when I wanted to go out with the hounds when I was with you, Beauflower?"

"I remember very well that I tried to make a sensible fellow of you."

"Couldn't be done. Never could sap over work much; but put me on a horse, and give me a steady forty minutes' burst, and I bet you a fiver I'm there or thereabouts. What good did Greek plays ever do me?"

"Not much help across country, I fear," said Mr. Beauflower, smiling.

"Do you want to know the horse to put money on for the next Derby?" said Cantelupe, half in fun.

"Not in my way, thank you. What is your favourite horse called?"

Cantelupe turned round in his saddle as if to make sure there were no listeners, then enunciated mysteriously the odd word "Immenschikoff." He

then winked violently, blew his cigar into almost a flame, and rode sharply towards the covert. The Doctor stayed behind for a moment's further talk.

"That's a nice specimen of Young England," said Mr. Goodrick, contemptuously.

"He is weak," said the Vicar, "but he does not mean bad. He is generous, too, in a foolish sort of way, and the people about here like him. Poor fellow, he's getting through his property as fast as he can. His last purchase was a performing pony that comes on the table after dinner. He's building a yacht, too, that is to be the finest in the world."

"I thought, Beauflower," said the Doctor, after a moment's pause, "that that young scatterbrains seemed rather enthusiastically earnest about Miss Robinson. Is he touched in that quarter, do you think?"

Beauflower coloured. He felt that he did, and was angry with himself that he did so.

Why should he blush? He was not in love with Amy Robinson. He admired her, as he did and had done one-third of the marriageable daughters in the neighbourhood, but he had never spoken to her much. She had manifested no liking for him either. Then why should he colour? He hardly knew, but still colour he did. He knew it as well as if he had seen his cheeks glow

crimson in a looking-glass. He felt he must do something, however, to hide his assumption rather than betrayal of feeling, so he said, rather abruptly,

“Oh, there’s nothing of that kind. You’ll have a nice day for hunting, Doctor ; the scent will lie well.”

“Yes, I think we shall have a run to-day, though I ought to be on my rounds ; I must be off, or I shan’t catch up Cantelupe. Good-bye! Adieu! I can’t see why on earth shouldn’t you clergymen hunt sometimes, and enjoy yourselves,” and he rode off laughing.

“I want to take you, Mr. Goodrick, to see Harker’s pictures, jewels and cameos ; he has a fine collection,” said Beauflower.

“Seen almost enough pictures ; but still I don’t care about going.”

Beauflower was nettled.

“Oh, there’s no compulsion, you know,” he replied, laughing ; “this is Liberty Hall.”

“Oh, I don’t mean it is any hardship, but I suppose Harker’s is only a third-rate collection ?”

Beauflower at once took up arms for the local collection.

“It is thought a first-rate collection by the judges,” he said ; “there is a splendid Raphael, and some superb Claudes.”

“Don’t care much about Claude. Often

insipid and artificial. What sort of a man, then, was that late Mr. Staunton ?”

“What, the young man who was drowned ?”

“No ; the father—the millionaire.”

“Oh, an eccentric man, who quarrelled with half the county, built seven miles of park wall to keep out the poachers and fox-hunters, and ended his days a recluse, and a collector who never received friends nor shared any friend's hospitality. He left all his English property to his steward, this Mr. Harker. The son, early in life, had married clandestinely and imprudently some poor girl, and his father threw him off from that time. Some say this Mr. Harker fomented the quarrel and prevented the father and son from ever being reconciled. People delight in repeating ill-natured stories ; for my own part I do not credit the calumnies. The fact, I believe, is, he made himself indispensable to the old man, just as those sort of people do.”

Mr. Goodrick listened with the deepest interest.

“I have heard,” he said, “of his building the great Belvidere, and making the men work night and day, and even on Sundays. My friend Staunton used so often to talk of his father that I have always felt a curiosity to see the place.”

“No, that was the grandfather who built the tower—an old city alderman, Wilkes' great

friend. He left his son, the recluse, the disappointed man whose money Mr. Harker got, one hundred thousand a year, and a million ready money. Only imagine! It seems incredible to a poor man like myself. It is an Atlantic of gold!"

Just then a boy came running towards them from the village.

"I wonder what this boy wants?" said Beauflower; "it is one of Mr. Harker's stable boys." The boy came up panting. "Well, boy, what do you want?"

"If you please, sir, old Mrs. Flower has been taken worse, and she'd be glad if you'd look in. Doctor Briscoe says she won't live over the night. She's quite insensible. I'm going to Fontford for medicine now, sir."

"Tell her I'll be there in about an hour." Then Mr. Beauflower, wishing his friend good-bye, started at once for the Abbey. That morning he would not choose for introducing his friend, it was to be devoted to a very different purpose. He must get money somewhere, whatever the mortification.

CHAPTER X.

THE HEAD KEEPER.

JULIA BEAUFLOWER ran out, tearful and indignant, as she saw her brother approaching. Her eyes, from which the tears distilled, shot also angry glances. She held the little Skye terrier in her arms.

“Oh, Ned! Oh, Ned!” she cried, kissing the whimpering dog at every other word, “one of those cruel keepers has just shot at Wasp and hit it in the leg. How cruel it is of them; they shoot at everything. If I was a man and had seen this wretch fire, I’d have struck him, that I would.”

Beauflower was angry, but in a less demonstrative way. He would, he said, complain to the head keeper about it as he went to the Abbey. If the head keeper was uncivil he would speak to Mr. Harker himself; he was sure he never encouraged the men in these things. The dog was not dangerously hurt; the leg bone was not broken, and the shot could be picked out.

Old Mrs. Beauflower was inconsolable.

“Cruel, bad fellows,” she said, “how could they shoot a poor inoffensive creature like that. Poor little Wapsy, did it hurt it dreadful?”

Then the worthy old lady plunged into traditional surgery, and proposed bandages of dock-leaves steeped in vinegar. “Your dear papa, Julia,” she said, “always thought me very clever as a doctress, and no one could bandage as I could. To-morrow we’ll try a snail poultice, it is an invaluable remedy, my dear.”

“It is too bad,” said the Vicar; “that Travers is a great tyrant. He makes the men do these things, but I’ll give him a lesson; I know he can’t bear complaints reaching Mr. Harker. A man who would do this cannot come to good. Poor little Wasp, chasing a rabbit, perhaps, just outside our garden hedge, and unable to catch it to begin with.”

“And if it did,” said Julia, angrily, “haven’t they millions of rabbits! Poor, dear Wasp!” and here she again fondled the wounded dog.

“I’ll go at once,” said the Vicar, “and see to this; it is too bad. I’ll stop this man’s insolence. He shall not do this with impunity.”

“Now don’t be rash, my dear Edward,” said his mother; but the Vicar’s blood was up, and off he strode.

At the lodge he saw the keeper’s boy rubbing a

gun barrel. He went up at once and asked if Mr. Travers was in. The boy said he was, and ran to call him. Travers came out presently, a tall, gaunt man, with long, tough, muscular limbs, and a bullying, blustering manner, which he could sometimes mask with a spurious joviality.

“Well, Mr. Beauflower, sir, how are you?” he said, in a careless, half-conscious way; “what can I do for you, sir?”

“Good morning, Mr. Travers,” said the young Vicar, drily. “I have come on rather an unpleasant business.”

“Oh! and what may that be?” said the keeper, shoving his hands deep down in his shooting jacket's pockets. “You've heard that mother's taken bad again?”

“Yes; I'm going to see her presently. I've thought her not so well for a long time. The business I've come upon is this. One of your men has just shot and wounded my sister's little terrier. You know Wasp? Now it is really too bad; the dog is a harmless little thing.”

The keeper's brow gloomed.

“I'm not accountable,” he said, “for all my men do; young hands, always coming fresh. They'd no directions from me, except to kill all dogs found poaching in Mr. Harker's coverts.”

“The dog was wounded in our own meadow,

Mr. Travers ; he could not have gone far with his wounded leg."

"I don't know how far he could have got," said the keeper, insolently ; "all I know, Mr. Beauflower, is that I gave no directions for shooting the dog. I'm not accountable for every poaching dog my men shoot in the woods."

"If you gave no orders to shoot this dog," said the Vicar, persistently, "I wish you to find out who did shoot him, for I tell you before your face it is a cowardly piece of cruelty, and one I will not submit to from the keepers of even the richest nobleman in England. If you refuse to make the inquiry your master shall hear of it."

The keeper made no reply for a moment, but, taking a shot pouch from his pocket clicked the spring insolently.

"I tell you again," he said, "I gave no orders. What use is asking the men? They'll only deny it, and then you'll lay it to me. I get all the blame for whatever the pack of skulking rascals do. It's not my fault if I can't get good men."

"Then you refuse to ask them?"

"I shan't trouble myself about a stray dog or so. I know what my master wishes."

"Then," said Beauflower, firmly, "there is but one remedy ; I shall appeal to your master. We'll soon see what he will say."

“You can do just as you like, Muster Beauflower. If that’s your remedy, try it. I’m not going to get my men in trouble about such a thing as a dog. You’re not going to whistle me out of my place, I tell you ; I’m too firm in my seat to be shaken out by you or any one like you. You’ve complained of me before. Oh, I remember these things.”

The Vicar for a moment looked as if he would have struck the brute to the ground. “I thought he was going to,” Travers said to himself afterwards ; “but he dared not do it ; I’d have made him remember it as long as he lived, parson or no parson.” “‘If he smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also,’” thought the Vicar ; “that is the precept of our religion, but in my college days I’d certainly have tried what an arm of flesh could do to chastise the evil spirit in this petty tyrant.” By a strong effort, however, Beauflower curbed the unruly member, and strode away. But before he stepped out of the shadow of the great lodge gateway into the sunshine, he turned and said :

“Mr. Travers, one of your men, and as I suspect by your order, has done an act of wanton cruelty to a poor unoffending dumb creature. I do not believe your master would encourage such conduct, and in that belief I shall appeal to Mr. Harker.”

“Appeal away, sir; ’peal away: it’ll amuse you, and it won’t hurt me. I know my business, and I want no parson’s advice about it.”

As he shouted this impudent defiance, Travers, as if to vent his rage on something or other, snatched his loaded gun from where it stood in the corner of the archway, and discharged it at a flock of pigeons that just then broke circling from an outer cornice of the gateway. One bird fell dead at his feet, and another dropped wounded a few yards off. There was an insolent defiance in the action, that made it almost equivalent to a blow. Mr. Beauflower, however, took no notice of it, and walked on without turning his head.

Insolent masters make insolent servants. The footmen and housemaids at the Abbey surged in waves of insolence that rippled into fainter circles of insolence among the grooms, gardeners, and lodge-keepers. The pride of new money of its omnipotence, and its crushing power, was virulent at Summerleas. The head keeper was a type of the whole band.

Mr. Beauflower resolved to take a short turn in the park, to walk off this momentary and pardonable flush of temper before he faced the terrible ordeal which his own imprudence had prepared for him. With elastic natures like his, and at his age, troubles soon loosen their fetters.

When sunshine plays upon youth, sorrow's chains melt in a moment; green meadows and woods musical with birds soon cast their talismanic influence on the young senses. Nature that morning refused to be sad with him, so he soon became glad with her. That silent but pleasant companion rebuked his sorrow; gentler influences one by one stole over him, and weaned him from care. The very murmuring of the lake came to him in a low undertone, like the brooding lullaby of a mother afraid of awaking her child that is but half asleep, and the wood-pigeons, whose note is but one changeless monotone of love, answered it from the firs in a low lingering tone of dreamy delight.

It was one of those mornings of the Indian summer in which the dying year seems to fall asleep smiling at recollections of its spring time. The great golden woods stretching down the steep banks towards the lake lay motionless in the hot sunshine, their golden reflections making a Pactolus of one half the water and beyond the border of rich shadow the lake glistened like a broad sheet of steel. Some dappled deer were moving in procession down the little valley between the woods; here and there a frightened wild duck, with protruded head, splashed across the lake, quacking with affright, and drawing a line of

light across the water, which his feet just skimmed where the swans' young flotilla moved to and fro. Dragon-flies, in gleams of emerald, flashed, ravenous and savage as highwaymen, over the dry reeds of the waterside. Now and then a fat aldermanic carp, weary even of sleep, gurgled among the water-plants, or a trout sparkled up in a spring at a gnat that had roused his capricious and pampered appetite. Now and then a heron flapped up in a grey waft of feathery light against the brazen beech woods, or a blackbird broke chirping from one of the little islands, and sped across to the mainland from some mysterious enemy. The only jarring sound that broke the harmony of this paradise was the occasional report of a keeper's gun, that went rolling in echoes through the woods, as if the first shock had brought down some avalanche by its concussion. As Beauflower went on through the woods by the lake's side, a pheasant, glistening with jewelled colours, would sometimes stalk before him, and then rocket away into the open. Every moment across the ground-ivy that spread between the hazels, the brambles, the dog-wood and the sallowing larches, a rabbit would trot carelessly, darting away as swift as light when it discerned an intruder on its domains. The beech nut husks crackled under Beauflower's

feet as he strode on past a certain spot generally known as "Queen Elizabeth's Grotto." A flight of stone steps between two pillars, crowned by stone urns here marked the place where, in former times, water-parties used to land. The steps were green with damp, the urns cracked and mossy.

Suddenly, a laughing voice shouted from the wood in a sort of half echo song, and a voice from near the steps replied with a snatch of the same wild Swiss or Tyrolese tune. A corner of the path brought Beauflower in sight of the latter singer. It was Amy Robinson. She was seated on the top step, her back towards him, her beautiful eyes intent on a little emerald-green float that was dancing in a ripple. Suddenly the water grew troubled, and out splashed a huge brown-orange perch, his back fin spiked and threatening, his body contorted with anger. In a moment he was nimbly drawn up on shore.

"Ethel! Ethel!" shouted Amy, in alarm at her own victory. "I've caught one, and such a monster. Oh, do come and take the hook out of his mouth. Oh, dear, dear, he's trying to get in again."

Ethel, intent on gathering chestnuts up in the wood, only replied by a faint shout, which indicated return some time within half an hour.

Amy shouted again and more earnestly. The reply came still fainter. The wood spirits had allured Ethel farther still within the mossy recesses of their dominions. Just then, the step of some one behind her caught Amy's ears, and she turned.

"Oh, Mr. Beauflower," she said, naively, after the first greeting, "will you do me a great service, and take this dreadful fish off the hook? Ethel always does that, but she's gone away looking for chestnuts."

"I shall be too happy," said the young vicar; and he seemed so as he acted as gratuitous dentist to the perch in trouble, extracted the hook and re-baited it. "I'm so glad to meet you, Miss Robinson," he said, "because Dr. Briscoe, when I met him this morning, told me that you fainted last night at the party."

"Oh, I have quite recovered," said Amy. "I think it was my journey, that was all."

"It was very cruel to make you play at all."

"Oh, no; it was my duty, you know. I was not a guest, but a governess. It was not pride. I assure you, Mr. Beauflower, Mrs. Harker is very kind, and I wanted so much to oblige her."

"That you forgot your own health. I cannot think how Mrs. Harker could be so unfeeling as to even propose such a thing. There is a bite; it is an eel, I think."

“ Oh, dear, dear, I struck too soon. How very stupid of me. No; there it is again. Oh, it's pulled it quite under. Oh, Mr. Beauflower, do, do pull it out for me. It is something dreadful.”

There was no trace of self-consciousness about Amy, no thought that all this time she might be winning a heart by this look, that turn of the head. She was only intent on the moment's occupation—*dum capimus capimur*. Love was watching the float and barbing the hook. Perhaps but for the emergency of the moment she would have been shy; but love is so ingenious in providing such emergencies.

Beauflower, too, was not one of those effeminate young clergymen who walk on tip-toe and lisp, and seem to have lost all manliness and spirit. He liked Amy, he was pleased at an opportunity of doing her a little service, and not being devoid of humour, he felt the oddity of the occasion, nor was he by any means opposed to the faint approach to flirtation which the opportunity demanded. Why are clergymen, forsooth, to be cut off from all such innocent delights? So, without a thought of anything but the happiness of the moment, and careless in his happiness as the bird of spring or the butterfly of summer, the young Vicar struck the fish, and then placed the rod in Amy's hand, urging her to play it without fear,

secure in his co-operation. There was a struggle—Amy resolute, the monster obdurate; Amy artful, and relaxing—the monster more patient and beguiled. Then grew Amy sterner and more impatient, the monster violent, but more hopeless. One great splash, and he was drawn on to the steps. It was a large tench—a beautiful fish, with shining olive scales and a warm brown eye. Amy turned her head, almost regretful at her victory, while Beauflower killed the creature with a rapid and merciful blow, and removed the hook.

At that moment Ethel shouted again from far up in the woods, and echo answered.

The Vicar, still busy in baiting Amy's hook, quoted Tennyson's beautiful bugle song—

“O hark, O hear,—how thin and clear,
 And thinner, clearer, further going!
 Oh, sweet and far from cliff and scaur,
 The horns of Elfland faintly blowing.
 Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying,
 Blow bugle; answer echoes, dying, dying, dying.”

“How beautiful! how very beautiful!” Amy said, clapping her hands, and her eyes glowing. “Oh, I must learn that by heart. How does it go on?”

Mr. Beauflower, who was watching her face with almost unconscious intentness, slightly coloured, and paused a moment; then he replied—

“O love,”

He said this very faintly,

“they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill, or field, or river.
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.”

There was a silence for a moment when Mr. Beauflower had repeated this verse. Then he said—

“It is quite fairy-land this side of the lake.”

“Yes. Ethel has been calling herself Titania and me the Lady of the Lake. She said if she came on any fairies dancing round a mushroom, she'd call to me; and there, there she's calling.”

“O, no doubt she's found them; but I am afraid I must leave this pleasant spot and its fairy court, for I have important business with Mr. Harker, and I must catch him before I go out. Give my love to Ethel. Good-bye, Miss Robinson. I wish you sport. The fish will come up and see what little enchantress it is beguiling them, and then you must beguile them to your hooks.”

Amy gave a deprecatory, pleased look. Then she rose frankly, with the natural grace which was her natural dowry, and held out her little soft white hand. Beauflower pressed it in his hearty way, and in a moment or two was seen on

the path leading round the head of the lake, passing a rustic bridge that crossed a fall. He turned and raised his hat, and then disappeared behind the wood.

Amy did not shout again to Ethel, but she resumed her seat on the steps, and gazed down intently on the water which glimmered before her—a little dim dream-world of hope and mystery like her future.

CHAPTER XI.

PADDY BLAKE.

THE very moment that the Vicar had left the lodge and taken the path across the bridge by the kennel to the side of the lake facing the abbey, the keeper, who had been earnestly watching him, came to a prompt resolve. Bad as he was, mean, violent, dishonest, and tyrannical, he flew swift as a falcon to his purpose, ran staunch as a bloodhound to his narrow aim. He had gloried specially in this, that his hard drudge of a wife in the lodge and several of the keepers scattered about the kennels had heard his quarrel with the Vicar. As Dr. Busby abstained from taking off his hat, even to King Charles, for fear of lessening his authority with his boys, so the head keeper made a point of never yielding a jot to any one but the squire himself or any visitor from whom he might expect a five-pound note. Servile by nature, Travers knew when to crawl and when to ride the high horse. He was blunt to the squire, and yet subservient.

He had power over him—that every one knew to their cost. The farm bailiff, the steward, the head gardener, had all by turns felt the danger of crossing Travers. Why he had such a hold no one knew, but hold he had for all that. There was an instinctive feeling at Summerleas that no plot, no stratagem could unseat him.

He first ran down to the shed where the men were lunching (taking their “bevers” they called it), and shouted out with the voice of a savage boatswain—

“Look alive, you men there, with those guns. Mr. Cantelupe’s party will be here to-morrow; and not so much idling over meals. Ten minutes is all the time I ever had the *dree* and twenty years I was at Lord Dumbarton’s; and what was enough for me is enough for you chaps.”

He then took the back way to the house past the stables, resolving to look in to see the head groom as he passed the harness room.

There were three grooms to be found there, pale, thin, hard-featured, Yorkshire lads, reckless, rather drunken, and very vicious. They had been listening to the stories and racing prophecies of a poor, ragged, pariah of a fellow, in a dirty torn coat, once scarlet, that time, and rain, and mud had gradually degraded into a sodden ignoble purple. He was the “Paddy” of the district, the

hanger-on of the kennels, the errand-boy of Wiltshire stables, the oracle of village tap-rooms, the communicator of special sporting secrets. His bullet head and elf-locks of scattered sandy hair was crowned by a muddy, threadbare, black velvet cap, while, in contradiction to his professional coat, he wore a pair of ragged once fashionable plaid trowsers, torn at the knees, and displayed bare feet instead of top-boots. His eyes, vacant and wild in their ordinary expression, were at times lit up by gleams of cunning, and not unfrequently by a good-natured smile that was by no means unpleasant. People differed as to what the man had been ;—some said a rich farmer at Warminster, who had drunk away his brains and squandered his property ; others said a small shopkeeper of Shaftesbury, who had lost all his money in racing. He had now sunk into a poor despised sot, feasting to-day on champagne at a county race-course, to-morrow lying struck down with fever in some lonely hovel on the Downs. If Paddy Blake, as he was called, was not ridden over in the hunting field, it was inevitable that he would die in some ditch, or be found frozen and dead some winter's morning inside a Druid's ring. The life he led was a sort of ghastly parody of a sporting career, and his death, come when it may, was sure to "point the moral" of such a life.

