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DAISIES AND BUTTERCUPS.

LONDON:

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DAISIES AND BUTTERCUPS.

A Novel.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

AUTHOR OF 'GEORGE GEITH,' 'THE SENIOR PARTNER,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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1882.

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Bul.

TO MY COUSINS,

COLONEL AND MRS. KILSHAW IRWIN

(MOBILE, ALABAMA),

I dedicate this Book.

IN THE HOPE THAT TO ONE OF THEM IT MAY

RECALL A PLEASANT MEMORY

OF THE

GREEN FIELDS AND SOFTLY GLIDING STREAMS OF

SURREY.

CHARLOTTE E. L. RIDDELL.

London, 1882.

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RESERVE

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BOOK I.

MR. CHEVERLEY AS NARRATOR.

DAISIES AND BUTTERCUPS.

Book the First.

MR. CHEVERLEY AS NARRATOR.

CHAPTER I.

MR. AMIOTT'S BEQUEST.

Far enough from London to be in the midst of all country sounds and sights, and yet near enough London to enable many a careful clerk and eager man of business to travel thither day after day, is a village called Reedbourne. It lies in the pleasant county of Surrey—far away in the valley of the Thames. There I own a small freehold cottage, together with a garden and five acres of land. Some day I shall make a good sum of money out of those five acres, but that day is not yet; and if it were, would have nothing to do with my story.

An' it please you to listen, I will tell how I be-

came possessed of my modest little estate; I, who was only a clerk in an insurance office, receiving in my more than middle age the not enormous salary of one hundred and fifty pounds per annum.

Pray do not misunderstand me. If I seem to grumble at the remuneration, I really only grumble at myself. One hundred and fifty pounds a year is not an annual stipend that as a rule satisfies the desires of men; yet I was not merely satisfied with the amount of my salary, but grateful for it.

This is a hard confession to make when a person has arrived at my time of life, but it is bitterly true. On my fiftieth birthday, as it happened, I received the advance which raised the amount of my pay to the sum mentioned, and on my fiftieth birthday as I walked home alone to lodgings where neither kith nor kin ever greeted me, I looked back over my life —stood, if I may use the expression, at a little distance from myself, and admitted one hundred and fifty pounds a year was all I was worth. Man and boy I had been a clerk for thirty-five years; and if for five-and-thirty years any one can sit on a stool behind a desk, and perform office drudgery for a salary which culminates in something

less than three pounds a week, why there can be very little in him, at least that is my opinion.

It is quite certain however, there is very little in me. The few people who like me and the great many people who dislike me are fully agreed on that point. If there be no other subject upon which my acquaintances hold identical views, and I do not think there is, from sewage to salvation, they are at least unanimous in their opinion of my utter incapacity, for which reason, setting aside all other reasons, I should never venture to tell a tale in which I held any prominent place.

The reader may make himself quite easy on that score. Nothing much worth recounting ever happened to me in the course of my life. In the experience of more than half a century I can recall the occurrence but of two circumstances affecting myself personally which fairly astonished me, and one of them was the advent of a legacy.

When Messrs. Greatchild, Fairboy, and Goodlad, commonly known in the City as 'The Three Children,' sent a clerk round to our office with a note requesting my presence at their office, I regarded the invitation as one which had simply reference

to some business connected with the 'Home and Foreign Insurance Company.' That the firm in question should want to see me in my modest capacity as a mere individual never crossed my mind.

But I was soon undeceived. When I entered the presence chamber, tenanted on this occasion by Mr. Fairboy, he actually rose from his chair and, holding out his hand, greeted me with a cordiality which made me fear that owing to some mistake the eminent firm in which he was partner had really intended to send for our secretary, or our actuary, or our solicitor, or our doctor—for anybody, in fact, on the face of the earth except me, Reuben Cheverley, aged fifty, a clerk whose salary had only a week previously been advanced from one hundred and thirty pounds per annum to one hundred and fifty.

'Pray sit down, Mr. Cheverley,' he said quite pleasantly. 'I took the liberty of sending round to you, because there are a few questions I wish to ask, just as mere matters of form, you understand?'

'I shall be happy to reply to any questions it may be in my power to answer.'

In all those long years I had learned caution

and how could I tell for whom this unit of 'The Three Children' might be acting?

'Yes, yes, yes, very proper indeed,' observed Mr. Fairboy, perceiving the way my thoughts tended. 'But the fact is, the questions I want to put have nothing to do with the "Home and Foreign;" they concern you, and you only.'

'Concern me!' I repeated in amazement.

You see, dear reader, if already I may call you so, for a quarter of a century, or thereabouts, my identity had been merged in that of the 'Home and Foreign,' I was less to outsiders a human being possessed of any individuality than a clerk. Even to my landlady, I was not so much Mr. Cheverley as a 'gentleman in the great insurance office in Bucklersbury.' That fact meant I could pay my rent regularly, and therefore recommended itself to the worthy woman.

The lips which once tenderly uttered the familiar sentences, 'Is that my boy? Is it Rube?' had been cold enough and silent enough for many and many a winter and summer, and since the day when I kissed them for the last time no one of my kith or kin had ever kept watch by the fireside for my

coming, or greeted my home-coming on the dull wet nights or the lovely spring evenings with a smile of happy welcome.

'I think,' went on Mr. Fairboy, without noticing my surprised repetition of his words; 'I think, Mr. Cheverley, your father was a clergyman? Correct me, please, if I am wrong.'

'You are quite right, sir,' I answered; 'my father was the Reverend Caleb Cheverley, Vicar of Littlelands in Somersetshire.'

As I spoke there came wafted to me, across the interval of thirty-five years, the scent of the lilacs growing inside the modest paling, the sound of the cooing of the pigeons as they ridiculously strutted along the highest ridges of the old-fashioned red-tiled barn. Ah! me. Ah! me. That memory should remain so fresh and young, while men and women grow so gray and old!

'Do you happen to recollect your mother's maiden name?' asked Mr. Fairboy, settling his double eye-glasses firmly on his aquiline nose, and referring to a paper lying beside his desk.

'Amiott,' I replied. 'Celeste Amiott. She was the daughter of an Admiral Amiott, and ran away

with my father, then only a curate. Her family never held any communication with her after her marriage.'

'Was not there some entailed property in the Amiott family?' inquired Mr. Fairboy.

'Yes, I think so; but I fear you can hardly depend upon my memory concerning that point, as the knowledge of it merely came to me through casual conversation. My mother herself knew very little about the matter, except that her uncle, Squire Amiott, owned some large estates in Cheshire.'

'I suppose he never did anything for you, Mr. Cheverley?'

'No, sir.' I was about to add no one had ever done anything for me; but I remembered that, thirty-five years before, I had been given a letter of introduction which gained me, at the age of fifteen, a salary of six shillings a week, to which introduction I owed, doubtless, my present stipend of one hundred and fifty pounds a year. Some people are able to forget these things, but I am not one of them; and accordingly I substituted for the sentence which rose to my lips, the words:

'So far as I am aware, none of my mother's

relations ever recollected the fact of my existence.'

'You are wrong there, quite wrong,' said Mr. Fairboy with the glee of a man who has been leading up to a point. 'One of your mother's relatives—' and here he rose, and, discarding his eye-glasses, looked at me genially from the hearthrug, whereon he stood airing himself after the fashion of Englishmen—'has recollected your existence to some purpose. Ambrose Amiott, of Grange Leigh, Cheshire, has left to the son of his dearly loved sister, Celeste, the sum of ten thousand pounds.'

He raised his voice as he concluded his sentence, till it sounded like one spoken in church, and unconsciously I responded as if divine service were going on, and intoned, 'There must be some mistake. It cannot be—it cannot.'

For look you, my wants were so few, I never thought, it never struck me then, what ten thousand pounds could do for me. What I did consider, remembering the awful poverty, the terrible privations of my mother's widowed life, was that this bequest of ten thousand pounds from her own brother, when she had passed beyond all power

of benefit from money, must be some awful mockery.

'There is no mistake, Mr. Cheverley, I believe. In a very short time I hope, with the aid of a few more particulars, or rather I should say of a few more necessary documents, to hand you over the money. We were Mr. Amiott's solicitors, and we have known for some time the fact of your being favourably remembered in his will.'

'Why should he remember me?' I asked, and I know my voice sounded hoarse and unfamiliar as I spoke.

'Ah! my dear sir,' observed the solicitor (heretofore *I* had always said *Sir* to solicitors), 'there comes a time and an hour to most men when they remember the duties they have neglected—the ties they have tried to forget. That time came to our client. In his will he mentions the reasons which induced him to leave something to his nephew, Reuben Cheverley, as a token of respect. I shall be happy to send you on a copy of the paragraph that refers to you.'

'Thank you, sir.' Once again, I, rising to depart, felt myself to be but a clerk in the 'Home and

Foreign,' and perhaps Mr. Fairboy guessed the fact.

'You are still comparatively a young man,' he said cheerfully, 'and this legacy will enable you to begin life advantageously for the second time.'

For answer I only smiled, and, shaking my head, walked out of his office, for the first occasion in all my long experience, feeling purely and simply that I could not be myself: that I must be some other than Reuben Cheverley!

Nevertheless, it was all quite real. My uncle had left me—me—ten thousand pounds, and for the future I could be, if I liked, independent of the world—so far as the £ *s. d.* question was concerned, at any rate. Just at first it all seemed to me a cruel and a bitter mockery that the son of the woman who had died lacking everything, save what her child's poor industry could add, in the way of luxury to her scanty income, should experience such a fearful reverse of fortune! Supposing now it had been one thousand pounds—that sum would not have upset my mental equilibrium! One thousand as a provision against old age, as a something which should render me indifferent to the caprices of new directors,

and the touches and twinges of coming years! That amount would indeed have surprised, but could not have stricken me with so terrible a sense of uselessness, and almost injustice, as was the case. What should I do with ten thousand pounds? I, whose habits were formed, whose wants were so few, whose tastes were so simple?

I had no wife; in the interest of my only niece, a nursery governess at Blackheath, my life was insured for a small sum in the 'Home and Foreign.' I could afford to buy more books, certainly; but already I felt, with Charles Lamb, that where there was no longer any necessity for pinching, in order to purchase them, one half the enjoyment of their possession would be gone.

Money brings its pleasures with it if it also bring its cares. Afterwards I found out that fact, but at first I can truly say the strongest feeling I experienced was one of bewildered discomfort. How should a man inured to poverty, who had grown accustomed to pinching and saving—to taking care of his clothes and limiting himself as to diet—how should he—or, in plainer language, how should I—divest myself of the habits engendered by thirty-

five years of usage, and learn not the way to save, but the way to spend? There had been a time, a short time, when, given the opportunity, I might have spent liberally, foolishly; but of that time I will not speak just yet. Rather at present let me tell of how others insisted upon my making a beginning in the noble art of squandering money—a beginning which so sickened me of the whole game of waste that ere long I was sailing in quite secure, if not very exciting, waters.

By some chatter of one of the 'Three Children's' clerks, it came to the knowledge of my office companions that I had been left 'something 'andsome,' as the young fellow who was the first to congratulate me worded his sentence; and then the talk—idle talk, foolish talk, shop talk, in a word, which varies in reality very little from the drab's talk to a charwoman in a lodging-house to the talk of the gentlemen employed in her Majesty's Service in the Government offices—began to run upon the line that the fortunate recipient of Ambrose Amiott's legacy ought to give a dinner.

Of my own inclination possibly, nay, indeed, I may say certainly, I should never have given a din-

ner to celebrate the advent of that ten thousand pounds, which came so much too late, if, indeed, money ever can come too late! But then one rarely in this world is able to follow the bent of one's own inclination; andso I agreed to give the repast mentioned, merely stipulating that some other than myself should have the ordering and organising of it. For, indeed, I understood as little about dinners as I did about ten thousand pounds: and after fifty—

But tut!—of what am I dreaming? Why cannot I remember the generation I have the privilege of addressing is one which has learnt the secret of perennial youth?

Still, when a person at fifty feels really old, it is extremely difficult for him to learn new tricks, even though those with whom he is thrown in contact are as willing to instruct as was the case at our office.

Only one man among my fellow-clerks held more aloof after the news of my legacy was bruited about; and he had always been an individual who kept himself to himself, and was careful to have nothing to do with any of us after business hours, and as little during business hours as might be. For form's sake he was solemnly invited to partake of the dinner,

young Cathcart, who knew most about those things as we supposed, ordered, in my name, at 'The Albion,' but he returned a refusal, almost insulting in its brevity, and volunteered the remark, Cathcart declared, 'that a fool and his money are soon parted.' Since, however, a strict regard for truth was not an integral part of Mr. Cathcart's nature, it is quite possible Holway never said anything of the kind.

The dinner was in proper time cooked and eaten. The guests pronounced it capital; and indeed, judging from the bill, it ought to have been good enough to please the palates of persons accustomed to greater luxuries than even Cathcart, whose father's second cousin had been Lady Mayoress. My health was proposed; and to this hour I have a vivid recollection of the mental agonies I endured while striving to gasp out a speech, thanking my friends for their kindness in drinking it. But for Barrigan, who prompted me, and Thompson, who said 'Hear, hear,' whenever I paused, searching about for an idea, I should have remained utterly dumb; but at last the ordeal was over, and I with tingling fingers and burning cheeks free to sit down.

As for the next morning I would rather say very

little about it. When I awoke the Sunday bells were ringing with all their might, and each stroke of the hammer appeared to fall on my aching head. My mouth was parched, my temples throbbing, the room seemed to be whirling round and round, the pillows to be slipping away from me; not, I can declare, that I had partaken of much wine; but when a man is not in the habit of taking any stimulant save half a pint of bitter with his mid-day chop, two or three glasses of sherry with a like number of champagne to follow, and a little neat brandy, recommended by Cathcart as a mere safeguard against accidents, produce an extraordinary effect.

They did upon me, at all events. Never have I forgotten the nausea, shame, disgust, of that awakening. I could not touch my breakfast, the very sight of dinner filled me with loathing, I drank cold water by the pail, and managed in the evening to drag myself to church, feeling more thoroughly a 'miserable sinner' than I had ever done before in the whole course of my life. I felt ashamed to show myself at the office on the Monday morning; and when I did show myself, with an affectation of never having had anything the matter, which proved perfectly success-

ful, I was appalled to see the unblushing effrontery of Cathcart when alluding to the 'soda consolers' he had swallowed, and to hear the dramatic rendering Barrigan gave of his landlady saying, 'This day week, sir, then, if you please, this day week! Mine is a quiet 'ouse—and a ree-spectable—and—a sober!'

'You should have seen my old woman,' supplemented Thompson; 'she delivered an essay on Man that would have astonished Pope.'

'Are you sure it was not on Beasts?' asked Holway, who entered at the moment, and proceeded to hang up his hat.

'You ought to give an entertainment to the ladies connected with this staff,' suggested young Cathcart to me, ignoring the question, 'so as to set yourself and us right in their eyes. Say a picnic up the river, or a dinner at Richmond or Greenwich, or a dance, or some delicate attention of that sort. I shall be most happy to devote my poor services to making any little thing you may decide on, a success.'

'You are very kind, Cathcart,' I answered, 'but I do not intend to give any more parties.'

'No?'

'No. I am quite in earnest. I am glad to be-

lieve you enjoyed yourself on Saturday evening; but I have no thought of giving a series of entertainments.'

'Lost his money, for a ducat,' commented Cathcart.

'Always thought it was a fluke,' muttered Thompson.

'Going to marry a lady in the serious line,' suggested Barrigan.

'Was drunk himself, I'll bet you a sovereign,' hazarded Jerman, 'and got notice from his landlady.'

'I just wish to ask you, Mr. Cheverley,' interposed Holway at this juncture, 'whether a fortnight ago such an unseemly riot would have been permitted to prevail in this office? You know it would not; and if it continue, I shall lodge a complaint about it myself.'

'Bravo, Holway!' said Thompson, ruling a red line.

'Liver out of order, old chap?' observed Cathcart, dexterously lodging a paper pellet inside Holway's coat-collar.

'Hush! Here's— "Allow me to hand you a

prospectus, sir,"' whispered Barrigan, as our manager crossed the threshold.

After he had entered his private room there was silence for full a quarter of an hour, during which time nothing could be heard save the noise of pens scraping over paper, and the bang-banging of the outer doors, as messengers passed in and out, and different officials, all more or less true to time, made their appearance. For some reason, Monday morning is not, I have noticed, a favourable period at which to observe the punctuality of gentlemen in the receipt of salaries.

After a little space Holway left his desk, and, taking down his hat, looked at it with an air of interrogation and irresolution.

'What! going out again?' exclaimed Thompson.

'Blest if the directors will stand this!' murmured Jerman. 'I'll draw their attention to it, see if I don't.'

'Going to take a turn among the twelve tribes, Holway?' inquired Barrigan.

'If you are detained at Sloman's send to us, and we will *all* come and see you,' said Cathcart.

'Try to persuade Messrs. Doe and Roe and

relatives to insure their valuable lives in our office. The commission would help to pay debt and costs, you know.'

'What does it mean?' I asked, as Holway, with a muttered oath, flung himself out of the office. 'Is he embarrassed?'

'Ra—ther,' observed Jerman.

'Got among the Jews, poor devil,' explained Barrigan.

'So far as my experience goes,' put in a stripling named Allan, 'the Jews are not a bit worse than the Christians—better.'

'So far as your experience goes, Tommy!' repeated Jerman. 'That is good. Did you begin accepting bills when you were in petticoats?'

'But I thought,' I said, turning to Thompson, 'Holway was as steady as old Time?'

'So he is; but how the deuce can a man with a dozen children, and a new baby every Christmas Eve, make both ends meet on a hundred a year?'

'Mr. Cheverley, *may* I trouble you to take this round to Mr. Fairboy, and ask him to send a verbal answer?' said the manager, at this moment opening his door.

Before the advent of my legacy his address would have been, 'Cheverley, step round with this,' but 'other times other manners;' and already I had begun to look upon this unwonted courtesy as my due.

'Mr. Cheverley, *may* I offer you the pleasure of my company round the corner?' whispered Jerman, as I passed behind him on my way out. A sad set of irreverent scoffers for an elderly gentleman possessed of money to consort with!

That idea struck me forcibly while I walked to Fairboy's. Hitherto the chaffing, the grinning, the gibing, the folly of my fellow-clerks had never troubled me, because, like Holway, I held myself aloof—kept myself to myself, as he would have said; but now, *nolens volens,* they were determined to have me for one of them, and I did not like it. There was an unfitness about the position which involved difficulties never previously thought of. Poverty had, happily, heretofore prevented my having much association with these wild spirits; but, unless I gave myself 'airs,' how could I ever hope to keep clear of them in the future? With that question still unsolved I turned into the offices of the 'Three Children,' and with it still on my mind received

the verbal answer our chief required from Mr. Fairboy.

'By the bye, Mr. Cheverley,' said that gentleman, as I was leaving his room, 'how are you going to invest your money?'

'I thought of leaving it where it is,' I answered modestly.

'What! on mortgage, at three and a half per cent? Absurd! Come round to me some morning, and let us talk matters over. Why, bless my heart! it only produces now three hundred and fifty a year; it is what the parsons call buried in a napkin—buried in a napkin,' repeated 'Meshach,' as he had been named by Barrigan, pleased at the wonderful appropriateness of his own simile. 'I am busy now, but look in some morning, and meanwhile I will think the matter over. There are heaps of good investments open, going a-begging, as one might say, goin' a-beggin',' that being the easy manner in which Mr. Fairboy in the abandon of friendly intercourse pronounced the phrase.

Coming out I found myself close to Holway in close conversation with the 'Three Children's' managing clerk.

'They say they won't give an hour after twelve o'clock to-morrow,' the latter was remarking as I passed; and five minutes later Holway resumed his place at his desk, very ashen in colour and very shaky about his hands, smelling also, as I could not avoid noticing, of gin, which odour he had futilely tried to cover with the treacherous fragrance of cloves. Well, if a man can ever stand excused for drinking in the morning it is surely when only twenty-four hours intervene between himself and ruin, and he sees no prospect of any temporal salvation being wrought during that interval.

When, after hours, Barrigan and I were wending our way northward towards our respective lodgings, I took the opportunity of asking my companion if he happened to know where Holway lived.

'Holway! O, out Leytonstone way; he has a bit of a farm there where he keeps cows and pigs, and ducks and poultry, grows his own potatoes, and drags up the twelve young ones. But I say, Cheverley, don't you go helping him. He is an ill-conditioned, sulky, self-sufficient prig, and even if he were not, it would be only throwing good money after bad. What *can* a man in his position do except have a

periodical whitewash? Let him whitewash; it is sure to have to come to that one day, and the sooner he gets the operation over, the fresher and lighter he will feel.'

'But his wife and children?'

'When a fellow is locked up, somebody always helps the wife and children. It is like being widowed and orphaned. Look how well all the widows and orphans get on, far better than those who have husbands and fathers. Promise me now that you won't be wasting your money on a cad who could not say "thank you" if he tried; I have your good at heart, Cheverley, I do assure you I have.'

'Thank you, Barrigan, I appreciate your kindness,' I answered, scarcely knowing indeed what to answer.

'And if I were you,' went on my friend, 'I would cut the whole concern, that I would. What do you want with a salary? Besides, you would be richer without it. There is not one of us, except perhaps Holway, who has not borrowed money from you, and we will go on doing it. We have begun and we can't help ourselves. If you are wise just send in your resignation, not that I want to step into your

shoes, pray understand that clearly, but there are things fitting and things unfitting; and no man owning a cool ten thousand has a right to pocket the salary, which would make "all the difference" to some other fellow; so good-bye, old chap, no offence being meant, none taken, I hope?'

'Quite the contrary,' I assured him, and we separated: Mr. Barrigan, not exactly sober, turning into the nearest public-house to string himself up yet a little more before again encountering his landlady, to whom he owed Heaven knows how many weeks' rent; I to partake of tea, after which meal I made my way to Leytonstone.

Thinking that perhaps Holway might object to see me if I sent in my name, I told the little maid-servant merely to say, 'a gentleman wished to speak to her master.' It was a thoughtless thing to do, as I understood the moment I saw Holway. I stood in the shadow while the light from a candle on the hall table showed me the ghastly pallor of his face.

'*My* name is Holway,' he said, coming forward to the door and speaking like a man who believed the evil hour, so long expected, had struck at last.

'What is it?' and his breath came in quick short gasps.

'Nothing to be troubled about,' I said cheerfully. 'Don't you recognise me?—I am Cheverley.'

'What do you want with me?' he asked. I fancy he said, 'What the d——' as a preliminary, but let us give him the benefit of the doubt.

By this time the little servant had discreetly withdrawn, and so I answered without any hesitation, 'I want to help you if I can.'

'Help me! to help me! Was that what you said? Nobody can help me.'

'Let me try at any rate,' I urged, stepping in and closing the door as I spoke. 'Is not there any place where we can talk quietly together for five minutes?'

Mechanically he took up the candle and led the way into a room otherwise unlighted, and destitute of fire, furnished in the plainest and simplest manner possible.

'A poor place,' he said, following the direction of my eyes, which unintentionally wandered round the apartment. '*But it is home.*' And then his voice faltered, and he lapsed into silence.

'I never knew till to-day,' I began, taking a chair of my own accord, for he did not ask me to be seated, 'that you were in any difficulty. How much is it, and what is it for?'

He hesitated for an instant, then pointed to the door.

'Cheverley,' he said, 'you know the way back to London; take it. I daresay you meant well and kindly in coming here to-night, but go; you can't do me any good, and you are certain to do yourself harm.'

'Why?' I asked.

'Why, man alive, can't you see? Do you think it a thing possible, a fellow with my family could keep out of debt? The disease is intermittent, but incurable. If you abate the symptoms to-night, the fever will appear again to-morrow, and in perhaps a worse form than ever. I blame nobody. I don't even blame myself; but I cannot cut the cloth to make a coat that anyhow will fit me, and so I must take the consequences. I don't want your money, Cheverley. I hope I am not a leech, like those fellows at the office, who will suck you dry

before they have done with you. What I have to face I must face, and so go, and good-night.'

'I shall not go,' I answered, 'till you tell me the amount of your difficulty.'

He fought with me for a long time, he resisted my entreaties, parried my questions, was almost rude in his answers, but at last he was beaten.

'Mind,' he said, 'it is with no good-will of mine you are mixing yourself up with my affairs. Ten to one you will never get even the interest on your money. I shall be in a like strait again most likely, before I am two years older. When that time comes—'

'It will be soon enough to meet the fresh trouble, whatever it may be,' I interrupted, finishing his sentence for him.

After some more conversation I left without even going through the ceremony of shaking hands; but I knew, though he parted from me almost churlishly at the little gate leading into the country lane, along which I floundered through the darkness, that he stood with his head leaning against the top bar, thanking God, after some fashion of his own, for the deliverance which had come.

CHAPTER II.

YOUNG MR. ALLAN.

There was in those days no quieter and more utterly country a lane, within a radius of eight miles round London, than that leading from Leytonstone to Leyton Station. By some accident, when I turned away from Holway, I took the wrong direction, and walked off southward instead of north-east, as I should have done. On, and still on, never meeting a creature from whom I could inquire my road, and only vaguely guessing I could not be going very much astray by the railway signals in the distance, and the glimpse I occasionally caught of lights, that proved a town could not be far remote.

How silent it was, though! Every now and then I stopped and listened, if I may use the expression, to the utter stillness of the night. No cries, no laughter, no talking, no carts, no organs, no sound of horses' feet, no tramp of pedestrians echoing along the pavement. No. Silence, utter silence! save

when a gust of the March wind tossed the branches of the still bare trees, when a dog barked in a lonely farmyard, or the noise of a train speeding off to Cambridge through the Lea Marshes broke the quiet, which almost made the ears of a Londoner, like myself, ache with its intensity.

How pure the air was! How it seemed to brace me up and to invigorate all my faculties! In the darkness I felt young again. No tell-tale daylight was there to make merry over the years which had come and gone since I, a lad, walked through the night in the quiet peaceful country; no garish sun mounted, higher and higher, to show more clearly my hair grown thin and turning gray, the methodical elderliness of my lean spare figure, the wrinkles across my forehead, the crows'-feet about my eyes. Just for a little space, just while I walked along Green Grove-lane in the darkness, inhaling the night scents of the early spring, my short youth came back and dwelt with me, came back like one long departed, and who can make but brief tarrying when he returns.

It was very sweet, so sweet that I felt loth to go on to the highway and relinquish the delusion, so

sweet that the lights at the Low Leyton Station seemed to blind and aggrieve me; and when I was told there would be no train for another hour, but that I might possibly catch one on the main line at Stratford, I felt it quite a relief to go out once more into the darkness, and try again to gather up the threads of the illusion, all broken though they were.

Looking back, I know it must have been on that night the idea of making a home for myself among green fields and pastures new first entered my mind; for hitherto it had never occurred to me even to wish to leave London. To jog on over the same thoroughfares thirty-five years had rendered familiar; to continue the same routine existence, which was now something more than second nature; to sit on the same stool, and to go on writing at the same desk, where I had already indited as many letters as might have filled a shelf in the British Museum; of anything different from, of anything better than this, my thought had taken no cognisance.

For, in good truth, had I been at once turned out of the office and into my legacy, I should have felt like the celebrated prisoner of the Bastille. My old occupation gone, how could I in a moment have

substituted another? I had no friends. Those of my early manhood were dead, or married, or abroad. The old ladies who once invited me to tea-parties were dead and buried, and their pretty daughters were buxom wives, and had pretty daughters of their own to dispose of to young clerks, or any other eligible who might present himself.

My word! though just in the first blush of the affair, it seemed a fine thing to have ten thousand pounds to whistle down the wind, I soon began to fear I should have small personal enjoyment out of it.

No person could imagine I found any especial gratification in settling the claims of Cathcart's tailor, or satisfying the tax-collector, who seemed to call about every other day on Thompson. I had known but little of my fellow-clerks, who, indeed, compared with myself, were mere birds of passage at the 'Home and Foreign;' and really, when I came to look at the matter dispassionately, as I did after that walk, when I felt quite young again, I did not see any particular reason why I should ever know much more of them.

On the morrow I would send in my resignation.

I quite made up my mind to that course ; and then ? Why, then I should have time to look about me, and to consider what step it would be better for me to take next.

When I arrived at my lodgings there sat young Allan waiting for me. This was another thing connected with the legacy that seemed objectionable. When I had no money, at least no one disturbed my privacy. After tea I could read for hours without a soul coming between me and my author. Now all that was changed. If my lodgings had been a club, or a house of call, Barrigan and the rest could not have regarded them as more fully at their service.

'O, here you are at last,' said Mr. Allan, rising as he spoke from the depth of my easy-chair, and holding out a hand which he had been warming before the glow of my fire. 'Here you are ; I was half afraid I should be obliged to leave without seeing you, and I am so anxious to get your name down as one of the patrons for my lecture on the fifth of next month. I have got such a capital idea. It will please all the clergy, and the old ladies who have heaps of money. Ay, and it will draw the artisan class as well. I am going,' he said, speaking

very slowly and impressively, 'to deliver a lecture at the Minerva Institute on this subject,' and he presented me a bill that had evidently just been pulled (I have no doubt he had waited at the printing-office while it was set up), which stated that on the fifth of April a lecture would be delivered at the Minerva Institute, Coster-square, by *Thomas William Allan, Esq., H. and F. I. O.*

'*Under distinguished patronage.*

'SUBJECT:

"IS MONEY CAPABLE OF CONFERRING HAPPINESS?"

'*The chair will be taken at half-past eight precisely by Sir Ahab Hardnail.*'

'Lord bless me!' I exclaimed. 'How did you get old Hardnail?'

'Well,' he answered, and I am happy to say he blushed a little as he spoke, 'I have not exactly got him yet, but I have no doubt he will come.'

'I suppose this is a provisional sort of programme,' I suggested.

'That is just it, Mr. Cheverley,' agreed the boy, for he was little more, eagerly. 'We have put it

all down as we hope to carry it out. Do you understand?'

I told him I understood it all perfectly; and he then produced his list of patrons, or, in other words, subscribers.

'Why, these are all Cathcart's people,' I remarked. 'Are they dummies too?'

'No; they are right enough. They have, every man and woman of them, either paid or promised to pay, and *their* word, you know, is as good as their bond.'

I could not avoid wishing it were possible to believe the words of Messrs. Cathcart and Allan came under the same category; but I only said,

'It is very kind of Cathcart to interest himself about your lecture.'

'Well, you see, the fact of the matter is, Cheverley, —you don't mind my calling you Cheverley, do you?'

Quite truthfully I told Mr. Allan that it was immaterial what he called me; but I could not help reflecting that none of the 'fresh blood' in the 'Home and Foreign,' introduced by the directors or owing their berths and salaries to some worldly circumstance totally unconnected with personal know-

ledge or merit, had ever before evinced any mad desire to address me familiarly.