Joe Dennison, a pale-looking stolid fellow, with a pewter pot in his hand, and one foot on the hob, was narrating the exploits of a certain horse that had belonged to his old master, Squire Osbaldiston.

“T’oud squire,” he said, “used always to say if a horse wants sweating, you may as well sweat him for the brass. I wore the purple and orange the day Blue Bonnet was beaten, for the first two heats by a mare of Mr. Kirby’s cos the squire wouldn’t let me make the running. Well, I went down on my knees to him. Said I to t’ oud squire, ‘Do mak a bit more running, squire, Blue Bonnet can run for a week, I know; and we’ll beat him yet.’ ‘Do as you like, Joe,’ squire says at last, and s’elp me if I didn’t win the next heat like a bird. I went sailing past ’em all, lads; and bless yer I’d have won if the bridle had broken. He was a long, loose-legged horse, too, but he’d the right stuff in him; and the next St. Ledger he came in three lengths ahead of thirty horses.”

“I remember him,” said Jack Bennet, a quick, sharp, choleric fellow, the groom next him, whose lazy head was embedded in the harness that tapes-tried the walls. Archer, the third lad, said,

“An ugly horse, with deep shoulder, big ribs, and a coarse head; he was one of Navell’s lot, eh?”

“Ugly he wasn’t, Jim; and he’d always make a rush at last for the post; Lor’ he was never second if he could help it—ah! that *was* a horse. That day he broke down at Epsom on the near fore tendon, I could have cried like a baby. He was never saddled again. I shot him myself.”

Here Paddy Blake broke in with a drunken shout and a scrap of an old hunting song—

“Lately passing o’er Barnsdale I happened to spy
 A fox stealing on with the hounds in full cry,
 ’Tis Darlington sure, for his voice I well know,
 Crying ‘Forward! Hark forward!’ for Skelbrook below,
 With my Ballymonoora,
 The hounds of Old Raby for me.

I’m the champion of the light weights. Here, 100 to 1 on Brown Bess. Done, my Lord Marquis. Put me on a hunter, and I’ll show you what riding is, my boys. I’ll split the park palings for you. Pass that beer here, Joe, like a man. Give me a silk jacket, and see how I’ll cut down the field. Is there any one knows how to use the whalebone at the right moment as I do. I’ll fight any one who says I can’t ride and win, but you mustn’t give me one of your cursed flat sides, light back ribs, leggy quadrupeds, half grasshopper, half giraffe. Put me on that horse I’ve seen to-day, give me five minutes’ start, and I’ll back myself to touch Salisbury Cathedral door

before any man living, even though he rode on an express train."

"What horse is that you're magging about, Paddy?" said Archer, hitherto silent, and busy cutting a briar root pipe; "anything to put money on? Is it the new horse Vates talks of as good for the Derby?"

Paddy looked mysterious, and irritated, then sang—

"Come listen, all you sporting coves,
Oh, listen unto me,
Whilst a song I do relate, of the nag that, sure as fate,
Will win at Salisbury."

"Give us the tip—come, Pat?" cried all the grooms at once.

"Is it a horse with a black speck on one of the front coronets, a flesh-coloured nose, and a round quarter?" said Joe, the groom who had first spoken. "Yes? Why, it's that coffin-headed thing of Cantelupe's—Lor', a dozen of 'im are not worth one of master's cart horses. I wouldn't put a crown on Immenschikoff. Why, he's not half as much in him as the little chestnut of Sir Edmund's. Pat, you don't get us to lay our money on that class of horse; it ain't our style."

"I tell you," said Paddy, "he has got a temper, but he's a flash of lightning when he chooses; and he'll pass them all, if he is properly ridden—I've

no interest in him myself, but put me on him, and see if I couldn't beat a rifle bullet, and give it ten yards —that's the horse !”

“Why, Blue Bonnet,” said Bennet, “would have distanced him on three legs ; I'll back our old Syntax against him, with a little start. Pooh ! get out of that, Paddy.”

“I saw him,” said Paddy, “when he was a colt taking his airing on Lady Down, and I never had my eye off him since. I never knew any horse promise so well, and I'll put all my money on him. Pass the beer, you chaps, the champion of the light weights is dry as a lime kiln.

With my Ballymonoora,
Ballymonoora,
The hounds of Old Raby for me.”

I tell you what it is, you chaps, you sit there and get so full of corn, and so lazy, that you forget what a good horse is. Why, haven't I seen all the good stables ? Don't I know the Bay Middletons by the black speckles, the Orlandos by the white on their legs, the Birdcatchers by their golden chestnuts, the Touchstones by their black browns. I want no teaching from Mr. Harker's grooms. I am a man that has had property ; I'm no stable sweeper. I've lost more money than you ever saw, and I've won more than you'll ever see.

I don't come here to beg, or to tout you out of shillings."

"Here, take some beer; no one wanted to rile you," said Joe, the ex-groom of Mr. Osbaldiston; "you *can* be good company."

"It's your stuck-up master" — Paddy's voice was growing every moment louder — "that pampers you, till you fancy yourselves gentlemen, and your horses your own. You spend the time that you ought to be exercising in cheating each other at cards; you ain't fit to back a horse, not one of ye; you don't know a horse, if it kicked you down; you're only fit to bruise oats and currycomb cart horses; you're a pack of ——"

"Come, none of that, Pat," said Jack, the smartest lad of the three; "keep a civil tongue in your head, or I'll show you the door, and double quick too."

"*You* show me the door?" said Paddy, menacingly.

"Yes; what do you come here for, spying about?"

"Spying about?"

"Yes, spying about, and trying to chisel us lads out of money; you call us a pack of anything again, and I'll just give you a one-two you won't forget easily, my man. Joe and Jim may bear

it—I won't, though you are a poor drunken beggar, not worth wasting time upon."

"And who are you?" said Paddy; "why, if you sold me a horse in the morning, I'd sell him you again before night, and you wouldn't know I had sold you unless I told you. You're a pack of idle loafers, only good to hold a horse while other men mount. I tell you the best horse in your stables is a mere pig compared to the one I saw this morning at his gallop. You teach me about horses?—why, I'd ride any one of you on a tortoise and give you a mile start. That for you!"

Paddy, as he uttered this challenge, snapped his fingers defiantly.

"Let him have it, Jack," said one of the grooms to the defender of Mr. Harker's stables; "if he doesn't mind what he's saying."

"I know this," said Paddy, "that you'd sell a race every one of you, if any fool would let you ride for him; and that you never see a fox killed unless your horse runs away with you. O, I know you. I've seen you sneaking round by-corners, and shirking the fences. There's not one of you can ride like a man. You're a pack of d——tailors, every mother's son of you—your master and all. You ain't worth a sieve of oats, any one in the stable. Every fool in Wiltshire knows you are a pack of drunken, lazy ——"

Paddy had no time to finish, for that instant the irritable groom struck out at Paddy; the blow was sharp and quick, but Paddy was far quicker. He ducked his head, then, rising with great agility, planted his bony fist heavily on the right cheek of his assailant, who, however, instantly grappled and threw him. The other two lads ran to separate them, but falling over the combatants, all four rolled together, Paddy being alternately the antagonist of each, and, by his singular wiriness, coming off by no means so badly as might have been expected. The boy Joe, who at first tried to make peace, getting jostled and struck in the fight, lost patience, and soon withdrew.

“Let them fight it out,” he said. “Go it, Jack, knock some of the sauce out of him—cheeking us about being a gentleman, too. Give it the beggar. He shan’t come here calling us all the names he can lay his tongue to. Knock his head off, and it’ll serve him hanged well right.”

But Archer, the second groom, proposed peace, good naturedly—

“Paddy had once given him a good tip—he didn’t forget those sort of things—and they’d better leave the man alone.”

Joe, thus appealed to, then pulled the champions apart. By this time both were consider-

ably bruised and out of breath, and were dragged apart with no great difficulty.

Paddy, flushed and crimson on one cheek, had had one tail of his dishevelled coat nearly torn off, and his black velvet cap trodden flat, while his opponent's lips were swollen as large as those of a negro king, and one eye was palpably discoloured. There was some English honesty about the fellow, however, in spite of his lazy insolence, for he shook hands with Paddy with evident sincerity, and they all sat down together, passing the quart pot about with as much formality as if it had been the Pipe of Peace, and moreover they filled Paddy a long white churchwarden pipe and gave him a seat by the fire.

"I was wrong, perhaps, in saying the horse wasn't a good horse," said Jack the warrior, tired of war's alarms; "but Paddy put my back up. It is a good-looking horse, though a trifle too short in the neck and barrel; and I heard Pitts say he heard in Salisbury that he'd killed two grooms, and couldn't be ridden."

"It's all a lie," said Paddy; "I stroked him this morning, and he was quiet as a lamb. That was Moloch who was so spiteful—you people here are jealous of the other stables."

Then he began to sing a scrap of a sporting song:

“ The bell is ringing for the start,
 There’s Jim in blue and white,
 With Heseltine in red, and Job
 In lilac, and Cartwright.”

“ There’s Holmes in blue and scarlet sleeves,
 And now I can descry
 The tartan vest and yellow cap
 Of Mr. Thomas Lye.”

“ There’s a Yorkshire stave for you, you Doncaster lads ! ”

“ What do you think of this ? ” said Joe, the groom who had acted as arbitrator. “ Here’s Billy Barlow in the ‘ Life ’ says next year’s Derby will be won the easiest ever known. Put the pot on for Springbok, says he.”

“ Yes ; terms for one year two guineas, to the Derby one guinea, to the Chester Cup ten shillings and sixpence, postage stamps taken. I know,” said Paddy, winking violently over the edge of the quart pot ; “ I know their little game ; why, I used to prophesy myself before I took to selling cards and got down in my luck, and grew too fond of lush. I’m told Springbok’s lost all his form. He *was* worth something once.”

“ Well, I’ve heard for certain they can’t ride that horse you’re so sweet on,” said Joe, the first groom, stolidly, “ and I believe it. It’s your business to crack up Immenschikoff, but you’ll never get me, Paddy, to put my money on him. Too wide awake for that.”

“Only give me the Harlequin colours, and I’d ride him to-morrow,” shouted Paddy, in his craziest mood. “Make way there for the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe’s jockey” (here he got astride a chair), “no curb bridle for me, I’ll ride him with a plain snaffle. His temper’s all right. There’s the saddling bell ringing—now we’re ready. Houp! my lads, nineteen horses to beat—more the merrier. Give us a leg up—all in a line there—no start! no start!—now the flag drops and we’re off leisurely—wait a bit—now they go—plenty of time—loads of time—I’ll soon cut them down—last off, and by like a swallow—only three left at Tattenham corner. Houp, lads! Now then for the Chifney rush, for he means it now. Houp, la! give him the whalebone—work him in—dark bay horse close at my side—give him the whalebone, lad—hand and knee, work him in—slash him along. There’s twenty thousand golden guineas to win, look, every face on the Grand Stand is turning white—slash him along—now for the rush—now or never!”

Paddy, at all times half-crazed about sporting matters, had worked himself almost to frenzy by the race he had been imitating; flogging the chair with an ash stick that lay on the table, he was shouting himself rapidly hoarse, when the door

of the harness-room opened and the head keeper strode in scowling.

“ Well, this is nice goings on ! ” he said, as he thrust one hand fiercely into the pocket of his brown shooting-jacket, “ very pretty goings on. Mr. Benson (the head groom), must hear a little about this, my lads. And what does this poaching fellow do here ? ”

Paddy, stopped in his monologue, stood on the defensive, but he still somewhat blanched and cowered before the harder nature that confronted him, having once fallen into trouble among the Abbey Wood keepers for snaring rabbits.

“ What harm am I doing ? ” he said, piteously, and yet saucily ; “ Mr. Benson’s seen me here often enough. I ain’t doing nobody any harm, Mr. Travers.”

“ No harm ? Why, I could hear your drunken shouting almost as far as the lodge. Look here, you groom fellows, I’m Mr. Harker’s bailiff, and it’s his wish I should look after every one as works on the place, groom or no groom, and I won’t have these poaching spies about here to get up lies about the place, steal pheasants’ eggs or some devilry or otherwise. Come, you fellow, get out of this ! ”

The keeper spoke as a young Irish police-

man intoxicated by his uniform and first good meal, might talk to a transgressing cabman, and as he spoke he laid one large horny hand on the poor harmless fellow's shoulder. Paddy demurred, but the keeper took him by the shoulder to move him to the door.

"If you touch me, Mr. Travers," Paddy cried, "it'll be the worse for you; take care, I'm doing no harm here."

"Harm, or no harm, out you go!"

The petty tyrant was furious. He made a dart at the poor tout, seized him by the collar, half throttled him, knocked down a chair and a dirty table on which two of the grooms had been playing at cards, and eventually threw Paddy sprawling several yards from the door.

"I'll get a summons for you," shouted the man, as he rose covered with mud, and looking the most pitiable of sights. "I'll pull you up, you Jack in office—you beggar on horseback—you shall answer for this knocking about people who've done no harm to you—you shall answer for this some day!"

"Summons away!" shouted the keeper; "I know my place, and don't you come on this property again, or you'll get what you won't like. You look out, for I'll take care you get pepper; we'll have no vagabonds about here. Come, be off; I know you!"

Paddy retreated, not gracefully, but with reasonable speed, and the keeper stayed a moment.

“You boys,” he said to the grooms, “don’t you encourage that scoundrel here any more—don’t you let me find him inside these doors again, or you and I will be having a quarrel. I don’t want to cross Mr. Benson, but I won’t have those cadging fellows about here to see where the game is and find the best place for putting nooses. Mind, you know me, and I won’t have it! Another time, and you all go. You know as well as I do that there is not a man on the place I can’t start if I choose. So (friend’s advice) take care, or you’ll be off your saddles in a brace of jiffies.”

“I’d as lief ride a flat race against Sattin hisself as cheek that fellow,” was the remark of Jack the groom to Joe the groom, as the keeper, with a severe eye at the cards and pewter pot, went out and slammed the door behind him; “he’s a regular sweep, and perhaps he’ll have a fall some day that’ll hurt him. He turns master round his finger—drat him. But why didn’t you, Joe, up and say something about it being our own room and we wanted to keep ourselves to ourselves—we ain’t in prison here.”

“Oh, yes, Jack, it’s all very well,” said Joe the pacific; “but why didn’t you? you’ve been the

longest here. I don't like getting in the way of a man as has got master's ear. He could put a spoke in our wheel any fine morning, and you know that as well as I do."

CHAPTER XII.

THE AUDIENCE.

SUMMERLEAS ABBEY was just the place in which the new money of our day delights to display itself. There was room to lavish it there. It was an old house of Inigo Jones's design, that had been spoiled by Kent and other impudent charlatans of the early Georgian era, who had removed the oriels, and added a huge Doric porch, hideous, cumbrous, but comfortable. It was surrounded by woods, which gradually passed, by transitions of huge shrubberies of rhododendron, into flower-gardens and velvety lawn. All that wealth could lavish had been lavished on it till every stone of its walls betokened the vitalising presence of wealth.

Mr. Beauflower was a frank honest man, with a good nerve and a large heart, but he was as timid that morning as if he had been a schoolboy going up to be lectured by the head master. He felt his colour come and go as the gravel

crunched under his feet, and as at every step he drew nearer to the front door. A lover going to propose could not have felt more nervous and distrustful. Once or twice he half resolved to turn back and abandon his resolution. But then again the pressure of his trouble came upon him, and he determined at all hazards to appeal to Mr. Harker. He rang, but the bell gave no sound. He rang again, and the next time, to his horror, with such force, that the sound of the bell echoed all through the house. In a few moments a footman opened the door—an imperturbable, insolent footman, whom nothing could ruffle.

“Is Mr. Harker at home?”

“I don’t know, sir, I’m sure; but I think master’s in his study. I’ll see, sir, if you’ll walk in.”

“No, thank you,” said Beauflower, nervously, “I won’t walk in. I’m rather in a hurry; I’ll wait here.”

“I’ll go and see, sir, directly. Mrs. Harker’s in, I know.”

The man returned in a moment with a message that Mr. Harker was very busy about some important business, but would have pleasure in seeing Mr. Beauflower if he would kindly wait a few minutes. Mr. Beauflower was shown into the drawing-room. It was very gorgeous, but yet it wanted that look of calm comfort and intellectual

luxury that a pleasant room should have. There were costly Indian caskets inlaid with coloured ivories, and mediæval reliquaries, and carvings, and enamels, and statuettes, and Louis Quatorze clocks, and Sèvres china, and costly Japan screens. But they were heaped together with vulgar profusion, and were too numerous.

Mr. Beauflower opened a photograph book that lay upon the table, and studied the family and its friends. There was Mr. Harker in as many shapes as Proteus, his hard iron-bound face ever the same, whether he was bestriding his hunter or sitting as Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, or resting his hand on a pile of books, or standing with his gun under his arm. There was Mrs. Harker, hard, false, and specious, with her company smile and her costliest dress. There was Miss Harker, with her favourite simper, in several affected attitudes—at croquet, at an archery meeting, in a riding habit, and attired for the county ball. Then came all sorts of county people—Lord Mazagan, the colonel of the local volunteers, and the Honourable Fitzgebert Cantelupe, and the bishop of the diocese, and many of the neighbouring squires, their wives, and daughters. But one page chiefly arrested Mr. Beauflower's attention, and that contained a photograph of Ethel and her governess. Ethel looked frank and smiling,

and was leaning against Amy, who was seated. Amy looked beautiful and gentle in it, but there was a shade of sadness on her features. While Mr. Beauflower was still absorbed in studying the sweet pure face, and contrasting it with Miss Harker's bold, knowing expression, much to the disadvantage of the latter, a great buhl clock on the mantel-piece chimed twelve on a sharp silvery little bell that gave a bright sharp stroke that made him start. He had been waiting half an hour, and the Harkers had lunch at two. Mr. Beauflower was an impetuous man; even his profession could not subdue that in him. He never allowed considerations of self-interest to stand in his way when any indignity was shown him. He rose to go. He would first ring the bell. He would not be kept waiting like a servant who had come for a place. He was implacable. He would go. He had just got as far as the mantlepiece, when the footman who had let him in opened the door, and said cavalierly,—

“Mr. Harker can see you now, sir. Walk this way.”

“I was just going.”

“Sorry to keep you, sir; but master never likes to be disturbed when he's busy—gave strict orders, sir—much as my place is worth, sir; says he, ‘Show in no one till the gentleman as is with me goes.’”

Mr. Harker, when Mr. Beauflower entered the sanctum, was seated at his desk, with several account-books before him, and was as busy as a steward on quarter day. He had the worn look of a man who had been hard at work, and somewhat worried by business.

The Harkers' career was imperfectly known at Summerleas. General report said the father had been a picture dealer in early life, and that he boasted of coming to London to seek his fortune, as a carver and gilder, with only a shilling in his pocket. But this is a common boast among the new rich. He had been employed by Mr. Staunton, the former owner of the Abbey, to buy old carvings and pictures, and had eventually wheedled himself in as a steward and sort of confidential adviser of the old man, who, having cut off his rebellious only son, had at last left everything but a plantation or two in Jamaica to the son of his indispensable man of business. Harker No. 2 was a pompous, blustering hard man, considered by his friends and toadies to be a first rate organiser and man of business, and a great experimental farmer; in reality a grinding, remorseless landlord, a tyrannical game-preserve, and a man who set his face like a flint against the class from which he had risen. His room was full of rain-gauges, and models of agricultural imple-

ments, while a large covered zinc tank seven feet long stood in a corner of the room, near a turning-lathe, for Mr. Harker was a scientific man, and had a mechanical turn, which he evinced by turning tortoise-shell rings and handles for drawers. His science consisted in a dabbling in manures, but it must be confessed that he was eager to test new improvements, and did some good in his neighbourhood by costly experiments, and by his energy in upsetting the old superstitions of farming. He looked up as Mr. Beauflower entered, rose, and shook hands in a patronising way.

“Sorry to keep you waiting, Beauflower,” he said, “but had some important county business to transact.”

“Oh, don’t mention it,” said Mr. Beauflower. “I know your time is very much taken up.”

“You’ve heard of the great experiment we’re going to make on the Home Farm?”

“I have heard something of it.”

“It is the Glasnevin experiment. Mechi’s hand-sowing has done so well under that active fellow Travers that we’re going now to try sowing the seed in a bed and transplanting it; we’ll part the roots so as to save the seed, and make each plant into ten or more. In wet seasons when the weather is bad that will be a great thing. You know the old proverb ‘set wet, sow dry;’ and the

cost of transplanting will be nothing. Travers says the women hereabouts will do it for two-pence the four thousand plants."

"Poor women!" said Mr. Beauflower, with an honest man's utter want of tact. "Nothing I lament so much about the poverty of my people, as the necessity for the women doing field labour. It is most demoralising, and it makes them neglect their homes and their children."

"I do not myself regard these things from the sentimental point of view," said Mr. Harker, with a dry superciliousness. "If the women choose to work, let them work; they know their own interests best. I adopt with the transplantation system the Lois Weedon system, and mean to try that on the same land year after year, without manure. By the bye, what did you write to me about that cottage of old Davis at Stoat's Nest?"

"That it is entirely unfit for human habitation. The water runs down the walls, and after several days' rain they can ladle it up off the floor. It's killing that old rheumatic mother-in-law who lives with them."

"Don't you believe a word they say. They're the most lying lot that I ever came across. They'll tell you anything to wheedle out a shilling. Travers tells me the thatch wants looking to, and

that's all. That is the worst of you clergymen ; the poor are always acting before you. They hide away their dinners when you come, and bring out their Bibles. Look at that man Anderson you gave so much to, not a worse fellow in the place. Travers says he kills no end of hares."

"Travers has some dislike to the man. I'm sure he's honest, and he is regular at church."

"That's his art : he knows he'd get very little money without that. I tell you they all humbug you. They're a cunning, thievish, poaching lot here, and if I could I'd pull down half the cottages. The rates are enormous. But, by the bye, I say, Beauflower, what's this Travers tells me about some old gentleman visiting you having a fit in the park ? One of the keepers saw him drop just opposite the house. What is it ?—who is he ?"

"I've heard nothing of it," said Beauflower. "We have an old gentleman staying with us—a Mr. Goodrick, an old West Indian friend of ours, whom we have never had before. It can hardly be true about the fit, or he would have told me ; besides, he arrived at our house perfectly well."

"Oh, I suppose it was the same old gentleman who brought Ethel's governess."

"Yes, it was ; he did give Miss Robinson a seat in his carriage ; by the bye, Mr. Harker,

would you allow me to bring him some day to see your pictures and your collection of jewels? He is a connoisseur in those things. I have been warm in the praises of your collection."

"Oh, they're nothing," said Mr. Harker, with that unconscious smile that a flattered person always wears—"nothing. I've a few good things, and that's all. I've got an opal or two, and a pink diamond that's thought superior to the Hope Diamond, and that's all. One or two good pictures; my Watteaus and that great Leonardo I gave Beckford three thousand pounds for. I can't afford pictures, still I won't have anything second-hand. All I have are the best."

An offensive humility was a prominent feature of the man's character. Beauflower still delayed to disclose the real object of his visit. He put it off as long as he possibly could. Besides, there was the complaint against Travers to first broach. He dashed at it abruptly.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Harker," he said, in an evident tone of regret, "to ever have to complain of any of your servants. I am a man of peace, I preach peace, I practise peace; but a case has arisen that compels me to speak. One of your men, I feel sure by Mr. Travers's express orders, has shot at and wounded a favourite terrier of ours, a poor, inoffensive little thing."

“I cannot believe that Travers would order such a thing. There is an unfortunate prejudice existing against this person. He is a very faithful fellow, and everything the men do is laid to him. The keepers complain very much of the people's dogs about here.”

“Ours never strayed, and had no sporting tendencies.”

“Ay, so you think ; but you can't help dogs straying near a preserve. I will tell Travers to procure you a Skye terrier, one of Lord Mazagan's breed.”

Beauflower's pride was hurt.

“Thank you, Mr. Harker,” he said, “it is not the value of the dog we care about, but he was a special pet. The poor people all complain that they cannot keep a cat, the keepers kill every one.”

“Quite right, too. I don't wish my labourers to keep cats. They are sure to kill game. I gave orders to have every cat found poaching shot. I'll speak to Travers about this dog, but I feel sure he ordered no such thing. He knows his duty too well. There's not a better head-keeper in all Wiltshire ; he's worth two hundred pounds a year to me.”

“If you insist in thinking him incapable of doing wrong,” said Mr. Beauflower, rather nettled, “of course it is no use my making any complaint.

All I hope is that you may not some day repent your confidence in him."

"I'm sure I shall not. I have a tolerable perception in such matters. He is never rude to you, I hope?"

"He was extremely insolent this morning—he defied me, in fact."

"I must speak to him, then. His zeal carries him too far sometimes, I find, and he has a strong dislike to strangers' interference with his duties. Indeed, he complained to me once that some remarks of yours about the game laws had done great harm in the village, and encouraged poaching. I did not myself hear that sermon."

"I certainly do think our game laws too severe, Mr. Harker. We have often discussed that matter. The rabbits destroy the farmers' crops. Mr. Brown himself tells me he loses a hundred a year by your rabbits."

"Oh, he'll say anything, though half the game he gets on his land is mine. He and his son are little better than poachers."

"I cannot share in your prejudice against Mr. Brown. The old man is honest to the backbone."

Both speakers were getting rather heated. Mr. Beauflower had thrown by now all thoughts of mentioning his pecuniary difficulties to Mr. Harker.

"If I remember right," said Mr. Harker, his

eyes half shut, as he stretched out his coarse feet towards the fender, and played, half angrily, with his watch-chain and the bunch of four or five spade guineas attached to it, "you object to the modern system of battue shooting? I like to discuss these things. What objection can you find, now, to battue shooting?"

"Well, I must confess I do," said Beauflower, with his hands clasped over his knee. "I cannot see the pleasure of going about, followed by an army of beaters driving up flocks of half-tamed birds that are instantly knocked down by the cartload. The pleasure I used to find in shooting consisted in the individual search, the expectation, the pleasant labour of overcoming the instincts of self-preservation in the animal. Butchery has, I think, taken the place of real sport."

"I have no sentiment in these matters. I am a practical man in everything," said Mr. Harker, with insolent carelessness, as if his opponent's arguments were hardly worth seriously grappling with. "My pheasants cost me a guinea each, and my pleasure is in killing them in the way I do. I would not give a thank you to go sneaking about the edge of a covert. It would be like sparrow-shooting in comparison. For myself, I like to do things in a large

way. I have always been accustomed to do them in a large way."

Beauflower thought to himself, "That is the mistake all you rich people make. They always think they can buy pleasure; but with all their battues, the farmer's boy, spending all day looking for one rabbit, enjoys his final shot more than Dives does all his battues." He, however, merely said :

"I fear we differ in these matters. I do not think the pleasure of a day's shooting can be increased by merely having twenty birds to kill instead of five. All true pleasure must be earned. It can't be bought ready-made."

Just then the door opened, and Ethel darted in, her golden hair tossing behind her.

"Papa," she cried, "are you coming in to lunch? Mamma hopes Mr. Beauflower will stop."

Mr. Beauflower shook hands with Ethel. "I am afraid," he said, "I must deny myself the pleasure. Mr. Harker, please make my apologies. I've got a train to catch at Slobury. It is the Visitation to-day at Salisbury, and I must see the Archdeacon. By the way, I'm seriously thinking of setting to work about our little church. Will you aid?"

"You may rely on me," said Mr. Harker, patronisingly, "and I can strongly recommend

you the architect who built that fresh wing for me. He's a first rate man—an A 1 man."

"By the bye," said Mr. Beauflower, "before I go, just one word. Might I ask you if you have any portrait of the Stauntons still about the house?"

Mr. Harker's face changed rather at this question, and he gave the speaker a look of searching, and rather offensive, inquiry, without answering.

"The fact is, the friend I'm going to bring knew some of the family years ago, and feels rather anxious to see any portraits of them you might have."

"I think there are one or two knocking about in the nursery or the garrets," said Mr. Harker, very icily, "but I really don't know. I have almost forgotten the very name of Staunton. They were a queer lot. However, I'll make the housekeeper see about it if it will gratify your friend. What's his name?"

"Goodrick."

"Goodrick. There was a man of that name, a tax-collector, at Shaftesbury."

"My friend," said Beauflower, with a slight sense of hurt dignity, "has no relations in this part of England. He is of an old Norfolk family, I think I have heard my cousin, the lawyer, say."

“Oh, indeed—a Norfolk family!” said Harker, with a parvenu’s full sense of the guarantee implied by family. “Well, he’ll be one of the first persons for years that I have ever heard even speak of the Stauntons. I never knew a family so utterly forgotten—not a trace of them left. It is most singular.”

Mr. Beauflower thought differently, but he said nothing. If Mr. Staunton, the millionaire, who cast his son adrift for an imprudent elopement and marriage, had been in later life a self-isolated, soured, gloomy man, collecting pictures and books for his own use, and declining all society, still he had been princely in his charities, and many a widow and orphan still cherished his memory; but the man—the servant he had enriched and made his son had long ago forgotten him. “Gratitude,” says Rochefoucault, “is a burden hard to bear, and every one tries, if possible, to shake it off his shoulders.” To a base nature like Mr. Harker’s, gratitude was impossible. The Vicar began to lose all trust and belief in Mr. Harker’s goodness of heart. As he was taking leave, the gong thundered out for lunch. One would have thought a Hindoo festival was being held, and that the gong announced the moment of sacrifice. That pompous announcement of a small event was quite in accordance

with the general spirit of the house and the tone of the proprietor's mind.

"We shall never get on, I'm afraid," thought the Vicar to himself, "but at all events I'll not come into actual collision if I can help it. On the game laws we'll agree to differ. I don't think he dislikes me yet."

Nor did Mr. Harker dislike the Vicar. He thought him an honest, frank man, rather too independent and theoretical, utterly unpractical, and no more fitted to manage business matters than a child.

The "Pieuvre" of debt would have to clutch Beauflower far closer before he would stoop to borrow money of a proud and insolent man like that.

CHAPTER XIII.

MISS CHIVERS.

THE Misses Chivers, two maiden sisters, as inseparable as the Siamese twins, inhabited a small stone house just at the entrance of Fontford, and about a mile from Summerleas. It was a demure, rather dull house, quiet as a family vault, with a nice lawn at the back commanding a view of the Abbey woods, that ran in towering terraces to the south of it.

Good old souls! They lived on their quiet unbroken life unruffled by the jars and bustle of the outer world, the roar and rattle of whose railway wheels reached them occasionally, viâ Slobury, as they walked among their rose trees. Ordinarily no sound crossed them louder than the gentle roll of Dr. Briscoe's gig, or the grind of some farmer's ponderous waggon. The sole surviving daughters of the captain of an India-man, who had left them comfortably off, they had resided for twenty years in this part of Wilt-

shire, and, apart from a little gossip, passed as guileless and inoffensive a life as could well be imagined.

Their little parlour, looking out on the lawn, was a pattern of prim neatness. It only wanted tumbling about to make it really comfortable. The furniture never altered its place, and was never changed. It never seemed to wear out nor to decay. The portraits of dull old George the Third and snuffy Queen Charlotte, greeted visitors, year after year, from either side of the mantelpiece. On the wall facing the window there was an engraving of the Repentant Gambler after Stothard, and another of West's picture of the Death of Nelson. On the Indian shells on the mantelpiece no grain of dust ever lingered more than a few hours. Among the old china, on the square stand with shelves for nick-nacks that stood between the two pictures, was a great blue jar, of delicious old-fashioned Pot Pourri, the spiced rose leaves in which spread a pleasant aroma through the room. An inlaid ivory work-box stood on a small table, in a recess near the wide stone mullioned window, and some miniatures of by-gone Chiverses, with pigtails and strange head-dresses, hung over this. A beautiful case of humming birds, of a hundred jewel colours, stood in the opposite corner.

The two sisters sat by the window reading the "Times," as they did every morning exactly at the same hour. An old fashioned work-box stood on a small table between them, on the varnished lid of which was painted a view of Vauxhall circa 1787. Elizabeth, the eldest Miss Chivers, was a plain, pale, energetic person, with large dark eyes, that were still keen and expressive. She was the ruler. The younger, Jane, was deaf, an invalid, and altogether of a more negative character. Her opinions were borrowed from her sister, for whom she entertained a veneration that would have been ludicrous, if it had not been so sincere and so full of humility. She was always beseeching Elizabeth not to do so much, not to over-do it, not to wear herself out, entreating her to rest, to take care of the cold, not to think of her, and so on.

Both sisters, like most people, however unselfish, who live by themselves, and have not much to think of, were slighty hypochondriacal, and very much disposed to talk of their own ailments. But this absorbing subject, it should in justice be said, was instantly forgotten whenever sorrow or sickness called for their sympathy. No persons were oftener found at the bedsides of the dying than these good old maids. They lived to console misery and comfort old age.

They might gossip a little, but their life was one long act of unobtrusive good.

"Here's a most dreadful thing, Jane," said the eldest Miss Chivers, laying down the paper. "An earthquake near Callao has swallowed up a whole town. O dear! dear! I really think the end of the world must be coming."

Jane Chivers took the event with great composure, and merely inquired if there was any account if the Queen had reached Balmoral. An earthquake several thousand miles off interests us, after all, far less than the death of one's pet dog.

Just then a cart dashed up to the back door, and a sleek, sly, portly man came round to the window with a basket of meat on his arm. He took off his hat when he saw Miss Chivers.

"Nothing to-day, Mr. Pitts, thank you," she said, lifting up the window. "We've just had some game sent us from Dr. Briscoe."

The butcher said the weather was turning cold, he thought, and having uttered this meteorological remark, returned to his cart, and drove off.

"What a nice mannered man that is," said Miss Chivers. "Very straightforward man." (Pitts was really a plausible cheat.)

Jane agreed that he was most well-mannered, but begged and prayed Elizabeth not to put her

head out of window again without slipping a handkerchief or something over it. So the good old creatures petted each other.

“You quite spoil me, Jane. By the bye, we must ask the Beauflowers to tea. Dr. Briscoe wants to meet the friend who is there. They tell me he’s going to take a house and live down here.”

While they were discussing this great event, the latch of the garden door suddenly lifted, and Amy Robinson ran up to the window, laughing.

“Why, here’s dear Amy, I declare,” said Elizabeth, at last. “She’s got a holiday. Ethel’s gone to see the hounds meet, I suppose, with her father. Well, Amy dear; my dear, dear girl, how glad we are to see you!”

“Oh, we are so glad to see her,” said Jane; “how kind of her to come and see us old bores that no one cares for.”

“Dear old bores, that every one cares for and every one loves,” said Amy, dancing about them like a fawn, in pure restlessness of high spirits and enjoyment. “It is the poor governesses no one cares for.”

“Fie, Amy,” said Elizabeth Chivers; “you little puss, you know you steal every one’s heart. Well, and how did the great party go off? Come, give me your hat.”

“Well, it was so grand and so tiresome. Oh, Miss Chivers, here’s the crochet pattern I promised to bring, and the wire for the woollen flowers.”

“And is Mr. Cantelupe so handsome, and is it to be a match? Dr. Briscoe says they’re evidently setting their caps at him. They tell me he’s got such fine eyes. Is he clever?”

“Well, not very clever; but he’s a frank, dashing sort of fellow. But Oh, do you know, my dear Miss Chivers,”—here Amy sat down on a footstool at her friend’s knee, took both her thin hands in the prettiest, gentlest way, and poured forth the whole story of her sufferings the night of the party, when the Harkers would make her play, and she fainted.

Miss Chivers’s eyes flashed with indignation. Jane was calmly indignant in faint echo of her sister.

“Did you ever hear of anything like that? Why, she ought to be put in the pillory. I call it a most unfeeling thing. Don’t you, Jane?”

Jane decidedly thought it was most unfeeling, and got out her crochet work.

“I wouldn’t have stayed a day longer, Amy,” said Elizabeth Chivers; “it’s as bad as slavery. How can women behave so to women?”

“Oh, you mustn’t make me discontented,” said

Amy, laughing. "They didn't know I was so ill."

"Didn't know! but they ought to have known, and I'd tell them. And is it true Mr. Beauflower's visitor brought you in his fly, and had a fit in the park."

"Oh, yes, he brought me from Slobury. I could not get another fly."

"And the fit: did he have a fit? and what's he like? Is he quite black?" said both the sisters, breathless with curiosity.

"He was rather faint in the park, but only for a moment, as he was walking up the hill."

"And what is he like? They tell me he's quite black," said Elizabeth Chivers.

"Yes, we heard he's a regular negro."

"Oh, the silly, silly people," said Amy, clapping her little white hands. "Why, that's his servant! He's a nice old gentleman; so funny; really good natured, but he pretends to be cross. The strangest thing is, he lives opposite papa and mamma in London, and he got me this situation without our knowing it. His laundress, such a nice respectable old woman, had asked for me. Mr. Beauflower's cousin heard Mr. Harker wanted a governess for Ethel, and told him of it. Very curious, wasn't it? and he is so kind and polite, I quite love him. He's such a

grand manner. He treated me as if I had been a princess."

"Ah! he's of the old school, my dear, evidently," said Elizabeth Chivers, Jane having now sank into a mere listener, as she generally did. "There were manners then. The hard, cold sort of way hadn't come in then. Do you remember young Mr. Staunton that county ball we went to, Jane?"

Ellen said she did indeed. Oh, he was an elegant youth, and Amy should only have seen him open the ball with Elizabeth; they were a handsome pair.

"Don't talk nonsense, Jane; I was always a plain creature, but I certainly had beautiful hair then. I was full of life and spirits, and my partner was handsome enough for two. Ah! poor fellow, he was drowned ten years or so after that. He ran away with a Miss Wilson of Knoyle; he left her and went abroad, and she died the same year, broken-hearted, some people said. Oh, what a handsome fellow he was, and so accomplished. I've got a lock of his hair now."

Amy was listening with the intensest interest, tears rose in her eyes, she was so tender hearted. Then she laughed, her April nature turning as quickly as the colour on a dove's neck.

"Oh, do let me see it. How I wish you'd

married him, dear, then he'd never been drowned."

"Ah! my dear, perhaps it's better it was not so, no doubt the chastening has done me good. I'm afraid I should have been sadly proud and ambitious, and not the meek old thing I am now. But, I did love him dearly. Oh, he was so handsome. I'll show you the lock of his hair, dear."

The good old maid, in whose heart this memory lay pressed like the dead flower in the leaves of an old book, sighed as she said this, then laughed at her own nonsense as she called it, and unlocking the Indian box, inlaid with green, black, and white ivory, opened a secret drawer, and drew out a small square of blue silk; inside this, in scented white paper, lay a glossy crescent of black hair.

"Oh, how beautiful," Amy said, with all a girl's interest. "Oh, he must have been handsome; why it's darker than papa's used to be."

The old maid replaced the relic as a priest replaces the relic in the shrine, yet quietly, and with no affectation of deep feeling.

"And this archery meeting," said Miss Chivers, "when is that to be?"

"On the 20th. Oh, it will be such fun. I've been practising incessantly with Ethel."

"But Miss Harker is to win the prize, of

course? You won't really try, any of you. That's what that merry-hearted creature, Julia Beauflower, said."

There was a good-natured sarcasm about Miss Chivers' manner that would not have vexed even Sir Fretful Plagiary himself.

"Won't we?" said Amy, "we will, though. I shall do my best. Miss Cantelupe says she's sure of it. But how wicked of me, I quite forgot to ask you how your rheumatism was."

"I wasn't free from pain, dear, one day last week, but I'm better now since the drier weather."

"I'm so glad," said Amy.

"Is Mr. Beauflower really going to begin the church at Summerleas? I'm afraid he'll have a deal of opposition from those obstinate old farmers. And between ourselves, dear, I confess I like the high old-fashioned pews, where one isn't stared at by everybody. Besides, if we do sleep there, whose fault is it, I should like to know?"

"But one doesn't sleep, Elizabeth, under Mr. Beauflower, he's so very much in earnest."

"Oh no, Jane, not under Mr. Beauflower. Why, what a colour you've got, Amy. I'm afraid your head aches. You find our room too hot, I fear. We always make a rule to light our

first fire on the second of October, and it's often too much for some people."

Amy could not account for the flush. She said she was not conscious of it, and did not find the room warm.

Just then, before the flush could be explained or in any way be accounted for, Ruth, the pretty little housemaid, neat as if she had stepped out of a band-box, opened the parlour door and announced Dr. Briscoe. The doctor, whip in hand, strode in, bluff and hearty yet, with all the ceremoniousness of the old school, and all the gallantry of a gay old bachelor. He greeted the Misses Chivers as old friends, and Amy with a paternal tenderness.

"And you've quite recovered?" he said, still holding her hand, which, indeed, any one would have been rather loath to let go, "you're sure now; no deception with Æsculapius. You really must not overtax your powers. I promised your dear friend, Miss Julia Beauflower, to insist on this."

"Oh, really, doctor, I'm quite well again, it was only the heat of the room when I was tired. I'm strong as possible. I can walk for ever."

"She walks too far," suggested Jane Chivers, timidly, and then qualified her daring assertion by saying, "at least, in my opinion;—I never could walk far."

“And she won't take wine. Isn't it very wrong of her?” said Miss Chivers; “now let's form a court of justice, and condemn her to two glasses of sherry every day.”

“We don't care about the walking or the wine,” said the doctor, with his whip over his knees, “but this we insist on, that she is not kept in more than three hours running. We must put a stop to this over-working. I'm sure Miss Ethel will be on my side.”

“Ethel? Oh yes, Ethel doesn't care how much holiday she has; but I mustn't think about myself so much.”

“This young lady must rebel. If not,” said the worthy doctor, “she must tell them that she can't and won't do it. Ain't you entirely with me, Miss Chivers.”

“Oh, entirely. I should have been tired long ago,” said Miss Chivers, resolutely.

“And so should I,” said Jane Chivers, timidly.

“Oh, it's not so dreadful a life,” said Amy, laughing, as she took off her gloves. “They're all very kind, but Mr. Harker's rather stern, Mrs. Harker sometimes rather hard, and Miss Harker often very cross.”

“Oh, Miss Caroline can snap,” said Dr. Briscoe. “She's so angry at the tardy appreciation of our sex.”

“Then, in fact, Amy,” said Miss Chivers, “they’re all very nice when they ain’t the reverse.”

Amy laughed. “Oh, no. I mean,” she said, “that they are really all very kind. Of course I must remember that I’m only a governess, and I cannot dictate to them. And now I’ll show you the new crochet pattern. Oh it’s so charming.”