Never until the advent of that wonderful legacy had I thought so little of myself. It was only when the world in which I then had my being came and worshipped my ten thousand pounds, that I realised how truly great was Mr. Amiott's money—how truly small Reuben Cheverley.

'The fact is,' Allan went on saying, while I, on another line of rails, but still keeping him both within sight and sound, was thinking my own thoughts, 'I owe Cathcart some money, a lot of money, and it is not pleasant owing money to a fellow one meets every day, and in one's own office too—now, is it?'

Never having had any experience of the sort, I could only answer that I should imagine it was not.

'I was sure you would say so, practical and matter-of-fact as you are,' Mr. Allan proceeded. 'Well, Cathcart, who really is a practical fellow in some things, though you might not think it—'

'Pardon me, but I do think it,' I interrupted.

'Do you? Now that confirms what Cathcart said only this afternoon. He said, "Cheverley is a deuced deal sharper fellow than you imagine."'

'Very kind and complimentary of Cathcart. But pray proceed. You were telling me you owed him some money.'

'Yes; and so this morning, as we were walking up to the 'bus—we live, you know, at Highgate—'

'Yes, yes,' I answered somewhat impatiently.

Allan was the most diffusive fellow in the office; and I had bought a copy of Charles Lamb's 'Letters,' edited by Talfourd, on my way home, which I was longing to open, since his letters, like his essays, are to me the most enjoyable ever written.

'He broke cover by saying, "I can't help feeling, Allan, how confoundedly disagreeable it must be for you to meet me morning, noon, and night, and remember that trifle there is between us."'

'He did not offer to write it off, I suppose,' was my commentary, as the young fellow paused.

'No; *you* know he is hard up, or else *I* know he would never have mentioned the matter,' said Allan loyally. 'To put the case in a nutshell, Mr. Cheverley,' went on the lad, 'he said he had been thinking of a plan which would help us both. I have a certain fluency of language, as you know,' explained the unhappy youth; 'and I have, since I was quite a

boy' (I wonder how far beyond boyhood, except in loss of self-respect, he fancied he had travelled?), 'been in the habit of writing little things, and reading them at first only among my friends, but afterwards to some private audiences. My uncle,' he proceeded, finding I made no comment upon his literary genius, 'is the proprietor of the *Eastshire Gazette*, and my cousin is now sub-editor of the *Modern Rambler.* There is a good deal about fishing in it,' added Mr. Allan, by way of explanation.

'You are quite a family of authors,' I remarked.

'Well, don't you think,' he said modestly, 'that if one member of a family writes, it sets the others thinking about writing too?' I have always been hearing my uncle praised up; and what a fine thing it is to have a newspaper; and I see my cousin sit down, with a pair of scissors and a gum-bottle and a pencil, and turn out an article as fast as a shot.'

'To return to your own sheep,' I suggested; for it seemed to me we were travelling far away from the lecture.

'Cathcart's sheep, rather,' he answered. 'To cut a long story short, then, he offered that if I would deliver a lecture he would get enough out of

his own connection to defray the expenses, and something over. Cathcart really does know a lot of good people; so he asked for leave of absence this afternoon, and went round to all his acquaintances in the City, and got a heap of names; as he says, "he can do anything for a friend."'

'And then?' This is a mere hint for Mr. Allan to proceed.

'Why, then, the question arose as to where the lecture should be delivered. Cathcart and I as we walked home puzzled our brains to consider what it should be about. I thought that "The Practical Effect of Insurance Companies on Family Life" might have been a taking title; but Cathcart said he did not think it would do, more especially as a friend we met, connected with the press, to whom we submitted the idea, asked if we did not mean Family Death, "because if you do," he said, "it is a subject I am up in, and I can give you plenty of cheerful data which I am sure would delight your directors." So at last, after Cathcart had suggested, and I said I could make nothing of his subjects, and I suggested and he said my subjects would not please the powers that be, I remarked, perhaps

something might be made of an idea of which a clergyman delivered himself last Sunday week, "Can money confer happiness?" The young ladies would like it, I went on.'

'"Ay," said Cathcart, "the young ladies who want to marry Alonzo, though he has only fifty pounds a year, the while they think their fathers ought to work twice as hard as any nigger to give them evening dresses that may enable them to eclipse other young women. The young men who, cramped for money themselves, wonder how their governors can have the heart to keep the purse-strings so tight. The old ladies, who have found money cannot make them young again; and the old gentlemen, who would not be made young if the door back into the twenties could be opened for them only by a golden key. Every one, from Imogene, who, a year after marriage, will be regretting she did not accept old Jones instead of Alonzo, to old Jones, will approve of the sentiment. One of the shams of the age is our public depreciation of the god we all really worship. Go home and write your lecture, Allan, and pile it up strong, that, except as a means of doing good, money is rather an encumbrance than

otherwise. Don't let any apparent discrepancy between your statements and your feelings stand in the way of your success. Remember, all worthy people require money for some purpose quite foreign to themselves. You, for instance, want it to repay me. I—but I need not bore you further. Recollect, however, even the clergyman last Sunday week sent round the bag." '

'It seems a pity,' I interrupted, 'that Cathcart does not deliver the lecture himself.'

'He could hardly do so, and tout for an audience; besides, as he says, "I have a few ideas, Allan, to which you are welcome, but I could never lick them into proper shape." I do not quite agree with him there; but still some persons have a certain facility of composition that others lack.'

'Undoubtedly,' I agreed. 'But now tell me what in the world made you fix on Coster-square as the scene of operations.'

'We could not think of a suitable place, so we decided to ask Palmett's advice. He is a friend of Hardnail's, you know, and a precious old screw too; but he is useful, very useful, and sometimes will give a helping hand, though not with any money in

it, remember, if you ask his advice and flatter him up a bit. He lives at Muswell Hill; so we walked over there and talked to him, and asked what he would recommend. We told him who was coming, of course, and the subject, as preliminaries.

" 'With your subject," he said, pouring out some more port, and pushing the decanter over to Cathcart, who only smiled and shook his head, and somehow managed to look as if he had touched nothing stronger than tea all his life, "With your subject—and a very good subject it is, excellent: vanity of riches—'Vanity of vanities,' saith the Preacher, and surely he ought to have known a good deal about the matter:—with your subject, as I was saying, you ought to go to Coster-square; I'll speak to Hardnail about it: he is one of the committee. You can send me a few tickets for him to distribute among his friends. Of course you do not expect to fill any hall with money, and it had better be full than empty. Hardnail will, I fancy, see the matter as I see it. Science is all very well at these institutions; but what can a shopkeeper want with science unless how to teach him the best way of adulterating his goods? Something moral,

and Christian, and practical is far better. There is too much discontent among the working classes—strikes, early-closing movement, and so forth. They have got a notion into their heads that, because a man has five thousand a year, he is to be envied; envied—while they, on eighteen shillings a week, and with no appearance to keep up, are always grumbling! They forget their advantages, and fancy a millionaire must be of necessity happy. It is utter ignorance, of course; but still it is a notion that wants to be dispelled. Money give happiness, indeed! Why, I know a man worth a plum, sir, who can't; digest a mutton chop—give you my word he can't, and look at those paving fellows, how they devour dry bread and fat bacon, and seem to think it the finest feast in the world."'

'What an idiot Mr. Palmett must be!' I interposed.

'*Is he?* I'll tell you what he did once. You know Holway; cross beggar! but that is nothing. Well, he had a young brother who started in business on his own account. I forget what the business was; and one day, while he was just con-

triving to hold his head above water, he had to pay a bill to Palmett that amounted to fifty-five pounds. I think it was fifty-five.'

'Never mind, for Heaven's sake, whether it was fifty-five, or five hundred and fifty-five, but get on with your story,' I entreated.

Allan looked at me with surprise, but proceeded placidly,

'I am sure it was fifty-five; but, whatever it may have been, he gave double the amount he intended—that is, for instance, he gave ten ten-pound notes and a five, instead of eleven fives.'

'Very stupid mistake to make,' I commented.

'Still, one that might have been made by any person. I remember myself—'

'O Allan!' I entreated, 'do look at the clock, and recollect that, if you are able to sit up all night, and be at the office at nine in the morning, I am not.'

'I am sure I beg your pardon; but I must just finish telling you about Palmett. The minute Holway found out the error he had committed, he ran round to Noble-street, and, all out of breath, told Palmett he believed he had handed him fifty pounds too much.

'"I am aware of that," said Palmett. "Let it be a lesson to you, young man, to be more careful in the future."

'Holway said it would be a lesson to him, and waited for the fifty to be returned.

'Palmett resumed his writing.

'"Will you give me a cheque, sir, or the difference in cash?" asked Holway, when the silence had lasted for a little while.

'Palmett ceased writing, and wiped his pen carefully.

'"I will give you neither," he said. "You have bought your experience very cheaply—the loss of fifty pounds to-day may prove the saving of hundreds of thousands to you hereafter."'

'The old scoundrel!' I exclaimed; 'but of course Holway got back his money?'

'Of course he got nothing of the sort. He went to his solicitor, and his solicitor told him he had no remedy. I'd have had my remedy either out of his pocket or his body; but Holway did not thrash him, or give him in charge, or do anything. He just flung up his cards.'

'Do you mean he destroyed himself?' I asked, aghast.

'O, no, he was too game for that; but the loss turned the scale so far against him—he was a poor man, in a very small way of business—that he made up his mind to struggle no more. "If that is trade in London," he said, "I would rather deal among the opossums;" and so he worked his passage out to Australia, and is doing very well, I believe.'

'What an unmitigated ruffian!' I exclaimed, referring to Mr. Palmett, the while I put down my name for half a dozen tickets.

'It is very kind of you, Cheverley, very kind indeed,' said the young fellow, as I placed the amount, thirty shillings, in his hand; but I fancied he looked somewhat disappointed that it was not a five-pound note.

Having got, however, all he could decently ask for, if not all he desired, Mr. Allan said good-night, and left me at length alone with Charles Lamb. But, somehow or another, as I read, or rather tried to read, my thoughts strayed from the text; and I wondered what sort of essay Elia would have written

on his last resting-place, had he in some spirit of prophecy been able to see his own neglected grave covered knee-deep with rank grass, stinging-nettles, and yarrow, while that of Dives, close beside, dwarfs the modest mound underneath which the frail body, where dwelt the tenderest heart, the kindliest humour, the keenest wit, lies mouldering away to dust.

CHAPTER III.

IN COSTER-SQUARE.

THE night of Mr. Allan's lecture arrived; and true to those habits of punctuality which, rather than any genius I possessed, had raised my salary at the 'Home and Foreign' Office to one hundred and fifty pounds a year, I arrived in Coster-square ten minutes before the time named on the programme.

It had been Allan's wish that I should accompany him to the scene of action, while Cathcart proposed calling for me, and Mr. Palmett actually looked in at the office, and after expressing the delight he felt in making my acquaintance, asked me to accept a seat in his brougham on the eventful night.

All very kind and complimentary no doubt; but either I was not such a fool as they took me for, or else that shadow, Suspicion, which of necessity dogs wealth a man has not possessed from his birth, had stolen closer upon my footsteps and made all human motives and actions seem darker to me than they

had done in the days when—well, to be quite explicit, in the days when Allan would have laughed outright at the bare idea of cultivating 'old Cheverley,' and Cathcart and Mr. Palmett and all their set would have seen me at Jericho before proffering the smallest attention or civility.

Further, my eyes were quite opened to the natures of my young associates. Thoughtless they might be; indeed, I knew they were, about every matter on which thoughtlessness was least desirable; but in addition to this, which I could easily have pardoned—had pardoned, indeed, and excused times without number—they were thoughtful where want of thought could only have been regarded as natural and graceful. Before me they took no pains to conceal the two faces which they turned, one to their own world—the other to their relations. Despite Cathcart's remark anent my sharpness, they evidently considered I was not clever enough to put this and that together; and that their follies, their schemes, their shifts, their falsehoods, their double dealing, their pretensions, their sins, had no meaning for the old fogey who, after spending his whole life in a shell, was trying to accustom his bleared

eyes to the wicked sights of a world hitherto beyond his knowledge.

Heaven knows I was no happier for the spectacle. I would not have seen could I have helped doing so.

Being unable to remain blind, I declined the civilities of Messrs. Allan, Cathcart, and Palmett, even to the extent of refusing to sup with a select little party after it was quite settled money could do little or nothing for a man, and so wended my way Coster-square-ward in my usual lonely fashion.

I had given back five of my tickets to Allan—what did I, who knew nor man nor woman in the slightest degree likely to enjoy the young fellow's eloquence, want with them?—and therefore took my seat amongst total strangers in the very front row of the audience. Natural modesty might have led me to select a less conspicuous position, but greatness n many ways had of late been thrust upon me, and I bowed my head even under this latest unexpected chastisement.

Just as I entered, Cathcart appeared, bustling about in a great state of excitement.

'You must come on the platform,' he exclaimed. 'It is all nonsense your sitting down there amongst

the audience. I will take no refusal. Come with me.'

'Not even in charge of a police-officer,' I answered with unwonted courage. 'I would rather go to Bow-street than venture among your "great guns." No, Cathcart,' for he was still detaining me, 'I am quite serious—you must believe me, please.'

'Well, wilful man, you will have your way, I suppose,' answered Cathcart, laughing; but he made me of as much importance as possible, marshalling me with great ceremony up the hall and across the space in front of the platform, to a chair beside one occupied by a pleasant, motherly-looking lady, very plainly dressed, with whom he shook hands.

As he passed back again along the front row, he nodded to a gentleman who came quietly in quite unheeded and unattended, a man with a strangely grave face, of whom I took especial notice, both because of his face and of his appearing in evening dress, a delicate attention none of the Palmett and Hardnail clique, except Allan and Cathcart, paid to the audience.

For me, I had never possessed a dress-suit in all my life; and I now presented myself to the gaze of

the Literary Institute arrayed in my Sunday frock-coat, black trousers, black vest, black necktie, hair watch-chain, a spare, uninviting-looking, elderly personage.

Not so spare, however, as the stranger—not quite so plain either perhaps. He was not ugly. I felt myself looking past my comely neighbour at him. There was nothing offensive or repulsive or hateful about his appearance, as there was to my eye about some of the people who now began to occupy the platform; but he was curious-looking and ungainly. Yes, that is the word, ungainly; lean, spare, taller than myself, with long bony hands—I could see that as he slowly pulled on his right-hand glove—large feet encased in patent leather boots; joints that seemed more prominent than joints usually are; and shoulder-blades that were gradually wearing a white mark on the back of his superfine coat. I felt fascinated by the man's appearance. I had never seen any one in the slightest degree resembling him before. He seemed another type of being to those amongst whom I had hitherto been thrown. His face was very long, and there were queer lines and hollows strewed about it that might

have been comical, but that somehow they were sad. No one feature was out of proportion to the other features; but yet nose, chin, upper lip, all had the effect of being misfits. His forehead might have been satisfactory had the bumps of perception and causality not been out of all keeping with the size of his other organs; his cheek-bones were somewhat prominent, his ears, large and flat, were not obtrusive, but things to marvel at when attention was drawn to them. He wore his hair cropped very short, a fashion not so usual then as it is now, and parted down the middle, which, in those days, was thought foolish, and even wicked; considered east of Temple Bar to be the evidence of a fool, a fop, a milksop, a swell, and many other things abhorrent to the City mind.

What could he be? Whence could he have come? Had I been sitting in a West-end theatre, or in any place of instruction or amusement adjoining those localities where leisure dwells and Pleasure disports herself, I might, like Charles Lamb, have hazarded a 'wide solution' concerning his calling and antecedents. But here in Coster-square, surrounded only by Cathcart's friends and the local

shopkeepers and artisans, for whose behalf Sir Ahab Hardnail, and others of that ilk, had 'got up' the Literary Institute, it was as impossible for me to assign him a place in the social scale as it proved for Elia to conjecture the rental value of all the retail shops in London. Truth to tell, I was *very* ignorant of a world in which I had spent over half a century. Almost any crossing-sweeper knew more of life than I.

At the 'Home and Foreign' we did not see much to enlarge the borders of our experience. The City men, who constituted the larger portion of our directors, and the country and West-end professional men who came as agents, or to introduce business, really comprised all the 'society' we ever beheld. Ours was not an office to which all ranks and classes frantically rushed with the intention of securing exceptional advantages. That sort of business we left to the 'Progress,' and other newly-fledged bantlings. Our terms were high, and our business special. 'Greenland's icy mountains' presented no more difficulties to us than 'India's coral strand.' We were quite as ready to take a life resident near 'Afric's sunny fountains' as to risk the insidious

effects of the 'spicy breezes' blowing 'soft o'er Ceylon's isle;' but we required to be remarkably well paid for doing so. That was our specialty—I mean the foreign insurance business, the being well paid forming, of course, a part and parcel of it; and so it had chanced that my observation of men had lain rather amongst intending emigrants, energetic travellers, officers ordered to foreign service, captains about to go down to the sea in ships, and other such folk, than alongside elegant leisure, or the affectation of it, which may any day be seen walking on the sunny side of Pall Mall, or lounging as near the shop windows in Regent-street as the views and exigencies of other loungers will permit.

For this reason I could make nothing of the gentleman in evening dress—nothing whatever. During the course of the proceedings I never saw him smile, never save once, and that certainly was not because of any witty remark made by the lecturer. Had Allan been preaching a sermon, that one auditor could not have listened with a graver or sadder face. Evidently the whole affair struck him as a very serious matter indeed. Even the prospect of it so subdued his spirits that, when the room was laugh-

ing at a drunken artisan, guffawing outright or tittering behind its handkerchiefs, his features merely relaxed into a smile, which struck me as more solemn and suggestive than his previous immobility. At public gatherings, as in church, small absurdities strike one as eminently ridiculous; and before Allan ever appeared on the platform we had all, the grave individual excepted, laughed our fill, and were quite prepared to receive Sir Ahab Hardnail and his *protégé* with effusion.

As befitted an institute established for the benefit of the dwellers round and about Coster-square, the space devoted to what may be termed 'the stalls' was extremely small; and even that space was jostled to right and left in quite a democratic style by the benches assigned to the holders of what, for want of a better term, I must call second-class tickets.

Of course, there was a lower depth still, filled, free of charge, with such of the aboriginal inhabitants as were friendly with the shopkeepers, or in favour with the local clergy.

Shortly after my entrance, a respectable grocer, for some reason—perhaps because he could not help himself—came sneaking along the side benches to a

place almost at right angles with the front row, where I sat. Clinging to his arm was an individual, whom I afterwards understood to be a foreman moulder, dressed in decent black, but grimy as regarded his hands, and uncertain both in gait and utterance.

Subdued at first by the lights and the sight of the assemblage, he remained, for a few minutes after taking his seat, quiet; then, possessed by that desire of appearing quite sober which attends semi-drunkenness, he nudged his companion, and asked, in an audible whisper,

'What itch 'l—'bout?'

All our eyes were at once directed towards the man who propounded this question.

'Hush!' answered his friend.

'But what itch 'l 'bout?' he repeated more earnestly; 'is't moosk, or play'n, or wat?'

'Lecture,' explained the sober and respectable shopkeeper.

'Lec—! what's lec? what itch 'bout?'

'Perhaps you would like to look at a programme, sir,' observed a young clerk at this juncture, leaning forward and offering one of Mr. Allan's wordy circulars for perusal. After that he folded his arms

across his chest, and looked down with a satisfied smile. He was one of Hardnail's clerks, and as great a prig in work and out of it as ever breathed.

By this time the moulder had secured the programme, and was endeavouring to read it upside down. Failing to accomplish this, he turned for information to his friend.

'Wha' itch goin' to be—singin'—tight-rope—wat?'

'Lecture—lecture—lecture; do hold your tongue,' said the grocer in an impatient whisper.

'The subject, sir, of the lecture,' remarked Hardnail's clerk with a bland smile, 'you will perceive to be, "Is money capable of conferring happiness?" Young Mr. Allan, of the Home and Foreign Insurance Company, is the lecturer.' Having finished which statement, the prig looked round for approval.

'Is money—' repeated the moulder thickly but audibly, fumbling the programme the while.

'Capable of conferring happiness?' finished the clerk with an air.

'Why, of course 'tis,' said the other. 'If any feller say 'tain't, he must be a damn'd fool.'

There was a laugh and a titter; a coster in the

background shouted 'Engore!' and then made a feint of wiping his lips as if after drinking a pot of beer. The men grinned unrestrainedly; the women put up their handkerchiefs and giggled decorously behind them. Even the prig was fain for a moment to cover his clean-shaved mouth, after which he coughed apologetically.

As for the grocer, he was too much ashamed to do anything, save turn very red; and affairs were in this position when the lady to my right rose valiantly and attempted a rescue. With the pluck of thirty, and the determination of sixty, she crossed the few feet which intervened between the stalls and benches, and said,

'My good friend, had you not better go home?'

The man looked at her in blank amazement.

''Ome—vy 'ome?' he asked.

'You are not in a state to be benefited by anything you may hear in this building. Don't you agree with me?' addressing his friend.

'No, mum, I don't,' retorted the grocer, who regarded this expostulation as an infringement upon the rights of the people. 'If he's only let alone, he'll let alone. Won't you, Bill?'

'O yes. I'm orl right,' agreed Bill, as distinctly as he was able to speak.

'He'll behave well enough, ma'am,' volunteered a quiet-looking man with a hectic flush, whom I found out afterwards was a packing-case maker on a small scale in the neighbourhood.

'You must overlook his vigorous Saxon,' deferentially suggested Hardnail's prig, recognising in the lady one of the Palmett connection.

'Ne'er a quieter fellow goin' nor Bill,' said a coffee-house keeper, looking round the audience for confirmation of his statement.

The elderly lady wavered. 'If I knew where you lived,' she began, addressing the popular Bill, 'I should like to call and give you—'

At this point something remarkable occurred. Digging his left elbow well into his friend's right side, Bill, in a stage aside, delivered himself of this sentence:

'I say, old fellow, she's 'ansom, though not young—she ain't young, but she's 'ansom.' And then he winked at us all solemnly, as if some enormous joke were in progress.

Then it was that I saw a smile flicker round the

lips of the man who had puzzled me; and while some friend whispered the elderly lady to resume her seat, a loud clapping of hands and burst of applause greeted Mr. Allan, who, accompanied by his party, now appeared upon the platform.

'Attention, Bill,' whispered the grocer, giving Bill an audible thump in the back.

'Orl right,' agreed Bill, and then fell asleep as calmly and satisfactorily as if he had drunk his orthodox bottle of port and been sitting with feet outstretched before a sea-coal fire.

The reader must excuse my not giving a de-failed account of Allan's lecture. As lectures go, it was not bad; as lecturers are, the young fellow did not acquit himself much amiss; but lectures being forms of entertainment as much out of my line as orreries, magic lanterns, dioramas, and other exhibitions of the same moral kind, I confess that more than once I found myself longing for the easy-chair and the bright firelight, the familiar book, and the happy solitude of my bachelor lodging.

Whether if I had not been behind the scenes, I might have liked the lecture any better, I cannot

say; but, as it was, the arguments Allan adduced to prove that money might generally be regarded as an unmitigated evil struck me as eminently unsatisfactory. Like Bill, I, who had known the want of money, felt that the man capable of imagining it could not confer happiness must be a —— fool.

Perhaps Bill's summary of the argument impressed me more than the lecture. Anyhow, though I ought, I am certain, to have been convinced the hind was really better off than the peer, I found myself deciding that after all the peer should be, if he were not, in the happier case.

According to the lecturer, money only brought with it care, anxiety, and responsibility; if it did not bring sin too, it was only by the grace of God and the exceptional virtue of the man who owned it.

How much less harass, for instance, dogged the steps of the person who, having nothing to invest, need dread no wars, no panics, no swindles! 'Certain as the Saturday night,' said Allan, 'is his money. So long as his employer can hold his head above water, the weekly wage or the quarterly salary must be forthcoming. When his employer drowns, when the waters have gone over him, when the

place which knew him once so well knows him no longer, how fares it with cook, gardener, coachman, clerk? Why, they all go to some other employer still prosperous, still solvent, and again receive the wages they have earned with the regularity of a Government annuity.

'At the world's banquet the poor are the guests, the rich the hosts. Over and over again we read of men who count their income by tens and hundreds a day, dining off a chop, which they wash down with cold water. They provide fine carriages for their wives, but they themselves go on foot. When they travel, they affect from choice the class we, who are not wealthy, select from necessity. They have seen all that is under the sun, and, finding greatness vanity, revert to littleness.'

So, at considerable length, the young fellow proceeded—quoting examples of miserly rich men who believed they were paupers; of careful rich men ruined by extravagant sons; of fond rich fathers whose daughters served them the scurvy trick of running off with penniless adventurers, as the daughters of over-fond and wealthy fathers will; of industrious rich men, who, having risen by dint of hard work,

laboured on till softening of the brain ended all power of work for ever. It was like a medical lecture in which all the disease is brought forward, and all the health suppressed. But the audience listened, and the Hardnails and Palmetts murmured a plaintive assent, and the porters and costers cheered, one half of them because they thought it the right thing to do, and the other half because it was borne in upon them that 'rich men might have their troubles too, Heaven be thanked;' while the cheesemongers and the grocers and cabinet-makers listened attentively, trying to make sense out of it all, and wondering where, in the division of classes, they and their hard work, and their struggling Saturday nights, and the unpaid bills, Hardnail and the like would 'look into and send on,' belonged.

A very curious and difficult problem, believe me, ladies and gentlemen, and one not quite to be solved by Mr. Allan or any superficial observer.

'There are cases, however,' proceeded the lecturer, 'when wealth comes as a sudden snare and temptation to a man. When, after a life of the most grinding economy, he suddenly wakes and finds that

he need be economical never again. Is that no lure of the devil, think you, my friends? Is the Evil One, then, baiting no trap for the man's soul? You may have known one hitherto generous and sympathetic—one to whom you were dear as Damon to Pythias, as David to Jonathan—changed in the twinkling of an eye by the favours of Fortune.

'Time was when he would have shared with you his last sixpence, his hardly-earned crust. But now? Look around, and who in any rank has not had some friend spoiled by a sudden shower of gold—seen some kind face changed by the sunshine of prosperity? Let me tell you a story, friends—a little trumpery story, about a small child, a kinsman of my own.' (O, Allan!)

'He was a naughty little chap, as boys are wont to be—a restive, restless, brown-eyed, curly-headed, active-limbed, strong-voiced young Turk; a very demon amongst pastry, the terror of his nurses, the apple of their eye (as the Scripture beautifully expresses anything very near and dear) to father and mother.

'Well, one night there was a meeting at his father's house—of good serious people—men and

women who had the well-being of the nation at heart; who desired to see the people drink less and pray more; go to public worship often, and to public-houses seldom.' (Enormous applause, led by the Hardnails and local clergy, and seconded ably by the rank and file in the background.)

'It was a serious gathering, one at which a child's presence and a child's pranks were as much out of place as it is ever possible for a child's doings to prove.' (Renewed applause, for Mr. Allan was evidently warming to his subject.) 'Like a judicious mother, as she is,' proceeded the lecturer, 'Charlie (we will call him Charlie, if you please)—Charlie's maternal parent, after a time, told him he must go to bed. Liking the society, Charlie demurred. The mother was firm, and the father firmer; and at last Charlie—the nurse being rung for—understood he had no choice in the matter. But, though he submitted, he was rebellious.

"I'll go to bed," he said, kicking imaginary sand before him as he made his exit; "*but I won't say my prayers.*"'

The wildest applause followed this statement. Whether the audience were glad that Charlie re-

fused to say his prayers, whether they approved the mode in which Allan told the story, or whether they were simply tired to death, and glad to make a noise on any pretence, I cannot say. Sufficient to say they did applaud to the echo, thereby enabling Allan, as time was getting on, to skip a few descriptive paragraphs, which certainly would not have added to the effect of his narrative.

'You must suppose now, if you please,' he went on, after bowing his acknowledgments, 'that some little time—say, a quarter of an hour—has elapsed. The important questions of the meeting are being discussed; from all minds save the mother's—ah, your hearts are with her—the memory of the naughty child is dismissed; what some may consider wider interests than the future of the curly-headed boy have ousted the recollection of his very existence, for the time being, off the stage. Bound to her guests, tied by *les convenances*, the poor mother cannot run up-stairs to see how it fares with the little sinner. All at once a silence falls upon those who are so seated as to command a view of the door. The handle has been gently turned, then the door opens a little, and the owner of a curly head

peeps in. No one speaks to Charlie. He fails to meet his mother's eye, so he pushes the door open wider, and stands in the entrance, flushed, eager, and yet shy—a tiny figure, with tumbled hair and bare feet, arrayed in white, just risen from his cot! For a second or two he remained silent; but he had his errand, and he must be rid of it.

"Ma!" cried out the sweet, shrill, childish voice, and at that sound his mother turned, and from the other end of the room saw her naughty little boy, the observed of all present.

'Unable to imagine what fresh freak of perverseness had brought him down-stairs, she advanced towards the door, exclaiming, "O Charlie, how could you!' but Charlie interrupted.

"Ma, I have said my prayers," he began; then added gleefully, "Isn't that a sell for Satan?"'

There were persons present who objected to Satan's name being publicly mentioned even in a sermon, but their dry coughs of disapproval were drowned by the din of applause which arose from the back and side benches. Even in the more select circles there were those who smiled a half-protesting

smile, and my plump and kindly-looking neighbour said audibly, 'Poor dear little creature!'

'I will not,' went on Allan, 'detain you five minutes longer; but before we separate I want to tell you of a parallel case, in which the disappointment to the Prince of Darkness must have been equally great. Not so very long ago there lived in this huge overgrown city of ours a man, no longer in his first youth, who from boyhood had filled a clerk's place, and received a clerk's salary. Summer and winter, spring and autumn, found him sitting at his accustomed desk—a man to be depended on, a man accurate in his work, faithful to his employers, a good servant to his Maker. He had no home-ties, death long before had severed them; he had few friends, for he was not well off, and even friendship—except on a desert island—necessitates the possession of some ready cash. Unexpectedly he was left a fortune—not a princely fortune perhaps, but one which must have seemed so to him, and proved to most men an enormous temptation, a very lion in his path. Should you have blamed a man who had lived solitary for half a century, saying, "While I was poor the world neglected me; now I will neglect

the world; I will take to hoarding; I will put my money out at usury; I will double, treble, quadruple this legacy, and then in my own fashion enjoy myself"? I confess, under the circumstances, I should have regarded such a determination as natural in the extreme. Quite reasonably—so it seems to me—this man might have said to himself, "Hitherto my life has been a fast; now will I feast; I will eat, I will drink, I will be merry, I will sleep softly, and take mine ease. Those who are sick and those who are sorry, those who are poor and footsore and heavy-hearted, may plod along their weary way, but for me there is rest at last; and in the sunshine of this late prosperity I will bask and lie at ease, regardless of the sobs and tears, the anguished prayers, and the bitter lamentations which rise above all the noise and clamour of our daily life, and are heard only by the angels in heaven."'