“Mr. Beauflower,” said Ruth, throwing open the door, and Mr. Beauflower entered, frank and pleasant as ever. His colour slightly rose as he shook hands with Miss Chivers and Amy; but otherwise he was unconscious of self and self-possessed as ever. He had anecdotes to tell, and village news to exchange with the doctor. Old Vernon of Dinton had broken his collar-bone out hunting for the fourteenth time. The volunteers were going to shoot for a cup. There was going to be a coursing match at Amesbury, between Mr. Long’s and the Earl of Portsmouth’s best dogs. The Honourable Mr. Cantelupe, having bought four tame deer, was going to drive them in a pony carriage. He was losing a great deal of money on the turf. All this news the vicar, and the doctor repeated, in a pleasant, witty, bantering way, and without malice or personality. The good old maids were delighted. Amy had never seen Mr. Beauflower to such advantage, so kind,

so sensible, so anxious to please. There was no acting a part, no bitter things were said for the sake of being clever, no innuendoes, concentrating the wandering spite and malice of the country side.

“You’re always bitter, doctor, when you talk of Mr. Harker,” said Miss Elizabeth Chivers. “At all other times you’re amiable. He is surely a very public spirited, energetic man. I hear they’re collecting subscriptions for a piece of plate for him at Slobury.”

“I know too much of the man myself to be very enthusiastic,” said the doctor, in his inflexible way, a stormy kind of light flashing from his cold grey eyes, “I suppose they give the fellow a piece of plate on the principle of the old Wiltshire proverb, ‘To the man who’s got an orchard give an apple.’”

“When the doctor is in that mood,” said Miss Chivers, “Mr. Beauflower, there is no doing anything with him. He fairly takes the bit between his teeth.”

“They tell me, Dr. Briscoe,” said Miss Chivers, stooping to admire Amy’s dexterity with the new crochet stitch, “that Mr. Cantelupe is going to stand for Bibury. Is it true that foolish young man is running through all his money? Dear me, what a handsome man his father was!”

“He’s going to the dogs as fast as his worst friends could wish him. He’s deep in the hands of the Jews who force him to take any rubbish they choose, pictures, furniture, what not, and, if report says true, he’s entangled too with that grand, public-spirited man, Mr. Harker. Poor lad, he’ll pay for it. He won’t come safe with all his feathers out of those redoubtable claws, that I can tell him. You must pardon me, Miss Robinson, you are supposed not to be present.

“By the bye, doctor,” said Mr. Beauflower, who had all this time been talking to Amy about crochet with the profoundest interest, “have you seen that old Mrs. Flower this morning. I have been twice, and they won’t let me see her. Is her mind gone or what?”

“Oh, her mind’s all right, the little she ever had at least, for her brute of a second husband used to beat her senses almost out of her. It’s the Travers’s way, that’s all, but she’s going fast, she may live, perhaps, four hours; hardly any pulse, kept alive with beef tea, she’ll just burn out. She’s lived far too low. That son of hers, the keeper, gave her only just enough to keep body and soul together. It’s a great shame that the Harkers allowed her to be in such a state. The cottage is damp and unhealthy.”

“I pressed Mr. Harker often about those cot-

tages," said the Vicar. "They are only fit for cow sheds."

"But they are so picturesque, Mrs. Harker says," said the fierce doctor. "Bah! I hate the word, because it implies degradation, demoralisation for the poor, and no progression."

"And what good is progression?" said the eldest Miss Chivers. "We were much more happy formerly. Servants then were not always reading their mistresses' letters or writing their own. People were more contented then."

"And dressed less," said Jane Chivers, meekly.

"Go back far enough," said the doctor, testily, "and they didn't dress at all. People were only happy when you were young, because they did not know their own degradation. Besides, they weren't happy at all, that's where you're wrong; it was you who were happy, and therefore you thought every one else so."

"The pig is happy," said Beauflower, "but it is only because he does not know he is a pig, and has never heard of sausages."

Amy and the Misses Chivers laughed at this, and the doctor thanked his ally.

"Ah! there is no use in poor me fighting against clever men, is there, Amy? but you haven't convinced me, doctor, you have only

silenced my one gun battery. I'm sure people were happier when I was young, and before railways made us all so restless. We'd fewer wants, and were easier satisfied. There was less jealousy of the classes above us, and we were all on different decks, and yet content because we were in the same ship. Oh doctor, doctor, you're a sad radical, isn't he, Jane?"

She always appealed to her sister from a kind wish to keep her in the conversation.

"Very sad," said Jane, caring more for the new crochet stitch than for all the British constitution put together.

"How I do envy you ladies!" said the doctor. "Work is a never ending pleasure to you, and all the time you can talk, listen—I was going to say flirt, but I won't say flirt—and observe."

Mr. Beauflower, who was holding some scarlet silk for Amy to wind, looked guilty, but made no reply. Amy, quite unconscious, defended her sex.

"You always think it is play," she said, "whatever we do. Why, this work is quite a serious study, isn't it, Miss Chivers? it wants the greatest attention; we oughtn't even to talk, ought we, Miss Chivers? Do help me."

"Not loud, you mean," said the doctor, rather

maliciously, for the Vicar had been talking in an under breath.

The Vicar, refusing to take the sarcasm, asked the doctor if he had seen young Brown lately, a fine young fellow who had been crippled for life by a fall out hunting."

"He'll never be himself again," said the doctor, rising to go. "It's a sad case, but the spine's injured, he'll never be sound. But I must be off on my rounds. Beauflower, I leave my character with you."

"No, I must tear myself away too. I've got to go to Birdbrook, there's a funeral there at two."

"Tear yourself away, now that's very pretty," said Miss Chivers, "isn't it, Amy? Well, I suppose we must let you go, but we are sorry to lose you, ain't we, Amy?"

Amy wished she had said "Ain't we, Jane?" but as she did not, she said quietly—"Yes," and bent again over her work.

When the two gentlemen were gone, there was a moment's silence, then Amy said,

"Mr. Beauflower repeated such a beautiful bit of Tennyson to me the other day—the Bugle Song—did you ever hear it, Miss Chivers."

"I never read but a page or two of Tennyson, my dear, and I thought him rather sugary and

cloying. I prefer "Thomson's Seasons," that's what I call poetry. I liked that book when I was a girl, and I like it now. Don't I, Jane?"

"Yes, you do, indeed, Elizabeth; we used to learn it at school, at Miss Simpson's in the Crescent. They gave you a Thomson as a prize, in most beautiful binding, I remember."

"Well, I don't know," said the eldest Miss Chivers to her sister, after Amy left; "but I think there's something growing between Amy and Mr. Beauflower. I feel sure he likes her, and he begins to know it; I'm not so sure that she cares for him yet; but then a man is twice as easy to read as a woman. His eye rested on her the moment he entered the room, it hardly ever left her, and there was a sort of unconscious deference when he shook hands with her at parting. Well, I wish him success. I only hope he is not living beyond his income, though some people say he is. It was very rash of him plunging into this church business. There was the rector of Stonecot Magna ruined himself that way. Dear Amy, I do hope those Harkers will be kind to her, and that horrid woman."

Jane hoped so too. She had not seen anything between the Vicar and Amy. It was for her (Jane Chivers) he had been helping to wind the silk, and very kind of him too. Amy was

only a child. Ten years hence was time enough for her to marry. He talked more freely than usual, she thought. She might be wrong.

“Ah, but we hadn't such prudent notions, Jane, when we were her age,” said Miss Chivers, who was never afraid of calling herself an old maid. “You were only sixteen, I remember, when you fell desperately in love with that young good for nothing Blagdon.”

Then the two old sisters laughed good-naturedly in chorus.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EXPOSURE.

JUST a short time before daybreak, when the curdling grey was thinning in the east, Paddy Blake, leaped lightly over a ruined portion of Mr. Harker's park wall nearest the village of Birdbrook, which he had honoured by selecting as his sleeping place. As he had scooped out a bed-room for himself out of the side of a snug hay rick, his hotel bill had not been expensive, and as his morning collation had consisted only of two fresh young turnips from an adjoining field, his charge for breakfast had not been expensive. His wardrobe being more eccentric than varied, he still wore the old mud-stained, torn, purple and scarlet coat, the ragged shepherd's plaid trousers, and those shoes which nature soles only once, and which are never taken off. His bruised black velvet cap still crowned his dusty and frowzy elf locks. His crazy, reckless face still bore prismatic marks of the bony fist of Jack the groom.

Paddy never walked; he always ran at a sort of jog-trot, like that of an Indian courier; a pace which, at an emergency, he could increase to a desperate speed. He was on his way to meet the Cantelupe fox-hounds, at Dinton, seven miles off; but he had a little business to transact first at the Abbey.

At the Abbey? What could this ragged vagabond, this seller of race-cards, this hanger-on of stables and tap-rooms, have to do at the Abbey? Yet it was to the Abbey he pushed his way through copse and plantation. Straight as the crow flies, stealthy as an Indian scout, he wormed his way through the nut bushes, avoiding the open wherever he could, for fear of the keepers, whom he regarded with as much hatred as awe. What he had to do he wanted to do before the light grew fuller; then he would gain the Salisbury road, and jog on to Dinton and his legitimate business.

All at once, as he got into the wood nearest the south side of the Abbey, now looming like a huge mausoleum in the cold twilight, he gave one stealthy look round, made a dash down, swift as a frightened deer, through the shrubberies and across the wide lawn, straight to the portico. Then, drawing a dirty, square, ill-folded letter from his breast pocket, he slipped it under the front door. Delighted

with the post-office he had so oddly chosen, he then executed two or three wild steps of a sort of wild Irish jig of his own composing, and leaping lightly over a high wire fence, intended to keep rabbits from the garden, he regained the high road by a cross cut, and jogged on calmly at his usual mechanical pace.

Yet, so elated was he at the delivery of the mysterious letter, that as he approached the lodge he began to crow like a cock and hoot like an owl, and as he passed under the great Inigo Jones arch, where the head keeper lived, he could not restrain himself from a thrilling imitation of a horn, which woke Travers, and drew from him a curse, as he turned again to sleep after a long night's watching in the woods, for there had been poachers about lately in the Cantelupe property, and they would probably try the Abbey pheasants next.

"It's only that Paddy fellow," Mrs. Travers said; but her worthy husband was already asleep.

Roused by the sound of his own voice, and beginning to shake off the drunken drowsiness of the night, Paddy, a hundred yards nearer the village, commenced a vociferous, and not unsuccessful imitation of a whipper-in, surrounded by all his spotted darlings, as an accompaniment to his performance on the imaginary horn.

“Hi ! Rookwood, Rookwood, Viper, Shakebush, Rattler. Hi ! there, dog, forward ! Rookwood, Sweetheart—who-o-o-o ! At this second blast Mr. Beauflower turned uneasily on his pillow, and Farmer Brown, up at five, and already at breakfast, preparatory to a ride to Warminster Market, shouted out to his wife in the kitchen as she loomed, like a witch in Macbeth, through the steam of a month's wash.

“Why, there's Paddy off to Dinton. Lord ! how well he do the harn, to be zure. Well, drat the fellow, it's martial like a harn, to be zure.”

And now Paddy, clear of the village, and as proud of having left his hand-grenade with the slow-burning fuze at Mr. Harker's hall-door, as the soldier who tied the bag of powder to the Delhi gate, was a little cooled by a cold shower that fell on the young, hopeful day, like a sour criticism on a young poet ; then he settled down to his old mechanical jog-trot, and buckled to for his seven miles run.

Mr. Harker had, two hours afterwards, just planted himself with his back to the fire, waiting for breakfast, when a footman entered with a square dirty-looking letter.

“One of the housemaids found this, sir, if you please, under the hall-door, this morning. Directed to you, sir.”

“Give it here,” said Mr. Harker, savagely. “Another, I suppose, of these anonymous letters.”

“Don’t know, am sure, sir; told to give it you, sir.”

“There, that’ll do; you may go. How long is it to breakfast?”

“Gong will sound in five minutes, sir.”

“Letter bag come yet?”

“No, sir.”

Mr. Harker went to the window, against which a small spiteful rain was speckling, and read the letter. It was written in a scrambling, awkward, illiterate hand, on the thinnest public-house note paper, and was rough with red sand from the public-house floor. It smelt horribly of rank tobacco, and was splashed here and there by the beer that had probably inspired the writer. It ran thus:—

“HONOURED SUR,

“Right is right all the world over, and wrong’s wrong, that’s what I say. If we will go over the fence we must expect a tumble. Your head keeper isn’t doing the right thing by you. He pockets half the tin he gets for the fizints, as is very well known by some as is not far off the tap-room of the White Hoss at Salisbury. Iv’e got it all bokd what he made last year over what he paid you. He is a chit and a

liar, as I can proof, and so can a gentleman as frequence the Red Cow in Winterbourne. You look out and you'l soon cotech him.

“Your well wisher

“ (and not a discharged gamekeeper at all),

“ DASH BLANK.”

“ To MR. HARKER, ESQ.”

“PS.—It's 72 fizints he didn't account for last half-year, and 114 rarebits.”

“Why, what is that, dear papa?” said Miss Harker, who just then sailed icily into the room. “What a dirty letter!”

“Oh, it's only another of those anonymous letters about Travers. I get about one a fortnight on the average.”

“I suppose, papa, they dislike him because he won't let you be cheated. Let me hear it.”

“Yes, that's it. He's worth all my other servants together. Would you like to see the Times, Carry?”

Just then the footman entered with the letter-bag. It contained half-a-dozen letters, but only three for Mr. Harker: two were circulars, the third was a book parcel, directed in a clear, flowing, business-like hand, which Mr. Harker at once recognised as that of the London poulterer, to

whom he always consigned his game. Its contents were the following :—

“ 144, NEWGATE STREET,
October 10, 1860.

“ SIR,

“ As an honourable tradesman, and having large dealings with you, I feel myself bound to make you acquainted with circumstances which I am most reluctant to conceal, and which have only lately forced themselves on my attention. I have, as you are perhaps aware, only recently succeeded to the business, and have only just had time to go carefully through my predecessor's books. I regret to say he was a man of no principle and much involved on the turf. Latterly he had grown quite reckless in business matters, and had taken to drinking. I find that your head keeper had two books, one for yourself, another for his own private use. The books Mr. Dawson left, and which I now forward, show me that in the last three years Travers must have pocketed more than £164 of your money. As an honourable tradesman I cannot allow this to go on without full inquiry. No doubt as a strict business man, which I know you to be, you will at once, by comparison of your private books, see if my suspicions are correct. It may assist you in this inquiry, when I tell you that my head

shopman has just come and reported the arrival of four dozen pheasants (three dozen only to your account), and 84 rabbits (32 to your account). Regretting the necessity of this letter, apologising for the intrusion, and still more hoping my suspicions may prove incorrect,

“I remain, sir,

“Your most obedient servant,

“W. A. WILKINSON.”

“Good morning, papa. Oh, Louisa Fenton writes the dearest letter,” said Ethel, who had been reading a letter from that romantic friend that girls always have, and who disappears only to be instantly replaced, “and she’s coming with Clara, and Kate, and Lucy, to the archery meeting, and they want us to go to the meet on Tuesday; the fox-hounds throw off at Mr. Penruddock’s. But how vexed you look! What is the matter?”

“Oh, nothing, my darling, you’d care about—only some disagreeable business. Where’s mamma?”

“She’ll be down directly.”

Just then Amy entered, fresh as a new-blown primrose, exquisitely neat and serenely happy. Mr. Harker shook hands with her mechanically; Mrs. Harker, who soon after arrived, patronisingly;

Miss Harker coldly, with evident dislike and no little jealousy. This was natural. The urn came in and the breakfast commenced, but Mr. Harker remained silent, moody, and preoccupied. He read the letter over several times, scrunched it into his pocket, then took it out and read it again. He rose several times from the table and looked out of the window, then he rang the bell violently.

“Roberts,” he said, “tell Travers when he comes to wait till I ring for him.”

Roberts looked astonished. Travers was a privileged man, who came daily to see Mr. Jabez Harker at the same hour; who spoke patronisingly to the servants, the man who could get the best of them turned away if they crossed him even by a look, and whose frown was the terror of the under keepers. He had never been kept waiting before.

“Master is in one of his tantrums, and black as thunder,” Roberts reported in the housekeeper’s room, “and I’d advise the lot of ye to keep out of his way to-day.”

“Why, what is the matter, Jabez?” said Mrs. Harker, “you’ve eaten hardly any breakfast.”

“A very disagreeable business,” said Mr. Harker, “I’ll tell you about it some other time, and yet, perhaps, I shall turn it to good. I think I see my way.”

All eyes were turned wonderingly on the head of the family, but no more was said.

Three quarters of an hour afterwards Travers strode up to the back door of the Abbey, crunching the gravel under the iron heels of his heavy shooting boots, and flapping his brown gaiters with a long ash stick.

The poachers had not shown, and he was proud of the precautionary measures he had taken. He exulted also over the rebuff he had given Parson Beauflower. He was blustering and violent as ever, and beat at the kitchen door loud and sharp, as much as to say, "Now double up, some of you, for I'm not going to stand any nonsense."

A scullery maid opened the door.

"Betty, my dear," he said, pushing in, "send one of the footmen lads to tell Master Harker I'm here."

Betty went, and was a long time absent. Presently a pert footboy came, rubbing a silver teaspoon in a rougey plate leather. There is an instinctive consciousness of misfortune in mean natures. The world is like a carrion crow, it can scent death a dozen miles off.

"I say, does Mr. Harker know I'm here, you boy?" said Travers, who was sitting beside a meat screen, scratching figures with his stick on the tiles of the kitchen floor.

“He do know it.”

“Well, I can’t wait here all day, so I’d better go into master’s study at once.”

The boy looked hard at the head keeper, and rubbed violently at the bowl of the spoon.

“Why the devil do you stare at me like that? If you’ve got a message, speak out.”

“Master desires you’ll wait,” the boy said at last, “till he rings for you; he’s very particularly engaged.”

“This is a nice way of wasting one’s time. Here, you boy, go and ask the housekeeper for a glass of sherry. I like it dry, mind.”

“All right,” said the boy; “I must go and tell Mr. Roberts first though, or I shall get a tidy blowing up; for he told me not to wait.”

“There’s something up,” said Travers, looking at the ceiling, when the boy had gone; “as sure as there’s a g in gunpowder. That London fellow can’t have blown about the pheasants. Well, I’ve got my answer ready, and I don’t care for none of them. Master can’t do without me; I could tell one or two disagreeable secrets about his game preserving if I chose, and he knows it; and there’s old Lord Mazagan, he’d give his head for me to come to him. It’s all right, my boys, it’s no use turning your backs on me. D—— this sherry, it is not dry enough for me. Betty, get

me a glass of ale. I don't like this stuff. There, no talk about it, run and get it. I'm dry this morning."

In the mean time, Mr. Harker was hard at work at the game books.

His pride was no doubt hurt at finding himself mistaken in his bailiff—his prime minister and favourite; but he was hardly sorry. Always suspicious, and loving power, he liked to have his servants fear him, and to keep some sword of Damocles hanging over their head. "Old servants," he said, "became tyrants, and turning men off prevented underhand plots forming to defraud one." As Jew turnpike-men used never to keep a toll-taker long on one road, so Harker changed servants frequently. He had begun to feel that he was often led by Travers, and he resented it afterwards, though he did not see it at the time. It would be a triumph to him, to hear his neighbours' astonishment at his suddenly turning off Travers—the factotum, the indispensable. It would show an inner power always at work, and superior to all influences. For past services he felt no gratitude. He wanted to show all about the Abbey how frail was the tenure which enabled them to batten on his wealth. He was not going to be a milch cow for any one. He would break any one who tried to impose on him, as a boy breaks the

ice in a cart-rut. He had no mercy upon any offender. He felt a pleasure beforehand in the prospect of tormenting and humbling this keeper, just as a child shakes the mouse-trap before he gives the mouse to the cat. He indeed always felt a positive pleasure in seeing others suffer pain under his gripe. There was a sense of power in it which he enjoyed.

Slipping the books, which had furnished such condemnatory figures, under the broad sheet of the "Times," he rang the bell, and desired the boy who answered it to send in Travers. Harker tasted the pleasure of that moment. It is those who have suffered tyranny who alone truly enjoy tyrannising.

There was a tap at the door. Travers entered. He took his usual seat by the door without ever being asked, put down his hat, and rested his stick against it.

"Well, Travers, any news?"

"No, sir," said the grim man, "the poachers did not show last night, or we should have given it them rather hot. They were about the Castle woods, I hear. The keepers there let 'em do what they like. One of their men told me in fact that they went snacks with them."

"Any news of the stray deer?"

"Yes, it's been seen about Chicklade, sir; and

I've sent a man to see if he can head it. Is that the new tank, sir, for dissolving bones. Does it work, sir?"

Travers was looking at the large zinc tank, which we have before mentioned. It was now full of a dark liquid, the acid fumes of which were perceptible in the room.

"Yes, that is the tank. I left off the lid to show you how quick it reduces the bones. I put in a bushel yesterday, now see."

Mr. Harker went with the keeper to the tank. There was nothing left but a layer of brown paste, two inches deep, at the bottom of the tank. "Lift on that cover," he said, "it keeps in everything."

The keeper did so with a smile of approval. The master then returned to his desk, the man to his seat by the door.

"Travers," said Mr. Harker, with a keen steady look at the rascal he addressed. "I hope you can trust the men who take the game to Slo-bury. You don't think they ever appropriate any?"

"I can't trust one of 'em—they are all rascals. You can trust them, but I never do. I check 'em in my own way. They can't touch a feather without my knowing it. Lord, I've got eyes on 'em besides my own. No, they don't touch the parcels, sir."

“I’m glad of it, because I heard my men drank about a good deal with the railway porters at Slobury. What was the last consignment of game to Wilkinson?”

“Three dozen pheasants and thirty-two rabbits. You can see my book, sir.”

Travers produced his book. The number was correct.

“And how many partridges last month?”

“Fifty-four.”

“And the total pheasants last year? Ah! I see from your book, 280.”

“Yes, sir, I think that’s what my book says.”

“Well, *my* book says,” said Mr. Harker, drawing out the two books from their concealment, that the pheasants you really sent were 380, the hares 240 instead of 150. How do you account for this, Travers?”

Travers was silent for a moment. Then he took his hat and stick, and stood erect, as if going to strip for a fight, “I say this, that it is all a lie, whoever said it—someone’s been altering the book. That man Wilkinson has taken a grudge to me because I would’nt bribe him, and would not let him rob you. He is a rascal, that man is, and he has been writing lying letters to you.”

There was a great deal of bluster about the detected keeper, but it was faint-hearted and

unreal. He was only like a hunted animal selecting the best point at which to spring on his assailants.

“Is this not your book? Tell me that.”

“Yes, but the figures have been altered. They ain't my figures, Mr. Harker. I can account before a magistrate for all I ever sold. You always knew what was killed at the battues.”

“I knew what you told me.”

“And what I told you was the Bible truth.”

Travers's face belied his words. He had turned livid pale; a cold perspiration was beading his upper lip and forehead. A chill moisture had risen on his sunken cheeks, and glistened on his square heavy jowl. He kept alternately wiping his face and tossing his sobby handkerchief into the crown of his hat.

Mr. Harker made no reply; he had turned to his desk and was studying the fatal books. Travers stood there by the door like a school-boy waiting for an imposition. All at once Harker turned.

“Travers,” he said, “I give you three months warning. I don't want to disgrace you, or to have this matter talked of all over the county. If your conduct bears full investigation I can reconsider the matter. I have been a good master to you, and haven't deserved these frauds.”

“I won’t have my character taken away, sir. Mind me, I’ll bring an action against this Wilkin-son. He daren’t meet me and make that charge.”

“That we shall see. I should propose that. I shall probe the matter to the bottom, depend on it. I’ll have no servant of mine defrauding me.”

Travers grew more livid than ever at this. He surrendered, but without open concession. He was like those soldiers who, when they leave an assailed position, leave their camp fires burning to deceive the enemy.

“I may have been a little careless about counting,” he said, “when we were hurried, but there’s been no fraud. My father was a very old servant of yours, Mr. Harker, and a faithful one. You promised him on his death-bed that you would always be a friend to me. Am I to be cast off now because some enemy of mine considers he could get more profit with another keeper less attentive to your interests?”

A strange change had come over Mr. Harker’s face at Travers’s chance mention of his father. He, too, grew pale, and a nervous flush rose on either cheek bone.

“I never meant my promise to bind me in a case of this kind, no one would. Your father was addicted to drink, but he was a good servant, and I rewarded him.”—Mr. Harker, as he said

this, leaned forward in his chair, and fixed his eyes immovably on the keeper,—“*You have no claim,*” he said, “*on me, Travers, that I know of; if you have, name it.*”

He waited eagerly for an answer. At that moment, John the footboy and Roberts the butler, who had been listening at the key-hole, and disputing for the place of vantage, bumped against the door in their struggle, but the noise did not disturb the speakers, and the guilty pair retreated in safety to a distant pantry. They instantly reported that Travers was in a row about some pheasants, and was going to get the sack. The footmen all agreed he was a miserable hupstart, and no good; pretty fair company for now and then, but never a man they should have chosen; he'd two faces; he wasn't fast and above board like, and he wanted polish.

Mr. Harker had had his small triumph. There was no fight left in the unfortunate keeper. All Travers could stammer was something about “an honest servant always having a good many enemies.”

“All that,” said Mr. Harker, “is irrelevant. I find a dishonest account kept, and you can only explain it away by accusing a respectable tradesman of lying. You may go now, but mind, be on your best behaviour. I will examine the matter for

myself. You shall have opportunity to clear yourself if you can. You can send one of your men here to-morrow. I don't wish to see you personally till this thing is cleared. Shut the door after you, and mind and get the rabbit nets ready for to-morrow. Mr. Cantelupe and some friends are coming. I've no time to talk to you any more now."

For a moment Travers felt himself crushed, but already his tenacious, dogged nature, always intent on self-aggrandisement, had recovered its spring. He was like a New Zealand warrior, whose elastic flesh, when wounded, is said to close like India-rubber after the bayonet is withdrawn. Before Travers had reached the kitchen he had arranged some schemes of escape. "I shall lay it all," he said to himself, "to that drunken beast Dawson, who died the other day. I shall declare he got the numbers down all wrong. Oh, I'll find out some bolting hole. Jack Travers isn't run to earth so soon. They're barking up the wrong tree if they think that. Worst come to the worst, there's old Lord Mazagan will have me, and not care a bit about a few pheasants. His keeper's a duffer, and can't rear enough birds for him. The vermin get them half, and the men sell the eggs. Let people take care not to cross me yet before I'm out of the saddle, or I may give

some of them a kick as'll unsettle half their teeth."

As Travers made his way to the kitchen, the footboy and Roberts reconnoitred him over the ground-glass door of the pantry, and reported him to the French cook as "awful cut up, and a muttering and swearing like any think." There was no one in the kitchen when Travers passed through but the scullery maid Betty, to whom he had before spoken.

"Where the d—— are they all got to? avoiding me, I suppose," he growled to himself.

"Where's Mrs. Spelman, girl?" he asked, angrily, of the fat, greasy, good-tempered drudge. Mrs. Spelman was the housekeeper.

"She's in the larder, sir; and, if you please, sir, she desired me to say the pheasants the keeper brought yesterday were very much shot."

"Very much shot? Who brought them up?"

"Ned Hacker, sir."

"Oh, Hacker, very well; then off he goes on Saturday. I particularly told him not to send any over-shot birds to the house. I'll see to that."

The girl began to cry, for Ned Hacker was her sweetheart. Mr. Travers took no notice, and slammed the door savagely behind him. He was in no mood for mercy now.

“By ——,” he said, clutching his stick as if it was a gun, “by ——, if I had that Wilkinson before me now I’d give him both barrels right in the eyes. Ah! by all that’s above and below, I would, though I was scragged for it the next minute!”

There was the making of a murderer about Travers if he had had more courage. But when his storms of rage subsided, he grew cautious, stealthy, and selfish again, and indisposed to risk much without a sure certainty of an adequate return. He would have given four years of life that moment, could a devil have suddenly started from the turf at his feet, or stepped from the shadow of that yew bush he passed, and offered him revenge on his enemies, and security from further exposure and shame.

When he re-entered his house, his poor drudge of a wife had got his luncheon laid out, but he swore at her, and pushed away the children, who wanted to play. When he had finished his meal, he rose moodily.

“I shall go and see mother,” he said to his wife. “She won’t be here much longer, and I shall be busy to-morrow at the rabbit shooting. She was never much of a mother to me, but still I should like to see her before she goes. It’s a sort of duty, you know. She missed father, though they quarrelled like cat and dog; so I suppose

I shall miss her, though she was always complaining and croaking about something or other, —rheumatism or some cursed thing. Then I shall go on and look up Pitts, about that money he owes me for the four hares.”

CHAPTER XV.

FARMER BROWN.

FARMER BROWN had for some time gathered at the "Peal of Bells," from Mr. Pitts, much to his surprise and regret, for Brown was one of the best natured of men, rumours of the difficulty of getting money from the Vicar. The honest farmer had never had a suspicion of such a thing before, and he felt vexed at a butcher in the next parish, a parish, moreover, he rather despised for its bad farming, spreading such reports, however true. He, therefore, when such rumours flew about, generally refilled his pipe, made a restless movement with his spoon against his tumbler of mahogany-coloured brandy and water, gave a spiteful dig at the fire, and asked the landlord what price he thought wheat would be at that day two months. Slowly then, and after a struggle, for he loved his money, Brown had resolved on an important step. The step involved a drive to Salisbury. One or two mean doubts whispered

by caution and acquisitiveness he cast behind him. As he mounted the old gig and seized the reins, his heart became twice as big as before, because he was going to do a kind action. He dared not mention the matter to his wife, however, because Mrs. Brown was sometimes inclined to thwart him in business matters.

He drove to Salisbury in the pleasantest frame of mind. Even the Stoke Deveril farms pleased him. He had a word for every one ; for the old turnpike-keeper and his pretty daughter, even for the people at the doors of the roadside inns. He left a wake of good humour wherever he went. He was full of jokes at the banker's, and drew fifty pounds with the utmost glee. He returned at a smart pace, giving an old woman a lift for the last five miles. His frosty old face beamed with satisfaction. One would have thought wheat was up to starvation prices.

Farmer Brown's was a plain, unpretending farm house, but strong, warm, and snug. There was a large porch to screen from sun, rain and wind, with two windows on either side of it. It was a simple architectural plan, yet the house looked massive, permanent, sensible, and comfortable. The windows had stone mullions in the Tudor style, and latticed and leaded panes. The small front garden, not much cared for—like

farmers' gardens in general—was a rough bit of unkempt lawn, bordered by a low stone wall and an overgrown box hedge. A China rose flowered at the door, and there were one or two blooms still on the honeysuckle that clung over the porch. Four or five purple and yellow dahlias flourished in the centre border, in which glowed a scarlet geranium and some heliotropes, while a great bush of fuchsia crowded its graceful scarlet pendulous blossoms. Just across the sunken road (a complete trout stream in wet weather, for the place was full of springs feeding the brook,) opposite the vicarage was a part of the farm-yard. In the central barn a flail could be heard pounding, with a muffled sound when it fell on the straw, sharp when it struck on the grass-strewn floor. Across the road, a huge blustering dung-hill cock, a sultan of the Mormon persuasion, was leading along his cackling harem in a stately way, as if he was the original fowl named by Adam and all others were impostors. On the very top of a large walnut tree, its leaves half beaten off by the artificial autumn of a remorseless threshing, from which its spirits had never rallied, a thrush sat and sang. In the farm-yard, near the house, some "young things," as Farmer Brown called his juvenile cattle, were sulkily munching, as if conscious of the impending market-day, that was to break

up their small society. The pigeons were fluttering about the orange roofs, while through an open gate a boy was leading a string of cart-horses, whose harness jingled as they paced heavily along. Up a steep meadow crowned by some firs, and to the right of the house, Farmer Brown's youngest son George, a sturdy young fellow of eighteen, with a craving alternately for the army, the sea, and the colonies, was striding, his gun under his arm, in search of two wood-pigeons that often visited an adjacent beanstack. The different sounds, mellowed by distance, mingled pleasantly together. The monotone of the flail, now sharp now flat, the song of the thrush, the shout of the distant ploughman, the brooding happiness of the cooing pigeons, the occasional bark of the dog, the bleat of sheep, the low mooing of the cows waiting for the milker, the burr of the distant threshing machine, and the song of the dairy girl, heard through the half open kitchen door, wove into one hymn of industry and happiness.

It was just five o'clock, Farmer Brown was back from Salisbury, and had nearly done tea. He kept to the old primitive hours, up with the lark and lie down with the lamb. It was daylight he burned, and when Nature, or rather her great solar lamp, dropped her remorseless black extinguisher, Farmer Brown put on his night-cap also and went obediently to bed.

“Morning hours,” he used to say, in his pleasant Doric—the broad Wiltshire—“had a bloom on ’em,” and he was ashamed of being up, like the gentry folk, four hours after the sparrers. If Nature didn’t waste nothing, she meant the sunlight to be used he was sure—that’s how he read it—at all events this was sartin, his father had always got up at five, and he wouldn’t be later. The last man at market never made the best bargain.”

How far this justified Farmer Brown in rising at five in winter, we do not know, nor did he care to argue the question. His laws were as the laws of the Medes and Persians. It would have been useless to prove to him that as he went to bed at nine, he did not gain much working time, for after all he was in the right—the early hours are healthiest, and they suited his work, so he gathered his health, homely wisdom, and money in his own simple narrow way. “If modern farmers liked their luxuries,” he said, “and aped the gentry, they might match themselves against him, and see whose fortune turned out best, and who made most money in the long run.”

It was just as Farmer Brown had had his third cup of tea poured out, and was reading with great zest the high price of corn at the last Devizes market, as Mrs. Brown was chiding Hannah, a great, good-natured, slatternly girl,

who had broken a plate in making some buttered toast, and as William, the handsome son who'd been crippled by a fall out hunting, was practising a tune on the concertina, that a knock came at the front door. Hannah, in red haste, announced that it was Mr. Beauflower.

Farmer Brown threw down his paper, sprang on his legs, and shouted a boisterous welcome, loud enough to have been heard a hundred yards off. There was a great deal more energy expended than necessary, but it was all in the purest good faith.

"Come in, Mr. Beauflower," he said, "come in, do 'ee; here, give Mr. Beauflower a chair, Martha. Why don't you put a chair for Mr. Beauflower, Hannah girl? Here, you come near the fire, now do'ee, there's a good man; now pray have a cup of tea with us, now do'ee. Hannah, you butter some more toast, now; now do'ee make yourself comfortable; Hannah, bring another block. Well, and how are you, and how's your poor mother and Miss Julia; seems a martial long time since we've set eyes on 'em. Well, you know we are always martial glad to see 'ee."

"Ah, 'tis a mortal long time; but now, John, dont'ee pour out that tea," said his equally good-natured wife. "Hannah, here make some more directly, and go and put the cake out. We were

admiring that sarmon of Sunday, about the tares, Mr. Beauflower. It come home to us, and Willy here wants you to let him read it."

It was as much as Mr. Beauflower could do to answer all these questions, to kindly but firmly refuse the fatal tea and toast just an hour before his own dinner, to take a chair several feet from the fire, and to shake hands alternately with Farmer Brown, his shrewd and managing but tried wife, and the invalid son, whose fine dark eyes glistened at sight of an old friend. The impropriety of pressing had not yet been noted in Farmer Brown's book of etiquette.

Four times the Vicar smilingly refused cake and tea, and four times Farmer Brown returned to the charge. A compromise was at last effected by Mrs. Brown, who, with all the triumph of a veteran diplomatist, allowed Mr. Beauflower to buy himself off with a huge hunk of seed cake and a bumper of treacly currant wine, thick, sweet, and cloying.

"Well, and how are you all, and how's the farm getting on, and where's that turkey you're getting ready for me?"

"Well, we're like the world, we roll on," said Farmer Brown, his pleasant frosty red face puckered with smiles; "as for the farm it just pays for the trouble of weeding it, and that's about all."

“ Ah! you farmers, you always say that.”

“ Well, just ask missis; we turn the money, that's all. It's not like the war time. Why in 'the year one,' two of my uncles in Dorsetshire both bought the farms they worked on. Ah! that was a time. Bony kept corn going up, but lor bless 'ee now—well—there's no money to be made now. Why in the year one——”

“ The turkey is getting on nicely,” said Mrs. Brown, seizing an opening as her husband was sneezing.

“ The year one ” was a prolific text with Farmer Brown.

“ And how's Willy?”

“ Well, he's big enough; he can speak for himself. He's very cheerful, Mr. Beauflower, though he don't get as strong as we could wish; but we hope, as the spring comes on, he'll get about a bit. He's very busy now learning the concertina.”

This spring strength was a pure fiction of the farmer's, intended to cheer his son.

“ And how's Robert?”

“ Well, he's away at some merry-making or other. He sticks to that more than he does to work. There's some rifle meeting on—shooting for a cup, I think. I am afeard they'll fill too often, whoever wins it.”

“He isn’t so steady, Mr. Beauflower, as we could wish,” said the mother, with a sigh. “But then young men will be young men, and I suppose he’ll settle down some time ; there’s good about him. That lad never told me a lie yet ; but he’s too fly about, and likes hunting and racing too much to please his father.”

“Well, Willy,” said Mr. Beauflower, “and so you don’t feel fit for work yet ?”

“No,” said Willy, hopefully. “But father thinks in the spring I shall get about again. I shouldn’t care if I could only work a bit, the days do seem so long. I saw Dr. Briscoe this morning, but I think one ride round the farm would do me more good than all the doctor’s stuff I’ve taken since I was ill.”

“Health will come in God’s own time, Willy ; you must be patient. And how’s George ?”

“Well, he still wants to be a soldier,” said Farmer Brown. “Nothing will do for him now but soldiering, but as I says to him, a soldier chap proud of his red coat reminds me of all the world of a sheep proud of the red ochre they rub him with to mark him for the butcher.”

“They’re so stiff-necked, you see, lads of that age,” said Mrs. Brown ; “they always want something they haven’t got, and the last story fills up all their heads for the time. He’s a good boy,

though, and in time the nonsense will go off, we hope—we hope so.”

“And is it true that we hear in the village,” said Farmer Brown, “if I may make so bold as to ask—that that gentleman stopping with you is going to take the house Mr. Harker’s farm bailiff used to have, just out of Fontford?”

“Oh, yes; he’s taken quite a fancy to Wiltshire.”

“And pray, how did you find old Mrs. Flower?”

“They wouldn’t let me in, Mrs. Brown. They’re a curious people, those Traverses.”

“It’s very strange; to be sure it’s very strange.”

“They let me see her last week. They say the son neglects her.”

“I remember her such a pretty girl,” said Mrs. Brown, “before I married John there. But her second husband took to drinking, and beat her, and then she had fits, and after the husband’s death her son neglected her, and half-starved her. I never liked her, but I always pitied her.”

“And so Miss Amy’s come back to us,” said Farmer Brown, cutting three huge sections of cake, intending to reload the young Vicar’s plate when he had struggled through the piece with which he was still toying helplessly, yet with a melancholy fortitude worthy of a better cause. “Now that’s a girl I hold to be a downright good

girl; Lord, how kind she was, Mr. Beauflower, to them Hackers, coming and reading to 'em day after day, through the rain and mud, when the old man had that last stroke, and bringing them little tit-bits from the house, and then sending the elder girl to school out of her own money. Ah! now that is a girl as does one's heart good to see in these times, when girls ain't what they used to be, and seem all trying to be men, and queer sorts of men too."

The Vicar assented, but in a way much too cold for Farmer Brown's warm heart.

"It looks very grand," he said, "seeing a string of poor people going by with pitchers for soup twice a week or so; very well it looks, like those men you see in Lunnon, carrying boards with advertisements. But give me the quiet way of doing good, and good that costs trouble to oneself. Lord, I've seen her scores of times steal into a cottage and say a few kind words that has been like sunshine in a dark place, and she's come out smiling, as if no sorrow could be where she was."

"Ay, she's a dear good young lady," responded Mrs. Brown, "worth half the stock of madams, and the old ewes dressed lamb fashion. She'll make a good wife for any man. There, if I was a man I'd rather have her with the one gown she

has on, than any proud duchess's daughter as has been all but fed on gold. She's known trouble, and trouble is like the first frost on the savoys, it mellows and softens people."

"She is indeed a very amiable girl, I think," said Mr. Beauflower, "and does a great deal of private unobtrusive good among the poor. And she shows discrimination, too, for she is not taken in by the fine talkers and the regular beggars, the plausible people who stop swearing and railing, and get out their bibles directly they see any visitor coming."

Mr. Beauflower uttered this praise with an almost ostentatious frankness.

Yet he was vexed, he hardly knew why, at anyone outgoing himself in praises of Amy, and he was also annoyed at her praises being forced specially (as it seemed) upon him.

"What a pretty old-fashioned ornament this is," he said, "standing upon the mantle-piece"—touching a large bunch of dry transparent seed pods of a heart shape, that mingled with peacock feathers, green and violet-eyed, and an ear or two of wheat, nestled over the mantel-piece in a blue china jar, between two staring, highly-coloured pictures of fox-hunting scenes.

"We do call that in this part, 'Money in both pockets.' It's like an old-fashioned pocket, you

see, and there's seeds on each side. It's a foolish name, you see, that the boys give it, I suppose, but still it is the name, and so we call it. Willy there likes to see it, and we keep it for him."

The Vicar laughed, and said it was very pretty. He was glad to see Farmer Brown liked the old farmhouse ornaments: the books on the side table in front of the best tea-tray, and the long sentry-box clock, with plenty of room in it for the works.

"Well, I do, Muster Beauflower, and like them old clocks, they ain't so smart as things they make now, but he keeps good time, and when I wake in the night I like to hear him ticking away steadily downstairs; it's company, too, for Willy, when he's alone, poor boy."

For some time the good simple-hearted farmer had evinced a strong desire to be alone with the Vicar. He had been restlessly looking at the door, and trying to catch his wife's eye, and at last he resorted to the broadest and most unmistakeable hint.

Nodding violently at his wife, he said, "You're such an old friend, I'm sure you'll excuse my missus, who's very busy making pork pies, and can't very well leave 'em to Hannah, for she's apt to make the crust too heavy. There, you go, my dear,

Mr. Beauflower will excuse you, I know. There, you go, Martha."