Thunders of applause. It struck me there must be some fugleman amongst the audience, so accurately did the clapping succeed to Allan's pauses, so certainly did the cheering follow a particular intonation in Allan's voice.

'I have told you,' resumed the lecturer, 'what this man might have done without blame or rebuke rom his fellows. I will now tell you what he did. He kept on his former road, still content with the few worldly pleasures, with the modest fare of the days when he was poor. But he had his resources, he indulged in his luxuries for all that. Wherever a human being had need, and he heard of that need, he stepped forward to help. What he denied himself he gave freely to others. Was some one suffering for a boyish folly, he held out a hand to bring him to shore. Was a man with a family in fearful need, he appeared a very saviour in time of cruel extremity. Why multiply instances? What I have said will indicate my meaning. Often, too often, as money proves a curse rather than a blessing, a misfortune instead of a gift direct from Heaven, there are cases when it is capable of conferring happiness upon its possessor and those with whom he shares his possessions. Like everything else, it may be used or abused; it may put leaden weights on his feet that can only drag a man down to perdition, or wings to his shoulders which shall carry him beyond the skies. Would it were possible for me to say

money was generally used as a power for good! Alas, and alas, I cannot do so! Few, indeed, are the instances in which, after the bait has been laid and the trap set, a man is able triumphantly to walk away, with his head erect, his soul confident—away from the lures of the Evil One, having achieved, indeed, in the guileless slang of little Charlie, a "sell for Satan."'

Having in his own person achieved which graceful peroration, Mr. Allan bowed to the audience, who rent the roof with their plaudits. Then Sir Ahab Hardnail proposed a vote of thanks, which, after being seconded, was duly carried and cheered vociferously. Then there was a good deal of bustle and handshaking, and putting on of mantles and shawls, and driving off in broughams and flys and cabs; and somehow or another, having shaken off Cathcart and got rid of Allan and Sir Ahab Hardnail and my genial neighbour, who had been once again complimented upon her good looks by the moulder before his friends carried him away almost *vi et armis*, I found myself standing on the steps of the lecture-hall, looking out disconsolately at a drizzling rain which was coming down with a good even persist-

ency that promised no abatement for several hours at all events.

Like most men who have had to cut their coats according to their cloth, and to appear fairly well dressed on very limited means, I had learned to hate rain with a hatred which was actual loathing. True, I could now afford to contemplate the prospect of having my best suit of clothes ruined with comparative equanimity, but the habits of nigh upon half a century cannot be cast aside in a moment; and I was looking ruefully at the steady downfall, when some one accosted me with the words,

'Have you not an umbrella, sir?'

I turned at the question, and met the eyes of the man who had so puzzled me, and who smiled as I answered,

'Lost it; for the first time in twenty-five years, left it in an omnibus.'

'Our way lies in the same direction,' he said, 'and I shall be happy to give you a share of my gamp, at all events till we reach a cabstand. It is not an article which can lay any claim to beauty of construction or richness of material, but it is steadfast. Time was when I was always losing umbrellas

(the money I have spent upon them, if it could be capitalised, would prove a provision for my old age); but at last I invested in this gingham and it has stuck to me. I cannot lose it! It won't be lost. I have forgotten it in railways, left it in cabs, lent it to friends, mislaid it in offices, but it invariably comes back to me. I believe it walks home. Well, and what did you think of the lecture on the vanity of riches?'

'O, it wasn't so bad!' I answered.

'Exactly; it wasn't so bad,' he agreed. 'I should say the young gentleman understood his audience pretty thoroughly; at least that portion of his audience he wished to please.'

No original remark occurring to me in reply, we walked on for a few yards in silence, which was broken by my companion.

'What a most *apropos*-of-nothing story that was he dragged in by the head and shoulders.'

'You mean about his curly-headed relation?'

'Yes; he intended it, I suppose, to point the moral and adorn the tale of his good philanthropist.'

'Very likely,' I said, feeling I was growing extremely hot.

By the way, you, if I am not mistaken, must be the gentleman who "sold Satan."'

'As Mr. Allan was good enough to put it.'

'Precisely, as Mr. Allan was good enough to put it. Somebody left you ten thousand pounds, I believe. Pardon me if I seem impertinent, but I have heard your affairs pretty freely canvassed.'

'You must have done,' I thought; but I only said, 'A relative had left me a legacy amounting to that sum.'

'I wish any relative would leave me ten thousand pounds,' he remarked.

'What would you do with it?' I asked.

'What would I do with it!' he repeated; 'that is easily told. I would sink enough in a Government annuity to make me feel certain I could never come on the parish: invest against a pecuniary rainy day, as I invested in this gamp against actual rainy days, and then *I would have my fling*. By Jove, wouldn't I! If the money only lasted three months, two months, one, I would have the full value out of it. I have never had my fling yet, as child, or boy, or man; and if you consider,' he added, suddenly

changing his tone, 'it is singular to reflect how many children, boys, and men, are in like case.'

'Most, I should say,' was my answer.

'So I should say,' he agreed. 'And seeing you were one of that majority,' he continued, almost without a pause, 'knowing you must have experienced the pains and penalties of short means, I wonder, I confess I do wonder, that now when you might have your innings out of life, you do not take them, instead of wasting your substance among fellows like Messrs. Allan et Cie.'

'Have you any enmity against Allan?' I asked, putting aside his comments on myself.

'Certainly not: I have no enmity against any living man. As regards the embryo lecturer, I sat out his farrago of nonsense to-night in order to do him a good turn. It would have been far pleasanter, and more profitable too, for me to have gone instead to Covent Garden, and heard that delicious little warbler, Lemberg.'

'What!' I cried, 'do you know her?'

'Only as one of the sweetest singers I ever heard. Do you know her?'

'I used to do so, long ago, before she made her fame.'

'Ah, well, that need not have been so very long ago. She has not lost much time in making *her* mark.'

'You said something about doing Allan a good turn,' I suggested, partly out of curiosity, partly because the Lemberg was not a subject upon which I desired to enlarge. 'Might I ask in what way you purpose to serve him?'

'I mean to puff him,' was the calm reply. 'I was there for that sole purpose. If I were in my own person to make a series of solemn affidavits to the Hardnail and Palmett bigwigs that I considered Thomas William Allan the cleverest lecturer that ever lived, not a man of the lot would attach the slightest importance to my observations; but let me say a few pleasant things in print, let Sir Ahab see the young fellow's name in his daily newspaper, Palmett find an account of his utterances in the *Financial Humbug*, and Lady Hardnail and the maiden Palmetts read a glowing criticism of this night's work in the *Little Bethel Magazine* and the *Temperance Guardian*, and you shall see what you shall see.'

'Are you a writer, then?' I inquired.

'I follow that calling,' he answered.

'Should you think me impertinent if I asked your name?'

'Not in the least. I am known among my fellow-labourers as Smith—John Smith; you have heard that name before; I daresay it strikes you as somewhat familiar. To save all trouble, however, I may tell you at once, I was not at Balaclava; nobody belonging to me fought at Culloden, or Waterloo, or St. Jean d'Acre; the Smith, Smyth, or Smeeth, who distinguished himself in China, or was hung for mutiny on the high seas, or rigged the Stock Exchange, or robbed the Bank of England, could claim nor kith nor kin with me. I am my own Smith, I am a Smith to myself, and a family in myself.'

'I am glad you are going to say a good word for Allan,' I remarked.

'I am going to say a great many more good words for him than he deserves,' was the reply; 'when you read the notices, which he will show to all his friends, pray remember that in my heart I think his philosophy the very worst possible: his

theory as bad as his English. At all events, Mr. Cheverley, before you hasten to disembarrass yourself of all your recently acquired wealth, before you throw your money to those sad dogs Allan and Cathcart and Barrigan, and the rest of that clique, consider how extremely difficult riches, when they have once made to themselves wings, are to lure back again. Never forget the old verse, which has such a deal of sound sense in its jingle:

> "'Tis a very good world that we live in,
> To spend, or to lend, or to give in;
> But to borrow or beg, or to ask for your own,
> *'Tis the very worst world that ever was known."*

If I were you I would cut the "Home and Foreign."'

'I have already sent in my resignation,' I answered, wondering in my heart why I was so frank to this extremely free-and-easy stranger.

'Indeed! And then?'

'I have some thoughts of buying a little place in the country,' I explained.

'You will like that, I am sure,' he said, with the bitterness which underlay every sentence he uttered. 'Among the daisies and buttercups all the women are virtuous, and all the men honest. See,' he went on,

'the gamp and I have brought you safe to your own door; so now good-night.'

'May I not hope to have the pleasure of knowing more of you?' I ventured; for somehow my heart had gone out towards this sad-faced, whimsical man. 'I should be very glad if you would give me the opportunity of cultivating your acquaintance. Will you?'

'Well, no,' he answered slowly; 'you are very kind, but, you see, the fact is I have one patron already, and at present I feel he is as much as I can do with.'

CHAPTER IV.

ARCADIA.

After all, some time elapsed before I found a place amongst the daisies and the buttercups just to my mind.

For still the vision of daisies and buttercups was perpetually recurring to me. Moreover, the phrase, as thus rendered by Mr. John Smith, stuck to my memory, for the simple reason, I suppose, that it reversed the reading of my boyhood. 'Buttercups and daisies'—that was it. I had not heard the three words joined together for over forty years, until he said, 'daisies and buttercups.'

Well-a-day, there is to some minds a delight in daisies and buttercups unintelligible to the comprehension even of those who dwell amongst them!

As I have said, the home I required did not immediately present itself. I visited many strange localities. I answered various advertisements. I had interviews with not a few owners and their soli-

citors before I purchased the little freehold at Reedbourne. No one assisted me in my search; amongst my 'new set' there was a wonderful unanimity of opinion concerning the folly of my desires. Even our directors condescended to caution me against the gratification of my pet whim.

'Pooh, pooh!' said one, 'don't do it. I tried the country and got sick of it. The butter was bad. Milk not to be had. Eggs laid by our hens cost me half-a-guinea a dozen, and cabbages sixpence apiece. In season or out of season, believe me, there is no place like London.'

'You may talk of your country, Mr. Cheverley,' remarked another, as if, indeed, I owned the whole of rural England, and made my possessions an unceasing theme of conversation, 'but, believe me, it is all a delusion—a complete sham. The world has grown too old for that sort of thing. It is very well for bucolic squires, who must remain on the paternal acres or else starve, to speak of the pleasures of dewy meads, and so forth. Dewy meads mean rheumatism, my good sir. June roses are never seen to perfection out of Covent Garden. Newly-mown grass proves usually the precursor of hay fever; while as

for strawberries, I can buy them better and cheaper (and, moreover, just as I want them) at Moses', in Gracechurch-street, than you could ever hope to grow them.'

'If you must leave London, why not go abroad?' suggested another representative of a class. 'Never been abroad? That is the very reason you ought to go now. Know nothing of the language conversationally? Why, that is the very fun of travelling in "foreign parts"! You will come back a new man. Every one should go abroad, if only to free himself from insular prejudices.'

'It seems to me,' I ventured, 'that most people go abroad in order to make donkeys of themselves when they come back. For my part, I would just as soon listen to the braying of a brass band as to the babble of English tourists fresh from "doing the Continent."'

'Ah! but that is an exceptional class of tourist.'

'Pardon me if I say I think it is the usual. It seems to me that conversation in England would, for six months in the year, collapse if people were unable to ask, "Are you going to Florence?" "Have you been to Venice?" "Don't you think, after

all, Vienna is the capital to see?" and so on *ad infinitum*.'

'But you are so satirical, Mr. Cheverley!'

Satirical! Good Heavens! I should like to have seen the human being who, twelve months previously, had ventured to suggest Reuben Cheverley owned a soul to be saved, if its salvation crossed the whims of his principals, much less a turn for satire, which, indeed, is no virtue or failing of mine. I see many things which seem to escape the notice of my cleverer and busier neighbours, and ponder upon them; and now when I comment upon what has passed under my nose, people say, 'You are so observant, or so satirical, or so severe,' or something else equally erroneous. They never found out I was anything but a nervous, elderly, poor clerk, until Mr. Amiott remembered me in his will.

Amongst all the people who talked to me concerning my project of buying a little place in the country, only one commended the idea. This was a former director, a Mr. Granton. He had always spoken a pleasant word to me when he came to the office, always been courteous, always wished me a happy New Year, and as years sped by sometimes

even paused for a minute by my desk to say a few sentences which were grateful to me—of necessity so lonely a man.

After I had left the 'Home and Foreign' for good, I was standing one day by a bookstall when he accosted me.

'I am glad to see you,' he said, 'and to be able to offer my congratulations on your good fortune. Hardnail told me about the legacy some time since, and the next time I chanced to call at the office I found you gone. I should think you must have had about enough of that desk and stool; I am truly glad you are out of harness at last.'

'It was the last thing I ever expected to be,' was my reply. 'Even yet I can scarcely realise that I am a gentleman at large. Often when I stop to look at something in the street, or stand as I was doing when you spoke to me, I think suddenly, "I must get back to the office—I must walk fast to make up for lost time."'

'"As the hand of the dyer,"' quoted Mr. Granton kindly, 'but even that can assimilate itself to something else; and ere long you will forget the pulling against the collar and the drudgery of years,

and learn how enjoyable a thing complete idleness, after a life of toil, may be.'

'Ay, if a man possess any of the arts of idleness.'

'Which you do, I presume—friends, for instance.'

'I have not any,' I answered, 'except these,' pointing towards the old and well-thumbed books I had been poring over.

'All the better: they will never disappoint you; a man who is fond of reading must indeed be at odds with circumstance if he cannot find on his bookshelves one good friend to talk to.'

'Books have kept me company through many a winter's evening that must otherwise have been dull and lonely,' I answered. 'Now I am going to try adding another inanimate friend who will sympathise with my pleasures. I think of taking a place in the country, though every one says I shall repent the step.'

'If you mind not merely what *every* one, but what *any* one says, you will do very little that is agreeable to yourself; for the happy or the unhappy, I believe there is no place like the country. Whenever I feel that the world and the people in it are not precisely all I could wish, I run away from town, and find that

a walk by the sea-shore, or a ramble over the hills, sets me right immediately.'

A few days after receiving this consolatory assurance, there appeared in the columns of the *Times* an advertisement that read as if the place to be sold might prove exactly what I required.

Thus ran the auctioneer's legend :

' *Surrey.—Freehold Estate.*

' *To gentlemen and others requiring a small compact residence, with land, near the Metropolis.—Mr. Twiner (of the firm of Twiner, Turner, & Round) is favoured with instructions from the Executrix of the late Josiah Turtle, Esq., to sell by auction (unless sold in the interim), at the Mart, Tokenhouse-yard, on Thursday, July* 1*st, at one o'clock precisely, a most desirable freehold property, situate about one mile from Reedbourne Station, on the S.W.R., from whence there is frequent railway communication with London. The estate comprises a brick-built residence, of pleasing elevation and picturesque exterior, containing two reception and four bed rooms, kitchen, scullery, dairy, and the usual domestic offices. The outbuildings consist of excellent two-stall stable, coach-house, cow-house, large barn, wood-house, brew-house, &c., and are extremely compact in their arrangement. There is a large garden, stocked with the finest fruit-trees ; the rest of the land is laid down in grass. The water is supplied by a well of crystal purity. Having been in the occupation of the owner for over fourteen years, the place is in the highest state of order and cultivation. There are several places of worship in the neighbourhood ; a post-office is close at hand ; and provisions of all*

kinds are cheap and abundant. Two packs of hounds are within easy distance, and on the adjacent moors game is plentiful. That monarch of rivers, the silvery Thames, is only a quarter of an hour's walk from the house. Indeed, it is rarely that an inexpensive residence, which offers so many attractions to the sportsman, the recluse, the busy merchant, the student seeking quiet, or the invalid in quest of health, is offered to the public. Further particulars may be obtained of Matthew Turtle, Esq., 910 *Lincoln's Inn Fields; of Anthony Nazing, Esq., Solicitor, Reedbourne; at the usual inns in the neighbourhood; and of Messrs. Twiner, Turner, & Round, Auctioneers, House and Estate Agents, Trafalgar-square, London.*'

Despite its pretentiousness, there were two things I liked about this description of the late Mr. Turtle's residence. One, the house was evidently small; the other, the advertisement made no mention of 'grounds,' a species of out-of-door decoration for which I entertain an utter abhorrence.

There was something also suggestive about the very name of the village—Reedbourne. Some of my rare holidays had been spent wandering beside the Thames, or dreaming on the banks of that long stretch of water belonging to the Conservators of the River Wey, which is so much less like a canal than like a currentless river tracing back to Lethe itself; and as I perused the advertisement again, the bab-

bling sound of distants weirs, and the soft sighing of the rushes, as the light breeze swayed them to and fro, sounded in my ears.

'I will go and hear what they want for the place by private contract,' I decided, 'and, if the price be near my limit, get an "order to view."'

Forthwith accordingly I repaired to Mr. Turtle's offices in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The price was considerably beyond the limit I had mentally decided upon; nevertheless, knowing the wide difference that often exists between the amount asked and the sum ultimately taken, I obtained a piece of paper on which was written, 'Please allow the bearer, Mr. Cheverley, to view The Snuggery.'

I started the next day for Reedbourne. It was a perfect day—not too warm, not too cold—a day when white fleecy clouds flecked the blue sky, when the trees looked green and bright, and the country put on its sweetest looks to greet my coming.

The station of Reedbourne, far away from the village of that name—the South-Western Railway, as, perhaps, the reader knows, eschews towns and other places where passengers might be supposed likely to get in, and stops at long distances off, and

even then under protest—is a pretty little roadside halting spot, set round and about with rhododendrons and great laurel-trees, flanked by a fir plantation, in and out of which rabbits peep and scurry as if they were playing with each other at hide-and-seek.

Of course no one could tell me where The Snuggery was (the utter want of knowledge evinced by the inhabitants of a neighbourhood when a stranger arrives amongst them is cnly to be equalled by the amount of their information when he comes to be regarded as the captive of their bow and spear), so I walked on to the village: now across a bit of common land; anon through a piece of stretching heath, yellow with gorse, and purple with heather; again along roads bordered by holly hedges, shaded by Spanish chestnuts, till I came to the church with its square gray tower, and squat body, and graveyard filled full, quite full. Ay, there were the billows of green that repeated the universal story; there lay the infant, and there the man or woman who had grown up and then been carried thither. 'Storied urns and animated busts' met the eye in plenty, as well as those rude wooden monuments which mark where the body lies mouldering, well

enough and long enough, considering the brief mortality of our memories.

Over the low gate I leaned and looked. Across the green sward the sunbeams fell as warm and as bright as they did on the common and the heath, where the bees hummed and the grasshoppers sang, and where there was nothing to speak of death—sad, pathetic, blessed ending of all our struggles, hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows.

Close by where I stood there was an old tomb, black with age, gray and green with lichen, on which the date MDCXXIII. had grown almost illegible; while hard by was a little mound so recently raised that the turfs had not yet knitted closely over it—a mound so small that possibly no one save the mother who bore it mourned for the tiny creature lying beneath. Over two hundred years, and perhaps not more than two weeks, set sail on the great ocean which laps on the shore of time; for ever ebbing, never flowing.

Of necessity a man who lives alone, whose thoughts, as a rule, are confided only to himself, has some odd ideas; and just then I had a strange vision of the stately man-of-war, represented by the

old tombstone, beating about the ocean of eternity, being hailed by the queer little cock-boat manned by an infant.

Into that sunny churchyard a full, full harvest had been garnered by the reaper Death. To how many a story was there written Finis! Heart-burnings, jealousies, cares, sorrows, were all past at last. Dives and Lazarus, the man full of honours, his fellow perplexed with cares. Under tons of granite, reared apparently lest he should get up out of his grave again, lay Crœsus, whose will had been duly proved in the Probate Court, and received honourable notice in the columns of the *Illustrated London News;* and a little way off Tom Styles, who slept as sweet a sleep under the daisy quilt, with a rough stone at his feet and another rough stone at his head, as though masons had laboured for weeks to hew his monument and engrave his epitaph.

What a peaceful scene it was, solemn, but not, to my thinking, sad! Rest seemed to brood over the quiet graves. No noise, save the humming of the wandering bees and the twitter of a few birds, intruded on the silence of the hour. The church

stood outside the village, quite away, in fact, by itself among some meadows. Anything more still —anything more utterly aloof from life—its cares, its passions, its pains, its toils, cannot be conceived than that God's acre lying around the old stone building, which already in fancy I called my own parish church, and surrounded by a lot of associations—children born of those curious parents, Memory and Imagination. I wondered whether Mr. Turtle was buried in the graveyard, and if so, where he lay; and then it occurred to me I had stood idling long enough by that wicket-gate, and that the business which was the motive of my journey ought to be attended to.

After many inquiries, a butcher's lad at length directed me to The Snuggery.

I was to 'bear across some fields till I came to a bridge, on the opposite side of which the path took me right along the river till I saw a weir; when I got to the weir I would see a lane to the right, and if I followed that to the sign of The Oak and Thistle I should be within a stone's throw of the house.'

'What is the name of the river?' I asked, after obtaining all this amount of information.

'Why, the Reed to be sure, what other?' What a walk that was—through the freshly-mown meadows, beside the quiet rippling river all fringed with rushes, its banks still bright with flowers! The orchids and the wild hyacinths, the hawthorn and violet, had faded away with the last breath of spring, but to them had succeeded a right royal show of scent and colour.

Meadowsweet — sweet, sweet meadowsweet — apple-pie, pennyroyal, all these things were either giving forth their perfumes, or exhibiting their gay colours to the summer's sun. How cool the water looked on the opposite bank, all shaded and sheltered by alders! How thick the willows grew beside the path along which I sauntered! How far away seemed the great metropolis with its noisy streets, its dusty side-paths, its glare and heat and turmoil!

'Ah! this is living, this is enjoying,' I said, taking off my hat and letting the pure soft breeze fan my temples. 'If one would recover the "lost hours," only in such a place as this can one hope ever again to meet them.'

Very quietly I sauntered on, now pausing to look

back at the church tower, now glancing at the shadows cast by the alder-trees; now marking the circles caused by the rising of a fish, and again the diving of a water-rat who had not expected to see a stranger when swimming for his hole, till, having passed all the landmarks I had been desired to notice, I found myself in front of a funny old cottage all stuck about with 'To be sold.'

How can ever I, who came to know that house so well, describe it?

My first impression of the place is as my last; it had always the sun upon it. In the bleakest day in winter there seemed a little bright gladness there. An old house too, evidently; in fact, it was the last original homestead left upon what had once been an extensive property, but now divided and subdivided till not even the owners of the old estate could have sworn to its identity.

This was the tiny scrap left of a park formerly owned by the noble family of Reedbourne. Here and there some traces of their former occupation may still be found in the neighbourhood. Pillars ornamented with their arms, gates eaten through with rust, which formerly swung open to greet their

coming, or speed their going. A great family undoubtedly. Famous, not so long ago in the world's history, and now nor peerage nor descendant has aught to tell of their former grandeur. They are gone—they have vanished as utterly as the last stones of their once splendid mansion, in which, before it was finally pulled down, the birds built and the wild animals congregated.

Windowless, doorless, roofless, it stood open to all the four winds of heaven till the whole property was sold, when the new owner sent down a gang of workmen who levelled the great house with the earth. In course of years, the portion referred to in Messrs. Twiner's advertisement changed hands more than once. First, a gentleman had it as a shooting-box (the shooting at Reedbourne was very good about the end of the last century); then a couple of maiden ladies resided in the house; after their decease, a farmer who rented some of the adjacent land lived in the cottage, and erected the barn referred to in the advertisements; after he beggared himself, the place lay vacant for a long time, or else was only inhabited by labourers, till, to cut the story short, Mr. Turtle bought the little property for 'an

old song;' and having some interest with the Railway Company, which enabled him to travel on better terms than most other passengers, he set up his household gods at Reedbourne.

Looking at the old church, I had pictured him going there to worship with his family, a clumsily-built man with a lumbering walk, slow, good-hearted, florid of face, dark of hair, his locks inclined and induced to fall a little over his low square forehead. How one may be out in the mental portraits imagination draws! The real Turtle never went to church at all, was not buried at Reedbourne, and had not a single trait in common with the Turtle of my fantasy.

His hair was light (as I saw when Mrs. T. subsequently showed me his photograph), he had a high arched forehead, a lean face, long nose, thin lips, which wore a smirk. Heavens, such a smirk! As regards dress, he affected a sort of clerical costume, and his white tie was a miracle of neatness. He belonged to some extremely small and obscure sect amongst the Dissenters, and 'made a poor living,' so his widow informed me, by preaching, lecturing, and rendering himself useful in a usefully religious

fashion. He looked years younger than his wife, who, if he were anything like his photograph, must have proved a serious trial to so smug and conceited an individual as the dear lamented. If ever a man desired the good opinion of this world, and the advantages its good opinion can obtain, that man, I should say, was Samuel Turtle.

How often I have travelled with persons of his type; heard his very double laying down the law in politics or religion to some weaker brother, or, oftener, sister; seen his duplicate intent on winning souls by his own admirable moral deportment; marked the gracious self-satisfied smile, the consciousness of heavenly gifts not vouchsafed to the multitude, and marvelled if the thorn in that fleshly frame were a wife like Mrs. Turtle—a home resembling The Snuggery.

'Poor dear, he were going to call it The Retreat!' explained Mrs. Turtle, 'but he feared the name might be regarded as Papistical. He were always so careful not to give offence; and though he had no ill-feeling to the priests and suchlike, remembering they could not help their ignorance, still he could not abear anything like following of the Pope.'

Which, indeed, I could well believe. Any man who looked less like a follower of the Pope than Mr. Turtle never existed. But, then, anything less like Mr. Turtle than his house was never imagined either.

An old house built of warm red brick, plenty of plaster showing in the joints, lichens, gray and brown and yellow, wandering over and beautifying the wrinkles caused by time and wind and rain; two projecting gables, with deep wide eaves, where many a family of young swallows and martens must have been reared; three windows, small and old-fashioned, on each of the two stories, which formed the main part of the building; a meagre lawn, a deep-sunk fence, a few melancholy pine-trees, marking what had once been the avenue; some recently-planted laurels bordering a narrow walk leading up to the hall door. Externally this was The Snuggery, and I confess my heart warmed to it.

Any intending purchaser of a 'Charming Villa' would have turned on his heel and walked back to the station incontinently; but I went on, presented my credentials, and was ushered by a demure-looking little maid-of-all-work into the 'parlour,' where sat Mrs. Turtle, surrounded by her family.

It was she who had the dark hair, the florid face, the clumsy figure, the uncouth gait of my imaginary Turtle; but she possessed, in addition, a 'go' and a 'diplomacy' to which the ideal deceased could lay no claim.

'O, yes, of course you can see the house,' she said a little peevishly, 'there have been scores about it already! It's not often there's such a place in the market. Sorry enough shall I be to quit it, goodness knows—but there! Now, where is that girl? Jemima, Jemima!'

'I only want to look over the garden and take a turn round the land,' I interposed; the while a shrill treble from the kitchen intimated that Jemima was 'Coming, mum.'

'Your good lady, sir, I suppose, will like to see the house for herself,' suggested Mrs. Turtle, with a certain aggressiveness of manner, not towards me, but the supposed wife in the background.

'Unfortunately, I am not married,' I answered, adopting the formula approved of in such cases.

'Your sister, then,' she amended, with, however, no accession of amiability.

'I have no sister,' I explained.

Mrs. Turtle looked at me in blank amazement. Then she said, quite unconscious, I am sure, of the dubious construction I might have put upon her words,

'Excuse me, sir, but is not there, then, no lady you would like to take a look over the house?'

'I have, unhappily' no lady relatives, except a very young niece.'

The change which came over Mrs. Turtle's round face on hearing this statement is simply indescribable.

Probably she had endured many things at the hands of men's wives, daughters, sisters, and mothers. Of one thing I am certain : never before had an 'unencumbered' bachelor come to view the house and grounds.

'Make yourself quite at home, sir,' she entreated, opening a glass door which opened on a small inner yard. 'The gate yonder leads into the garden, and beyond there is a way to the fields ; but Tommy can go with you. Where's your cap, Tommy? Show the gentleman round the place.'

'The gentleman' was about to enter a protest against this arrangement, when happily it was dis-

covered that Tommy had not on his shoes, for which reason it was agreed that the meadows and garden should be inspected without the assistance of a guide, and that one of the children would act as cicerone when the turn of the outbuildings to be viewed arrived.

Thus quite alone I wandered out into one of those dear old gardens where fruit and flowers and vegetables grow together, where thyme strays all about the beds, and columbine blooms where it listeth, and high privet hedges fence the enclosure from the eyes of the curious and the steps of the profane; where damson-trees are to be seen laden with fruit; where there are bowers cunningly devised to shelter from the heat of the mid-day sun; where the damp piece of ground down by the pond under the hawthorn is kept for periwinkle and lilies of the valley; where there is something of almost everything good of its kind; which would cause the heart of a regular gardener to faint within him, but has charms unspeakable for little children, and is not destitute of attraction for children of a larger growth who love to pace the moss-grown paths in a silence and solitude impossible where the noise of rollers,

the clatter of mowing-machines, the snip of edging-tools, and the general stir and bustle inseparable from well-kept walks and trim borders prevails from dewy morn to pensive eve.

I was delighted. This was my ideal garden, presented to my sight in all its tangled reality. Here the birds built, here the birds sang; here I should see the lilacs coming into flower, and behold the laburnum fling wild her golden curls; here was a well, an actual old-fashioned well, with chain and bucket all complete; while elder-trees, laden with bloom and berry, met the sight, growing wild outside the hedges.

From the garden I passed into the fields, which were indeed in no higher state of cultivation than the rest of the little estate; fences out of repair, gates broken and lying on the ground, or else tied to posts with bits of old rope. Evidently illness, or shortness of money, or that weariness which sooner or later attacks every one who tries to wage an unequal fight with Fortune, had proved too much for Mr. Turtle. The place might have been in Chancery for fifty years, so tangibly was the mark of ruin impressed on everything, from the children to the

horse, who, with bent-over knees and bowed head, looked humbly at me as I walked close beside where he grazed.

Finding nothing exhilarating in the aspect of the meadows, I returned to the garden, where one of the little female Turtles, in a very scant and very dirty print dress, with sun-bonnet to match, was amusing herself by jumping backwards and forwards over the moss-covered stone roller. The only atom of mourning this child wore for her dead father was to be seen on her legs, which were covered with stockings once black, but now mellowed to a dusty brown. She was an ugly ill-mannered little sinner, who, between each uncouth jump, made a snatch at some gooseberries growing close at hand, and ate them voraciously, skins and all, making a disgusting champing noise the while, as though she had been a pony discussing a feed of oats.

Not far from the well was an apple-tree covered with lovely rosy fruit—a very early apple, locally known as the Duchess's Favourite; and at sight of the boughs laden and drooping with the weight of the rich burden they had to support, I felt myself longing like a boy to put forth my hand and gather.

'May I gather an apple?' I asked of Miss Turtle, who at this juncture took another awkward plunge over the roller.

'What d'ye say?'

'May I gather an apple?'

'S'pose so—we does;' and she leaped back again.

I gathered and sat down to eat. No fruit ever tasted more delicious. When I had finished I drew up a bucket of pure cold water, and, after rinsing out a little tin mug which stood beside the well, drank.

Yes, this was just what I wanted; the silence of the country, the clear blue sky overhead, the songs of the larks in the meadows beyond, water cold and fresh from its native spring; a little spot all of my own, all to myself. Yes, I must have The Snuggery if it could be bought at a fair price; but I would not pay that asked by Mrs. Turtle's solicitors.

Just as I had reached this point in my soliloquy, Tommy appeared coming down one of the grass paths in the garden—Tommy swept, garnished, and sheepish; Tommy 'drest in all his best,' with shoes well polished, with face rubbed up into a painful

brightness, holding his cap in his hand, as if he were posing for his photograph.

'Marianne, ma says you are to go in,' said he, addressing his sister.

'Sha'n't, then, there!' was the answer.

'Very well,' sighed Tommy, as if there was no more to be said. 'I'm to show you the stable and the rest of it,' he went on, turning to me, who, taking the hint, requested him to lead.

In the coachhouse, so called by courtesy, we were joined by Mrs. Turtle, who had also renovated her own appearance, and now burst upon us in the glory of a fresh cap, with wide strings floating over her shoulders. Her dress was the same, but she had brushed and tidied it up a little, and fastening the crape collar was an enormous mourning brooch—large enough to have been in memory of half the dead lying in Reedbourne churchyard.

From the outbuildings the lady conducted me into a spacious kitchen, with red-tiled floor, across which a matronly-looking hen, elderly, sedate, and long legged, was solemnly manœuvring her latest progeny.

'Drat those fowls!' exclaimed Mrs. Turtle.

'One can't leave a door open a minute but they must be messing over everything.'

'Last time aunty Sophy was here Speckles laid in her bonnet,' volunteered the youngest of the Turtle brood, who was clinging to his mother's skirts.

'You naughty child, be quiet! Aunt Sophy would be very angry indeed if she heard you. Little boys should never speak till they are spoken to.'

'But Speckles did,' repeated the irrepressible, '*and the egg got broked.*'

'Got broked, indeed! I wonder where you learnt to speak English, Master Alfie,' said Mrs. Turtle, with elephantine playfulness. 'Take your fingers from your nose, ducky,' she went on, addressing a puny atom of a girl, evidently her especial pet. 'I only hope Mr. Cheverley may not be set against the place by seeing such a tribe of little wild Indians running loose about it. Poor things, poor little darlings, I can't check them as I ought, Mr. Cheverley. I never look at them but I seem to—'

Here Mrs. Turtle's usual flow of language deserting her, she took refuge in her pocket-handkerchief.

Now was it right that I, a lonely man, meaning no harm to any one, should, when I went in a busi-

ness-like way to look over a house, have my heart harrowed in this fashion? Was it fitting, I ask, that Mrs. Turtle should at this juncture find her feelings overcome her to such an extent that she was obliged to retire from the room, leaving me alone with four children—me, who had never known in all my life what to say to a child?

'Ma's always like that when she has visitors,' observed Tommy, in a matter-of-fact way, intended to be reassuring, and which undoubtedly was so.

'This,' said Ducky, touching a clean counterpane —we were in the best bedroom by this time, for Mrs. Turtle had insisted upon my seeing everything there was to see—'was put on for you, and will be taken off when you go.'

'You're to stop for tea,' further explained Speckles' friend. 'Mimy has gone into the village for some buns.'

'And I am to show you the back way to the station when you go,' explained Tommy, still unconsciously posing for his photograph.

'And remember, ma said you were to be sure and not take a shilling if the gentleman offered it to you,' supplemented Ducky.

Being furnished with which general *carte du pays*, all that remained was to get out of the house as speedily as might be. So, after having declined Mrs. Turtle's offer of wine, one glass of which she was good enough to say could not hurt me, and assured her it was out of my power to stop and partake of tea, and having got rid of Tommy at the Oak and Thistle, where he struck off to spend the shilling already burning his pocket, I walked slowly up the main road leading to the village, speculating not unpleasantly as to all I should do when The Snuggery was indeed my very own.

Already I felt myself an inhabitant of Reedbourne—its people were to be my people, its doings my doings.

With what interest I regarded an ecclesiastic, who returned my scrutiny with a look of bland righteous curiosity!

If he had been a little less like a fox his appearance might have pleased me better, but his face was one which would probably improve upon acquaintance; and in fancy I could perceive those keen eyes glancing over my little library of good and rare books; watch those thin lips unclose to make some apt quotation,

to utter some apposite remark. Nay, might it not even be that hereafter I should know him so well as to speak of those doubts which trouble faith, though they cannot destroy it? That spare frame, that worn face, that ascetic expression, spoke of thought and learning, while at the same time something in his appearance gave me the impression that this person, whom I set down as the rector, was a man of the world, using the phrase in its best and widest sense.

If such were the case, he would sympathise with the wrestlings I had held over vexed subjects, not merely in theology, but Nature—sympathise, even though he failed to solve them.

Yes, I thought everything in Reedbourne, from The Snuggery to the parson, promised well for comfort. My own poor father had been somewhat of a mere bookworm, yet how gladly strangers entering our parish welcomed his rare visits, or accepted his ever-ready hospitality! On the same principle, I felt that I, who do not care for chance acquaintances, should nevertheless be more than pleased to clasp the hand of this new spiritual guide; and though I rebuked myself for the bigoted idea, still it would

recur to me that the rector could not fail to be delighted when he heard The Snuggery was not given over to another itinerant preacher, but to a stanch church-goer, who, in the course of a thirty-five years' experience, had heard almost every sermon delivered in London worth listening to.

'He is about my own age,' I considered, 'and probably is acquainted with many of the celebrities I have heard preach. That will be another topic of interesting conversation;' and, so thinking, I went on my way with a light heart and an agreeable expression of countenance, pausing often to regard the exterior of some large house, and wonder who dwelt in it, feeling even a sort of proprietorship in the butcher's shop, where hereafter I hoped to order my modest joint; and resisting an impulse to make an errand across the road and enter into affable converse with the grocer, who, in his shirt-sleeves and a snowy white apron, was standing at his door yawning undisguisedly.

Yes, the village of my dream at last: fairyland, with its green banks, where in spring-time the primroses put out their tender blossoms shyly; sleepy hollow, where the rooks might caw all the day long

an' it pleased them, without let or hindrance; cosy nook, sheltered from the world's storms, out of the way of the world's din and turmoil, the village I had been looking for, the ideal I had sought to realise, and hitherto in vain! Peaceful and quiet, quiet as its own graveyard, and yet there was nothing desolate about its quietude!

After the first few minutes there is to a Londoner something terribly lonely in the utter stillness and deadness of most country places, but there really was nothing lonely about Reedbourne. According to its fashion it resembled some out-of-the-way nook in the City, or a quiet square in the West Central district. It was still, because just out of the roar and fret of the great hum of human life, but it was not inanimate. No sense of death, or of that repose which is almost akin to death, oppressed me then or after in that dreamy village. There was life, if not exuberant vitality. Plenty of blood was always coursing through its veins, placid and lethargic, as was the expression its fair face wore.

My impressions of Reedbourne, as I paced slowly through it on the occasion of my first visit, were

pretty nearly those Mr. Smith had sneeringly put into words.

'Amongst these daisies and these buttercups,' so I am quite certain ran my mental thought, 'all the men must be honest and all the women virtuous. Here, no struggle for mere existence can be waged. In those humble but pretty cottages, the curse laid upon labour must seem shorn of half its terror. What would not a cockney, even in the position in life of a mere clerk—such as I was, a little time since—give for that thatched hut all covered with ivy and decked with roses, surrounded by its fair piece of garden-ground, where the broad-beans are now in pod, and the scarlet-runners fruiting and blooming at the same time, as is their lovely fashion? Who could be bankrupt here? A sheriff's officer would feel lost if he were to wander into so solvent a neighbourhood. No usurer ever held a bill of sale over the furniture of any resident in Reedbourne, I feel confident. Ay, let my friend of the long gaunt frame and the sad expression sneer as he likes, there is no place like the country, and Reedbourne is the best bit of country in England.'

Very much cleverer people than myself have

since come to precisely the same conclusion; which fact, while it cannot quite exonorate me from the charge of having been a simple fool, may at all events serve to extenuate my folly.

There is a nice innocent look about Reedbourne which might deceive even a Bow-street magistrate. He would let it out on bail, or dismiss any charge against it instantly, or pat it on the back and sympathise with it as a pretty guileless creature from the country, who had got into questionable company, and must be taken care of and befriended; and then Reedbourne, with a smile on its lovely face, would 'thank his worship, and withdraw,' and nobody would ever see a look of satire or amusement ruffle its expression, since one of the things in which that favoured village is deficient is a sense of humour. No surgical operation could make it see the point of any joke which was not either coarse or foolish. Its apprehension, as I understand the position of affairs now, is that of the pothouse or the nursery.

But on that lovely afternoon there was for me 'A Golden Time.' Still, 'The world (at Reedbourne) was in its prime,' and I enchanted myself with regarding a village which, not content with

one green, as is the custom of most villages—must be a spendthrift in that as in all other respects, and just have a green, scattered all about with some sort of houses—shops, mansions, cottages—wherever it pleased the foot of any chance wayfarer to pause.

Already I had passed three: one graced by a chestnut-tree and three poplars; one bare of anything save a pond; one quite bewooded by elms. Almost under the shadow cast by a line of these trees, two wagons filled with furniture had come to a stand immediately opposite a very large house of the Queen Anne period, set conveniently, but not too modestly, back from the road.

A warm comfortable-looking house, that spoke of money as plainly as house well could.

The men were busily engaged putting nose-bags on their horses; and so I, who in my old age had grown idle and curious, stood looking through the open gate, and speculating what the rooms in that house might be like, and who the people were that would soon be occupying them.

A dreamer all my life, I pictured the new tenants as middle-aged, solidly wealthy people, quiet in their

habits, regular in their hours, punctual in their payments.

They had sons and daughters almost grown up, and younger children as well; the family *must* be large, because, manifestly, the house had been built to meet the requirements of a man whose quiver was full to overflowing.

Unless they were Quakers—and about this I had my misgivings, as there was a grave, rich, substantial, solidly-sure look about the house and the appurtenances thereof, which might well have attracted and retained the notice of a member of the Society of Friends—the new tenants would give many a party, and add considerably to the liveliness of Reedbourne.

To myself I could picture little boys in knickerbockers, little girls with masses of fair hair flowing down their backs, coming and going, out and in the old-fashioned house. I fancied in the winter walking past that dwelling and seeing the gas-light gleam across the darkness, and carriages setting down guests; while as for the summer, from open windows I felt satisfied music would float and laughter echo.

Ay, for long years I had been lonely—God alone knows how lonely—but humbly I thank Him my heart never grew chill, my temper grudging. The happy faces of the children, the beauty of lovely women, the luxury of refined homes; these things, though not mine, and not for me, had always seemed gracious and exquisite even in the darkest days of poverty; and was it likely that now, when I had money to spare, leisure and health, eyes to behold the fairness of Nature, ears to hear the songs of the birds, the hum of the grasshopper, I should wish other than that the new owner of the Queen Anne house should be happy and prosperous—though he was nothing to me—and I likely to be for ever something less than nothing to him?

Just then a gardener coming to the gate touched his hat to me.

'Beautiful day, sir,' he remarked.

'Lovely,' I answered. 'The fresh tenants will take possession under every advantage.'

'Bless you, sir, they won't be in for a fortnight yet, I daresay. Half the furniture isn't down, and the workmen can't be out of the new billiard-room this week. It will be a place, sure-ly. If the old

Squire could see the house now he would go on. He was that mean within doors he did not even let the smell of paint nigh it for forty year; and now this gentleman he has pulled down and built up, and tore down partitions and thrown out rooms. Ah, we want more of his sort about Reedbourne, that we do!'

'What is the gentleman's name?' I asked.

'Mr. De Field, sir. Field, I am given to understand, they calls him for short up in London.'

'Field!' I repeated. 'Do you mean Frank Field?'

'Very like, sir; the things come down addressed with a Christian Hef, but I am no scholard.'

'Frank Field taken this place?' I repeated to myself in amazement, not indeed that in these days of rapid fortune-making I ought to have felt surprised at anything; but then I had known Mr. Field when he could certainly not have taken even so good a little cottage as The Snuggery.

'I suppose the gardens are very large?' I remarked, while my eyes looked longingly inside the gate.

'Will you take a walk round, sir?' suggested the

man, who, already full of beer, probably scented more in the direction of my waistcoat-pocket. 'The men will attend to their vans; they are only gone round to the Reedbourne Arms for half a pint, and they won't need me yet awhile. Yes, sir, the gardens has always been very good, noted far and near. In the old Squire's time, though he could abear to spend no money indoors a'most at all, he still were liberal-handed about the houses and suchlike. "Don't spare the muck, Harner," he used to say. Harner was head and I was one of the under ones; and, by Jingo, he didn't spare it! There is not such a bit of ground in all the parish, though I say it; and you might search England through and not find such camellias as I could have shown you three months ago.'

But what I wanted more especially to see was the inside of the dwelling-house; and as we passed from room to room my old-fashioned ideas were fairly put to the rout. Such painting—such moulding—such gilding! And then the paper-hangings and the furniture!

Almost overwhelmed, I stood and looked about me.

Home! Could anybody feel at home in such a blaze of colour? But then my ignorance, my utter ignorance of high life, of wealthy life—of any life, in fact, save that led by a poor clerk in an insurance office! Pity me, reader, when I tell you I could see no more children leaving and entering that abode. Little gentlemen and little ladies, it might be, would cross its threshold in the days to come, but girls and boys never; no clay marbles, no wooden hoops, nothing common or unclean, could possibly gain access to those begilt, besatined, bemirrored rooms.

Even The Snuggery, with its hateful children, its snarling dog, its moulting parrot, its worn carpets and piano, supported on one side by a music-stool screwed up to its fullest height, seemed more to merit the sacred epithet of Home than this spick and span old house, rouged and powdered like some ancient beauty, renovated, restored, and spoiled.

Well, well, and so De Field had prospered, and was going in for a Queen Anne house at Reedbourne, respectability and ostentation. What on earth did it all matter to me? And yet it did matter, for I felt angry.

Why? Ah, for that sensation I can give you nor verse nor chapter.

He had a house which pleased him; soon I hoped to have a house which pleased me. I did not envy him all his brass and glass. I would not have taken the residence so decked out, as a gift; and yet the sight of Mr. De Field's new home, white, glittering, filled with easy-chairs and easier couches, surrounded by flowers, got up in every respect regardless of expense, filled me with a curious discontent, a vague dissatisfaction.

Perhaps because I knew the man, not personally indeed, save in the vaguest and most distant fashion, as an omnibus cad may know the fare who has once travelled with him from Paddington to the Bank; perhaps because I was an old-fashioned simpleton, and deemed the house of a business man should look like business until the hour when he and commerce shook hands and separated on the very best of terms—those, namely, of mutual respect.

Anyhow, Mr. De Field's 'little box' at Reedbourne failed to recommend itself to my primitive tastes, the while its magnificence aroused those feelings—of shall we say envy, jealousy, and all un-

charitableness?—to which expression has already been given.

Somehow gilding and buhl cabinets, inlaid tables, and carpets, and hangings, which dazzle with their brightness, seem to me out of place in Arcadia.

Among the daisies and the buttercups, should we not rather consider Nature's arrangement of colours, than revel in the Tyrian hues of Art?

But there, I am an old fogey! 'A poor, dear, stupid, silly old man!' as I have been given to understand Mrs. Turtle styled me, though, indeed, if you come to that, there cannot be such a disparity of years between myself and the buxom T. as could justify her standing on the vantage-ground of youth in order to contemplate the waste of years across which I have travelled since I left my cradle.

As for the grounds belonging to Mr. De Field's house, Squire Blunt, the old proprietor, who dearly loved shrubs, flowers, trees, a thick sward, and conservatories full of all rare exotics, had made them as beautiful as he could, and the new owner was spoiling them as fast as possible.

Yes, it was all of a piece. The cold papers, the bright mouldings, the chilly glass screens, the hard

pictures, the sculpture placed where, if marble could shiver, those scantily-dressed figures must have perished from cold—these things, I say, were but complementary to the starveling standard roses, the lawns shaved to baldness, the hideous ornamental gravel, the still more hideous floral arrangements out of doors.

'Money has been no object,' remarked my cicerone, as I stood looking at some bedding-out designs, some of which resembled very ill-made jam tarts, and others an elaborate trifle. 'What Mr. De Field always says is, "Spare no expense." So as the things is done properly, money is no object.'

'So I should say,' I answered; and having produced from my waistcoat-pocket the coin for which the man's fingers were itching, I left Reed House, and walked up towards the station with a little—just a little—of the enchantment which had hung about my visions for an hour previously, dispelled.

As I wended my way through the straggling village, I saw another arrival of furniture, portending a fresh inhabitant in Reedbourne.

This time, however, there was no flourish of trumpets about the business. The removal had evi-

dently been effected as cheaply as possible, and the goods which 'Nelson, Carrier,' brought down in two carts from the station, were as different from those still waiting delivery at Reed House as 'Skim Dick' is from Stilton.

Old chairs, old carpets, old tables, bedding sewed up in bundles, boxes of queer shapes and sizes, all these goods and chattels were solemnly deposited round and about the side path in front of a very small cottage, and from thence conveyed by the carrier, his son, and a diminutive maid-servant into the interior.

As I paused for a moment, contrasting, not uncharitably, I hope, the furniture of the two houses, a couple of women passed by.

'Lor,' said one, in that tone of voice which so enormously reminds one of very sharp vinegar, 'what a mangey lot of sticks! If they had been mine, I should have felt ashamed to move them.'

'Perhaps he hadn't no money to buy no more,' hazarded the other. 'Some of them curates is as poor as church mice.'

'Calls theirselves gentlemen, too,' said No. 1. 'For my part, I have no patience with such airs and

graces. What I says, when I hears about gentlefolk, is, "Have they a carriage, and do they keep a suit of servants?" If not, they may be very good sort of people, but they ain't my sort, that's all.'

If we think of it, fools are oftentimes the best exponents of this world's wisdom; and not so confident as I had once felt that London notions and modern ideas were unknown in the rural districts, I bent my steps to the little station, where, having half an hour to wait, I sat inhaling the odour of the pine woods, and watching the 'gallopers' as they raced through without stopping to London, or sped like the wind to the towns lying in the placid country far and far away.

CHAPTER V.

ADELAIDE LEMBERG.

In due time I became the owner of that eligible freehold property set forth in Messrs. Twiner's advertisement; but it was far on in the autumn before I actually entered into possession of my new estate. Words cannot tell what I endured at the hands of Mrs. Turtle ere doing so. For good steady persistency, for determined resolution to strive and obtain her own way, for utter want of delicate sentiment and lack of consideration towards the feelings of other people, commend me to the widowed mother of a large family. Truly her weakness is her strength; her forlorn position is a very tower of strength.

When a woman confronts a man, arrayed in crape and surrounded by pledges of affection in all states and stages of growth; when she says she is poor, alone in the world, making a struggle to bring up her 'dear children' respectably, what can one do but

submit? What could I do but submit? Nothing; and so I submitted, until life became a burden, and the postman's knock grievous as a running sore; till, in fact, if she would have only returned the purchase-money, The Snuggery had been hers and a handsome cheque as well. Fortunately, however, Mrs. Turtle did not desire to repossess the eligible freehold. She only wanted to rent it, and proposed that I should board and lodge with her.

'She knew she could make me comfortable,' she wrote. 'At any rate, I might try the experiment for three months,' which, she went on to say, would not 'bind either of us'—the meaning of such utterance being to my apprehension still enveloped in mystery. Her first request was that she might remain for a little while after the sale at the cottage. This, in a moment of weakness, being conceded, the little while lengthened itself out over the fruit season, during which Mrs. Turtle so bestirred herself that not an apple or pear was left on the branches, while the filbert and walnut trees were stripped with masterly comprehensiveness. Of course I did not want the fruit; but still, as I had paid her, individually and collectively, for every cabbage on the ground, every

pippin on the boughs, she need not have left the place bare as though locusts had passed over it.

When I refused her proposal of 'sharing expenses,' and negatived a suggestion that she should remain at The Snuggery as managing housekeeper, she attacked me about the furniture, under pretence that I had got her poor husband's property 'dirt cheap,' since 'everybody said' if the auction had not taken place on a wet day, such a freehold would have fetched double. She insisted that I, and I only, ought to purchase her furniture. All in vain I represented that I did not require her chairs and tables, and that when she removed to the lodging-house she spoke of purchasing, all the odds and ends The Snuggery contained would come in useful. She turned my arguments against myself. Where could such odds and ends prove so useful as just where they were? As for the lodging-house, everything in it would be complete and 'ready to her hand.'

After this purchase was completed Mrs. Turtle discovered there were some articles included in the sale 'she would not have parted with, if it were ever so,' and entreated me to allow her to buy them back.

Having no passionate attachment for anything in the house, I asked her to make out a list of the goods she wished to retain, and, under the delusion that she meant to move at once, gave them to her. But Mrs. Turtle had not the slightest intention of moving. She now reverted to her original proposition of renting the house; this time, however, without any suggestion added, of 'receiving me' as a lodger.

Politely enough, as I fancied, considering what had gone before, I wrote stating I had bought the place for occupation rather than investment, and that though I felt grieved at seeming to hurry her movements, I should be glad to know on what date it would suit her convenience to leave The Snuggery. In reply Mrs. Turtle inquired 'if I wanted to turn her and her fatherless children out on the world without a roof to shelter them?'

At that point I lost patience. It was then I went to my solicitors, The Three Children, and instructed them to say I was willing to give up my purchase if Mrs. Turtle wished the affair cancelled. Mrs. Turtle thereupon came to my lodgings, and wept and scolded to such an extent that in my de-

spair I caught up my hat and fled, leaving the elderly spinster, who owned the house, to get rid of her as best she could. From my lodgings she went to my solicitors, who, having been forewarned by me, politely but firmly declined to see her on any pretext whatever. It is related that Mrs. Turtle sat in the clerks' office for three mortal hours, and asked each person who went in or came out if he was Mr. Greatchild, or Mr. Fairboy, or Mr. Goodlad, and that during that period not a man could be found who would confess to being a principal in the firm.

Meanwhile Mr. Fairboy had driven over to Mr. Turtle's office in Lincoln's Inn, and put him in possession of the state of affairs.

'I'll soon settle that,' remarked Mrs. Turtle's relative, and he proved as good as his word. Within a week Mrs. Turtle had left The Snuggery, and I was installed as owner.

The first thing I did was to advertise an auction of the furniture, which Mrs. Turtle, I am given to understand, duly attended, in company with two of her children. She cried a good deal, it is stated, and confided to a friend, in a stage 'aside,' that she had been 'robbed and cheated,' 'completely taken in.,

Likewise she pointed to several of the lots, and said they were really hers, but that she had been 'dared to remove them;' and that when she went to bid a tearful farewell to the cow, the poultry, and the horse, which were not included in the sale, she observed 'she trusted they would be treated better than she had been, but that it always fared ill with poor dumb beasts when they passed into the hands of strangers, who would most likely starve them—if they did not do worse.'

It is a curious thing that, no matter how limited one's acquaintance may be, some good-natured soul always turns up ready to repeat tidbits of conversation, in which no single compliment to one's good qualities finds a place!

Once rid of the furniture, I invoked the aid of painters and paperers; the smoke of years was cleared off the ceilings, the dirt of years painted out, the walls were covered with pretty chintz-like hangings; not an inch of the house but was swept and garnished; and then I sent down new, but not expensive, furniture, and took possession.

'Lor', sir, it do look gay,' remarked the woman I had engaged to look after my domestic concerns, as

she gave a little final dust to an easy-chair in the drawing-room, and cast a not quite approving glance around, the while she added,

'The old place is as smart now as if it was expecting a young wife.'

'There is no young wife for me, if that is what you mean, Mrs. Brooker,' I answered.

'Well, well, sir, it is perhaps best as it is,' said Mrs. Brooker, manifestly relieved.

'There can be no doubt about that,' I replied, catching sight as I spoke of my own worn face and old-fashioned figure and elderly movements in a mirror opposite; and I meant what I said, though never for a moment did I conceal from myself the fact that in every paper I had chosen, every article of furniture I had selected, the hope of a woman's approval, the desire of a woman's smile, influenced my purchase.

'Some day,' I thought, 'some day she may come here—one never can tell when, or how soon—and I should like her to find everything bright and pretty and gay, to do her honour.'

Ah, Mrs. Turtle, with a little underlying venom, you styled me 'A poor dear, stupid, silly old man!'

but you never understood how much truth there was in the statement.

Stupid and silly enough Heaven knows, though not, perhaps, utterly foolish, seeing that through all I never dreamt of such a madness as marriage! In the little episode which lay next my heart, of which no one knew anything save myself, there was nothing to be ashamed of, though, indeed, I should have writhed, had a woman like Mrs. Turtle imagined my memory held so fair an image.

As it fell about, I will tell it to you, reader, only to account, recollect, for the dainty deckings of my new house, so utterly at variance with all the instincts of my life.

I must go back a little in my tale, nearly six years, in fact, in order to begin at the beginning of the story which gave to my existence the only gleam of romance that ever tinged with colour the monotonous gray of an experience made up of commonplace events and routine duties. It was raining. Looking back, it seems to me that it rained on very many days as I paced to and from the office. At all events, on that particular winter's night I remember it rained sharply, and when I turned from the City-

road into a side street, on my way westerly towards Pentonville, the wind caught my umbrella and almost blew it inside out. Altogether I was not in an amiable mood when I reached my lodgings. I had been detained at the office. I was cold and wet and hungry. My tea was not ready, the 'kettle did not boil;' the servant said a 'new lodger for the first floor had put them out.' Whereupon I made some remark to the effect that probably ere long they would require a new lodger for the ground-floor.

It was not often I spoke hastily either to landladies or their servants, but on that especial evening I felt so thoroughly out of tune I could not wonder at the maid telling her mistress 'the parlours' had come home as 'cross as two sticks.' I heard her make this statement with my own ears, and decided that general amiability of manner towards lodging-house keepers was a mistake. After a time she brought up the kettle half full of lukewarm water, supplemented the kettle with the tea-tray, tried to poke up a recently-lit fire into a blaze, and then asked if I was pleased to want anything more.

The 'no' she received in answer certainly did not err on the side of geniality.

Drawing up a chair to the fire and pulling a book out of my pocket, I beguiled, with reading, the time till flame should so far conquer smoke as to enable the kettle to boil. As I read my ill-humour vanished. Always to me the words of a wise calm writer have proved as soothing as the tones of a congenial friend. This was what I opened on—a grave truth spoken across the centuries by a man whose weakness can never neutralise his greatness, whose grasp of intellect was, nevertheless, powerless to protect him from venality:

'Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark; and as that natural fear in children is increased with tales, so is the other;' and in like stately measure to the end of that short poignant essay, which would make even one who never before thought reflect. Ah, well indeed might Ben Jonson say of the man who penned it, 'In his adversity I ever prayed that Heaven would give him strength, for greatness he could not want!'

I had just not closed, but laid down my book for a moment, with one finger keeping the page open, and was considering, when suddenly there floated on

my ear what I had never before heard in that or any other lodging-house—the tones of music.

So-called music it had been my doom to listen to far and far too often—so often, indeed, that of late years, before taking apartments, I always inquired into the domestic arrangements of the dwelling where I thought of pitching my tent, and of the other dwellings to right and left. Whether, for example, the hall of No. 3 intervened between the parlour of No. 2 and its own ground-floor apartments; and if the young gentleman at No. 1 performed in the summer evenings on any sort of instrument, either in the garden at the rear or beside the open window in front. Further, I instituted strict cross-examination as to the presence in No. 2 of any piano, accordion, flute, violin, or penny-whistle, and satisfied myself, as far as any human being could, that no means of oral torture, beyond the vocal organs of the inevitable drab, and the shrill nagging voice of her mistress, existed on the premises.

On entering into negotiations with my present landlady, none of these precautions had been neglected, and for twelve months not a sound of

attempted melody, save an occasional psalm-tune or sentimental ditty, sung through the nose and ascending from the basement, had harassed my ear.

Judge, then, of my astonishment when, under the very roof which sheltered me, I heard for the first time the notes of a piano, touched by no uncertain hand, and a voice, such as we might fancy the angels to possess, break the silence.

Ay, that was music, and under its spell my heart began to beat painfully!

As the feet of the little children dance when the organ-grinder wakens with a lively measure the echoes of some grimy court, so my soul, long a stranger to any sound which could remind it of a brighter gayer world outside the daily round of duties, which had become so accustomed that they ceased to be even weary, started with a throb, to find its pulses were only numb, not dead.

Softly I crept to the door, and leaving it ajar, returned to my chair and listened—O, *how* I listened!

With what bated breath, what amazed surprise, what ashamed emotion, I drank in the sweetness of that wonderful voice! In my night of middle age, which had never known moon nor star, it came as

the song of the nightingale comes to the weary watcher beside the bed of pain. My eyes grew dim. I could not see the lamp or the firelight clearly; unheeded, the unwatched kettle boiled willingly, and spluttered over the hearth. I dared not stretch forth my hand. I almost feared to draw my breath, lest the spell should be broken.

In a moment, silence. The wild bird-notes ceased suddenly; all at once the song died—not gradually or naturally, but in its very midst; the bubbling of the kettle, the spluttering of the water over the hot bars, became painfully audible; then the swish-swish of my landlady's silk dress, brushing the stairs as she majestically descended from the regions where she robed herself, met my ear; then there came a clatter of plates, which announced that the family supper was in course of preparation; then a smell of fried steak and onions; the banging of the front gate as Mary Jane went out for the evening beer — these things which were usual occurred, and the voice which was unusual remained silent.