Directly Mrs. Brown had gone, after some faint remonstrances and many homely apologies, the farmer laid formal siege also to Willy.

"Willy, my lad," he said, going up and taking his hand, "you look tired, you mus'n't worrit any more over that there moosic, you go and lie down a bit, that'll do you good."

Willy remonstrated faintly, but capitulated. The moment he was gone, Farmer Brown complacently drew his chair closer to the Vicar, and looked him straight in the face. He was embarrassed, but still he darted boldly at the subject.

"Mr. Beauflower," he said, "my farm last year brought me a little more profit than usual—not much to boast of, but still a little profit."

"I am very glad to hear it." The Vicar wondered what on earth could be coming.

"Now I know you're going to repair our church (not that I like giving up my father's old pew, and I don't pretend to,) I don't like your draughty benches, with every one seeing if you close your eyes for a moment, and nothing takes off sleep in sermon time like closing your eyes for a moment, father used to say. But I know you parsons have many calls on you, and many ways to spend your money, poor men here, poor

men there, and people writing for charity, and it struck me that you might like a little of the money you'll be promised down at once, for the architect will want a hansel, and the builder and the man who hauls the stone, they'll all want something, and there'll be circulars to print, and all that, so I turns this in my mind, and this morning, without telling my missis, I drives to Salisbury, and gets out five-and-forty pounds in gold. I never did like those rubbishy notes, and here it is."

As he said this, Farmer Brown went to an old-fashioned bureau, and pulling it open, took out a wash-leather bag of sovereigns and placed the bag on the table by Mr. Beauflower.

It is a remarkable fact that there is always something hollow, strained, unnatural, and jarring about the voice when the owner of it is acting a part, and not speaking from his heart. True love speaks with the deepest and fullest harmony. Deception is always a semitone or two out of tune.

Mr. Beauflower felt this in a moment, and the blood flushed up to his face. He knew how careful, close, and thrifty the farmer was, and felt sure that no art or eloquence would ever get more than five pounds out of him for the restoration of any church ever built. He saw at once it was a kindly furtive way of offering him a loan without

hurting his pride. A horrible memory of the manner of Mr. Pitts, the butcher, also flashed across him; was it possible that his anxieties could be the subject of village conversation; did the half-drunken ploughmen at the "Peal of Bells" laugh at him—the keepers in their huts in the woods at night mock at the possibility of seeing him arrested? Were the tattling old women at the village grocer's talking about his debts over the counter when they came for herrings, tea, and snuff? It could not be for the church, there was no money wanted yet for preliminary expenses, he had told every one so at the first vestry meeting; besides, Mr. Harker had half offered him £200 at once, and was going to begin immediately on his own aisle and family pew, and had half promised two windows and a new organ.

Farmer Brown did not rightly interpret the reluctance. Ostrich-like, he considered his carefully-arranged ambuscade complete. He considered himself wrapped in an invisible cloak.

"Now, don't you make any bones about it, Mr. Beauflower," he said, "I mean it, and there it is, and hearty welcome you are. When the money begins to come in, then's time enough to repay me. Come, you take it."

Mr. Beauflower rose and quietly dropped the money into Farmer Brown's hands.

“No,” he said, “Mr. Brown, I’m sincerely obliged to you, but we are not in want of any money for some time to come; besides, I do not receive the money. The subscribers pay it into the County Bank.”

“Now do’ee, do’ee take it. I’m a straightforward man, and I mean it. I can afford it; it’ll get no interest for me worth mentioning at the Bank; now do’ee take it and make what use of it you like for the present. I don’t want to see you put out by our church matters. You’ve put your name down for one hundred pounds—mind a hundred pounds is a good deal for any man, and you shan’t be put out every way. Now do’ee take the money as ’tis meant.”

Mr. Beauflower said, coldly and firmly,

“Thank you, Mr. Brown! I thank you very warmly for your kind offer, but I could not take the money, and now I must say good bye, dinner will be waiting for me.”

“I wish now,” thought Farmer Brown, “I had offered it him point blank.”

Good old soul, he had no more power of diving into that refined, thoughtful, and proud nature than a mole has of sinking a coal shaft.

The Vicar went forth into the village lane another man. The brand was on him. He had never felt the curse till now. The Pieuvre of

debt had been grappling with him, and the scars of the wounds it had inflicted were visible, he found, to all the world.

Perhaps (and this seemed to sting him most,) —perhaps, even his mother and Julia had heard of his debts.

Perhaps even——Amy.

The bitterest degradation is to be degraded in the eyes of those we love. Did the Vicar then love Amy? If he did not, why did her name rise before him at that moment?

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO CONNOISSEURS.

THE duties of a governess are not too agreeable to even the youngest and most buoyant spirit. Duty at times shrinks before them; happiness cowers and mopes; even Love's smile fades before their dull monotony. The back of Atlas is not strong enough to bear the heavy burden of dependence. No governess that ever lived but has felt at times that the meanest drudge, starving over slop-work, was happier than herself in her luxurious slavery.

How cruel women can be to women, the Nun's recent trial shewed us. Women know well how to wound. They only prick with lancets where men use swords and bludgeons that cut and bruise; but they can infuse the subtlest poison into a word by a single inflexion of the voice, by a turn of the head, the movement of an eyebrow. Perhaps it is because the victims of such women as Mrs. Harker do not drop down dead under the lancet

and the poison that the oppressors have no pity. They know how to inflict tortures worse than homicide, and yet leave no wound for which justice can claim compensation. Their poisons, like those of the Borgias, kill years afterwards; they see no blood ooze from the breaking heart, and they therefore feel no remorse; they have an unhal- lowed pleasure in keeping a slave in a country where slavery is thought to be illegal.

These women have a keener pleasure still in heaping indignities on natures that birth and edu- cation have rendered sensitive to the highest degree, and that position and misfortune have deprived of all power of resistance. It is the secrecy of the cruelty that makes it more terrible;—it is the secrecy that prevents the inflictor being branded. Mrs. Harker's nature was specially capable of such cruelty to one who resisted her caprices, or ran adverse to her plans.

There were symptoms already of the dislike that was growing in her mind towards poor unconscious Amy. Since the night of the *soirée*, when public attention, especially the young Right Honourable's, was drawn to the pretty governess, Mrs. Harker had grown colder, more repulsive, and more exacting.

Ethel — still Amy's devoted companion and champion—was a nice high-spirited child, hard

to lead except by the silken bands of affection, who had a noble contempt for the vast desultory mass of knowledge at present expected from young ladies of her age.

“What is the use of it?” she said, leaning her pretty saucy head on her hand in intense weariness of Mangnall’s Questions, that range over countless subjects, from the solar system to lucifer matches. “What is the use of it, Amy? I’m not going out as schoolmistress. What do I care about Miltiades and Epam—pam—paminondas, and William Rufus, and Oliver Cromwell, and Gustavus of Sweden, and how people make cochineal, and how far the sun is from Saturn, and all that nonsense? I shall forget it all the year after I’ve done with you. What does Carry know about vulgar fractions? She can’t do a figure. What does papa know about Saturn’s belt? I don’t believe he ever heard of it.”

Amy hardly knew how to reply to Ethel, so baffling is a child’s philosophy. It had never before struck her how broad and shallow was the modern education she had to impart.

“Oh, you silly child,” she said, laughing in her own sweet, guileless way, “you would not like to know less than other girls. If of all you learn, only a little will remain,—the more you learn, the more that little will be.”

Ethel leaned her wise head on her little hand, and allowed that there was something in that. Then looking up, and shaking her golden mane, she said thoughtfully,

“Amy, do you like being a governess?”

“No, darling.”

“Then why are you one?”

“Because papa is poor, and it is my duty to help them.”

“What a pity it is that what is right isn't always pleasant too. I wish instead of these nasty French verbs, and these horrible questions, you had only to teach me riding, and archery, and croquet.”

“Then I should have to be strict, and the lessons would come so often that you would not like them; and you would want to get back to the scales, and the verbs, and the size of the moon, and the date of Magna Charta.”

People in conversation have a way, as fencers have, of acknowledging a thrust received. Ethel gave that sign with all the gravity of a grown-up woman. Girls are instinctive mimics, and soon learn the manners of grown people, even while they remain children to each other.

“I suppose,” Amy said, “the standard rose-trees on the lawn, Ethel, don't like the iron rods they're tied to, but yet they wouldn't grow straight without them.”

“Oh, Amy, how clever you are! But you a’nt an iron rod! Mamma is, though, and Carry’s all iron.”

“Come, Ethel, we must go on with the questions, dear. Now what was the date of the battle of Marathon?”

“One hundred—one thousand— Rubbish, I don’t know. Oh, Amy, did I tell you we’re all to go to the meet on Tuesday, and Carry’s going to ride Fire Fly, the big chestnut. She can’t manage it, and she’s afraid; but she wants to show off because Mr. Cantelupe is to be there. Such fun! but Jim, the groom, is to keep close to her, so there is no danger. You’re to have Peacock, the grey horse, and I’m to have the pony. It’ll be awfully jolly!”

“It’ll be very nice,” said Amy, clapping her little white hands; “I do so like to see hunting. But come, Ethel, we must go on now with the irregular verbs. Have you done your exercise?”

But incorrigible Ethel was intent on Du Maurier’s last clever drawing in a number of “Punch” that lay on the table.

“Oh, Amy,” she said, going to the window, “I didn’t tell you that mamma has promised to ask dear old Miss Chivers to the archery. She wouldn’t at first, but I teased her so.”

“Ethel, dear, you must go on, dear, with your

sums. You're very idle this morning. You'll really make me angry."

"Oh, Amy, you couldn't be angry. Amy, Amy, come look here; here's Mr. Beauflower and that old gentleman we met the other day, coming to call."

Amy hardly knew why, but, at those simple words, her heart seemed, for a moment, to stop beating, then the blood seemed to flow faster than ever, and she felt that her face, too, in some way, betrayed that inward sensation; so to hide it, and to prevent Ethel seeing it, she went to the window, took her by the silky mane playfully, kissed her hair, and looked out too; but, to her disappointment, the visitors had already passed under the portico, then the bell rang, and they were admitted.

We must now follow in their shadow. All the way through the park Mr. Goodrick had been silent and preoccupied. The lake glistening in places like a steel blade shaken in the sunshine, the white-sailed armada of proud, angry-looking swans, the wild ducks scattering before the keeper's punt, the deer feeding in the valley beyond, on the other side of the park, the black-birds scudding with frightened chirrup from bush to bush, the rabbits trotting across the path, the thoughtful red cows grazing in the meadows, the

swallows sweeping past or crescenting over the water, none of these things seemed to draw Mr. Goodrick from some absorbing thought that held him captive. His friend, as a pleasant companion should, humoured his mood, and was silent. The vicar's thoughts turned unconsciously upon Amy. Should he see her?—he wished to, and yet did not wish. He liked her best away from those proud, oppressive people; he could not bear to see her a serf—a Cinderella, who was still waiting for the fairy prince—the recreant knight who still lingered in fairyland. He thought how little likely it was that the Pieuvre that held him fast would ever allow him to marry; he wondered whom Amy would marry, whether a rich or a poor man. Would she go back some day to the sordid life in the river-side street and sink into a scraping, cheating lodging-house keeper? After all, she was not a lady; that he had to remember. She would go away, and he should think of her as a pretty face that had passed across a dream;—yet not merely that, he said to himself, not in her mere grace and beauty such as meet in a lily or a violet. No, there was a loveability. Ah! if she had only been a lady fit to marry a Beauflower of the old Wiltshire family dating back from the Plantagenets. Perhaps really she was sordid, with narrow views, and with the craft that lies in

women, as the claws lie within the cat's velvet paw. His love could not yet blossom freely—the cold winds of pride kept the bud from opening.

“I'm very silent,” Mr. Goodrick said at last, “but the place so reminds me of my old friend Staunton and his stories of the place. You mustn't think me rude—as they said of Dr. Johnson, ‘he's only the skin of a bear.’ What a beautiful place it is! It would be hard to leave it. If I was its master I fear I should say when I was dying, ‘and must I leave all this?’”

“It is very beautiful, but the man you will see in a moment is not happy. He is feared here, not loved. The poor people are always regretting the old squire, and he knows it. There are some bad stories about him, but then he's no favourite in this part of the county. If it wasn't for his money, I don't think he would have a chance of society. As for that presentation of plate they talk of, it is all got up by his own tradesmen and a few of the smaller gentry who want to toady him and get to his parties.”

“You are severe.”

“Well, I am. But the man is so very odious. But you will judge for yourself. Let's ring the bell.”

The visitors were instantly admitted. The butler who let them in passed them on to a footman, who ushered them into the cabinet room, as

it was called, a square apartment of considerable size, at the back of the drawing-room, and looking out upon a small back lawn.

The room was surrounded by large buhl cabinets, of the florid Louis Quatorze period, on which stood large bronze busts of the Cæsars. It was one of the disagreeable features of the house that the not very ancient arms of the Harkers seemed emblazoned all over it. They were on the chairs and on the inlaid tables and everywhere. They were so much insisted upon, that they at last drove you to irresistible scepticism. If a man in conversation repeats an assertion often, you may be sure that he is doubtful of it.

When Harker entered, the vicar was attentively studying the bust of that wild beast Caracalla, and fancying he saw in it a development of some of the features of its owner. Judging from the vicar, men's hearts are not carried in glass cases, for Mr. Harker was flattered at the attention paid to one of what he particularly considered "a great bargain." Mr. Goodrick was gazing intently in the fire, again absorbed in some reverie that held him. Men who have lived much alone are subject to reveries, and this was a sad one, for it invested his face with an air of the most intense abstraction from the outer world. With his face crimsoned in the firelight,

he looked like some ancient philosopher expiating in purgatorial fire the errors of an imperfect belief.

Mr. Harker was courtesy itself ; but courtesy of a patronising, self-conscious, and unpleasant kind. He was acting the millionaire host, and was anxious to prove his strict adherence to the rules of the society that welcomed him but despised him. His manners were Lord Mayor's manners ;—the stage country gentleman's manners. He was not like even Cantelupe, for instance, who always seemed to move as if it was impossible he could do anything unbecoming a gentleman.

Mr. Harker was evidently flattered at the visit, and anxious to appear at his best before a distinguished London connoisseur whose name he had heard at sale rooms and picture auctions. Mr. Goodrick was watching Harker with keen eyes, that were incessantly turned on him when he was not actually speaking to their owner. His look displayed not so much the curiosity of a detective as the ceaseless curiosity of an inquirer and thinker—of a man determined to thoroughly search out a nature at once hateful, yet interesting, and strange to him. It was the sort of look a barrister gives an important witness against his client—the look a man gives an enemy whom he has long hated but never before seen.

“I am most delighted, Mr. Beauflower,” said Mr. Harker, when he had been formally introduced to the Vicar’s friend, “to show a part of my poor collection to your guest. It will contain nothing new to him except perhaps one or two things. You are fond of jewels?”

“They are my special study,” said Mr. Goodrick. “But I have grown tired of coins, and pictures, and shells, and china, and ivories, and enamels, and now I’m devoting myself entirely to jewels.”

“My agents in Holland and France have all carte blanche to buy the best things for me. By-the-bye, you were admiring those busts. I got them at Christie’s, quite a bargain. They belonged to the Duke of Buckingham; they’re from Stow. I only gave three guineas each for them; they’re worth fifteen, I’m told. Not a bad investment. As a business man, I pride myself on this, that not a single article in my collection but would sell for double what I gave for it. It is not every one who could say that.”

“I certainly couldn’t,” said Mr. Goodrick, drily; “but then I don’t want to sell again what I buy.”

“No more do I,” said the rich connoisseur, rather pompously; “oh no more do I. I am not a dealer; but still, it is pleasant to think the value there, available at any moment.”

The Vicar assented to so much.

"In such times of great commercial shipwrecks, no precaution is useless."

"I don't know," said Mr. Harker, rather scornfully, "that the precaution of keeping a few thousands in this way is of much use, if no other was taken. But I will just show you a curious tray here of Cingalese cat's eyes, black opals, star stones, very rare green amethysts and fine white sapphires."

As he said this, Mr. Harker threw open a large buhl cabinet and took out an ebony drawer labelled "India and Egypt."

"This black opal," he said, taking a jewel from its velvet cell, "is from Nubia. It has the crimson glow of a ruby, you see, and looks like a small bit of coal red-hot at the end."

"Yes, I've seen them before," said Mr. Goodrick, coldly. "This is not so good as I have seen; it is too cloudy. I prefer, for my own taste, this Brazilian hyacinth; the orange and scarlet are very pure in it. I see you have some of the Oriental hyacinth, the honey coloured, but this bit marked Oriental is only rock-crystal that has been heated and smoked. The Dutch lapidaries often take in the English dealers in that way. This spangled topaz is fine, but they're not hard to get."

Mr. Harker was a little nettled at the cold-

ness of his visitor. He had felt sure of dazzling him.

“My collection is like most men’s,” he said; “strong in some points, and weak in others. My emeralds and sapphires I pride myself most on; and one or two of my diamonds which are historical stones. I have one especially that Henry the Eighth used to wear. It was given him by Francis the *Second*” (Mr. Harker’s historical knowledge was rather shallow). “It was called the ‘Phoenix.’ This blue topaz, too, is thought fine by *experienced judges*.”

Mr. Harker infused the slightest possible drop of acid into these two last words, to imply a suspicion of his visitor’s infallibility; but Mr. Goodrick was granite, and like Gallio, “cared for none of these things.” He seemed omniscient.

“It is pretty,” he said, holding the gem to the light; “but, for my own part, I prefer the red topaz, which is perhaps rarer. This beryl is good. Look, Beauflower, what a fine green colour; it would look better by candlelight. How curious, too, this Cingalese cat’s eye is. Hold it to the window and you’ll see coloured rays issuing from a central point and extending to the edges.”

“This is my favourite stone,” said Mr. Harker, taking a jewel from a large central drawer. “It

is a magnificent sapphire, nearly as large as Mr. Hope's; it is not however like his, blue by day and amethystine by night. It cost me one hundred and fifty pounds, and is worth three hundred."

"Yes, a fine stone," said Mr. Goodrick, coldly. "But I have seen such sapphires in Russia, in the Regalia room at the Kremlin, that I hardly feel surprise at any sapphire of moderate size. In the Czar's crown there are blocks of sapphire almost as large as pigeons' eggs—monsters! Yes, that's a fine stone. It's a curious thing, Beauflower, about this Brazilian topaz,"—as he said this, he laid down the sapphire carelessly and took a small red gem from an open drawer next it.—"You'd take this for a ruby, but it is only a Brazilian topaz that has been heated in a crucible of hot sand."

"I always called that a Balass ruby, and I think you must be mistaken about it. I showed it last week to one of Hunt and Roskill's head men, who was down here with some jewels for my friend the Honourable Mr. Cantelupe, Lord Mazagan's nephew, one of our Wiltshire noblemen, and he pronounced it a remarkable specimen of the Balass ruby."

"Then I do not congratulate Messrs. Hunt and Roskill on their young man," Mr. Goodrick

replied, with cutting coolness ; “ for I have myself seen the topaz changed to this colour. They do it every day in Amsterdam. But I’m sorry I’ve undeceived you.”

“ Oh, I would rather know the exact nature of any gem I possess,” said Mr. Harker, with an ill-affected indifference, that was as vulgar as it was badly assumed.

“ What is this pretty olive-green stone ? ” said the Vicar, appealing to Mr. Goodrick as the undisputed possessor of the most knowledge on the subject.

“ Oh, that,” said Mr. Goodrick, smiling, as if he had found an old friend, “ is a peridot, or olivine, as the English jewellers call it. It is found sometimes in lava, and it has this special merit, that it is the only precious jewel that has ever been found in stones that have fallen from the moon. The people in the moon don’t seem to throw away their diamonds much.”

“ That reminds me,” said the Vicar, laughing (Mr. Harker refused to laugh ; in fact, he seldom laughed at anything)—“ That reminds me of Farmer Brown, the other day, when one of his shepherds found some Roman coins in ploughing up a bit of Down land : ‘ How them Roman chaps seem to have dropped their money about,’ he said. ‘ When the same time goes by again,

the people who come after me won't find many of my shillings.'"

"Ah! those were the Vespasians you gave me?" said Mr. Harker.

"Yes."

"The turquoise is a curious stone, Beauflower," said Mr. Goodrick, assuming that the owner knew all the secrets of mineralogy (though he knew few or none, and had only picked up his collector's jargon from the jewellers and curiosity dealers).

"How? It looks harmless enough."

"The real Persian turkois loses its pure blue colour if kept near musk or camphor, or exposed much to the fire. They imitate the stones in Paris by dying bits of fossil ivory blue. These imitations, however, always effervesce when tested with acid. This is a genuine one and a fine one."

"It ought to be, for it cost me twenty pounds," said Mr. Harker, rather angrily. "And now I will show you my imperial jewel—my great treasure; the one I really hold to be unique. I gave three hundred pounds for it to a Hungarian nobleman; and it is said to have been one of those French crown jewels stolen in 1792. It is mentioned, I believe, in Bantum's History."

"Brantôme," quietly suggested Mr. Goodrick.

“Yes, Brantum. It is a rose-coloured brilliant.”

Mr. Harker, as he said this, took out a small key, opened a special drawer in the very centre of the cabinet, and took out a small blue silk bag, which he opened with religious care, and drew out a very fine brilliant that flashed forth prismatic colours as he drew it from its hiding place.