But all in a moment I could not return to the making of tea and the poking of fires—to the solitary chair, and the wisdom of the Lord of Verulam. Out

of gear with myself, I was standing moodily looking with my bodily eyes at the flaming coals, and with my mental vision at the hopes and the enjoyments, and the pleasures, and the pains of youth, which my youth had never known, when something caused me to look round, and there, standing in the doorway, I beheld an apparition I shall never forget so long as I remember anything.

It was that of a young girl, who looked younger than her actual age, clothed in some soft black material, which fell in artistic folds about her slight lithe figure. She was fair; she was beautiful. Not even now could I tell you the exact colour of her eyes, but they were large and expressive; nor the shade of her brown hair, though the fashion in which it was dressed at once arrested my attention. It looked like the nest of some pretty bird; and lying amongst the tangled locks, as if merely resting there and not fastened in any way, was a little bow of black ribbon. Ah, Heaven, how often my heart has ached in the weary lonely years, when memory has given me back that night, that room, that girl, that mass of fair, soft, curly, clustering hair, decked simply with its own bright beauty and a knot of ribbon!

'I did knock, sir,' she said; 'but I could not make you to hear.'

Even without the last expression I should have known she was not English. Her accent was unmistakably foreign—as foreign as the little apologetic gesture with which she deprecated any possible anger at her intrusion.

'I could not rest,' she went on, advancing at my entreaty towards the fire, 'I could not be happy till I came myself and told you the fault was indeed with me, and not with the good madame. When she did let me come here she knew not of the piano that it was to me needful, as your book, your pen to you. Please not, therefore, to make madame suffer for me. Never, never again, while you are at your home, I will touch of a note. If you fear, I will go so soon as I can get another lodgment; but leave not madame on account of my forget. I assure you sacredly it was but that it went away from my mind that you had hatred of the music, or I should have kept quiet—still as a very mouse.'

'*I* hate music!' I said in astonishment. '*I* wish you to remain mute! I never heard anything so exquisite as your singing in all my life. My

only feeling, while listening, was a desire it might go on for ever.'

'Ah, you make flattery!' she exclaimed.

'Flattery! No, indeed,' I answered. 'I came home in a bad humour with myself, the world, and the weather; and now I feel as if there was enchantment in mere existence.'

'But will you not speak a different story to the madame to-morrow?'

'I shall tell her I should like to hear such singing as yours from morning till night.'

She looked straight in my face, as if to read my very thoughts; then her eyes filled with tears, and she said, with pitiful earnestness,

'I only hope the other people in this great rich country may be of the same mind with you.'

To this hour I do not know how it all came about; but ten minutes later she was sitting opposite to me pouring out tea for both of us.

In person, Mrs. Haymes, Mary Jane being still absent, answered the bell, and audibly ejaculated, as she left the room, 'Well, I'm sure!' in comment upon my request for a second cup and saucer.

No shyer man than myself probably ever existed,

and of myself I certainly never should have made friends with Adelaide Lemberg. But she made friends with me. She was so solitary, and I—to her eyes—so old, that at once she gave me her liking and her confidence. Her grandmother had been English, which explained, she said, the fact that our language was 'to her the same, only more better as the German.' Her father was dead; ach! yes, I beheld; and the white delicate hand smoothed down the folds of her black dress. And there were the little brothers and the little sisters, and the mother so beloved and so grief-stricken, and with scanty store of money. And she had one gift, her dower from God, and she was come to England, where there was so much gold, to strive and gain some of it. She had arrived but three days. She had friends, yes, indeed; one of them had sent her to madame's, another was out in the country, and a third ill, but she had no need of money; she must wait, and it would be well for her and the loved ones, all in the good time.

'And as I had been so kind, so—so kind (ah, how pleased the mother and the brothers and the sisters would be when they did read of my having

permitted her for to pour the tea!); if I truly did love the music when it was not that of the learners or the streets, how she would feel at singing for me at such times as I had the inclination to listen!'

That was the beginning. When the end came I knew I loved her, but I did not tell her so. Foolish though I might be, my folly never urged me to reveal that secret.

Nay, I strove with all my strength to hide it, and so successfully that, quick and clever as she was, she failed to guess the secret pain she made me suffer, the constraint I had to put on myself, when, with her red lips, she innocently kissed her 'dear, dear friend,' and bade him good-bye, the while tears filled her lovely eyes. She did not succeed all at once. She had sharp and weary work to make her genius recognised. She laboured incessantly, with a steady persistency, an untiring energy which only the young ever display. She lived hard, how hard I know now; for in those days I fared so meagrely myself that I could scarcely realise the deprivation of proper food as a serious calamity. It is after people have once been among the flesh-pots that they hanker for them; after they have revelled

amongst leeks and cucumbers that they loathe the monotony of the wholesome manna.

But working or fasting or buffeted by Dame Fortune, she had ever a smile for me. Never, even when it was quivering with disappointment, did her face fail to light up in welcome when I entered. Almost every evening either she partook of tea with me or I of supper with her, while on Sundays we invariably dined together.

Mrs. Haymes did not quite like the arrangement, for reasons which must be obvious to those who have ever resided in lodgings ; but Adelaide had a fine disregard, or rather want of perception, of the opinions of that portion of the world which could influence neither her pleasure nor her profit (this, I fancy, is an idiosyncrasy of foreigners that probably accounts for their greater lightness of heart), and made our mutual purchases, and superintended the preparation of our mutual repasts, with a calm indifference to the opinion of Pentonville in general and our Row in particular, which engendered a fine feeling of Christian and suburban hatred in the bosom of Mrs. Haymes.

CHAPTER VI.

'SAD MEMORY.'

One afternoon, 'twas in April, I remember, having come over a little faint and dizzy while in our secretary's office, he told me to leave off work for that day, and went so far—which, indeed, for the 'Home and Foreign' was very far indeed—as to send a messenger to the nearest cabstand for a vehicle to take me home, the fare of which was charged to the Company. There could not have been much the matter with me, for as we drove northward I felt—save for a certain not unpleasant languor—as well as I had ever done in my life.

'I wonder,' I considered, 'whether Adelaide is at home? If so we will go down the river together. A little change is all I require.'

For I had been working hard and late at the office. Just then we were short of clerks, and business was brisk, and the directors trusted to me, and—but all this has little to do with my story.

Arrived at Mrs. Haymes' residence I dismissed the cabman, walked up the garden, ascended the two steps, opened the door with my latch-key, and beheld in the hall a trunk I recognised, a familiar portmanteau, a little bonnet-box I had seen before. All were labelled 'Miss Lemberg.' Good Heavens! what did it mean?

Without the smallest ceremony I rushed up-stairs and entered her room. She was standing by the centre table with one hand resting upon it, doing nothing; for the first time, in all my knowledge of her, absolutely idle.

'Ah, dear Mr. Cheverley, this is the one good—the one bright spot to be marked with a white stone in all this weary day. Of course I should have written to you; but to speak! ah, that is far, far the best!'

'What has happened? Where are you going?' I asked breathlessly.

'What has happened is that I have no money. Where I go is back to the inn I came, whence to hither.'

'But—but I do not understand,' I gasped; 'tell me all—tell me everything.'

'Yes—friend loved—yes—I tell you all. To the madame here I owe four weeks' rent. Each day I look for a letter with order from mine own home. Each day it comes not. I fear the dear mother must be ill,' here she paused, and the sensitive lip twitched. 'So madame wants her money. She is poor, she says, like me, wishes that I should be no longer in the place of a better tenant. Therefore, dear Mr. Cheverley, I go.'

I had been pulling myself together as she spoke. All at once I seemed to become aware of my own physical feebleness, and of the necessity for mental strength. Yes, I was ill, and I must be well. I grasped these facts by some intuition.

'Please to sit down,' I entreated, 'and take off your hat. Do you know how much rent is owing to this harridan?'

'None, now, I am thankful to tell,' said Adelaide, 'as I meant to speak at first, only my poor foolishness came in between; the madame, she not so unkind as I thought, says, "You have a watch, you have a chain, you give me them, and I return receipt for your lodgment, and you can take away your baggage. But you must be out of this before three

o'clock." Ah, I laboured to do it! Yet as you see so happily, because thus I behold you once more, I did fail of perfecting mine intentions.'

I did not answer her words. I could not. It was at that moment I understood I loved her, that the sweet, foolish, fatal passion had left me untouched in early life, only to strike me a more deadly blow in my unlovely middle age. Without noticing that I failed to reply, she went on with the low tender voice in which it was natural for her to babble out her pretty graceful utterances.

'How happened it you came home?' she asked. 'Another ten minutes and I should have been here no more. Ah, I see now how it is! How selfish in me to hitherto remain blind! You are pale—you look tired; you have returned in a cab; you are ill; dear, dear friend, sit down, and I will—no, I cannot—yes, I shall go to the madame, and ask her permit that I make you one more cup of tea before I leave.'

'I am going to see Mrs. Haymes myself,' I answered. 'Remain here, will you, please, till I come back?'

'It is so happy that you are back,' she murmured, and sat wearily down in a chair to await my return.

In the hall stood Mrs. Haymes, black, bony, defiant.

'I want to speak to you for a moment,' I said, holding open my parlour door for her to enter first, but she declined this politeness.

'After you, sir, *if you please.* I hope I knows my place, and has tried to keep it.'

'Just as you like, Mrs. Haymes,' I replied. 'Will you kindly let me know how much Miss Lemberg owes you?'

'Marmselle owes me nothing, sir. She has got her bill receipted, as she will tell you if you ask her and she speaks the truth.'

'Mrs. Haymes,' I said, 'I want Miss Lemberg's bill and her watch and chain.'

'Then, sir, I am afraid you'll have to want them,' answered Mrs. Haymes, smoothing out the folds of her black silk dress.

She was standing upon one side of the table and I on the other. I was looking straight at her, while she tried to avoid meeting my eye. Ordinarily one of the most timid of men—nervously averse to quarrelling—given to condone small acts of larceny and overlook petty theft—I felt myself on this occa-

sion a very lion in defence of that poor girl up-stairs. Hitherto I had regarded my landlady with a kind of awe, but now I knew I must subdue her.

'Mrs. Haymes,' I said, 'I want Miss Lemberg's watch and chain.'

She began to waver—I could see it. Had I descended to argument she might have won; but, as matters stood, I was making an impression.

'Dear, dear,' she began, pulling out her handkerchief and whimpering a little; 'all the time you have been with me I am sure we never had a word before. A kinder, quieter, nicer gentleman could not have occupied apartments, till that first floor—serpent as she is—came and began making mischief. Them foreigners is all alike. The minute one of them, man or woman, crosses your threshold—'

'Mrs. Haymes, will you fetch Miss Lemberg's watch and chain?'

'Excuse me, sir, but I'm not going to see your good heart imposed upon; I have your interest too much on my mind. Let marmselle's watch and chain be, Mr. Cheverley. Who is she, I should like to know, as can't pay her way honest, that she

should be let loose on the world, with a gold watch and chain deceiving them as works their fingers to the bone so that they may owe nobody nothing?'

'Mrs. Haymes, *will* you fetch that watch and chain?'

And as I spoke, I laid my hand on the table with a certain decision which startled the lady who objected to foreigners.

'To tell you truth, sir, the things ain't in the house to fetch. My Rosa Blanche chanced to be here when I took them down-stairs; and as her good gentleman happens to be in that line, working and suchlike for the jewellers round about Clerkenwell, I just lent the watch and chain to her so as to make sure I had not been cheated altogether out of my lawful debt.'

Long experience of Mrs. Haymes convinced me there was not a word of truth in this statement; and therefore, producing my own watch, an old silver warming-pan of a timekeeper, which had belonged to my grandfather, I said,

'Mrs. Haymes, I will just give you five minutes to produce that watch and that chain. If they are not in my hands by the time I have men-

tioned, I shall reluctantly be obliged to go for a policeman.'

To this hour I have not the faintest idea what I should have done with the policeman if I had fetched him; but the shot told. Possibly Mrs. Haymes' knowledge of the powers of the law was as vague as my own; at any rate, with many tears and reproaches, she left the room, and shortly reappeared, stating, 'it was a providence Rosa Blanche had turned into the draper's at the corner to buy a hood for her youngest child; so there,' finished Mrs. Haymes, 'is the gold watch and the gold chain, if either of them is gold—a thing, if I was you, sir, I'd have tested —and there's marmselle's bill, and glad indeed I shall be to see good money for it in place of trumpery jewelry.'

I was looking over the bill as she spoke, and at this juncture remarked,

'I see you have charged one week's rent in lieu of notice.'

'Yes, sir, quite regular, as you must be well aware.'

'But *you* gave Miss Lemberg notice.'

'As for that, if the rent is paid up now, marm-

selle is welcome to stay out her week here for me.'

I opened my purse and counted the exact amount owing, then I drew my pen through the disputed item, and correcting the addition, pushed the bill across to Mrs. Haymes.

'Miss Lemberg will not remain here,' I remarked. 'Be so good as to receipt that account, and do not let us argue about the matter.'

With lips very tightly pinched together, Mrs. Haymes did as she was desired; then she said with a sneering drawl,

'And your rooms, sir, are they to be empty too as well?'

'So far as I am concerned,' I answered, 'they need not be at present; it rests entirely with you.'

Half an hour later, Adelaide was snugly ensconced in good lodgings in Claremont-square. Her piano was to follow immediately, so soon, indeed, as I could have it removed. I had promised to forward her letters, and I forced the four pounds still left in my purse upon her as a loan. Tears came into her eyes as we parted for the time.

'It was the good God directed me to find you,'

she said. 'What should have happened in this great city to me so lonely, without the fortune of meeting you?'

Next morning the expected letter arrived, and another also. The latter was from a person who offered Miss Lemberg a certain sum, on condition of her singing at half a dozen concerts he was about to give. The girl seemed wild with delight, but, I confess, I was unable to share her enthusiasm.

'It is so poor a thing,' I ventured, and then she interrupted me.

'But much the better than none. It will be the commencement. Some one may hear me and say, "She can sing, that girl," and so give me a little more.'

She accepted the offer, and all came about as she had prophesied. One evening she called at my lodgings (I was by that time in fresh quarters, the experiment of staying on at Mrs. Haymes' not having turned out satisfactorily), and, before I could place a chair for her, had poured out her budget of news. It was done, it was finished; her future was assured: she was to go to Italy, she was to be lodged, and to be boarded, to be clothed,

and to receive a certain sum merely to put in her purse.

The friend, the kind friend—though not so kind as I—who had sent her to the madame, was he that arranged all for her. He blamed her for not having gone to him again, he blamed her more for singing at the concerts, 'but I think,' she added archly, 'he had forgot me till then.'

'No more anxiety for the dear mother; a little while, and she could give much help to all. There was but one thing for which she grieved: it was parting from me; I had been so good, so tender, but I would write. I must write, and could I promise not to forget her?'

Forget her!—well, well, but let that pass.

The next Sunday we spent together. After all, Bohemia is a happy land, where one can choose one's company, and keep it too without any thought or fear of Mrs. Grundy. The Bohemia of art, of travel, of poverty, is merely a state wherein one can do what one pleases, and go where one lists without taking into consideration the opinion of Mrs. Pry and Mrs. Censor, and all the other members of that great inquisitorial society.

With a white stone I shall always mark that happy Sunday in my memory. She came quite early, and we breakfasted together. My then landlady did her honour; and, out of the fulness of her generosity, placed upon the table new-laid eggs and a pat of fresh butter, together with a few flowers—all out of a great hamper that had come up the previous day from the country, bringing a flavour of the country with it. Altogether, what with the crisp watercresses, and the little glass dish of honey, and a slice or two of spiced beef artistically garnished with parsley; the tiny jug of cream, the steaming coffee, the warm May sun, the window set wide open and giving upon a miniature grass plot—we felt the repast to be quite a feast, an event in lives so bare of luxury and beauty as ours.

Once I surprised tears welling in Adelaide's eyes, but she laughed and tried to make light of her folly.

'Only we have been so happy,' she added, 'it seems to me sometimes we never can be so happy again.'

When we had finished breakfast, she put on her bonnet, and we went to St. Mary's, Islington, for

morning service. After we came out I told her about the woman who had been buried there with the gold pin thrust through her heart; and she took up the idea, and made quite a fanciful little story about it, far different from the real, as we paced slowly home. Then we dined, neither of us caring to eat, and yet both trying to do so, one to please the other; afterwards we went out by the Great Northern Railway to Wood Green, and walked back by way of Southgate and Colney Hatch and Muswell Hill to Hornsey.

Shall I ever forget that walk, the sweet calm of the Sunday afternoon, the songs of the larks, and the way in which her eyes seemed to follow them almost to the gates of heaven? The air was laden with scents, the hedgerows decked and white with May blossoms, peace seemed everywhere save in my own heart. She was young and I was old; her life was before her, mine was behind me; when she loved, as she was sure to love, there would be beauty and fitness in the feeling; but there was neither beauty nor fitness in the affection which rent my own heart with a pain that was all sorrowful.

I have never paced those lanes since—I hope I

never shall again. I have no desire to live over again the bitterness which then filled my soul, and I have still less wish to interpose any commonplace associations between myself and the one romance of a prosaic life.

In the realms of memory still sing on, sweet birds, fill the heavens with melody and the earth with a rapturous delight; still, sweet eyes, follow the flight of the eager songster; still bloom, ye flowers of May; still, ye breezes, waft sweet scents on your balmy breath! It may be winter in those lanes sometimes in reality, but for me—never. In the darkest and dreariest day I can see the sun shining and hear the larks thrilling out their lay, and I can feel again the pain at my heart, which was as that of a new birth; poor heart, so long numb and dead, waked into sensation merely to experience a fresh pang.

Surely no two sadder faces ever looked from the top of Muswell Hill adown the fair prospect which then met the eye. Heaven knows how it may be now! The destructive hand of improvement may have transformed that lovely landscape into a barren waste of tenth-rate streets and shoddy houses;

covered the green fields with villas, and cut down the goodly trees. What it was is all that concerns me; for of my own good-will I shall never more behold that stretching landscape, that combination of so many beautiful things.

Stamped on my brain it remains like the recollection of the dear pensive face of her who walked beside me, like the memory of that happy, happy day, which was yet one of the saddest of my life.

When we returned we could take nothing save a cup of tea. The morning had gone, and the evening was at hand. For me the sun was westering, and night, I felt with a shiver, was at hand. Tired though we were, we went to church again. It seemed easier to do anything than to talk. Cityward we bent our steps, and through the quiet streets walked leisurely, awed and depressed by the Sabbath stillness, till we reached an old church rich in architectural beauty, in oak carving almost black with age, in brasses placed there in memory of the forgotten dead, in monuments raised to perpetuate the names of men and women who were of those who 'make history,' in great high square pews, into one of which we were shut by an evil-looking elderly dame. There was a

rest about the place; there was something in its aspect which seemed to say, 'Generations have suffered and rejoiced, fretted out their little day, and behold they are at peace.'

The organ was good and mellow, the choir fairly competent; but the voice, which sang aloud to God that night falteringly, and with exceeding sweetness, was the one voice in all the world to me; as I pause for a moment in my story, I can hear it now.

So I can the words of the text: 'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him, but weep sore for him going away; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.'

As has been said, we were quite alone in the seat; and when for the second time the preacher repeated the sorrowful words written above, Adelaide slipped her hand into mine, and gave it a nervous squeeze. The preacher was not a good one. He had not his business at heart; and I doubt if either of us remembered much of what he said five minutes after we were out of the church.

More slowly than ever we paced the City streets homeward, for our hearts were heavy and our limbs weary. It was Adelaide who first spoke.

'That seemed a strange text for the minister to have made selection of,' she said in her soft pretty way; 'but I think it do not apply to me—I feel I shall come back quite safe, quite sound—though I *am* going away.'

Her right hand rested on my arm, and I put mine upon it, as I answered,

'No, my dear, you may "return no more." An Adelaide Lemberg will, please God, come back safe and well and happy, but after to-night I shall behold the little girl with whom I have passed so many, many pleasant hours—never again.'

She understood me in a minute. 'I know what you mean. It is not possible for us to stand quite still. I shall be older—know more—have seen much; yes, it must be that I change. To-day I am not what I was twelve months ago, but in one thing my heart will never be different. It can never know a change for you.'

'It will be pleasant for me to believe that,' I answered.

'Yes, you must believe that. It could as soon change to my mother, to my brothers, to my little sisters, as to you.'

That was it, dear to her after a fashion—less dear than the mother and the brothers and the sisters for whose sake she had ventured out into the world. I had always told myself how foolish I was, yet I never clearly understood how deep was the gulf fixed between us till that moment.

She was going away early the next morning. Her new friends were to call for her about the time I usually went to business, and we had consequently decided to bid each other farewell overnight. Upon that farewell why should I enlarge? When the last minute came, and we stood hand clasping hand, she broke down a little. She was never a girl who wept loudly or passionately. In her grief she was not demonstrative, so I could just see the tears starting from under her long lashes, as I looked upon her.

'Good-bye; God bless you, dear,' I said.

Then she raised her head and lifted her lips to mine, and kissed me, and it was over.

Time passed away, weeks grew into months, months into years. As it had ever flowed, so my life went on now, a sluggish current which varied not in its course, summer or winter, spring or

autumn. I grew older rapidly—as I fancy at some periods of their existences, at some crises in their experiences, men and women often do. I went to the office as usual. I spent my evenings as of yore. I frequented old book-stalls just as I had always done, picking up now and then a rare volume offered at a price I could afford. No fresh amount of energy seemed to develop in me; on the contrary, no wild visions of making a fortune, of rushing into speculation and transforming myself into a millionaire, able to benefit the little brothers and sisters and widowed mother ever lured me into even a moment's contemplation of the impossible.

It was she who alone could make the fortune; she who was destined to prove fairy godmother to the dear ones she loved so well. She had everything before her. I could not read her letters and fail to understand she was destined to make a great success. With genius, industry, youth, competent advisers, she had but to abide her time—appear—conquer.

I knew her life almost as well as though she had spent it under the same roof with me. She told me everything, I think, that affected her prospects. The hours she studied, the parts she was best fitted

for, the languages she was endeavouring to master, the people she met, the countries she beheld.

On my own side I did not remain quite idle. Even to write to her it was necessary that I should know something of the operas of which she spoke, have some comprehension of the difficulties she had to overcome, some means of testing her powers against those of the great singers of the day; and accordingly by degrees I gathered together quite a little library of books relating to musical celebrities, and learned, so far as written words could teach, how this contralto had made her name, how that soprano rose into favour. I grew quite learned in musical terms, and could have stood a competitive examination concerning the *libretto* of every opera that had ever been popular.

At first it was all like wandering through dreamland. Light reading of any kind had formed little part of my studies; and indeed it was only when I recalled the fact that all these apparently trivial annals, all the little ins and outs of artistic intrigue —struggle, failure, and success—had affected, for good or for evil, the lives of men and women, that I could concentrate my attention on the text. To my

foolish ignorance, at first this art existence seemed a poor sort of life, unworthy the serious attention of people possessing immortal souls, but I knew I was wrong; I knew that what appeared superior wisdom was indeed the very silliness of narrow prejudice.

I had but to look around, but for a few hours to leave the great City and contemplate the world God Himself did not disdain to create, in order to perceive how indissolubly grace and beauty have in the decrees of the Almighty been wedded to strength and greatness. I thought also of the tender softness, the subtle poetry, I had felt steal over me when, for the first time—herself still unknown, unseen—the spell of Adelaide's gift stirred within me sorrowful wells of emotion, the depths of which were never sounded before; and then, further, I remembered the lonely barrenness of an existence devoted almost entirely to procuring the means of keeping soul and body together, relieved merely by the recreation of reading the thoughts of men whose hearts had apparently been as solitary—of compulsion—as my own.

Occasionally, during the course of the opera season I made my way up into the gallery, and by

dint of a judicious selection, managed to hear most of the great artistes of the day.

Truth to tell, these expeditions left me generally somewhat sad. I could not but wish Adelaide to succeed; and yet if she did succeed, I felt I could be nothing to her, scarcely even a friend. I did not, of course, know at how much favourite singers calculated their yearly incomes, but it was impossible for me to doubt that in comparison to myself they were millionaires. Nay, even from what she said in her letters, I knew that already Adelaide must be a source of considerable profit to the person who had undertaken to bring her out.

Just before the 'Home and Foreign' raised my salary to that one hundred and fifty pounds mentioned in the first chapter of this story, she sent me a locket containing her portrait, which could not have cost much less than one half of my then yearly salary.

And the likeness was not that of the girl who had stood in my doorway, who had walked with me adown Muswell Hill, who had slipped her hand into mine as we sat side by side in the old City church. An older, a handsomer, a cleverer Adelaide; but not

just the same! Ah, that, however, I had before realised, was inevitable!

Not long, not very long, that is to say, after Mr. Amiott's legacy was left to me, she returned to England. She came all in a hurry, to stay only for a short time, to appear in a new opera, to take the place, indeed, if my memory serve me faithfully, of a favourite singer who, having met with some accident, was unable to fulfil the first portion of her engagement.

I did not know her when she ran into my room one Sunday afternoon. I declare, till she spoke, I could trace nothing in common between this new Adelaide and the old. She seemed at first so much more womanly; she had grown, strange to say, so extremely foreign-looking that, if it had not been for the remembered tones, the clinging hands, the caressing voice, she might have been any richly-dressed fashionable woman come to honour my poor house.

She was rapturous in her greeting, full of delight at my good fortune, triumphant concerning her own prospects.

'This time,' she said, 'it is all so much in haste

and hurry; I shall have no single moment scarcely to myself. I go abroad again almost on the instant. I only come now because the composer he knows me, and knows I understand his music. But next season I hope to come for good—and then—ah! again we can be as we were once formerly, when I made the tea at madame's. With all their trouble they were sweet days, those so happy. You must hear me sing. I shall send you a box; promise me now—make a faithful promise—that it shall be that you come.'

I told her I would go; but not to any box or stall. Hidden away amongst the audience, she might be certain I should be present at every possible performance when she appeared, and with this assurance she was fain to be satisfied.

That I did not fulfil my promise, I should be ashamed to confess here, if I had not prefaced it by a confession to her.

As I sat up there in the gallery, and watched her and heard her, I felt as if my heart would burst. I could not bear it.

When the applause began, I covered my face with my hands, to hide the tears I vainly tried to

repress. My previous life had unfitted me for such a scene, my experience was too narrow to grasp so wonderful a transformation.

Her singing was, to my ears, as the singing of an angel; but I could not identify the artist, who stood the cynosure of all those eyes, with the little girl dressed in mournful black I had known so long ago.

Two gentlemen sat close beside me—men evidently accustomed to the stage, and matters therewith connected.

'What do you think of her?' asked one of the other, a little doubtfully, and I strained my ears to catch the reply.

'She has a heavenly voice,' was the answer, spoken with the decision of one accustomed to have his words listened to, 'and it has been well trained, and her appearance is in her favour; but she can't act. If she could only act as well as she can sing, she might carry the town by storm.'

I walked very slowly home that night, pondering as I went.

CHAPTER VII.

BESSIE.

The courteous reader—how I love that phrase, borrowed from a time when writers were slow, and such few readers as 'gave their minds to study' (another suggestive expression) very sure!—the courteous reader, whese attention I shall have been happy enough to engage, can now, either sympathetically, or in a spirit of pitying derision, understand why it came to pass that, in the furnishing of my little drawing-room, I took more interest and pleasure than in anything else connected with my new abode.

Since that time I have often experienced a fine feeling of contempt for my own ignorance, when memory has given me back the look of that apartment decorated for the reception of a 'Queen of Song.' A modern baby might laugh in its sleeve at the thought of such simplicity; and, indeed, a modern baby is wiser in many respects than I was

then. Of the world I knew literally nothing. What seemed to me luxury must have appeared to those accustomed to the glories of upholstery the barest simplicity; but of all comprehension of that kind I was then happily innocent.

In my case it would have proved the acme of folly to be wise. Ignorance was a pleasure to me. Like a child I set out my house, and deemed it beautiful—and made my make-believe play—and felt quite sure it was all real, and enjoyed myself exceedingly; because what I was doing was for her whom I loved with a devotion perhaps no prosperous and accepted suitor ever knew.

There was not a thing I did, during the whole of that happy time of merciful illusion, but bore some relation to Adelaide. Sometimes I pleased myself with thinking if I had married young, and been left a widower with one only child, a daughter, I should have loved to deck out a place for her as I strove to deck The Snuggery for Adelaide.

She loved primroses; and I planted, with my own hands, a dell, with those modest flowers and sweet tender violets. She once told me she delighted in daisies; and, therefore, I refrained from having a

barren and unprofitable little mead ploughed up. She had an affection for bantams; and I, accordingly, introduced some of those ridiculous birds into the poultry-yard. Ah, me! it was happy work, and a happy, happy time. To the end of my life I shall associate the fine bright autumnal weather with the ingathering of a harvest of satisfaction and content.

It was then I explored the neighbourhood around Reedbourne so thoroughly that even now, I think, I could draw a map of the roads and footpaths which might, in its accuracy, compete with the productions of Ordnance surveyors. I said to myself, 'I will bring her here. I will take her there. She shall behold that fair expanse of country from this rising ground, and saunter across the meadows with me, till that pensive bit of river landscape surprises her fancy. We will walk up the hill where the trees almost meet across the road; and she shall, when the snow is crystallised on the branches, see with dazzled eyes a fairer and more wonderful transformation scene than ever was designed by any human craftsman.'

Away out in the world she was working, struggling, succeeding. Stranded in that remote nook of

lotus-land I was idly dreaming; every effect of light and shade, of cloud and sunshine, of rippling water and gloomy pine, seeming fairer and more beautiful, because some day her eyes were to look upon them.

Thus walking, planning, dreaming, the days glided by; the rich tints of autumn faded from out the land; beside the streams the alders stood bare and dark; in the woods the fir and pine cones littered the ground; the deep purple flush had died from off the heather; the brackens were withered and brown; the mornings were dark and cold, and the evenings long and pleasant, to my thinking at least, as with easy-chair drawn close beside a blazing wood-fire, giving out a faint aromatic perfume, I sat —my lamp well shaded—reading the thoughts of men whose words were, to my heart, as the sound of music, sweet, solemn, tender.

Yes, it was the most restful part of all the year; the quiet time which comes between the sleep of the life-giving sap and its awakening. I had become accustomed to my new experiences. I had grown to love my strange home. I had dropped as naturally into this fresh position as though used to it for

years. Christmas was at hand, coming quite near, when an advent occurred which—almost more, indeed, than the event of Mr. Amiott's legacy—changed the current of my existence.

A very unimportant event at first sight, certainly; nothing more than the arrival of my young niece to 'keep house' for her bachelor uncle.

Never probably did uncle know really less of a niece than I of Miss Bessie. When my father died Bessie's mother went out to seek her fortune as a governess. She was older than I by some years; and, after a little time, dropped into a very good situation, where she was less governess than companion, less companion than friend.

The family she entered paid her a high salary; treated her with every consideration; took her abroad with them, and, after a fashion, made her a very fine lady. She was so fine, at all events, that eventually she decided upon cutting her mother and myself. We asked her for nothing; but perhaps she feared we should do so, or imagined the fact of acknowledging such very poor relations might militate against her worldly advancement.

Whatever the reason chanced to be, she dropped

us, and for a long time we heard nothing whatever about her—nothing, in fact, till she walked in one day 'straight from India,' as she explained, dressed in widow's weeds, and holding by the hand her little girl Bessie.

She had been left badly off—that, as she came back to us, goes, of course, without saying; she had been left very badly off indeed, and she was, though she did not then know it, dying. We were so poor ourselves that we could do little more than give her a shelter; but she soon did something for herself, by managing to get Bessie admitted into an orphanage.

Not long afterwards she died; and, as her small income died with her, we were sorely crippled by the expenses of her illness and funeral. But my mother was happy that she had come to us at last; that her own hands had held water to the parched lips; that her only daughter was not alone amongst strangers when she breathed her last. We never removed Bessie from the orphanage. It would have been madness for us to attempt such a piece of quixotism. We could only have given the child scanty fare and poor clothing; we had to pinch ourselves in order to

pay our humble way; and my mother felt the love she could bestow might be dearly bought with the loss of all the advantages her granddaughter was enjoying. So we left her at the school, seeing her as often as we could, but learning very little of her nature.

In course of time she followed in her mother's footsteps—only at a respectful distance. She obtained a situation as nursery governess; and as she had not a penny of her own—except what she earned—or a friend in the world besides myself, I managed, by dint of considerable economy, to insure a few hundred pounds for her in the event of my death.

When I could arrange to do so, I was in the habit of taking her out for a few hours' pleasure. Sometimes we went into St. James's Park to feed the swans; sometimes to Hyde Park to see the great people driving there; sometimes a little trip down the river; anything, in fact, which was at once accessible and cheap.

It never occurred to me on these occasions that we had not much in common, as, indeed, how should there be, with that waste of years stretching between? I thought her a good little girl, and I felt

sorry for her, and was wont to sympathise in all her troubles, and agree that her various employers could not be at all 'nice people.' She had always much to say about them; and how tiresome the children were, and how difficult the mothers were to please. Bessie did not keep her places very long; but as she did not profess to be able to teach young ladies, and as Miss Edith and Miss Florence, and the other baby misses, had a habit of shooting suddenly beyond the nursery, that fact caused me little astonishment.

She was so delighted to be with me, so grateful for the small kindness I could show, that I contracted a sort of affection for her; and when my legacy arrived, I set a certain sum aside for Bessie as a future marriage portion, and determined that the next time she was 'between two situations,' as she expressed her very frequent worldly condition, I would take her a trip to Paris, where I trusted her knowledge of conversational French might serve for both of us.

The idea of the continental visit enchanted her. She could talk of nothing but Versailles and the Tuileries whenever we walked out together; and

though at first I had merely treated the matter as a mere suggestion, she soon converted it into an absolute promise.

'But are you certain you will be able to make yourself understood, Bessie?' I asked. 'You remember, you must not depend upon me.'

'Make myself understood?' repeated Bessie. 'Why, I am always talking French.'

And so it was settled that I was 'some day' to take her to Paris.

All this time it never struck me as a desirable arrangement to propose that when I was settled in The Snuggery Bessie should take up her abode there also; but it struck my fair niece, and finding I did not broach the subject, she worked round to it herself.

She was miserable in a situation; I could not think how wretched she was. While I had so little money she would not vex me by telling all she had to endure; but now, surely, surely I would take pity on her?

Of course it ended in her coming. I did not want her. Certainly the arrangement was one I should never have thought of proposing, or of agree-

ing to, if I could have avoided doing so; but how was I to object? how could I suffer my own selfish and recluse habits to stand between this child and happiness?

She was the nearest relative I had in the world; and though I considered it a mistake to insist that, because a man or woman is your relative, he or she has a right to bore one to death, still I was so painfully conscious of most of my opinions being at variance with those society has agreed to adopt, that I felt diffident about proposing any other plan for Bessie's comfort.

It was on the first day of January that Bessie arrived. I had broken the news of her advent—which was received with disfavour—to the person who had kindly consented to act for me in the double capacity of housekeeper and servant. I had convinced myself that her room was warm and comfortable. I had ordered such little additions to the accustomed dinner as I thought might please the appetite of a girl accustomed to school-room fare; and then I went out to the station to meet her.

Such rapture! such kissing! All the way to The Snuggery she held my hand in hers, and said at

intervals, 'Dear, dear uncle!' and 'I am so happy!' and 'You are so kind!'

She seemed almost delirious with joy, like a dog just let off the chain. The Snuggery was the loveliest place she had ever seen; her bed-chamber, the 'darlingest' room in England; the cat was the friendliest creature possible, and my study the cosiest nook imaginable. She said the toast was cold, and made me fresh, screening her face from the fire the while. She placed the lamp where its light fell best on the page of the book I was reading. She never spoke unless I addressed her, except when she muttered, 'How delightful this is!' She produced a dainty bit of crochet-work, and seemed to be doing wonders with her glistening needle; and when she said good-night, she lingered over her words and her kiss as though she were leaving some blessing behind.

'Poor little Bessie,' I thought, 'how little it takes to make you happy!' And I read on, feeling that I rather liked myself in the character of benefactor, and considering that if all personal sacrifices proved as little irksome, it would be rather easy and pleasant to be good.

Next morning she was down before my housekeeper, Mrs. Brooker, and went out to explore the place ere the sun rose. At breakfast she chattered about the cocks and hens, the ducks, the lovely, lovely pigeons, the dear old horse, and that delightful cow. She was fain also occasionally to get up and hug me, and though I said, 'That will do, Bessie,' more than once, she felt it incumbent upon her to take me in her arms, and imprint kisses upon my scattered locks ere entering upon what I suppose she considered the duties of the day.

In the pursuit of those duties she turned out all my drawers, and upset the methodical arrangement of my clothes; she rearranged my bookshelves, and for a month I could never lay hand on a volume I wanted.

How Bessie worried me for about a week no one can imagine! She was so eager for work, she found occasion to use her needle where certainly needle was not wanted. She made out dirt existed where not even a speck of dust had ever met my eye; and she so harried Mrs. Brooker—not perhaps a quite dependable person, but an admirable cook and servant, nevertheless—that at the end of a fortnight she gave me notice to leave.

'As for you, sir,' she said with dignity, 'a child might please you, and a purfessed cook never ask a better master; but Miss Richards would make a saint commit suicide.'

'She drinks gin, uncle, and she steals things,' explained Bessie, full of that detective spirit which conduces so greatly to the misery of households.

With a sigh, I gave up the argument. Mrs. Brooker went, and a servant of Bessie's own choosing came.

What dinners we had then! what an untidy house—what dirt—what irregularity! If we had spent our lives in a state of chronic removal, we could not have been more miserable. Our vegetables were either boiled to smash or brought up hard as stones. The water was usually smoked, the coffee weak, the tea bitter. Bessie's puddings were either sticky or curdy. Sometimes the bed-chambers were not tidied up until the evening, our meals were irregular, our rooms dusty and unswept; in short, at last I said,

'Bessie, your domestic does not seem to me to be much of a manager. We had better have Mrs. Brooker back again.'

'Of course, uncle, if you like to be robbed,' she answered, with a judicious application of pocket-handkerchief to her eyes.

'My dear,' I rejoined, 'I am not at all sure she ever did rob me, but I am quite certain she made the house a great deal more comfortable than your *protégée*.'

'Then by all means have your favourite back again,' said Miss Bessie, with a near approach to 'flounce.'

'I mean to have her,' I answered meekly.

Accordingly we had her back. She was very glad to return. I was delighted to reinstate her. The arrangement entered into was that Mrs. Brooker should take entire control, and Miss Richards refrain from interference; and that the new state of things should commence under agreeable circumstances, I told Bessie to pack her box, and took her off to France.

There had been times since Bessie came to Reedbourne when I found myself troubled with doubts as to whether she were really the clever and capable young lady she represented herself to be; but after one day's experience of her vaunted know-

ledge of the French language I doubted no longer. I knew my niece to be a superficial and conceited little impostor.

Well, it was a disappointment; but what could I do? There she was on my hands, for me to make the best of that I could. We had not an idea in common. Never did I imagine that any one who knew how to read could be so densely, hopelessly ignorant.

When we returned home, and settled down again into the pleasant monotony of a country life, I earnestly entreated her to commence some regular course of study, to try to increase her knowledge and enlarge her mind. I asked if she would like to take lessons in music and French. I suggested she had commenced so young to earn her own living that hitherto there could have been but scant leisure for her to improve herself, and to all I said she gave a ready assent—a far too ready assent.

'I never had a minute to myself, uncle,' she remarked. 'I was always either teaching the children or walking out with them, or doing needlework or something. Ah, it was a very hard life! you cannot think how hard it was.'

'We must see that it is easier now,' I answered

cheerfully; 'and I believe, if you devote a few hours each day to improving yourself, that at the end of six months you will be astonished at the progress you have made.'

Bessie was quite sure she would—she was so sure that she immediately went out and made some purchases in order to begin the great work of cultivating her intellect. She thought she would not take any lessons, she felt confident she could teach herself, and she 'was so old she knew she should feel ashamed for any one to learn how ignorant she was.' It all sounded very well; and I confess when I saw copy-books, drawing materials, music-books full of the stiffest and blackest exercises, and all the usual educational appliances, unpacked and placed in a prominent position on the sideboard, I thought I had misjudged my relative, and that she really did mean to wrestle with the difficulties of learning, and overcome them.

Vain delusion! For a few days Bessie made a feint of grappling with Czerny, of studying perspective, of reading French, of borrowing from my shelves the heaviest and most abstruse volumes she could find; but after that she found that Mrs.

Brooker's occasional intrusions into the dining-room distracted her mind, and began to feel sure the noise of those 'dreadful exercises' must disturb me. For this last reason she decided to practise when I was out for my morning or afternoon stroll, and for the former reason she carried her books up-stairs; and, spite of all my remonstrances, elected to 'study' in her bed-chamber. There she used to remain for hours together; but as I found she made, so far as it was possible to discover, no progress in any single branch of learning, I may be pardoned for concluding that she spent those pericds of seclusion in reading the silliest novels obtainable at the local library, or in writing letters, for which occupation she had—like many young ladies—a perfect mania. Her pianoforte practice consisted of playing the easiest part of some easy air over and over as fast as possible. To my own knowledge, she never mastered the second part of 'The Swiss Boy;' while as for her singing—but I pass over in silence the agony my niece's *mezzo-soprano* voice caused me.

Through all that time I had a little private sorrow of my own, which caused me—lest personal annoyance should induce general injustice towards

others—to display greater forbearance than I might have thought necessary had my own heart been quite at ease; and I therefore expressed neither disappointment nor surprise when I came fully to understand that Bessie was a lazy, greedy, deceitful little puss, who must have set a bad example to every child she taught, and proved a thorn in the flesh of every mistress she served.

To my mind there was scarcely a fault the girl did not possess. She was too idle to mend her own clothes; she would pin the braid round her dress rather than devote a few minutes to putting it on properly. It was her habit to come down always late for breakfast, yawning, as if she had not closed her eyes all night; she would sit before a fire, and let it go out sooner than trouble herself to rise and put on coals. She was greedy too, bringing no healthy and thankful appetite to regular meals, but declaring, unless there happened to be some dish she specially affected, that 'she was not hungry;' that she could only 'eat the least atom,' 'the tiniest weeniest bit,' yet managing to make a good dinner after all, if the pudding chanced to prove palatable, or any second dish was served which she liked.

Between her and Mrs. Brooker there waged so bitter a war that, as I heard subsequently, Miss Bessie was unable to procure a morsel of food from the pantry without the housekeeper's knowledge and consent.

It was perhaps for this reason she went about with a supply of cakes, nuts, fruit, or sweetmeats in her pocket; answering a question, if suddenly addressed, with her mouth full, and scattering crumbs of biscuit and other fragments of food about the carpets, whenever she produced a letter or handkerchief.

All this was hateful to me, but it was not so hateful as her utter want of comprehension of everything exquisite in poetry, legend, and Nature. For her there was no glamour in the snow, no witchery in the sunshine. She asked me what Poe's verses meant, and said candidly she considered Coleridge an 'old stupid.' If you repeated to her a touching story, a graceful legend, she would at once cap it with some foolish tale she had heard at school or been told by some old nurse. If one read to her a pathetic chapter out of a favourite book, she would say, 'she had no doubt it was very nice, but for her

part she did like something lively.' She objected to Dickens and Thackeray, remarking, 'they are so dry,' to which last word she evidently attached some different meaning from that understood by most persons; whilst as for scenery, the finest road to her in the world was that where she could meet the greatest number of men and women—the former preferably, naturally; shop-windows were to her a finer spectacle than the view from the top of the Hog's Back or St. Martha's Hill, whilst as for the sight of the river, she declared frankly she hated it, unless she could be out on it, in a boat with a pleasant party, which last contingency she was kind enough to hint might produce a favourable modification in her opinions.

It may be that in other counties of England there are banks sprinkled with lovelier flowers, dells where more wonderful tangles of bramble and honeysuckle and wild roses are to be met with than in Surrey. People who know more of the favoured spots of our country than I pretend to do tell me of places where what we consider exotics grow freely in the open air, and the cherished plants of our gardens are to be met with blooming by the wayside. Some day, some happy day, I hope to visit these haunts, word-pictures

of which have been oftentimes made for me by dreamers like myself; but when my eyes do behold myrtles and camellias flourishing in a climate where frosts are not bitter enough to destroy, I do not think my heart will prove disloyal to the memory of those gently-gliding streams of Surrey, flowing on calmly beautiful between banks starry with such floweret gems as never decked a diadem, set out with such varieties of colour as never gardener massed in a parterre; gay and beautiful, yet restful to the eye; bright and sweet, yet scarcely so two days together with the same brightness and the same sweetness.

Changing, ever changing; one blossom replaced by another, one flower blooming for its short hour, and then giving place to another more exquisite still. That is bedding out if you like, gentlemen of the Horticultural Society, all among the soft green grass, and the springing rushes and the quivering reeds; on the banks where the shoots from the old elm-trees are putting out their freshest and tenderest buds, and the leaves are still lying brown and bare as they dropped in the autumn weather; down in the deep dells, which in the winter-time were pools of water; there in copse and hedgerow, in meadow, in

marsh, in the distant woods, beside the streamlets, and on the bosom of the rivers, are flowers that we should regard as pearls of price if they were not strewed with Nature's lavish generosity round and about every path we tread.

To all these things Bessie seemed mentally blind. If I admired the peeping primroses, the delicate mosses, the soft green of the eglantine, the fairy tassels of the larch, my niece said, 'It is all very nice,' or 'Lor'!' as the mood was on her.

The trembling tottergrass never drew an exclamation of delight from her lips; the dainty ferns put out their fronds in vain, for as she passed she failed to notice their beauty; the trembling aspens had no voice which could appeal to her deaf senses; and the noble swans, sailing up the silvery Thames to the bosky aits where the willows were reflected from the calm clear water, suggested to her no other idea than the remembrance of some transformation scene wherein the principal fairy floated on the stage in a gilt shell drawn over a mimic lake by two artificial birds.

No, there was not in all this rural life a sight or sound which affected or delighted my young niece. Day by day we drifted further and further apart. No

topic of conversation that interested me seemed intelligible to her. No walk around all that lovely neighbourhood appeared pleasant in her eyes, save that which led through Reedbourne to the railway station, or a winding dreary highway conducting to the nearest town.

By degrees it dawned upon my understanding that Bessie was sadly discontented with life at The Snuggery; all the charm of novelty was dispersed, all the illusions she had cherished were dissipated.

I do not know what she had expected, perhaps she did not know herself, but at any rate she was disappointed. She did not tell me this. I failed to perceive all at once that she found existence fearfully, horribly dull, but after a while I saw the girl was miserable, and then the meaning of many hitherto dark utterances became clear.

It had not entered my mind to wonder that the inhabitants of Reedbourne did not call upon me. On the contrary, I should have wondered very much if they had, but Bessie professed herself lost in astonishment at my lack of all acquaintances.

'You do not even know the clergymen,' she remarked with a little pout.

'Well, no,' I answered, 'it is hardly my place to call upon them.'

'But aren't you surprised, uncle, they have never called upon you?' she persisted.

Now, to speak quite candidly, I had experienced a sensation as near surprise in consequence of this omission as it was in my nature to feel on such a subject. The reader may remember that when I first sauntered through the village, I met a reverend gentleman who, I imagined, might sit in my modest study and exchange ideas about the books—collected through many laborious and lonely years—which lined it.

I had now been located many months at The Snuggery, and knew no more of my spiritual instructor than could be gathered from the sermons he preached. At first I expected him—I looked for his coming and for that of his aide-de-camp, the curate, whose worldly belongings had excited the contempt of two of Reedbourne's unlovely daughters; then I forgot to remember them except on such occasions as they were recalled to my memory by seeing them in the street or in church; then I heard by chance, a silent listener in the train to a conver-

sation carried on between two of the inhabitants, that as a 'certain regiment did not dance,' so the clergy of Reedbourne 'did not visit.'

There were exceptions to that rule, however, apparently, for I often saw the vicar, and less frequently the curate, entering the house which had been Squire Blunt's, where the successful De Field now resided.

One thing, however, was quite certain: the clergy did not visit *me*; and feeling in no way bound regularly to attend the parish church, which Mr. Rivers was in the habit of touchingly referring to as 'our beloved parish church,' I had fallen into a habit of wandering afar off for religious nourishment—straying, in fact, into any pasture which promised even a few blades of refreshing herbage.

This was a serious trial to my niece. She felt quite certain if I would show some interest in parish matters that Rector and Co. would greet me with effusion.

'It would bring you into contact with all sorts of people, uncle,' she said. 'That is the way Mr. Dodman got into society at Camberwell. Maggie told me so herself.'

'But then, you see, Bessie, I am not Mr. Dodman.'

'No,' agreed my niece slowly; and her tone implied that though the fact could not be helped, it was one to be regretted.

'Don't you think,' she began, after a pause devoted to that particular sort of reverie in which Bessie was an adept, 'don't you think that if you go on this way, week after week, and month after month, never visiting, never calling upon anybody, never having anybody calling upon you—'

'Well, Bessie?' I asked, as she hesitated.

'That you will find some day you are very lonely?' finished my niece, changing, as I quite understood, the form and substance of the suggestion.

'I do not believe I shall,' I answered. 'You must remember, Bessie, I have been accustomed to what you call loneliness.'

It was not necessary for me to add that I doubted whether asking for the secretaryship of a local coal club would introduce me to congenial society.

Constant dripping wears away a stone; and at length Bessie's recurrence to my lack of acquaint-

ances made an impression even upon my dense selfishness.

Stupidly I had imagined that what contented me would content a young girl; and I confess it was only by slow degrees I understood that when Bessie referred to my loneliness she really meant her own; when she pathetically pictured a dreary future without visitors or visiting, she merely intended politely to convey to me some idea of how fearfully she was bored.

As I have intimated, all this knowledge was borne in upon me gradually, and at length I quite understood her tactics.

'It must be dull for her,' I considered, as I looked across the river to Thamesford, one of the prettiest villages in England, and then an idea suddenly occurred to me.

'Good Heavens! is she, I wonder, as tired of me as I am of her?' to which succeeded another: 'Perhaps she is more tired?' which was indeed the case.

At dinner that day, I said,

'Bessie, I have been thinking that you must find it somewhat lonely here—'

'O uncle, you are not going to send me away!

You surely would never be so cruel as to make me go out as governess again! I will do all you tell me. I will study, indeed I will,' she interrupted, evidently more alive to her own shortcomings than I had ever before seen her.

'No, my dear,' I answered, 'you are not very fond of teaching, I know; and moreover, I don't think you are very competent to be a teacher. But you must be lonely; and as I do not see how I can give you society in the neighbourhood, I have been wondering whether you would like to ask that Miss Dodman you talk so much about to spend a little time with—'

I never was permitted to finish my sentence. Bessie rushed at me—I can employ no other phrase—and, flinging her arms round my neck, embraced me with effusion. I was the 'dearest darlingest uncle,' she declared, 'in the whole universe. She did not know how to thank me. Maggie was the nicest girl in the world; Maggie was the one thing wanting to make The Snuggery perfect; Maggie—'

'You have upset the salt-cellar, and you are spilling the gravy,' I remarked.

'And it is unlucky to spill the salt,' she said,

taking up some and flinging it over her left shoulder (there was not a superstitious rite Bessie failed to observe: so far as I had been able to judge, superstition was her only religion); 'but nothing can be unlucky if Maggie is coming. O you dear, dear, dear—' ending the sentence with a rapturous kiss instead of an orthodox substantive.

'I wish, Bessie,' I observed, 'you could be brought to comprehend that, while not wishing to undervalue these tokens of affection, I am not accustomed to such violent demonstrations of attachment.'

'But I am so happy, uncle.'

'I am delighted to hear it. Suppose you let me be happy too.'

'I will do anything you ask me. O, won't Maggie be enchanted! I may write to her this afternoon, may I not? She will count the hours till she comes. You cannot think how nice she is, and she is *so* clever. She is able to do everything; you will like her, I know.'

'I suppose it does not matter very much whether I like or dislike her,' I answered a little ungraciously.

No person would have imagined that the listless, slow-footed, discontented-looking Bessie of the morning was the bright, active, smiling Bessie of the afternoon.

She danced up and down the stairs. She dashed off her letter, and, though it was a warm day, started out to post the invitation. All the evening I heard furniture being pushed about, and tacks being hammered into valance-boards and toilet-tables.

Mrs. Brooker, going up to see what all the noise could be about, remarked, in tones loud enough to reach my ears,

'Lor', miss, what a mess you are making! Leave the room to me, and I will settle it up.'

But Bessie would not leave the room; and, as I passed the door, I had ocular proof that she was indeed making a mess.

Quicker than I should have imagined the letter could have been delivered, an answer came. It was written by Miss Dodman; and such portions as Bessie read aloud were to the effect that her mamma felt much obliged by my invitation, and would gladly allow her to visit Reedbourne; that I must indeed be

good, kind, thoughtful uncle; that Bessie was the most fortunate girl in the world to be my niece; that Miss Dodman was delighted at the prospect of seeing Bessie, and that the writer soon hoped to 'fold her in a fond embrace.'

Various passages were not read out to me; but, from the giggles with which Bessie perused them, I concluded that they had reference to some silly jokes and secrets between the young ladies.

'See what a nice hand she writes, uncle,' said Bessie, presenting me with a half-sheet, whereon Miss Dodman stated:

'So I will add no more, darling, as I hope to see your dear old face so very, very soon, except that I am my beloved Bessie's most fond and affectionate

'MAGGIE.'

'Good gracious!' I thought, 'what is this infliction I have brought upon myself?' And, with a groan, I entered my own sanctum and shut the door.

The very next day Miss Dodman followed her letter in person. Bessie went to the station to meet her, and the two came back together, with great

state, in a fly. When I beheld the size of the trunk under which the driver staggered, my heart misgave me.

'She is never going away again,' I decided; 'she means to remain here for the full term of her natural life;' and then I stood face to face with Bessie's most fond and affectionate friend.

'Uncle, this is Maggie,' was my niece's informal mode of presentation; and Miss Dodman shook hands with me, and said how much obliged she felt for my kindness in asking her, and how glad she was to see Bessie again, and how lovely the country was looking.

'I have never been down the South-Western line before,' she explained, and was proceeding to other conversational efforts when Bessie interposed and carried her up-stairs, in order to take off her bonnet before tea. All the affairs of the nation might have been settled during that process of bonnet removal. Chitter, chatter, chitter, chatter—there was a noise in the house as when a flock of sparrows hold their parliament.

The room appropriated to Miss Dodman was directly over my study; and through the open win-

dows there came a continuous buzz, like the busy humming of a thousand bees. If they had been separated for twenty years, it seemed to me, those girls must have exhausted every incident of the period in that conversation carried on at express speed.

They came down to tea with arms entwined round each other, and at intervals during that meal Bessie pressed her friend's hand with effusion.

'We must seem very silly to you, Mr. Cheverley,' said Miss Dodman ingenuously; 'but Bessie and I have been always such friends.'

This explanation was frankly and nicely spoken. It was at once an apology and an excuse, and caused me to look with more favour, or, perhaps I should rather say, less disfavour, upon this new troubler of my peace.

People who admired her style considered the young lady pretty, '*very* pretty indeed,' Bessie told me. I had another form before my mind's eye very different indeed from that which graced the tea-table; but still I could not help seeing that Miss Dodman was, after a fashion, good-looking. She had a clear red-and-white complexion, blue eyes, light

wavy, not to say frizzy, hair, white even teeth, and a somewhat winning smile. It was not a refined face, there was nothing classical about her features; but she looked a cheerful, frank, amiable girl, and she had an expression of innocence and guilelessness which struck me as agreeable. She seemed accustomed to make herself useful, for she was always offering to do or fetch something, and then apologising for the liberty taken, with the words,

'I forgot I was not at home.'

After tea, when we repaired to the drawing-room I had furnished with a view to the reception of a far different visitor, Bessie said,

'Now, dear, you must play something;' and then I understood what had helped to make Miss Dodman's box so heavy.

Such thick music-books—such piles of 'pieces'—as she and Bessie appeared laden with on the threshold! I turned sick at heart. Bad enough it had been to hear Bessie profane the instrument bought for the pleasure of another performer; but after the first she troubled my piano only by fits and starts, and besides was so wretched a musician as to be almost beneath notice and contempt.

Here, however, was a horse of quite another colour—a young lady who manifestly did play a great many arrangements and fantasias, and Heaven knows what beside—a young lady who said to me, as I relieved her of her burden,

'Bessie told me yours was such a lovely piano, I could not resist the temptation of bringing all my music. Ours is such a wretched old thing; the keys are so worn they would do for egg-spoons.'

From which I inferred the Dodmans were not rich, though Bessie had represented them as living in good style.

Miss Dodman played very well, though I cannot say she either charmed or pleased my ear. Perhaps she was shrewd enough to guess this fact, for after a little time she rose, and, closing the instrument, declared she would not torment me any more.

'The moment papa comes in he says, "Now shut up that thing, and don't let there be any row of practising while I am in the house;"' and the young lady laughed as she repeated this utterance. 'If I may,' she went on, 'I should like to play on this lovely piano when you are "out of the house;" but

I do not want to be a nuisance, and I know all gentlemen in their hearts hate music.'

Then I was obliged to answer that the music she made was not to be hated; but I am afraid I spoke coldly, for she went to the window, and looked out upon the lawn for a little while, and did not talk much afterwards until she and Bessie went up-stairs to bed.

Hours later, when I sought my own room, I perceived that the door of Bessie's bed-chamber stood open, and heard still in full progress, in Miss Dodman's apartment, that even babble of chatter which had previously so amazed me.

As I walked along the passage Bessie caught the sound of my step, and exclaiming,

'Hush—there's uncle!' a dead and unnatural silence immediately ensued.

But it did not last long. Before I could place my candle on the dressing-table the swish-swish-swish of talk recommenced; and whenever I awoke I heard still a noise as if another weir had been added to those already in the neighbourhood.

CHAPTER VIII.

MISS DODMAN.

Time went on. In that quiet valley the days glided away with so little of event to mark their passage, it was only when the summer came one realised spring had departed—only when the snow fell one awoke to the fact that the golden grain was garnered.

For me, after Miss Dodman's arrival, life flowed more smoothly than had previously been the case since that evil hour when Bessie came to reside with me—ill-omened phrase—for good.

If the evil of a niece had to be endured—and I saw no way of getting rid of it—why, Miss Dodman was a great assistance in enabling one to bear the incubus. With the 'dearest of dears' in the house, Bessie's peculiarities did not shoulder mine so frequently as formerly. Her 'old darling'—another term of affection—proved a sort of buffer between my niece and myself. I could not observe, indeed, much, if any, improvement in Bessie's habits. She

was still as lazy, as useless, as untidy, as greedy, as silly, as ever; but having once relinquished all hope of reforming these evils, it seemed a comfort to transfer the annoyance to another, who looked with the kindest eyes and the most smiling face upon her friend's shortcomings. A vague idea of asking Miss Dodman to remain at The Snuggery as companion to Bessie flitted through my mind, but happily I refrained from clothing it in words.

I would not bind myself to anything. I would do nothing irrevocable. Perhaps the Dodmans might ask Bessie to pay them a return visit (they had often taken pity upon her before when she was out of a situation); and if they did, I should—blessed possibility!—have the house to myself for a whole winter.

Never again, I knew, could The Snuggery seem to me what it had done in the fine autumnal weather when I decked the rooms for a visitor who never came.

Never came, and who never now could come! No more—no more! In the past the girl Adelaide lay buried. There was no Adelaide for me now, such as my fancy remembered her. She was mar-

ried—she belonged to a husband—her letters were not as the letters of old. It had been a pleasant dream, but it was ended. She was a great lady now—the Baroness Aronheim—wife to a man who had as many ancestors as debts, and who let her remain on the stage because he needed all the money she could earn. They had gone to America shortly after their marriage; and newspapers reached me constantly, giving accounts of the successes she was achieving—of the *furore* she was exciting. Her letters, however, were few and far between.

According to her own account, she had scanty leisure for much correspondence; but 'though I write not often, I think of you ever.' That was what she said, but I did not attach much importance to the statement. She had gone out of my life, and why should she remember me? I had stood still, and she had gone on.

Fêted, flattered, a celebrity, she seemed to my imagination as different from the Adelaide Lemberg who had walked with me on that Sunday so long ago, as noonday is from dawn.

She was not to blame for my folly; yet with her marriage all the sweetness, the poetry, the beauty of

life seemed to have departed. It signified nothing now that the notes of the piano selected with a view to her approval should be profaned by the touch of other fingers.

Bessie was as welcome to torture its keys as anybody else. The drawing-room set apart for Adelaide's occupation was no more to me than any other room; perhaps, on the whole, it was a relief to see the ruin which had been wrought in my heart made visible on the common objects of life. Every line of the poem which had rendered common things so lovely was turned into bitterness; and it signified little that the prose which succeeded was vulgar and unromantic as prose could be. Through the dreary winter time I think my heart must have been numb and cold, for I felt little save a dull sense of loss; but with the rising of the sap I awoke to a keener grief—to a miserable sorrow of loneliness—to an aching want of some hope and object in life—of something to look forward to—something to expect, to do, to strive for, to compass.