“There,” said he, “look at that—there’s life!”

“How very beautiful!” said Mr. Beauflower.

“Very fine; yes, *very* fine!” said Mr. Goodrick, after a long and careful inspection. And this was the stone Francis the First? ——”

“Francis the Second gave Henry. Charles the First’s queen sold it to Louis the Fourteenth.”

“Francis gave Henry the Eighth. I doubt that part of its history—very much doubt it.”

“Doubt it! why, it is a stone with a proved pedigree. Pray, sir, as you seem to know so much on the subject, may I ask the reason of your doubts? I think you will find it difficult to controvert the opinion of men like Violet le Duc and Professor Monson. I should like extremely to hear your reasons for this confident opinion?”

The great collector was obviously irritated. The legend of this pink diamond—his historical

jewel—to be impugned, and by a mere unknown amateur.

Mr. Beauflower looked rather vexed at the scepticism of his friend and the obvious annoyance of Mr. Harker. For a moment, too, he felt doubtful of the depth of his friend's knowledge; he seemed too anxious to depreciate.

“If you really wish my reason,” Mr. Goodrick said, with the most cutting calmness, “you shall have it. It may appear to you insufficient. My reason is this: This stone is a brilliant; now brilliant-cutting was not introduced into Europe till the time of Cardinal Mazarin——”

“Well,” said Mr. Harker, not quite clear as to how the dates told in the matter, “now suppose Cardinal Mazarin gave it to Francis the Second.”

“That could hardly be, considering that Francis lived about a hundred years earlier than Mazarin.”

“I still,” said Mr. Harker, “can hardly imagine my authorities to be wrong. But as you criticise my collection with such severity, I will not trouble you more, but close it, and show you my pictures. I have a few fine Watteaus and some very choice Dutch pictures, chiefly from the Beckford Gallery, a Claude or two, and a good head by Leonard—*a very sweet thing.*”

Mr. Goodrick bowed, but expressed no wish to see more jewels.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FAMILY PICTURES.

“I AM afraid, Mr. Harker,” said Beauflower, “that we must leave the pictures for some other day. I promised to be at Fontford at half-past four. Poor Mrs. Chetwynd wants to consult me about the dilapidations: the surveyor for the new incumbent has brought in a ruinous bill. Poor woman, she doesn’t know what to do. It will beggar her.”

“How foolish of her husband letting the other people off when he came in—utterly unbusiness like—but all you clergymen are poor men of business.” (There was no excess of human sympathy about the parvenu.) “Well, gentlemen, as you will. Come any morning and look about as you like; *I* have to thank Mr. Goodrick for a most valuable lecture on precious stones.”

Mr. Goodrick bowed; the sarcasm had rebounded from him as a bullet from an alligator.

“We shall hope to have the pleasure of seeing

you at dinner, soon. We are expecting friends. Mr. Bodger, the royal academician, is coming down to advise me about the decorating a room that I want done, and a ceiling or two I think of having painted with Rubens subjects."

As Mr. Harker turned to lock his cabinet, Mr. Goodrick whispered to the Vicar, "Ask about the family pictures he promised to show us."

"Perhaps before we go," said Mr. Beauflower, instantly, as Mr. Harker turned, "you would allow us to see those family pictures I spoke about?"

"Oh, certainly. I'll ring for Roberts and send him to the housekeeper."

Just then Ethel raced past the door singing "The Three Fishers." Her father opened the door and called her.

"Ethel, darling," he said.

Ethel came in carrying two white plates.

"I've been for two plates," she said; "Amy is giving me a lesson in water colours."

"I told you not to call Miss Robinson Amy, Ethel; you must remember she is only a governess. Shake hands with Mr. Beauflower."

Ethel tossed her golden hair and shook hands, a little shily, with the visitor, whom she liked.

"Run, dear," her father said, "to Mrs. Spelman and ask her to send some one down with those

two old pictures that used to be in one of the spare rooms."

Ethel looked surprised, but instantly raced off to carry the message.

She had scarcely left before Roberts knocked at the door, opened it, and said,—

"If you please, sir, the keeper's here with the police constable from Shaftesbury. They've brought the men for examination."

"Tell them I will come directly. Take them into my study. You'll excuse me, I'm sure, gentlemen. My men have caught two of those Shaftesbury poachers that have been troubling us so long, and I have to take the depositions. Pray stay here and look about as long as you like. Roberts will be down directly."

"Pray don't let us keep you a moment," said the Vicar, and Mr. Goodrick also bowed, but was silent.

As the door closed upon the odious product of new money, the Vicar said to his friend,—

"So, you see, the man has some respect for his predecessors. He has some regard, however faint, for the man who cast off his son and left him all his wealth."

"He has no real knowledge of jewels, and that is why I grew insolently pedantic. No; I have no belief in the man," said Mr. Goodrick, rousing

from a reverie ; “ he is a concrete of selfishness and vanity. He is capable of all baseness—look at his steely eyes, his hard mouth, and his stony jaw—no—expect nothing good from that man.”

“ I don't like him, but I am not quite so wholesale in my condemnation as that. He seems a good father, and he is just in business matters.”

“ Get in his grip, and try his justice. No ; that man is inexorable, or I know nothing of physiognomy.”

“ For who can read the mind's construction in the face ? ”

“ Bah ! Shakspeare could be a fool sometimes, like the rest of us—besides he lived before Lavater. If this detestable man turns out a Howard or a Peabody, then cast it in my teeth, and I will renounce all attempt to find God's likeness in man's face. The Devil's features I know well enough ; his facsimile is common in every lane and street. Ugh. But here come the pictures.”

The door opened and in came two footmen, directed by the butler, each carrying a large picture, three-quarter size. “ They're rather dusty, sir,” said the butler, as he ordered them to be placed against the wall ; “ but they haven't been well treated. They used to be in the

laundry, and Miss Ethel and her playmates have been playing their games with them."

They were two large pictures of the Lawrence school, dating back by the costume to about 1810. They had been injured by damp, and the frames were chipped and broken. The one picture, that of Mr. Staunton, represented a handsome man with bold Roman features, and rather past the prime of life. It was a proud austere face of great intelligence, but turbid with suppressed passion, the eyes especially threatening and fiery.

His costume was a blue coat and brass buttons, and he wore the bolster neckcloth of the period. The other portrait was that of a very handsome, dark-haired woman, with a proud, but very sweet expression about the eyes. She wore a white short-waisted satin dress, and her arms were bare, according to the fashion of 1810. Both pictures were spotted with damp, and pierced with arrow-holes as if children had been allowed to shoot at them for amusement. The corner of the second one had come off the stretchers and hung flapping over the face, so that Mr. Goodrick had to lift it before he could see the beautiful countenance it concealed.

Mr. Goodrick did not utter a word, but sighed heavily and stooped down, and then, kneeling on one knee, to look closer at the faces, studied them,

as if he never could be satiated. The Vicar, standing behind them, looked at them with a lesser interest as the servants retired.

“So these are my friend’s father and mother,” said Mr. Goodrick. “Good God! if Staunton had seen them like this the sight would have killed him. Here is a race not only forgotten but despised. How cold and stern this face is: yet what a grand expanse of brow, and what a loving, tender face this of the lady. No wonder Staunton used to speak of her with such passionate affection. Staunton was always a man of intense feeling.”

“Yes, it is a face to love: but the father’s face seems to me petrified with pride. A hundred thousand a year, and a million of ready money on coming of age, is enough to spoil any man. He quarrelled with all the county, cast off his son, and shut himself out from the world. If that wife had lived he would have been very different. Ah! you see more in pictures than I can. It is a pleasure I wish I shared—they’re well painted.”

As the Vicar said this, he dropped himself into an arm chair, and took up a volume of the Fairy Queen that lay on the table. A pink and a blue ribbon between the pages showed that probably Ethel, or some lady visitor, had been reading the book. The Vicar, a great reader, opened the

wonderful fragment at the fine passage where Una wanders in the forest.

“One day, nigh wearie of the yrksome way,
From her unhastie beast she did alight
And on the grass her dainty limbs did lay.
In secret shadow far from all men’s sight
From her fayre head her fillet she undight,
And layd her stole aside. Her angel’s face
As the great eye of heaven shyned bright,
And made a sunshine in a shady place.”

Then, an involuntary thought came into the reader’s mind of Amy Robinson, as he had seen her when seated on the stone step by the lake.

The Vicar turned to the beginning of the book. There was the Staunton crest, “an eagle with a snake in its mouth,” and the motto, “Sooner or later.” The Harker crest was a sheaf of corn, a snake twining round it, with a bird in its mouth, and the motto, “Laboro et oro.”

The Vicar turning round to direct Mr. Goodrick’s attention to the Staunton motto was alarmed to see him turned very pale, and with a cold dew rising on his forehead.

“Are you not well?”

“No; it is that old feeling again. I think the room is too hot. Take me into the open air—your arm—thank you—I shall be better in a moment.”

“Shall I ring to ask for a glass of wine?”

“No, no; ring to show them we’re gone, that’s

all. Let me get out of this room. My pulse has almost stopped—now it beats a little faster—come—I am afraid I shall faint again.”

Once in the open air, Mr. Goodrick soon revived; his colour came again, he walked erect and firm.

“Now I feel better,” he said, in reply to his friend’s anxious inquiries. “I never could bear a close room, though I have been half my life in Cuba. Didn’t that man say he was going to examine some poachers?”

“Yes; it is the old story:—

‘The forest laws were sharp and stern,
The forest blood was keen,
They lashed together for life and death
Beneath the hollies green.

‘They wrestled up, they wrestled down,
They wrestled still and sore,
Beneath their feet the myrtle sweet,
Was stamped to mud and gore.’

They tell me one of the keepers is nearly killed, and they’ve broken one of the poachers’ arms, a bad fellow who lives at Swallowcliff, and who’s been in trouble before.”

“How can you wonder at it. There are men here living on twelve shillings, who have perhaps a sick wife, a mother and five children. Taste meat once a month, work twelve hours a day in the cold and wet on adulterated bread, kitchen

fat, and tea. All round their feet every day they see fat hares and countless rabbits and pheasants worth five or six shillings each. What's the result—the good fools and the patient serfs every now and then turn poachers, and they buy drink—a day's forgetfulness and a dream of something better—with the stolen game—oh! these country gentlemen of yours—they will pay for it some day. Fast and savagely, or slow and contemptuously, their punishment will come. They have centuries of neglect to answer; centuries of dead minds and miserable hopeless lives. Oh! they will pay—the account still runs.”

“But there are many good, and wise, and true. I am a Liberal to the back bone—but you, you are a Revolutionist.”

“Not I. I value Whig and Tory alike. I see what is going on in this England; it is one vast struggle to get wealth, or power, and to keep it. It is only the man without either who cries out—you clergymen pander to the gentry, you daren't tell them their faults. Your sympathies are with them; you both join against the poor—Ugh. Some famine winter you'll see that there is a limit to patience. The old volcanoes only slumber.”

“You take too gloomy a view, our Wiltshire poor thrive even on these small wages. Labourers are not too numerous, and work is constant. Any

child of talent is discovered at the school, and passes on to better things."

"Pshaw!—to bird minding and turning manure heaps; why, the children leave school at ten or eleven. — Don't tell me — you don't see these evils—you are too near them. You're a worthy fellow, it's only the system I blame. I see in the English labourer a hopeless, degraded helot, debarred from all that can help him to escape from his degradation. Pent in unwholesome and demoralising houses, with no amusements, no music like the German, no dance like the French, no war like the savage, no vote like the American, no skating like the Dutch, regarded by his landlord as a beast of burden, neither loved nor loving; his youth a ceaseless toil, low debauch in his middle age, toil and struggle in his old age, penury at last, and a death in a workhouse. This is your free and glorious country! your immortal constitution! this is your Protestantism and your Christianity! Bah!—England is a bladder, and time will prick it. The progression of the age, and the permanency of these evils, must meet one day, and then it will be the meeting of fire and paraffin."

The Vicar was about to answer these gloomy and cynical views, when a gig drove past them. They had just reached the high road that bordered

the Park. Dr. Briscoe was in the gig, his head down to the fresh wind, and choleric and good-natured as ever. He greeted the Vicar heartily (Beauflower being an especial favourite of his), and bowed to Mr. Goodrick.

“We shall soon have the pleasure of calling you neighbour,” said the doctor; “I hope you won’t find the house at Fontford damp—it used to be so. Just come from seeing the rascal that’s been hurt.”

“Not seriously hurt, I hope,” said the Vicar. “It’s Davison?”

“Yes; well, he’s got a severe concussion, and the left malar bone broken—those gun stocks are very hard. It’ll cure the dog of poaching.”

“And the keeper, which is it?—is it the red haired fellow?”

“It’s young Hacker, the good-looking lad—he’s got two fingers shot off, and his collar bone put out. One of the infernal poachers had a flail in his pocket, and he used it, too. They say it was that vagabond Paddy Blake told them of the keepers when they were watching for them on the Terraces, last Friday. Good-bye, I must be off; that old fellow at Purtwood’s had another fit of the gout, I told him he’d have one if he went to the farmer’s dinner, and drank too much. He’ll have one once too often. Good-bye—you’ll

be at this archery arrangement? Remember me at home. Good-bye, Mr. Goodrick. Now then, Beauty."

Beauty was the doctor's mare; the best trotter that side of the county.

"That's a sterling good fellow," said the Vicar, but he's impetuous and doesn't like contradiction."

"Not many of us like it. We all go well in a fair wind. But come, tell me the story of my friend Staunton, that you promised. Why did his father cast him off so remorselessly? He would tell me his story."

"I cannot tell you much, as it happened before I was born, and my father, who was fond of the Stauntons, did not like to talk of it. In fact, there was, I believe, always a mystery about the matter. The story is, I believe, this. The son, just fresh from Oxford, a fine, generous, clever fellow, and the idol of his father, fell in love with a pretty, innocent girl, the daughter of a poor Devonshire curate, named Wilson, who had come to Fontford to do temporary duty for the father of the very clergyman who has just died at Birdbrook. There were two sisters, but the youngest was a child and was at school in London. The Wilsons lived then at a large old house, now a farm house, that you will see on the right hand going to Fontford. The father suspected the

danger, and forbade the son's visits. The end was, they eloped and went to Paris; the father, kept in constant irritation, it was said, by the machinations of the father of that very Mr. Harker you just saw, at once altered his will, and swore never again to see his son. The son, urged by his friends, left his wife in Paris, and went to Jamaica to some family friends, to enter a counting-house there. Ten months after he left, the wife died. The son corresponded for a long time with his Wiltshire friends through the son of his father's steward, the man you just saw, his great confidant, but after four or five years, a coolness arose between them, and no more was heard of him—four years after he was drowned while on his voyage to New Orleans. Gradually this young Harker became indispensable to Mr. Staunton, who had shut himself up and renounced all county society, become, in fact, a sordid miser and misanthrope, and as some said, an epicure and shameless voluptuary. He spent money, however, largely on china, pictures, ivories, and enamels. He lived only for that;—this young man, who had been in a large curiosity shop in London, and had married the handsome daughter of a rich upholsterer in Tottenham Court Road, travelled for him, collecting rarities, bought and exchanged for him, became, in fact, his steward,

agent, librarian, curator, and secretary. The old man announced openly to the people round him his intention of making him his heir. He did so, and on the old man's death in 1844, Mr. Harker succeeded to all his wealth, personal and otherwise. Some second cousin of the Stauntons in Devonshire disputed the will, but it came to nothing. You see those posts there?"

The Vicar pointed to some low stone posts, on both sides of the road leading to the lodge where Travers lived.

"Well, the people about here say that old Staunton could have put a bag with a thousand pounds of gold on each of those. He was a most accomplished man, I believe. He had learnt music from Mozart, architecture from Sir W. Chambers, and he was a good linguist and a traveller. His father had been a great West Indian merchant, and I've heard that, when he was at Lausanne, he bought Gibbon's library and read till he was nearly blind. He was a man of impetuous passions, and never forgave the county for throwing him out for Bibury. After that, and his son's elopement, he never went beyond his own park walls. He made seven miles of drive along those terraces up there, and was seen by no one but the keepers and the gardeners. Poor man! That was the happiness a million of money bought him."

“Poor old man,” said Mr. Goodrick, thoughtfully; “and did he renounce *all* his Wiltshire friends?”

“Renounced them, or was renounced, for people who wanted to prey on him, spread mysterious reports of his excesses, and at last he was avoided by every one, except, as I have heard my father say, by three families—the Cantelupes—our own family, and Farmer Brown’s father, in whom Mr. Staunton delighted, and from whom he got all his news; that was his circle.”

“What a life; what a terrible self-banishment! Poor man!”

“Some said he voluntarily led it in expiation of his cruelty to his son—others said his mind was gone ever since his wife died—she was beloved by every one; she died two years after young Staunton left. But I’m tiring you with my story, and there is my mother and Julia coming for us.”

“You’ve not tired me,” said Mr. Goodrick, “I like to hear about my old friend’s family.”

“Poor fellow,” said the Vicar, “if he did sin against his father he paid bitterly for the offence, and if his father showed him no mercy, he, too, lived in a frightful purgatory of his own creating. No Hell can be so terrible as the Hell some of us carry within our own hearts.”

Julia looked very healthy and pretty, flushed with walking.

“Oh dear,” she said, “such a dreadful thing, Wasp and the cat have been fighting.”

“And George (the clerk) has been for the keys of the church,” said Mrs. Beauflower.

“I hope Mr. Goodrick has enjoyed his walk?”

Mr. Goodrick said he had, and offered Mrs. Beauflower his arm.

“And Ned,” said Julia, tripping by the side of her brother, “Amy has been, and I could not remember that beautiful verse of Kingsley’s you told me.”

The Vicar repeated them :—

“Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,
Do noble things, not dream them, all day long,
And so make life, death, and that vast for ever,
One grand sweet song.”

“Yes, that’s it—how beautiful it is, isn’t it—now you must praise that, you despiser of modern things.”

“I don’t care for modern poetry, Miss Beauflower,” answered the inexorable, “any more than I do for modern statuary, enamels, or china. My poets are Dryden, Pope, and Churchill. I want human nature, satire, and epigram in verse, not sermons and landscapes.”

“You are hopeless.”

“My dear Julia!” said Mrs. Beauflower, solemnly and reprovingly.

“I do believe he even would dislike Aurora Leigh?” said Julia Beauflower.

“Never heard even of the lady’s name,” said Mr. Goodrick.

“You mustn’t think, Mr. Goodrick,” said Miss Beauflower, “that I pretend to much poetry. My nature is strictly practical—I’m to marry a doctor and roll out pills, mamma says. It is Amy is the poet.”

“Julia, don’t be absurd,” said the matter-of-fact Mrs. Beauflower.

“Oh, you’ll never marry, Julia,” said her brother, laughingly, and putting his hand on her shoulder, “you’re so saucy, you frighten all your lovers away.”

“You mustn’t listen to all the nonsense this scatterbrain girl of mine talks, Mr. Goodrick,” said Mrs. Beauflower, deprecatingly, “she has such high spirits, and she is so very flighty.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE DEAD WITNESS.

MR. HARKER discovered so many flaws in the account books of his head keeper, that within a week after the letter from the poulterer he had told him privately that he should dismiss him within three months from that time. He did not wish any open scandal. He made a point of speaking to him as usual when he met him in the park, or in the road, he treated him with the old familiarity, and even gave him formal audiences at the same hour. The village was deceived and thought Travers secure, but all this was done merely to prevent the public talk, and arose from a cruel desire to make the downfall more sudden and more felt. The man was to expiate his fraud by having the sword of Damocles hanging above his head for three long months.

Mr. Harker had two motives in this,—one to inflict a retributive torture, the second to hold out a warning to all future servants who should

peculate ; but he did not know the stubborn tenacity of the man with whom he had to deal, his desperation when at bay, nor, above all, had he any forewarning that any real resistance was possible in a man whom he held beneath his foot.

It was two days after the visit of Mr. Goodrick, that Mr. Harker's barouche drew up at the door of the Abbey. A great call on Lord and Lady Mazagan had been planned by Mrs. Harker and, lunch being just over, the carriage awaited the party. Mrs. Harker and Miss Harker were already in the carriage, tucked in ; parasols, card cases, foot-warmers and all complete. Mr. Harker was still delaying, one of the gardeners had just brought him some message from the village.

"Is Mr. Harker not ready?" said Mrs. Harker rather loudly and acidly from the carriage: "Phillips, tell Mr. Harker we are waiting."

Phillips, a smart young fellow, was half way across the hall when he met Mr. Harker and delivered his message.

"Tell your mistress that I am unable to go, some business detains me; but stop, I'll go and tell her myself. My dear," he said, stepping out to the carriage, "I cannot go with you to the Castle."

"Not go, papa?" said Miss Harker.

“Not go! and why not?” said Mrs. Harker.

“Green the gardener has just told me the keeper’s mother is dying. I think it is right I should go and see her; you must remember her husband was a very old servant of my father’s.”

“I don’t see the necessity,” said the amiable Mrs. Harker, “the clergyman and doctor will be with her, that is quite enough. It will make our visit far less complimentary, and you know Lord Mazagan’s influence in the county.”

“You must make my apologies,” said Mr. Harker, looking down at the white door step, and tapping it with his gold mounted pimento stick; “it is most important that I should see this dying woman. Coachman, you may drive on,—good-bye, Carry, you look charming in that new bonnet.”