Idleness had been sweet and pleasant when I first took up my residence at Reedbourne, but time now seemed to hang heavily on hand.

I began to run up to town more frequently; I went to exhibitions; I sometimes actually walked through the Park; and one day I found myself in the Zoological Gardens.

I was delighted to find that Mr. Granton had a little place near Thamesford where he occasionally stopped for a week or so at a time. Quite by accident I met him strolling along the banks of the Reed, rod in hand, and basket slung behind him.

'I wonder you do not turn fisherman, Cheverley,' he said, one day, as we sauntered idly along, side by side. 'Fishing would be just the very occupation for you. When I am harassed and out of sorts, sitting beside a quiet stream and watching my float exercises much the same influence upon me, I fancy, as David's harp must have done over Saul. You ought to get some tackle and begin.'

But I shook my head, and answered 'that I was too old a dog to learn new tricks,' for which reason I did not buy line and hooks and take to angling.

All through that bright spring weather I was very badly off for employment indeed; and but for Mr.

Granton's frequent visits to Thamesford, I scarcely —looking back—know what I should have done with the hours which moved so slowly.

He, however, was very kind. He used to call at The Snuggery and entice me out for long pleasant walks. At intervals of only a few days he would, when in the neighbourhood, bring me over a book, or come into my study with a smile to show me some interesting article he thought would prove of interest.

Being unused to society, I felt constrained to decline all the invitations he kindly gave; but though I could not make up my mind to go to his house for luncheon or dinner, that never prevented his coming to mine and eating a crust of bread and cheese, washed down by a glass of ale, or drinking a cup of tea when he sat to rest in my quiet room, after a long day's rambling beside the banks of Surrey's many streams.

The heart of no man given to unprofitable studies, to vague musings, to speculations concerning the wonders of creation, and the difficulties to be encountered in trying to reconcile the old vexed question of God's goodness, and the troubles of this

troublesome world, need have desired a better male companion than Mr. Granton.

He was not vivacious or amusing, or even particularly clever, but he had read and thought much; he had come in contact with men of different countries and various creeds, he had seen 'foreign parts,' as the dear phrase of old has it, and his talk was just dashed with that touch of pensive melancholy which is so peculiarly grateful to the listener whose mind happens to be at the moment a trifle out of tune with the world in general.

Happily I was able to keep him all to myself. By some especial piece of good fortune I happened to tell Bessie, when she first asked me about him, that he had been one of the directors of the 'Home and Foreign,' and that he was in the neighbourhood for the sake of the fishing.

Hearing this and no more, imagining he was a mere lodger at some village inn, and seeing that he was not young or likely, or, as she expressed herself, 'one of her sort,' she took no more interest in the subject, and I judiciously refrained from enlarging upon it.

Had she known he owned a most lovely little

house, set about with gardens and shrubberies and lawns sloping to the river; a house furnished, as I saw the only time I entered it in those days, in the most exquisite fashion, and filled with art treasures; the house of a man possessed of most cultivated tastes and ample means of gratifying them, Bessie would have given me no peace till she was made free of that paradise.

As matters were, she rarely came into the room upon the occasion of any of Mr. Granton's visits.

'He looks even older than you, uncle,' she explained with a charming frankness; 'and I can't understand what you talk about. It always seems so dry;' for which reasons, and probably for others best known to herself, Bessie left me to enjoy the society of this congenial friend in peace.

After Miss Dodman had been with us for some time, Bessie caught cold; and as she consequently declined to give us the pleasure of her society downstairs, and would not hear of our visitor 'imprisoning herself in a sick-room,' that young lady and I were naturally thrown much together.

It was then Miss Dodman began to show me those little attentions which, no doubt, caused her

to be 'always wanted,' as she told me she was, in her own home.

In those days Miss Dodman asked if she might be allowed to pour out my morning coffee for me; and over the breakfast-table I learned, by degrees, more of the Dodman family than I ever desired to know.

'Papa does work so hard,' his daughter told me. 'If he had more capital, of course he could spare himself a little; but, as he says, almost all his capital is invested in children.'

'Papa sometimes says he wishes I had been a boy. I could have been of great help to him by this time. But just fancy, the four eldest of us are girls! It is too dreadful, is it not?' And so on, and so on, till really occasionally I caught myself wishing that the Dodman family had never existed.

All this was very ungrateful on my part, as Miss Dodman, left to her own devices, busied herself about fifty little things Bessie never dreamed of attending to.

That I never grew to like Miss Dodman's society —that I never found it in the slightest degree soothing or congenial or interesting, it is, perhaps, un-

necessary for me to say; but in comparison with Bessie she seemed absolutely intellectual; whilst, without any comparison at all, her cheerfulness and her bright good humour were delightful to see. True, Mrs. Brooker said to Peter, the gardener and odd man, while he was one day shaking some pieces of carpet, 'Eh! that Miss Dodman is a sly one—a deep artful young snake,' but the remark did not affect my estimate of Bessie's friend. Naturally Mrs. Brooker did not like my visitors; and she was too careful for me to overhear her opinion of the last of them to leave much doubt on my mind as to her object.

What troubled me far more than the housekeeper's disapproval was the way in which Bessie refused to be convalescent. The doctor said there was not much the matter with her, and that she would be better down-stairs than keeping her own apartment; but a full fortnight elapsed before we could induce her to show herself in the drawing-room, and for ten days more I was forced to make myself so far agreeable to Miss Dodman as to take her out for long walks, in which she declared she especially delighted; or for little excursions upon

the water, when she told me she had 'never been so happy before in all her life.'

During the whole of this time Mr. Granton happened to be absent; never permanently resident at Thamesford, he came and went as the fancy seized him, or as the necessities of business and the calls of pleasure prompted. He had gone to Paris for a week, and remained away so long that I had almost forgotten to expect his return, when one morning, as I and Miss Dodman were waiting to cross the ferry to Thamesford, Mr. Granton himself stepped out of the boat.

'I have only been back a few days,' he said, after the first interchange of greetings; 'and I was going to look you up this afternoon, on my way back from Reedbourne, where I have some business to transact; but as I see you are bound for the other side of the river, I will call some other time.'

'We are only going across the ferry in order to walk back over the bridge, a mile further on,' I answered. 'We shall be home in less than an hour, and I do hope you will turn in to The Snuggery.'

'Then I will,' he answered, with his own pleasant smile; and we parted.

When he called we were about to sit down to our early dinner, at which meal I asked him to join us.

Bessie, still giving herself the airs of an invalid, coquetted with cold lamb, and toyed with gooseberry tart, and answered such remarks as Mr. Granton addressed to her with the air of one who should say,

'Cannot you let me alone? Is it possible you fail to see how ill I have been?'

For this reason possibly our guest turned his attention to Miss Dodman, who brought a good healthy appetite to bear upon the simple viands, and said, quite openly, that she was 'very hungry indeed.'

Mr. Granton devoted a good deal of attention to her; asked her how she liked Surrey, whether she had ever been at Reedbourne before, talked to her about the various points of interest in the neighbourhood, and made himself—so Bessie subsequently declared, with that little toss of her head, the meaning of which I had learned so well—'quite agreeable.'

That he should have done so surprised me, I confess, a little; but what surprised me still more was the curious expression with which, from the

window of my study, he afterwards watched Miss Dodman and Bessie strolling about the garden with arms encircling each the other's waist.

'Seems a bright clever sort of a girl,' he commented. 'Did you say she was a relative?'

I explained. I told how it chanced that Bessie had come to Reedbourne, and why Miss Dodman was invited to solace her loneliness. I added I did not consider the young lady clever, but that she was most adaptable and good-natured.

'I fancy she is clever in her own way,' he remarked. 'And this illness of your niece—has she been ailing long?'

For answer, I said that I did not think there had ever been much the matter with Bessie, and that I was quite sure there was nothing the matter with her now.

'You have not thought about sending her from home, I suppose—to the seaside, for instance?'

'I have not,' I replied; 'but I will do so if the doctor considers a change necessary. I am afraid you fancy she looks delicate.'

'Frankly,' he returned, 'I don't think she looks nearly so ill as you. What is the matter?'

I did not answer him for a moment, but then I said,

'I have met with a trouble. I am trying to live it down.'

'But not succeeding very admirably, I fear, in the endeavour.'

'You are right; I am not succeeding.'

'You stand more in need of a change, I fancy, than your niece.'

'Perhaps so; I had not thought of a change being advisable for either.'

He did not pursue the subject; neither did he greatly prolong his visit. Before leaving, however, he reverted to Miss Dodman.

'Did I understand you to say that her father is in business as a commission agent?'

'Yes,' I replied, wondering at the interest he evinced in the Dodman connection; 'his office is in Lawrence-lane, I think.'

'Pushing sort of man—assured manner—"hail fellow well met"—"I'm the equal of anybody" kind of person?'

'I have never seen him,' I explained.

'He lives somewhere to the south of London, and

has a delicate wife and a tribe of children—most of them girls.'

'Maggie's father lives at Camberwell, and she has three brothers and five sisters, I believe. Do you know anything of Mr. Dodman—you seem interested in the family?'

'I know something of Mr. Dodman, and I am rather interested in the family,' he answered with a smile, the meaning of which I could not then understand.

A week went by, and though Bessie confessed to feeling better, she still threw Miss Dodman upon me for such amusement as my company might afford. Twice, therefore, when we were out together, we met Mr. Granton, and each time he talked more to that young lady than I could exactly comprehend.

One morning early I stole away by myself without asking for her society, or running the risk of having it forced, by politeness, upon me.

The first post had brought me a letter written upon foreign paper, and in a difficult hand, which I desired to re-read and ponder over in solitude, for it came from Adelaide's mother, and was full of, to me, disquieting matter.

'She had,' the writer said, 'no other friend of her beloved child's to whom she could speak freely without hesitancy but to me. Her heart was in suspense—her mind had a terror. Did I know, could I tell her, good of the Baron to whom her daughter confided herself? The letters, so few, so seldom, of Adelaide cherished, informed her nothing of the dear one's happiness; and she was told—ah! yes, and this it was which filled her with apprehensions frightful—that the Baron was not an honourable sir, as became his rank, but a gambler, a spendthrift, a one notorious.

'Before her marriage Adelaide wearied never of sending home gifts; but now there came not any, not no more.' She begged me to understand that 'of them she had in "these days" no need; she was well off; but she knew too much the mind of her daughter to doubt of her boundless generosity if the stories whispered were untrue. She panted to know what I could tell her—I, the dear friend, cherished of Adelaide, when she was so poor, so lonely, so unfriended, would I pardon, and would I write? Would I retain her confidence given, in the sacredness of my own bosom? Would I forgive

the anxiety of Adelaide's mother, and, for one so dear to both, think no wonder that she made opportunity for to send this letter? If I could but tell her Adelaide was happy, it would be that she should make herself also happy—content, even though she saw her child no more.'

It was the loveliest morning imaginable. On the banks of the Reed all the wild flowers that blossom in July seemed to be growing and blowing —tansy, meadow-sweet (called, for some reason, by the poorer classes in that neighbourhood, dead-man's blossom), apple-pie, burdock, sorrel, cow-parsley, nettles, forget-me-not, the impudent-looking little monkey plant, ragged robin, together with reeds, rushes, and long rank grass, were all opening out their various colours, and growing in a wild tangle of glorious profusion beside the quiet stream, upon the surface of which king's cobs bloomed and water-lilies floated. To the left of the path was a ravine, the sides covered with thorn bushes, whence the flowers had long departed, and where green haws were already forming. At the bottom rippled a tiny stream; and amongst the blackberries and the wild rose bushes, on which the hips would soon be red,

woodruff was giving out its fresh sweet scent, and briony and convolvulus and nightshade were clinging to and climbing around stem and branch and leaf.

A right royal show, one a king might have viewed with pleasure ; and as I walked along, miserable about her, wondering how it was really faring with the woman who had grown into my very life, the thought so long ago put aside as vain, recurred to me—'What would *she* think of this ? Would not all this beauty appeal to *her* as it does to me ?'

On I went. I can see the landscape changing and changing as I write. Now within sound of aspens rustling, though no breath of wind shook the leaves of any other tree. Now across a murmuring weir, adown which the waters glided softly ; now looking to where, in a once well-kept park, two great cedars looked darkly and grandly at the farmer's cattle grazing upon the turf set apart in former times for deer ; then, beside a mill the clock of which had stopped years before at exactly half-past two ; then over a foot-bridge, raised so high in the middle that I could see for miles over the fair country steeped in sunshine ; then down into green meadows, and along a path close to the widening

river; then a pause, to look at a distant homestead where, beside the red-tiled barns, the well-dried hay was being carried and stacked.

Ay, even to the horses coming across the stream so broad and shallow, where on the one side the pollards, newly topped, stand out brown and bare against the sky, and, on the other, gaily painted boats are drawn up on the shingle—it all comes back to me more vividly than in a photograph. I can see the loose harness reflected in the water, the figures of the carters as they sit sideways on the horses, their legs dangling while they jog with each movement of the animals; there is a willow down by the lock-house further on, bending tenderly towards the river; I can hear the rough 'whoop!' and the gruff 'come up!' of the men addressing their clumsy steeds; the soft regular plash of oars plied by some one who understands his work. Clear and distinct from the distant ferry rises the cry of 'O—ver,' and then I know the Thames is close at hand, and that the stream dividing those green fields beyond is but the backwater from the weir beyond the lock.

I shall go a little further still to a quiet spot I wot of; and there, whence I can see the gray tower

of that old church on the opposite bank, and a bosky ait where the swans live when they are at home, I will re-read the letter written by Adelaide's mother, and try to satisfy myself that there must be some mistake; that the loving tender maiden, who was so sweet, and gentle, and confiding, cannot have spoiled her life by marrying a man incapable of appreciating the beauty and nobility of her unselfish nature.

CHAPTER IX.

AN INCREDIBLE SUGGESTION.

The hours passed by, and it was nigh noon. Midway in the river, in that bosky ait where the young cygnets were reared, there might be coolness and shadow, but on land certainly nowhere else in the Valley of the Thames. One of the mysteries I have yet to solve is the reason why in that favoured region there is no shelter, and there is no shade. The rain beats, the wind howls, the heat of the sun pours down; and though there are trees and hedges, there never seems tree nor hedge that can save from drenching or sunstroke, or prevent a wanton breeze snatching off your hat and making merry over the misfortune.

To come back to what I was saying. There was no shade, and, spite of all my misery, at length feeling the heat more than I could endure, I arose to seek a different place of rest, when I confronted Mr. Granton.

'I am so happy to meet you at last alone,' he said.

Still with that feeling upon me of desiring quiet and shade, I put out my hand and answered 'that I was glad to see him.'

'You are troubled about something,' he went on kindly.

'Yes,' I answered; 'it is the old trouble—only now it has taken a different form.'

'Can I help you?' he asked.

'You forget,' I answered, 'that I was left a legacy, and that I am, comparatively speaking, rich. If money could help me I should need no help, having it.'

He smiled—a kind compassionate smile—while he replied, 'Money is new to you, but, believe me, after all, money is very little.'

I knew it. Much as money should have done for me, it had brought me very little. At that moment I could have written sermons about its utter worthlessness.

'You have not been looking well for some time past,' he said, understanding, perhaps, that reference to my grief was like the fretting of a wound. 'Why

do you not try a change of scene and air? Solitude is all very well, but like most other good things it is possible to have too much of it.'

'I wish I had,' I groaned, thinking of my niece's even flow of inane babble, of the exasperating mediocrity of Miss Dodman's eternally smiling, round, red-and-white, milkmaid type of face.

Mr. Granton looked at me curiously, then remarked,

'By the bye, that reminds me I was going to ask if Miss Dodman's visit is to last much longer?'

'I do not know, I am sure,' I answered, wondering at the interest he seemed to take in that very commonplace young lady. 'She is always saying she has stopped an unreasonable time, and then when I beg her to remain, she replies that *she* will be only too glad if her papa raises no objection, but *he* is so particular, and so much afraid of any of them out-staying their welcome.'

'Practically, however, he never does raise any objection?' said Mr. Granton.

'It would seem not, for she stays.'

'And you are glad, I conclude, that she does stay?'

'I ought to be. It is a relief to know my niece has a companion whom she seems to like.'

'I wonder,' began Mr. Granton after a slight pause, 'whether you will be offended by my advising you to take Miss Dodman at her word the next time she suggests returning to her family?'

'I certainly am not offended,' I answered, 'but I confess I feel a little surprised.'

'And you wish, naturally, to know my reasons for tendering such counsel. They are extremely simple. You ought to let Miss Dodman go as soon as possible, unless you wish her to remain altogether.'

'I do not want her to remain permanently; at one time I did think of proposing that she should stay as a companion to Bessie—a salaried companion, you understand—but I rejected the idea, though I think both the girls would have liked such an arrangement.'

'I am pretty sure that is not exactly the arrangement they desire,' he said. 'The thing they do want is that Miss Dodman should remain here as your wife.'

'What!' I exclaimed.

In the extremity of my astonishment I stood quite still and stared at Mr. Granton, who broke into the first fit of genuine merriment in which I had ever known him indulge. Looking upon me, he laughed long and uncontrollably—laughed till the tears came into his eyes—laughed after he had wiped them away.

'I beg a thousand pardons,' he said, 'but it was irresistible.'

And, indeed, I must have seemed a ludicrous candidate for matrimonial honours, standing there with mouth and eyes wide open, limp with amazement, dumb with intensity of astonishment—an old-fashioned elderly man, clad in black garments that had pertained to the days of my struggling clerkship—destitute of any grace of manner or beauty of person likely to find favour in a woman's eyes.

'The notion never occurred to you, I see,' remarked Mr. Granton, with difficulty composing his features into an expression of befitting gravity.

'Good Heavens, no!' I answered. 'It is impossible it ever occurred to her—utterly, totally impossible.'

'Believe me, it is not only possible, but certain.

If I were in the habit of making bets, I would stake a large sum that Miss Dodman has been playing her cards to win Mr. Cheverley.'

'This is dreadful,' I exclaimed. 'It is such a frightful idea that I cannot realise it.'

'Afraid to realise the fact of your happiness!' said Mr. Granton, laughing again. 'Come, confess you have all along cherished a secret, and, as you imagined, unrequited attachment for the young lady.'

I laid my hand on his arm.

'Do not jest about the matter,' I entreated, 'but tell me what induces you to believe the girl ever thought of anything so monstrous, so inconceivable?'

'I can't say,' he replied; 'the first time I saw her the notion flashed through my mind. I thought about her afterwards; in fact, I could not help thinking about her; then I began to suspect that she and your niece were in league—that Miss Bessie's illness was half assumed in order to throw you and Miss Dodman together. If it were not for the father, the matter might never become serious; but Dodman has been stretching his hands out after "capital" ever since I knew anything of him, and,

unless you are very careful, he will try to screw money out of you by threatening a "breach of promise."'

'What ought I to do?'

'I should try to get the girl out of the house. When next she proposes going, do not ask her to stop. You might find it necessary to leave home for a short time. Whatever you do, try to accomplish your object quietly and naturally. Think the matter over for twenty-four hours; then make up your mind to adopt some course, and stick to it.'

Like one in a dream, I walked slowly homeward. If I had been going to execution I could not have felt more reluctant to enter The Snuggery. I own I did not—I could not—believe Mr. Granton to be other than mistaken in his opinion; but still there was a horrible possibility about the whole thing which fascinated, even while it revolted me.

How, having heard what I had heard—how, with such an idea forced upon my consideration—could I meet those two girls; listen to Bessie's prattle, and thank Miss Dodman for those little attentions which Mr. Granton implied were but so much love-making?

Love-making! Pah! The very phrase made me feel sick. Already I seemed to loathe the memory of Miss Dodman's round face and red cheeks, and blue eyes and brown hair. I could not meet her—not then, at all events. It was so intolerably hot, and the roads were so destitute of shadow, that I must get under shelter somewhere, but I would not go into the house. At the bottom of the garden there stood an old arbour, a rough affair, but dark and cool; there I resolved to consider out the affair. It was easy to slip unperceived through the gate leading from the paddock to the moss-covered walks; and as I knew the arbour was not a place affected by my niece and her guest, I felt certain I should be able to rest there in peace, and gather together my scattered senses without the fear of being exposed to intrusion.

Putting aside the tangle of hops which shaded the entrance, I entered the summer-house and sat down. I was tired, I was warm. I had tasted nothing all day save a cup of milk swallowed before setting out on my hurried ramble. Mrs. Lemberg's letter, and Mr. Granton's caution, had both, in their way, disquieted me. Excitement of any kind was new

and agitating. I could not remember when I had felt so weary. With a feeling of relief upon me, I stretched out my limbs, leaned my head back against the rough unbarked pine slabs which formed the walls of the cool retreat, looked for a few minutes with half-shut eyes at the tracery of leaves festooning the doorway, and then sank softly and gradually to sleep.

I must have been asleep over an hour, when I began slowly to awake, and, still scarcely conscious whether I was dreaming or not, heard the sound of voices close beside me. Some persons were evidently talking just outside the summer-house. The hedge which divided the kitchen-garden from the fields adjacent was, at that particular spot, well shaded by a fine old walnut-tree; and on the green bank, beneath its branches, I soon found Miss Dodman and my niece had ensconced themselves, and were chattering away like a dozen sparrows.

'And you are quite certain, dear, we shall live in London?' It was my niece who uttered these words.

'Of course—do you suppose I would live here?' answered Miss Dodman.

'Won't it be delightful?' exclaimed Bessie ecstatically. 'After being buried alive in this stupid place, I shall not know what to do for joy. Tell me all about it over again, Maggie—about what we shall do when you have the management of everything. You have not changed your mind about the carriage?'

'No,' said Miss Dodman decidedly, 'we must have a carriage. It would never do to go about in hired things.'

'And we shall drive in the Park,' continued Bessie with a silly chuckle.

'And have a box at the Opera, and never be a single evening at home, except when we ourselves "receive,"' capped Maggie.

'There is only one thing, Maggie, which troubles me,' said Bessie, hesitating.

'What is that?' asked Miss Dodman, a little sharply.

'Well, you know, dear—now, Maggie, you must not be angry—that at the beginning he had only ten thousand pounds, and he must have spent some of that; and ten thousand pounds at five per cent *can't* make more than five hundred a year—ten pounds a

week; and I don't see, darling, how we are to keep carriages and go to the Opera, and have everything we want for thirty shillings a day; and it won't be *quite* thirty shillings either.'

'You little stupid, he must go and make money. He will have to be taken away from those ridiculous books, and taught how to make ten thousand a year. I think we might manage on that, what do you say, Bessie?'

'Ten thousand a year!' repeated the young lady. 'It takes away my breath!'

'It does not take away mine,' retorted Miss Dodman.

'But how in the world is uncle to make ten thousand a year? I don't believe he had much more than a hundred at the insurance office.'

'Pooh!' said the other. 'That was quite a different affair. With capital pa declares anybody can do anything. He calls it the Archimedean screw.'

'When do you think it will be, dear?' asked my niece a little irrelevantly.

'When do I think what will be? O, you mean the marriage! Well, he has still got to ask me, you know.'

'I should fancy he would do that very soon.'

'I'm sure I do not know—he is very slow about it. I never did meet with anybody so slow before; but I daresay it is only his old-fashioned way. I feel satisfied he is very fond of me.'

'There can't be any doubt about that,' said Bessie briskly. 'Did you notice how carefully he put the rose you gave him yesterday in water?'

'Yes; and when I expressed a wish to see the *Queen* for the last week, how soon he went to the station and ordered it down!'

'And how he jumped at the notion of taking us both to Windsor, Maggie darling!'

'He is very kind in his way,' remarked 'Maggie darling' pensively. 'I shall be able to do what I like with him.'

'I am certain you will, dear. I wonder where he has gone?'

'London, most likely. Mrs. Brooker said he seemed in a hurry, as if he wanted to catch a train.'

'Perhaps he has gone to speak to your papa.'

'He will speak to me first, I fancy,' answered Miss Dodman, with a little triumphant laugh. 'Have we not sat here long enough, Bessie? It is

getting a little cooler now; let us go down to the river. There are sure to be plenty of people on it such a day as this.'

They were gone. Fainter and fainter grew the sound of their voices, as they wandered across the paddock, and so off to the Thames by the path I had come.

Though not an eavesdropper by habit or nature, it never occurred to me either to move away while they were speaking, or to make my presence known.

Candidly, I confess I felt no compunction about the matter. If a plot for murdering me had been in process of hatching under the walnut-tree, I should have listened to its details with much the same feeling as I listened to these two girls arranging the future of my life according to their ideas of what that future ought to be.

Why, O why, had I been so blind—so foolish? How could I have remained so ignorant as not to realise that if a man be only rich and a bachelor, some woman will be found tenderly anxious to share the burden of his wealth with him?

Thought I had gone to London, did they? Well, they should not find themselves mistaken on that

point. I looked at my watch; there would be a train for Waterloo in less than an hour.

Away from Reedbourne, I could arrange some plan of action—decide on the best course to pursue.

'Shall you be back to-night, sir?' asked Mrs. Brooker, as I stood folding up my umbrella into that careful symmetry of form I delighted to behold.

'I do not think I shall be back for a few days,' I answered; and so departed.

Arrived in town, I went straight to my former lodgings, where the landlady received me with effusion.

How strange it seemed! The old surroundings—the old sounds—the old atmosphere—nothing changed, save that my former landlady's cap looked dirtier and her dress dingier than of yore, and that, where my book-shelves had stood, there hung two engravings, one Ruth, the other John the Baptist. Nothing much changed save myself. There was the narrow strip of garden-ground on which she and I had looked out upon that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday morning when we partook of breakfast together. There was the remembered mirror over the mantelpiece, in which I had seen her dear face reflected.

There was the easy-chair in which I had sat alone for so many, many solitary evenings. It all came back, as the waves brought the dead past for a moment to the shores of the present: the monotony, the drudgery, the round of dreary work, the years in which I had grown accustomed to my labour as perhaps the brutes grow accustomed to theirs. But a few hours previously I could have preached homilies about the vanity of riches; now, being brought once again face to face with the realities of the time when I was poor, I felt as if I must fall on my knees and thank God for having delivered me from penury, brought me out of that land of stultifying bondage, into a fair country full of leisure, and freedom, and beauty.

In that moment it came to me that I had failed to employ my wealth as I ought to have done. I had been delivered from one narrow life, and at once and voluntarily taken up another differing in its nature, but hardly in its degree; still a snail in an accustomed shell, I had but moved my position. From necessity, for years I led a life of the merest routine; and when I could have left it, I found myself leading a routine existence still.

Well, it is never too late to mend, never, and it was not too late for me. Walking that evening through the familiar streets, I decided upon my plans; I settled what I would do with a little of my future.

I would travel; I would see something of the world, something of my fellow-creatures. I would try to shake off part of the shyness which had ever paralysed so many of my best efforts; and if I could not be brilliant or clever or remarkable in any way —all of which, indeed, I knew to be impossible—I would endeavour to be human, and know something more of my kind than I had yet done; and see whether there was no string in my own nature which might produce a melody when touched even by unaccustomed fingers.

Yes, I would cast aside my shell, and go out into the world instead of shrinking from all contact with it.

Before doing anything, however, it would, I felt, be necessary to dispose of Bessie.

Ever since we lived in the same house, we had been like two dogs coupled unwillingly together, and each pulling a contrary way.

What I liked she disliked—the things I disliked she liked. It might, indeed, be no blame to her, but it was torture to me, that in all respects we were so dissimilar.

Never was it possible we could become congenial. Better, far better, therefore, that she should go her way and I mine, than try to maintain the relations which had failed so signally. But then arose the question, Where could she go? in what direction would it be right to permit her to wander? In any well-regulated home she must prove not only miserable herself, but the cause of misery to others. To send her amongst intellectual people would be a vain attempt to alter that which was unalterable. The more I considered the question the more it perplexed me, the more hopeless seemed any possible solution to such an enigma. At length I decided upon asking Mr. Granton's advice.

By return of post came his answer:

'Delighted to hear you have resolved to travel. A year passed abroad will prove a year well spent. Concerning the young lady, I should, if in your place, ask Mrs. Dodman whether she knows of any family who would receive her for the sum you men-

tion. Should the arrangement seem desirable to her, Mrs. Dodman could propose for your niece to live with them. I know the objection you will at once raise to such a plan, but the advantages connected with it are these: Miss Richards likes, or professes to like, the family. If you send her to reside elsewhere, she will at once begin to pine for those she regards as friends; whereas, should she disagree with them, as after a time I imagine she will be almost sure to do, you can then propose some other course more, perhaps, in accordance with your own views. Further, in the future she may be more amenable than I suspect you will find her at present, while the arrangement will conciliate the Dodmans—a not unimportant point to be considered.'

It was not the advice I had expected, neither was it quite the advice I liked, but I had asked Mr. Granton's opinion, and determined to be guided by what he said; and, because his words sounded over-worldly, I did not mean to shut my ears to the common sense they contained.

There were many things I should have preferred to seeking an interview with Mrs. Dodman, but

evidently the thing must be gone through; and before midday I started for Camberwell.

When I arrived at the house I sought—that of the gentleman who was always looking out for capital—I found the hall-door ajar, kept open, in fact, by the foot of a very irate individual who was addressing some exceedingly unpleasant remarks to a slatternly servant, evidently anxious to get rid of him. I had lived too long in lodgings where the landladies were sometimes impecunious, and always a little behind with their tradespeople, not to recognise in the angry creditor a purveyor of milk.

Why that harmless fluid should exercise the influence it does upon those who deal in it has always amazed me. There is nothing mild, I warrant, about the man whose daily dues in the way of halfpence and pence are suffered to fall into arrear.

'It ain't no use to speak to me,' said Mr. Dodman's servant, at length goaded into indignant retort; 'I don't owe you nothing. Keep your langwidge for them as does.'

'That is just what I mean to do,' was the answer. 'I want them to hear me. I wish to tell them I can't and I won't put up with their promises

any longer. I will stand here till I see somebody. I will take out a county court summons—'

'Suppose in the mean time you allow me to pass,' I suggested. 'Is Mrs. Dodman at home?' I went on, speaking to the woman, who now—as the man stepped back a pace or two—opened the door for me to enter.

'After you, sir,' suggested the dairyman, who, equal to the change of position, followed close upon my heels into the house. 'I'll just wait till I can see your mistress,' he added, and took up a position in the hall.

It was a poor house—a poor dingy house with thin walls, and imperfectly fastening doors; and I could not avoid hearing the dialogue which ensued between Mrs. Dodman and the importunate creditor, while I waited for her in the parlour.