Without one look at the receding carriage, Mr. Harker instantly made his way to the cottage of the keeper’s mother. If philanthropy was his sole object, and not inward fear or curiosity, he must have been a perfect Wilberforce, for he strode on as if Death would fly at his presence. The great Inigo Jones archway re-echoed with his quick steps, and some pigeons feeding at the keeper’s window flew off in dismay at his approach. The dogs chained in by the keeper’s

sheds started out of their kennels wildly at his approach, shook their chains, and tried to get loose to follow him.

Some children on the little bridge letting down a string and a stone over the arch, stopped their researches and pulled their forelocks at the Squire's approach. The village was quite empty ; the men were all away at labour, on the down tending sheep, or in the fields ploughing. The school was hard at work and buzzing like a restless hive. George, Mr. Beauflower's gardener, was busy sawing wood at the stable door in the glebe field, which was bordered by the church-yard wall. The gunmaker was not at his window, nor the netmaker at his door.

Fifty yards up the village street brought Mr. Harker to the gate of the little garden, back in which lay the small cottage of the dying woman. It was a plain stone cottage, with two windows above and two below. Smoke was rising, but only from one chimney. The geraniums in the garden were already blackened with the frost, and nothing showed any signs of life but a little holly tree, crimson with sealing-wax berries already glowing at the thought of Christmas. The door stood ajar, Mr. Harker pushed it open and entered. There was no one there ; a drowsy cat was the only living thing, and the cat was sleeping rolled

up in a heap by the side of some smoking wood ashes on the hearth, in the centre of one of those huge caverns of a fire-place common in Wiltshire cottages.

A yellow faced clock, toned by the smoke of generations of fires, was pulsing on mechanically like the breathing of a human being. The plates on the dresser rack were undisturbed; there was no meal preparing.

Mr. Harker knocked—called, but, no one answering, he opened the door of the staircase, and went slowly up the dark steep stairs that opened at once into the bedroom. There, in a bed without curtains or head, lay the dying woman with her face turned to the wall; she was asleep, and by the side of her bed nodded the palsied deaf old neighbour who acted as her nurse. It was the dying watching the dying.

“How is she, Mrs. Payne?” he asked.

“Martal bad, sir, to be zure, martal bad, all over aches, and not long for this world; we heard the death watch all last night, and there was a screech owl at half past dree out in the firs by Farmer Brown’s. Shall I wake her?”

“No, don’t wake her; has she expressed any desire to see me?”

“Yes, twice yesterday; Mr. Travers said he’d tell you.”

“He never told me. He said yesterday she was much the same. It was Dr. Briscoe told me she was near her end.”

“Do let me wake her. She said she must see you. Ah sir, it’s hard work, at my age, answering all her fancies.”

“How long, Mrs. Payne, since Dr. Briscoe was here?”

“Three weeks come Wednesday.” The old crone’s answers could hardly fail of being irrelevant, as she never heard more than a word or two of the questions.

“Pooh! why, he came this morning, you old fool. Has her son seen her this morning?”

“Nothing but arrowroot and a little wine Parson sent her, leastwise Miss Beauflower.”

“Has Mr. Beauflower seen her? eh? and alone?”

“Only gets two shillings a week as the Parish gives me, and two loaves. Tan’t enough, tan’t enough to keep body and soul together.”

“Look you here,” shouted Mr. Harker in the old hag’s ear, “here’s a shilling for you, go and get a glass of wine for yourself and this poor woman, and I’ll watch here till you come.”

“It better be sperits, sperits ’ill comfort both of us more.”

“Get what you like, but go. I will watch her.”

“A blessing, blessing upon yer,” said the old woman, putting on a black rag of a bonnet that hung behind the door, and shuffling off, “if she do call for anything, give her a spoonful of that doctor’s stuff on the mantelpiece. It’s to stop the pain.”

The crone stumbled downstairs, stirred the wood fire, and closed the door after her.

Mr. Harker was alone with the sleeping woman. He rose instantly, took a careful survey of the miserable, ill-lit room; there were two chairs, one bottomless, a paper covered trunk with a dirty bonnet-string trailing from it. There was a square of cracked looking-glass, with the quicksilver showing in blotches over its once faithful surface, a drabby gown or two behind the door, a small rickety table and a chest of drawers; on the drawers stood a very common and very old writing desk, the lid of which was open; on the opposite side of the room to the bed where the dying woman lay was a door leading into a second small bedroom. This door, against which hung a dirty torn shawl, was ajar; on the inner sill of the one small dingy lattice window was a pot containing a sickly geranium with one starved scarlet flower; on the mantelpiece stood a bottle of medicine and a bottle of red hair-oil.

The woman's breathing was so faint it was not audible. The only sound was the ticking of the clock downstairs, and the fretful buzzing of a blow-fly in the window-pane.

"I wonder," said Mr. Harker aloud, he was so preoccupied with the thought that haunted him that he scarcely knew whether the voice spoke to him or whether he himself gave it utterance—"I wonder whether the old man left any papers behind him about me or the Stauntons. He always seemed as if he had some hold over me if he chose to exercise it, but my pension gave him ample money for drink, and he cared for nothing else; still there might be some letters that he had stolen, and could I but get them, and this woman dies, as she soon will, I shall be safe for ever. But nonsense! there are none. They'd be in this desk, if there were any."

As he said this Mr. Harker opened the desk, and searched it thoroughly, tapping it to discover if there were any secret drawers. But it contained only some old receipts for rent, a faded Daguerrotype or two, and some dirty envelopes directed to "Mr. John Travers, the Abbey, Summerleas, Wiltshire;" no letters, no papers. The desk stood before a square swing looking-glass, and as he slammed down the lid of the desk with satisfaction at the result of his search, and raised

his head, his eyes fell upon the glass before him.

There, to his alarm, he saw his own surprised face, and over his shoulder another face, swollen with suppressed passion, and with suffused eyes glaring like those of a murderer about to strike. He turned, it was Travers the keeper, who had stolen in from the other room stealthily with stockinged feet; he had watched every movement and heard every word.

“I’ve not been all my life trapping weasels and foxes,” he said sardonically, and without any attempt at respect, however faint, but as one labourer to another, as a criminal to an accomplice—“I’ve not been watching poachers ever since I could hold a gun, and not know how to get near them before they could be aware on it; so you, you come here under pretence of seeing a dying woman, and when you’ve got the nuss out of the way by a shabby trick, you look and see what papers and secrets you can steal.”

“Steal!”

“Yes, I say steal, as you said steal to me the other day, and had no mercy when you found a few pheasants wrong in my account. I’ll spread this story everywhere. I’ll teach you to come prying and stealing here.”

“You dare repeat those words?”

“Dare? I dare do anything, but I’ve not done with you, my grand gentleman. I’ve got you now in a cleft stick.”

“Make what charges you will, no one will believe you; it was mere foolish curiosity.”

“Ah, you’d no motive; that’s another of your lies.”

Mr. Harker turned paler, even to his lips, for there was some tiger’s blood in him, and he clenched his right hand.

“You are drunk,” he said, “you leave my service to-day.”

“You lay a finger on me,” said Travers, “and I’ll drive you through that window. I am younger and stronger than you, and I am accustomed to use my hands roughly; you shall tell me presently the day I am to leave; ah, my grand gentleman, I have a grip on you now.”

A lull seemed to come upon Travers’ passion, and he all at once put his arms insolently akimbo and smiled with savage satisfaction. “You’ve maybe read,” he said, “some of those penny stories where a villain gets some fine barrynet in his power and bleeds him when he likes; now I’ve often wished I could get a barrynet to bleed; and I’ve got one, or as good now; and now I believe them stories. I’m not a villain, and you’re

a respectable rich man, but I've got my teeth across you, and I mean to bleed you."

"You're drunk, Travers! What's all this nonsense? Let me pass on, I'll have you punished for this; you'll get no promise out of me by this bullying. Let me go, or you shall leave me to-day. This is a shallow game of yours. There's a policeman passing, now I'll call to him out of the window. If you stop me, mind it's an assault, and I'll press it hard on you and turn you out to-night without a character. You'd better take care, my man, you know I don't forgive easily."

To do Mr. Harker justice, he did not look as if he did forgive, or would forgive, easily.

But Travers was not to be daunted. "Look here," he said, beating his hand on the desk, "you think I don't know what you looked in here for, but you're mistaken; I did, I had reason to know; now then, call for the policeman, and I'll blab the whole affair. Ha! I thought that would tame you. Here" (he said, pulling some papers from his breast pocket and slapping them fiercely) "these are what you came for, though you weren't sure they existed."

"I know of no papers, what are they? they are forgeries of your own, give them me."

"You shall hear;—give them you? not if I know

it,—not likely ; you'd keep them, and carefully, wouldn't you ? Sit down, and I'll tell you what they are. I always thought, from his manner at times when you threatened to stop his annuity, that my father knew more about your doings up at the house than you would like. But I was a wild lad and crossed him, and he never made a friend of me ; so I ran away and got keeper at Lord Portsmouth's, and didn't come back till after his death ; my mother here never cared for me either, and if she knew anything she never told me ; she could not read, and I dare say never looked over his papers ; and she was too cunning and suspicious to let me do so. I think she knew a little, but that's nothing. Last night when she was lying asleep with the laudanum, and Dr. Briscoe told me she wouldn't live twenty-four hours, I took the key from her pocket, went to this desk and gave it a good look ; the devil it was, I suppose, told me I might perhaps find something that might be of use—something that might help me with you."

Mr. Harker's face looked as if it was turned to stone.

"You know why you dread what I am going to tell you. I found three papers : one was the copy of a statement that he had sent to Dr. Chevalier, the doctor whose business Dr. Briscoe took, to be

opened after his death; another contained a second statement; and the third a secret I shall keep to myself."

"Read me this absurd forgery," said Mr. Harker, defiantly; "it is as valueless as a yesterday's newspaper; your father, in some drunken fit of malice, must have invented this in revenge. I did once threaten to stop his pension, because he became such a disgrace to the village."

"You can judge: I'll read it you;—'Believing myself at the point of death, I, John Travers being at the time of sound mind, as Dr. Chevalier can depose, swear that the hour after Mr. Staunton died, and before it was known in the house, Mr. Harker brought me a will leaving all Mr. Staunton's money and land to him. He told me that the will was drawn up a week before by Mr. Staunton's wish and direction, but that he had never had strength to sign it. He therefore asked me, on promise of reward, to put the pen in the dead man's hand, and imitate his signature, which was easy, as the Squire had been paralysed and wrote very tottery and feeble. I consented after much persuasion, and to quiet my conscience he let me put a fly in the dead man's mouth, that I might afterwards swear there was life in him when he signed.'"

"It's a lie," said Mr. Harker, faintly. He was

livid with mingled fear and rage, and one hand was feeling in his waistcoat pocket, as if for some concealed weapon.

“Shall I go on? You seem unwell, Mister.”

“Go on with this impudent lie. Tell your whole story, but take care, I shall not easily forget this day.”

“No, I dare say you won’t, I shall take care of that. Bluster will never get you out of this scrape. Shall I read the second paper.”

“Read all the lies either the sot or you invented.”

“Sots can tell truth. This was on father’s conscience, and he was drove to tell, as I shall be unless my conscience is paid to be quiet. He was like a man, you see, who’s ill—he was ill twice before he could throw off the whole thing. The second paper’s dated two months later, June—he died in August. The first, you see, only proves that you paid him to sign an incomplete will that *might* have been old Staunton’s; the next takes us a step or two farther. He says, ‘To make my peace with God, I, John Travers, wish to swear, being on my death-bed, that the morning Mr. Staunton died he called me to his bedside and said, “John, mind I’ve never made any will since I left all to my nearest blood whoever they are. It was that Harker set me against my son, God forgive me! My real will is in the right hand

top drawer of my knee desk." This also is signed Louis Chevalier."

"It's all an infernal trumped-up lie," said Mr. Harker, "Dr. Chevalier died seven years ago at Mentone and no such papers were then produced; you'll never get a sixpence out of me, man, this way."

"The third paper is more important, and screws you a bit tighter. It proves, in fact, you have no right to one foot of the Staunton property."

"I'll hear no more of this. Do your worst, you leave the lodge to-night."

"All right, then my course is clear. I ride off for Dr. Briscoe, bring him, wake up the old woman here, who's got her senses still, and will stir up with a good dose of brandy. I shall then read the three papers, get her signature to this being really my father's writing, screw from her all she knows, take it down, sign it all, and then post off to-morrow to the sharpest lawyer I can find in Salisbury. But while I go to the doctor, I shan't leave you here alone, because there have been—"

Mr. Harker's courage drooped. The revengeful keenness and promptitude of the man was not to be daunted. There was but one remedy—conciliation.

“Come, Travers,” he said, “we’re both men of sense. Don’t do what you’ll be sorry for. These lies might give me trouble, and therefore I wish to lock them up; but remember, if you failed in proving them, as assuredly you would, it would be a chain-gang and transportation for life for you. Study your own interests, man; let’s talk it over. Take a chair; don’t talk too loud and wake the woman. If I give you a thousand a year for ten years will you give me those forged papers?”

“Say four thousand, and that’s cheap.”

“I couldn’t give that. I’ve lost money lately by mining speculations, and by a London bank. Let’s say two and a half.”

“Not a penny less than three; and I must remain keeper, and keep the thing quiet, for fear you’d run away or slip out of the agreement somehow.”

“Two and a half for three forged and absurd letters;—it’s good pay.”

“I want three; not a stiver less.”

“Two. You know I could refuse a penny.”

“Three; not a skirrick less;—and not a quarter enough either. Look at seven mile of terraces, look at the timber, look at Brown’s farm, Snelgrove’s farm, and a thousand acres of arable land. Look at the house, and all your money at the banker’s. What use would all that be in Pentonville?”

“Three thousand, mind, merely for a precaution.”

“Yes, three thousand for a precaution ; and dirt cheap too.”

“Well, I agree.”

“Paid quarterly into the London and Westminster Bank, in the name of Troughton.”

“Agreed.”

“One day after the time—unless the delay be explained the next day—I take the letters to a London lawyer.”

“Let it be so.”

“And you will treat me as before ; and I’m to be your head keeper till I can get the best farm in Dorsetshire ; or as much longer as I like, for I shall like to feel I’m the real master here now.”

“If you must have it so.”

“Good.”

“And now the papers ?”

“Papers ! why, you must think me a blessed cussed d—n fatheaded fool, Mr. Harker. Oh, I keep those ; they’re my securities. You can have ’em, but only on the day the last of the thirty thousand pounds is paid. And now I think I’ve let you off very easy. It’s a pretty penny, too, for three mere forged letters.”

“I have reasons not to wish my past connection with the Stauntons discussed—honest reasons.”

“Honest, of course. Well, now we understand

each other. The first thousand I'll draw to-morrow."

"When you like."

"Good: now you're easier in your mind—Lord, I can see it in your face. Dr. Chevalier is dead; mother once dead—the secret rests alone with me. I'm safe now;—it is my interest to be safe, for I'm an accomplice, too. You don't want the police called now, eh?—I could find him at the 'Peal of Bells.'"

"I shall go now; I want no insolence: you have what you want."

Mr. Harker went moodily downstairs, and the door closed sharply after him.

As the outer latch-gate slammed, Travers went to the bed, and, with a brutal laugh, carelessly threw the sheet over the face of his step-mother. The features were stiff and waxen; she had been dead an hour; he had known it, but he had not told the half-tipsy, half-dozing nurse. Death had no majesty for that hard, pitiless, revengeful nature. The corpse had been to him but a means of extorting money.

"I've beat the penny stories, after all," he cried. "They never thought of that trick. Fool, why didn't he go close and look at her. Well, she never did much for me in life, so she ought to be useful when she's dead. How Harker stared

when I told him a bit of that third paper: he'll turn me off now, won't he? Catch him at it. It's my turn to crow now."

As Travers went downstairs whistling, to kick the logs together and renew the fire, the old woman lifted the latch and shuffled in, nodding her head and singing tipsily to herself.

"She's gone," he shouted to her; "and here's five shillings, go and buy some gin, and bring a woman to help lay her out. She wasn't a bad sort, take her altogether."

The old woman bore the news with great equanimity. If we could only hear and see how our friends would receive the news of our death, what cynics we should become if we ever returned to earth! The crone had been the dead woman's special gossip, and she had toadied her as steadily for pinches of snuff and drops of tea, as courtiers do a king for titles, pensions, and appointments. The five shillings, and how to spend it, now absorbed her whole mind.

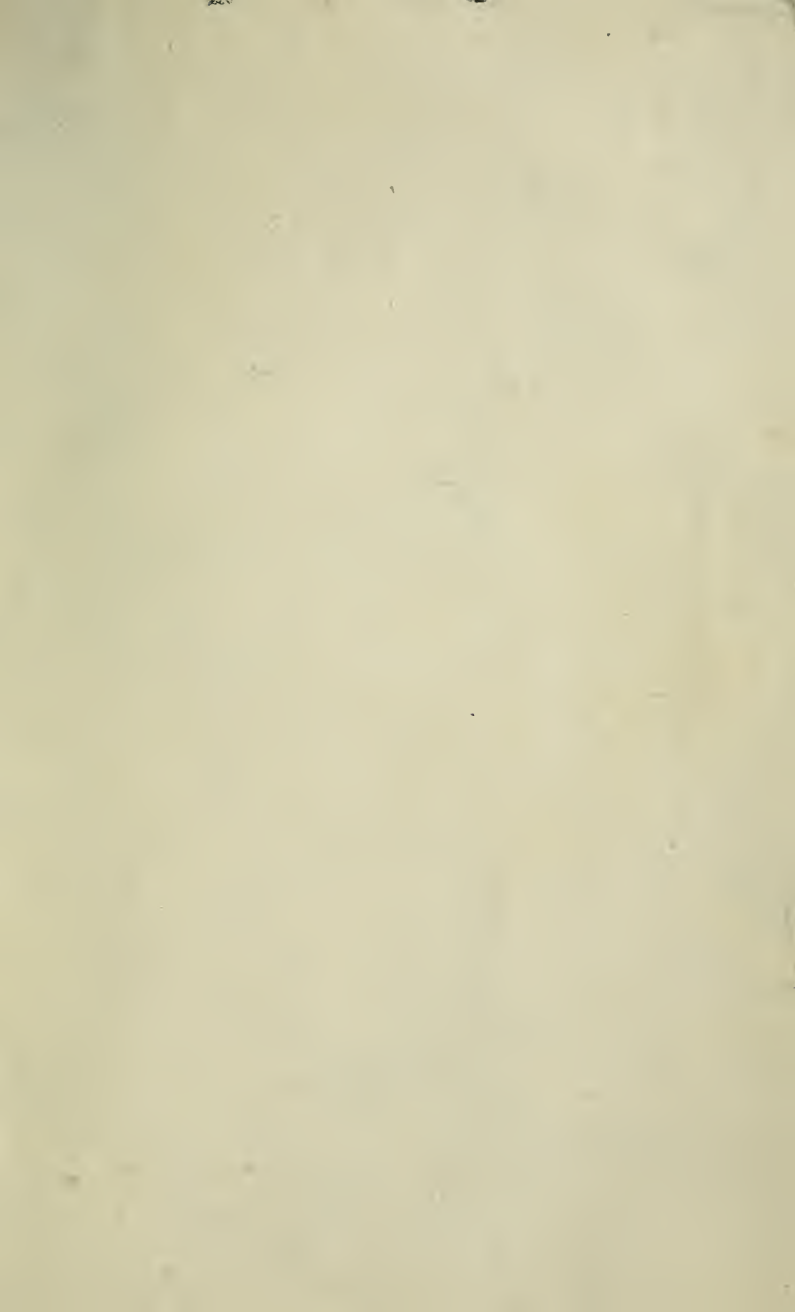
"And think of them Traverses," she thought, "doing the thing so handsome, and he never giving the old lady much, either, when she was alive. Not that I shall tell Mrs. Munby, because she's that greedy and fond of a drop, that there'd be no more use—— poor dear old thing. I wonder whether they'd miss that best gownd of hers—it

can be no use to them, and she did once ask me if I wanted an everyday gown, one evening when I told her I should go first, just to please her."

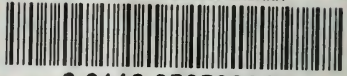
And Mr. Harker thought to himself, as he paced moodily back under the shadow of the great arch of the lodge, "Pray to God," said an inner voice, "for some lightning to strike him before he can disclose that secret. Pray to God for some fever to sweep him off before he knows the danger,—then you would be free. If some deer would gore him, or some poacher put his knife into him, then, then you would be safe and happy." And another soft, low, mocking voice whispered from the blackness of the shadow that dogged at his heels, "No! you will never be safe from such a man as that, *never*, NEVER. He will prefer revenge to money; even when the money is paid, he will demand more, and then betray you. If you die first he will reveal it and beggar your wife and children. The sword is always over your head. If you stand for Parliament, he can denounce you at the hustings—he can stop every path, check every ambition, and he knows it. Pray that cancer rot him. Pray that he die piecemeal, for he is your master and you are his slave FOR EVER. That third secret, too, the deadliest of all, he keeps in its sheath. *What is that?* You hold everything but by his permission, and you know

it, miserable wretch! You were unhappy before, but now a darker and more hopeless misery will press you down for ever, unless you, in some way, break this chain, but how? but how?—You can never break it—you can never break it, *never, NEVER.*” The first evil spirit that had spoken was HATRED, the second was DESPAIR.

END OF VOL. I.



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