After a little delay Mrs. Dodman entered, looking flushed and weary; after all, such scenes do take a considerable amount out of even the most hardened of debtors.

'I am sorry to have kept you waiting,' she said, and sat down, a mass of good-natured untidiness in a room strewed with work of every description; a

room so disorderly that I at once felt Bessie's heart would have rejoiced at sight of it.

In five minutes I had explained the nature of my errand; in one, Mrs. Dodman jumped at the suggestion.

'We always were very glad to have your niece with us, Mr. Cheverley,' she said; 'and I think she used to be happy here. So you need not be looking any further afield for a safe place to bestow her while you are out of England, and—well, I do not like the idea of taking any money for her, especially after your kindness to Maggie; but we are not rich—we are not indeed,' she repeated, as though fearful I should imagine they were millionaires; 'and if it will really be more satisfactory to you—'

It was so much more satisfactory to me that when, a little later on, I walked out of the house—having left behind me a cheque for Bessie's first quarter in the 'Maison Dodman'—I regarded the dairyman, whom I again encountered, quite in the light of an old acquaintance, and addressed him in a friendly manner.

It grieves me to say that he did not reciprocate my civility, but made me an answer which, though

spoken under his breath, was perfectly audible, and coupled me and the Dodmans together in a manner that at any other time must have proved hurtful to my vanity.

CHAPTER X.

TO BE LET.

Having thus rid myself of my encumbrances, it was astonishing how naturally and eagerly my thoughts turned to foreign travel.

It seems to be a law of Nature, and a merciful one, that those who are tied hand and foot by the necessities of their position should become such creatures of habit as to feel the prospect of change distasteful; whilst others of their fellows who are able to indulge their caprices find that appetite grows with what it feeds on. After all, it is but the eternal *ego*, which is as strong in the breast of the man who has only the beauties of his suburban place of dwelling to contemplate, as in him who may be here to-day and *en route* for St. Petersburg to-morrow.

And thus, when I had realised to myself that it was actually possible for Reedbourne to continue its course without the presence of Reuben Cheverley, as London, which had been my habitation for a very

much longer period, seemed able to do, I began, I believe, to disparage my dwelling and the village near which it was situated. Often I caught myself considering what a good thing it was I should be far distant before the floods were out again and the snow lying on the roads, before the dark nights came, with lamp lighted at four o'clock, and the long hours stretching away in dim gloominess until bed-time.

Foreign lands were about to be honoured with my presence, and I therefore commenced to regard those lands with favour. I approached works of travel in quite another spirit from any which had ever previously possessed me; and I caught myself repeating sentences in strange languages, and holding imaginary conversations in unwonted tongues, about what had hitherto seemed the most ordinary affairs of life.

Already I was beginning mentally to say, 'Those cabbages need not be planted; *I* shall not be here.' 'There can be no necessity to talk about earthing up that celery; *I* shall not now require it;' and indeed, had it not been that the man who saw after such details remarked, 'Whoever comes, master,

while you are away, will be glad of a dish of greens;' and 'We had best plant out them broccoli; most gentlefolks are main fond of it as a change from roots'—I fear the next occupant would have come badly off for winter vegetables.

The charm of the place I had thought to make a home was gone. Poor fool! As children set cut flowers in their little gardens, and caper for joy to see the goodly show, unconscious that in a few hours all the beauty the *parterre* contains will be past and gone, so I had planted without root, and behold, where I hoped to gather was barrenness; where I had thought to cull bright roses, I reaped but thorns of disappointment.

I had dreamed my dream, and it was over. Let who would see visions, I should behold mine no more. The subjective life which had sufficed for me once could in the future prove nothing but a mistake. I would leave Reedbourne, and, crossing the Channel, strive in strange lands and among strange people to begin—now I was no longer even middle-aged—a new existence, broader, wider, more cosmopolitan than any I had ever previously conceived of, as being possible for myself.

The man, however, who has for thirty-five years been careful about pennies is scarcely likely ever to become careless with reference to pounds; and, anxious as I felt to commence my travels, I had no intention of doing so till a tenant was found for The Snuggery. Disenchanted as I was with my purchase, I understood too well the advantages of having a spot of earth one can call 'home,' to part lightly with the little freehold, otherwise I should have sold the house and land, and disposed of the furniture by auction.

As matters stood, I adhered to the design I had conceived of letting the place 'Furnished;' and though those who 'came to view' inflicted upon me humiliations innumerable, that design was at length achieved.

If ever a man wants to know the opinion of society concerning his residence, he has only to try and let it, and not an imperfection but will be candidly pointed out.

At last I was at one with Mrs. Turtle; at last I understood what she must have suffered at the hands of her sister-women.

There is no law powerful enough to compel any

one to take a house he does not like, except, indeed, necessity; and why, therefore, the ladies who came to look over The Snuggery should have treated me with a lofty disdain, and the house with contempt, I am quite unable to explain.

Mindful of my own house-hunting experiences, I endeavoured so to word the advertisement as to convey a fairly accurate idea of the cottage and its appointments; but had the description been that of a palatial residence, the persons who came to look at it could not have expressed more bitter disappointment, or louder indignation with the reality.

At the time I marvelled what these people, who all came from the regulation six or eight roomed houses in the suburbs, really wanted; but I know now.

Their *beau idéal* of a residence was a London villa, with abundance of steps, stucco, varnish, and pretension. In the days when a stroll in the summer evenings, and a walk out to the more distant suburbs, were among the few pleasures of a routine life, I used to marvel at the 'genteel residences' I beheld run up by builders, and pity the human beings compelled to inhabit them.

That is an old story now; and the surprise is past as well as the pity. Supply, as a rule, means demand; and there can be no question but the present producers of eligible residences understand perfectly the tastes of those for whom they have to cater.

In my ignorance I had imagined The Snuggery to be a place any gentleman of limited means might have been glad to rent; but the ladies taught me my error. Though why they should have considered it necessary to insult me into the bargain, and, keeping only one poor little maid-of-all-work, flourish about housemaids' and butlers' pantries and china closets and back staircases, is difficult to understand.

I might have completely lost heart as to the chances of ever letting my country residence had I not happened to get into correspondence concerning it with a gentleman who seemed to have the rare merit of himself understanding what he wanted. His letters were clear and to the purpose; and though he did ask an infinite number of questions, he sent them in list order, so that I experienced no more

difficulty in answering them, than I should in filling up an insurance form.

'I want an inexpensive place in the country,' at length he wrote. 'From the description you give I imagine your house may prove suitable; and if you are likely to be at leisure next Friday afternoon, I will run down to Reedbourne by the train which leaves Waterloo a little after two. Should Friday be inconvenient, I will try to get away on Monday.'

To which I replied that Friday would suit me very well indeed, and that I should hope to see him by the train named.

In expectation of his visit the walks were rolled and the grass mown, the house swept and garnished, the straggling branches of the rose-trees nailed up, the flower-beds raked and weeded, the kitchen-garden relieved of haulms and pea-sticks; the windows set wide open to let in the breeze, and the blinds drawn close to keep out the sun; the furniture arranged so as to display its beauties to the greatest advantage, and the kitchen hearth swept, and a huge iron kettle hung on to boil.

We were all in readiness: Matthew in the stable grooming the melancholy-looking horse; Mrs.

Brooker in a new cap; myself trying to read Macaulay's 'Essay on Robert Montgomery,' when a loud rat-tat-tat of the knocker, followed by a sharp peal of the bell, announced visitors.

'Mr. Rodewald, sir,' said Mrs. Brooker, in her best manner, throwing open the study door, and ushering in two gentlemen, one of whom held out his hand, and saying, 'Mr. Cheverley, I presume,' declared his name to be Rodewald, and adding that he had taken the liberty of bringing a friend with him, begged to introduce 'Mr. Smith.'

'I think Mr. Smith and I have met before,' I observed, recognising, in the individual before me, the gaunt and mirthless stranger of Coster-square.

'Eh! how's this, Smith? You did not tell me you were acquainted with Mr. Cheverley.' And Mr. Rodewald turned upon his companion with quick suspicion.

'My acquaintance with Mr. Cheverley is of the slightest,' answered Mr. Smith. 'If I had known he was the owner of this place I could have told you we walked back from a lecture one night together.'

'What a strange coincidence your meeting here!' remarked Mr. Rodewald.

'All coincidences are accounted strange. I am sure I don't know why,' commented Mr. Smith.

'Will you rest for a little while, or should you first like to look round the house?' I asked, feeling it might be well to change the conversation.

'I should like to look round the house,' answered Mr. Rodewald briskly. 'What do you say, Smith?'

'That, with Mr. Cheverley's permission, I will remain here. *I* am not going to take the place.'

'What a strange fellow you are!'

'I am a tired fellow,' said the other. 'Mr. Cheverley, have I permission to remain among your books?'

'Certainly; but I fear you will not find much to your taste upon my shelves.'

'Now, how can you possibly tell what my taste is?' he answered.

'Let us leave him to his own devices,' suggested Mr. Rodewald; adding, as we crossed the hall, 'He is in one of his contrary moods to-day. A singular fish, but clever—wonderfully clever.'

To this statement I made no answer, for the simple reason that none, which seemed suitable, occurred to me; and without further discursive con-

versation I showed Mr. Rodewald the house and garden, and yard and meadows.

By this time habit had rendered me pretty familiar with the lynx-eyedness of persons who came to view, but in the whole of my experience I never met with a man or woman so sharp-sighted, physically and mentally, as Mr. Rodewald. Before we had exhausted the premises I was reduced to a mere cipher. I felt myself in the presence of a master mind, of an individual capable of making the most out of the land; of causing a dozen blades of grass to grow where one had grown before; of obtaining unwonted crops out of the garden; of consuming those crops when fit for gathering; of inducing hens to lay all the year round; of having eatable bread baked at home; of fatting pigs in a very short space of time; of storing apples so that they should not decay; of getting twice the work out of man and beast I ever attempted; of managing a business in town, and yet keeping an eye upon the pettiest detail of household expenditure.

He had every element of success. Good health, a calm judgment, a cold heart, a calculating head. As he stood gazing up at the house I looked at

him intently, and the picture then taken on the canvas of memory has never faded.

A man under, rather than over, the middle height, stiffly built, not gaunt like his companion, or flabbily fat, like too many English people. A man who looked as if, on emergency, he could strike out straight from his shoulder, and prove as ready with his fists as he undoubtedly was with his tongue. In his youth possessed probably of a complexion clear red, clear white; but the suns and winds of many a year had browned the white and faded the red, and given a manly look to cheeks which might once have been effeminate. Light-brown hair, streaked here and there with gray—hair short, crisp, not curly; whiskers with a tinge of red running through the brown; a clean-shaved mouth and chin, an aquiline nose, blue eyes—keen, cold, quick, and intelligent; a broad forehead, a somewhat short neck, a head capacious enough to hold plenty of good or of evil—such were the items that went to make up Mr. Rodewald, standing a little in advance of me on the lawn, and looking up at the house.

'I think it will do,' he said, at last; 'but your terms won't. We can talk them over by and by;'

and he led the way back, as if he were already in possession.

'Mr. Smith will wonder at our long absence,' I remarked; for the inspection had, indeed, occupied a considerable time.

'O no, he won't!' answered Mr. Rodewald; 'he has been deep in some book, you may be quite sure; you never met such a creature as he is for reading. He would rather spell over an old directory than not read at all.'

'And you?' I asked.

'I can't read. Each man has his forte, and printed matter is not mine. I can read looks, though,' he went on, laughing. 'You are marvelling now what a practical man like myself and an unpractical man like Smith, can have in common.'

'Well, I confess, some such idea did cross my mind.'

'I knew it,' he said triumphantly. 'I knew exactly what you were thinking. At first sight it does seem unaccountable that we should be such friends; but if ever you see a very little woman, you may be sure that she has a tall husband; and it is

on the principle, I suppose, of the sympathy of opposites that I am so fond of Smith. We have not a single idea in common. He is clever in everything I do not understand. In the wisdom of this world he is a perfect child. He never will be rich—he never can be rich. His opinions are not my opinions, neither are my ways his ways; but still we have been friends for years, and I tell you honestly I could "better spare a better man."'

For answer I only inclined my head. The fact was, Mr. Rodewald's flow of talk, and Mr. Rodewald's easy assumption that the friendship professed towards Mr. Smith could only be regarded as an act of weakness and condescension on his part, checked even my modest trickle of conversation.

It seemed so simple a matter to listen to his utterances, so difficult to originate any utterances of one's own. Even Mr. Smith, I noticed, who had certainly evinced no reticence of speech as we walked that night through the rain together, was possessed in Mr. Rodewald's presence with a dumb spirit.

As if to belie his friend's statement concerning his love of reading, when we reëntered the study we found Mr. Smith sitting gloomily beside the open

window, his legs stretched out, his hands in his pockets, his thoughts apparently miles away.

'I believe he has been asleep,' exclaimed Mr. Rodewald, crossing the room and giving him a sounding thump on the back. 'Come, wake up, wake up! We have been all round the place, seen the garden, and the horse and cow, and cocks and hens.'

'You need not tell me you have seen everything there was to see, for I knew that already,' answered Mr. Smith, rising lazily, and stretching out a hand towards his hat. 'Time for us to be getting back to the station, is it not?'

'You will take a glass of wine?' I suggested hospitably; but both gentlemen declined my offer.

'Have a cup of tea, then?' I persisted; 'it can be ready in five minutes.'

Mr. Rodewald hesitated.

'We shall miss the train,' remarked Mr. Smith.

'Let us miss it,' said Mr. Rodewald decidedly. 'We have not the chance of drinking tea in the country every day, and since Mr. Cheverley is so kind—'

'I assure you the kindness is all on your side,' I interrupted hastily.

'This is delightful,' exclaimed Mr. Rodewald, rubbing his hands and walking to the open window. 'What do you think of the air, Smith? Is not it enough to make an old man young again?'

Mr. Smith did not answer. He gave one quick sad glance over the quiet landscape stretching away in the distance, and then, turning to the book-shelves, looked at the titles of the volumes I had collected in the course of a long and lonely life.

CHAPTER XI.

MR. RODEWALD.

We were at tea. Upon the whole Mrs. Brooker had provided an impromptu meal which, if unfashionable in the variety and abundance of the edibles set forth, at least did no discredit to the liberality of the house.

'I never was so hungry in my life,' observed Mr. Rodewald, helping himself to a second and plentiful plateful of cold ham. 'Why don't you eat, Smith?'

'Because I am not hungry,' answered Mr. Smith laconically; and then he finished his cup of tea, and asked for another with a solemnity which was perfectly appalling.

Upon the whole, I could not avoid feeling that Mr. Smith was somewhat of a wet blanket. He would not talk, he would not eat. When Mr. Rodewald addressed him he answered in the curtest manner possible; when I asked him a question, he replied in monosyllables; the only thing he seemed

to care for was tea, and that he drank in, to my mind, a comfortless and forlorn misanthropical manner, without cream or sugar.

All at once he unbent; cutting Mr. Rodewald short in a pleasing course of cross-examination, he said,

'Well, Mr. Cheverley, and so the daisies and the buttercups have not realised all your expectations. You have found Arcadia a trifle dull, and country life, though a charming idyl in theory, apt to become somewhat monotonous in practice.'

Mr. Rodewald laid down his knife and fork as his friend began his sentence, and when he had finished flashed a glance towards me, which said more plainly than any spoken words could have done, 'I am proud of this man; listen to him, he is very clever—that is why *I* have taken him up.'

It was the look a proud mother wears, when her show child opens its lips to delight an admiring audience with some precocious sentence; a schoolmaster's face might have assumed the same expression, the while a crack pupil was successfully undergoing some severe test of his learning. In a moment I seemed to arrive at a vague understanding of the

position. This was the patron to whom Mr. Smith had referred so slightly, and yet with such emphasis. In some way Mr. Rodewald was master of this gaunt, sad-faced, bitter-tongued man; held him as captive of his bow and spear, and dragged him at the chariot wheels of his own worldly prosperity—a goodly exposition of the difference between genius and success.

That glance was a revelation; and almost involuntarily I looked towards Mr. Smith to ascertain if he had observed it also. No, evidently not. He was playing with his teaspoon—fiddling idly with any object within reach, which is so characteristic of nervous and excitable people, his eyes turned towards my end of the table, waiting for an answer.

'I do not think I am tired of the country,' I said, wondering in my heart whether I was or not.

'And yet you want to leave it; want to leave this pretty little place where you have only set up your household gods for about a twelvemonth.'

'It is household gods he lacks,' interposed Mr. Rodewald. 'If there were half a dozen rosy faces gathered round this table, Mr. Cheverley would not desire to turn wanderer.'

'I was not speaking of children,' said Mr. Smith pettishly. 'Only of the Lares and Penates—the well-filled bookshelves, the neat and appropriate engravings, the comfortable easy-chair, the piano I heard you trying, the cocks and hens, the creepers trained about the windows; all these things I have been told become a part and parcel of a man's inner consciousness; and yet he is going to leave them—going to, figuratively, tear himself in sunder.'

'Parting with your household gods will never cause you a regret, I should think,' observed Mr. Rodewald.

'We are not talking now of John Smith, but of Mr. Cheverley,' retorted the other. 'Come,' he added, turning once more to me, 'confess, the country has proved a failure; the summer days have seemed long, and the winter evenings dreary; all the men have not proved honest, or all the women virtuous; you have found out that, even in the rural districts, there is a seamy side to life, which side is most frequently presented for consideration when one is living within earshot of the nightingales—within scent of the roses.'

'You may be quite right,' I answered; 'but really you must not come to me to decide the matter for you. I have nothing to confess, for I know almost as little of rural social existence as when I left London. If I were residing in Lamb's Conduit-street I could not be more ignorant of the inner life of Reedbourne than is the case now.'

'But, residing in the country, you must have become interested in the doings of its inhabitants?'

'I assure you, no. I care as little for them as they do for me.'

'Which may mean that you and they both care a great deal.'

'But which means nothing of the kind,' I replied. 'My reasons for wishing to leave Reedbourne for a time have nothing to do with the place or the people. I like the place as well as it is probable I shall ever like any place; and, for the people, I know nothing whatever about them.'

'But you have friends—society,' struck in Mr. Rodewald. 'There must be very good society in a neighbourhood such as this?'

'Very possibly; I know nothing about it.'

'But, my good sir, consider, you cannot have lived twelve months in the place without forming a connection of some sort?'

'You mean, I suppose, a visiting connection?' I said, thinking that there were some points in common between my niece and Mr. Rodewald. 'There are, I believe, people who do make acquaintances in the most unlikely places, but I am not one of them. I knew nobody at Reedbourne when I first came down to look at this cottage, and if I lived here for twenty years I do not suppose I should know anybody.'

'You except the clergyman, of course?' persisted Mr. Rodewald, clinging to straws.

'I except no one,' I answered firmly. 'If we come to terms about this place I can let you the house, but I can't let you society, not even that of the local clergy.'

'Evidently, then, you will not be expected to subscribe to the old women's flannel petticoat club, or the school-children's pocket-handkerchief ditto,' suggested Mr. Smith hopefully.

'Do be quiet for a minute,' said Mr. Rodewald.

'I want clearly to understand what Mr. Cheverley means. Do you really imply that you are not on speaking terms with your own rector?'

'Can't you let him alone, Rodewald?' asked Mr. Smith. 'He is evidently a pestilent Dissenter, or a malignant unbeliever, or a Turk, Jew, heretic, or infidel of so outrageous a complexion that even the clergy won't try to convert him.'

'I am not a Dissenter, or an infidel, or a heathen,' I explained, observing that Mr. Rodewald was becoming impatient; 'but I might be, for all I know of the rector of Reedbourne and his curate. I have listened to their preaching, I have subscribed small amounts to the local charities, I have travelled with the greater and the lesser dignitary—our "beloved rector," as the curate calls his chief, and "our dear curate," as the rector calls his aide-de-camp—and I repeat, they are no acquaintances of mine, and they should be no acquaintances of mine if I lived at Reedbourne for fifty years.'

Mr. Smith shook his head gloomily when I finished, as one who might say, 'You are doomed;' but, as though weary of the conversation, Mr.

Rodewald rose from the table, and, walking to the window, stood looking over my possessions.

'I think,' he began at last, after a silence which had become irksome, 'I should very much like to take a long ramble round the neighbourhood. Do you happen to know, Mr. Cheverley, if there is any inn at Reedbourne where one could get decent accom modation for the night?'

Mr. Smith lifted his eyes, and looked at the speaker with amazement; while I modestly placed the two bed-chambers, occupied till recently by Bessie and her friend, at the service of my visitors.

Mr. Rodewald hesitated, but his companion said, speaking to him,

'I must get back to town.'

'Then I think, if Mr. Cheverley is quite sure I shall not be disturbing his arrangements, that I will avail myself of his offer,' decided Mr. Rodewald. 'You can send a telegram for me, Smith, so that they may not be uneasy at home?'

'I can do more than that,' replied Mr. Smith. 'I will take a note to Miss Lydney, if you like to write it.'

'Well, you are a good fellow. Mr. Cheverley, may I trouble you for a scrap of paper?'

'You will find everything you require in my study,' I answered; and then I followed Mr. Smith, who had wandered across the hall, and out into the open air. He held his hat in one hand, and was smoothing the nap round and round with the other when I joined him.

'You really want to let this place and go away, I suppose?' he said.

'Really and truly,' I answered.

'Well, I daresay you are right. It is a pretty little spot; but living always in one corner of the earth, with nothing to do in it, must be a shade duller than playing at whist with double dummy. Besides,' he added hastily, '"the heart knoweth its own bitterness," and each man can judge best what is likely to compass his happiness. Personally, I have no passionate affection for the country; and yet if I owned this cottage—'

'I am going abroad,' I explained, as he paused expressively and looked about him.

'You think you have lived among books long enough, and now want to see men and places?'

'That is about my meaning.'

'After the first plunge you will find it a change for the better. People who can travel should travel—should collect memories of unclouded skies to refresh their souls in our November weather—should try to see countries where life is not so hard, so prosaic, and so unlovely as it is here. But all this is not what I wanted to say. What was it? O, I remember!'

He gave his hat another brush, and continued:

'As you really wish to let this place, I may tell you that you could not find a better tenant than Rodewald. He is very sweet upon The Snuggery, I can see that; but he won't give you what you ask in the way of rent. He will beat you down—he will dispute every inch of ground with you. Wise folks say you cannot draw blood out of a stone, but I declare that Rodewald can. His specialty is to get a shilling's worth for every sixpence he expends. Upon the other hand, he will take care of your furniture as if it were his own, and pay what he agrees to do punctually. You need not be afraid of finding a single book dog-eared or missing on your return. Miss Lydney, his sister-in-law, is the best of mana-

gers; and his two little girls are, to my mind, charming.'

'What about his wife?'

'She has been dead for years. His affection for her and the girls is the one soft spot in an otherwise stony nature. After all, however, you know weak amiable people are not always the best to deal with in business; and you will find Mr. Rodewald a good tenant if you care to accept him.'

At this moment Mr. Rodewald himself came out with the note he had just written.

'You are quite sure it won't take you out of your way?' he said, addressing his friend.

'Quite sure it will be a great pleasure to me to deliver it. For the present, good-bye, Rodewald; do not lose yourself in the wilds of Surrey. Good-bye, Mr. Cheverley;' and he would have shaken hands with me in farewell then, but I said I would walk beside him as far as the gate.

There we parted. Over the top bar I stood looking after him as he paced along the hot dusty road.

Tall, gaunt, ungainly he appeared, with the relentless sun streaming from the west full upon his

remarkable figure; but I had taken a liking to the man. He interested and perplexed me; and I, the least curious of living beings, caught myself wondering concerning his antecedents, marvelling whence he came, and what the story was which had driven him, a mere waif and stray, out upon the world. When I returned to the house, Mr. Rodewald astonished me by laying his hand on my shoulder, and asking,

'What was that eccentric fellow saying to you?'

'He was saying what a good tenant I should find you if we come to terms,' I answered, only suppressing some portion of the truth.

'He is a faithful creature,' commented his patron, smiling; 'a very strange character, but faithful. I have been able to serve him a little, and he is grateful; and in these days, Mr. Cheverley, gratitude is not a common quality. He was in one of his most contrary moods to-day; but I humour him, and take no notice—probably you remarked that. Smith is a man for whom I entertain a very great regard. Some one says we generally do like those we have been able to befriend; and there is much truth in the observation. He is a wonderfully clever fellow;

could do anything if he only gave his mind to it; but he won't—there is the pity—he will not.'

I made no reply. Behind the blame, behind the praise, a story lay, I felt quite sure—a story, the length and depth and pathos and misery of which this man who spoke had never—could never—grasp.

Life is a curious tangle altogether; but there is perhaps nothing more curious about it than the affinities of utter strangers—the way in which people 'take,' as nurses say of children, to those who at first sight might seem most antagonistic to them.

Heaven knows, Mr. Smith was not a person to whom it would have struck any one as probable the heart of a shy recluse was likely to go forth; but something about him—some turn of thought, some trick of expression, some far-away look in his perplexing eyes—attracted and puzzled me.

While we were sitting at tea I imagined that if it were only possible to ascertain the nature of the link which tied two such different men together, some clue might be gained to the mystery of Mr. Smith's life; but now I abandoned that conjecture as untenable. Mr. Rodewald's knowledge of his companion was evidently slight and superficial. He

might, as he said, have been acquainted with him for years—been even intimate, as the world accounts such matters—but he certainly did not understand his nature.

Whatever of tenderness, of pathos, of sorrow, of sin, of suffering, lay deep in the man's heart, and in that past which had left him the mystery he was, were matters, I felt satisfied, quite outside Mr. Rodewald's cognisance.

'He writes reviews, I think he told me,' I said, as we reëntered the house.

'Reviews or anything else; nothing comes amiss to him. He is on one of the comic periodicals; turns out verses for the Christmas annuals; runs stories through the penny papers; has had what he calls a "big book" of some sort on the stocks for years; might be a celebrated man if he would make up his mind to settle down to regular work, but he can't; and so, while fellows who have not half his brains are making their thousands a year, he grubs along in a couple of dingy rooms up two pairs of stairs in New Inn.'

'He is not married, I suppose?'

'Married!' repeated Mr. Rodewald scornfully.

'Does he look as if he were married? Why, that is what I am always dinning into his ears. Bless your soul, a good managing woman would be the salvation of him; that is, always supposing he did not break her heart in a week.'

'Why should he break her heart?' I asked.

'Drinks like a fish.'

'O!' I said.

'That's it,' explained Mr. Rodewald; 'that's the curse; not but what I will say for Smith that he can be as steady as anybody when he likes. It is a curious fact, but it is true, that so long as matters are going badly with him he is as steady as possible, but the minute things begin to mend he flies to the bottle. Independent of the sincere liking I have for him, that is one reason why I keep him so much under my own eye. I don't mean to seem boastful, but I do sometimes feel I stand between that man and utter degradation. If it had not been for me, I believe he would have gone to the devil headlong years ago.'

I scarcely knew what to answer. Of my own knowledge I could not, of course, tell where Mr. Smith might have been but for the presence of this guar-

dian angel; but yet Mr. Rodewald looked to me a man more likely to give a helping shove along the road indicated, than to stand between a friend and perdition. On the whole, therefore, it was a relief when Mr. Rodewald announced his intention to go out for a look round the neighbourhood.

'I do not ask you to accompany me,' he said, with a good assumption of cordiality, 'because I am sure you are tired, and because also you must know every inch of the country off by heart.'

For answer I only said that I did feel rather tired; and then he set off alone, to make, as I felt certain, inquiries about me and The Snuggery. That he never trusted fully the word of any man was a conviction I could not shake off. It had been borne in upon me at about the same stage of our acquaintanceship as when I began to suspect that Mr. Rodewald's own statements were sometimes—shall I say?—plausible.

Yes; plausible is not a bad word to express the meaning desired to be conveyed. He did not exactly lie, but he contrived to put such a gloss on things that they seemed other than they were. Perhaps he had learned this art in the City, which place he

called by some very hard names. Indeed, before he retired for the night he tried to make me believe he was about the only honest man in it. Upon the other hand, however, he might have brought the trick over with him when he came from Germany, a mere lad.

If it had been possible for me to do so, I should have liked him on account of his nationality, but it was impossible. I think he felt this, because he obviously tried to make himself agreeable and—failed.

About nine o'clock he returned, jubilant, enchanted with the neighbourhood, delighted with the air, charmed with the people.

'The natives are wonderfully civil,' he said; 'never had so many hats touched to me before in one evening in my life. Suppose they mistook me for some other person.'

Then we sat down to supper, he declaring he had a wolfish appetite; and he was pleased to express himself in favourable terms with regard to Mrs. Brooker's cookery, and, to prove his praise sincere, by doing ample justice to the viands set before him.

After the modest meal—for modest it was, though

we had set out the best our larder boasted—Mr. Rodewald proceeded to business.

'I am a man of very few words,' he was good enough to tell me, taking the pipe he had asked permission to light out of his mouth, and puffing a little cloud of smoke into the air, 'so I will just come to the point at once. I like your place, but I don't like your rent.'

'I can't tell you,' he said after a pause, finding I made no answer, 'how beautiful I think Reedbourne; what a peaceful feeling comes to me as I sit here with you, far away from all the noise and bustle and weariness of that great wicked London. This is the spot I have dreamed of—the spot I should delight to live in; but I am not a rich man, Mr. Cheverley, and I have two motherless little girls, whose future I must assure. That is the plain state of the case.'

And he put his pipe between his lips again, with the air of one whose feeling was—'I have spoken.'

'You mean to make some proposition, I conclude?' was the remark I naturally hazarded. That it would be of the slightest use for me to make a proposition was an idea which never crossed my

mind. The right to say 'yes,' the power to say 'no,' it might be that the liberty to utter these words still remained with me; but to originate anything, to suggest modifications of my former demands, it was Mr. Rodewald I felt who alone could undertake such enterprises.

He did not answer me verbally. Engaged in breathing fresh life into his pipe, he simply nodded his head, produced an old envelope and a stump of pencil, and commenced working out a series of problems.

By the time he had finished his pipe was again well alight, so well established, indeed, that he was able to hold it between his fingers while he spoke to me.

'You want to go abroad,' he began; 'I don't know your reasons, and I won't ask your reasons, but I take it for granted you have reasons for so wishing, or you would not strive to let your house.'

'You are quite correct so far,' I said; 'pray proceed.'

'I also take it for granted, as I think I may, that those reasons are quite unconnected with any pecuniary difficulty.'

'You may take it for granted, Mr. Rodewald, that my reasons are purely personal, and concern myself alone,' I retorted.

'Gently, gently, gently,' he entreated, and smoked on for a few moments, apparently with the design of permitting me to regain the composure he spoke of.

'I want you clearly to understand, before we go any further,' he began again, after a little while, 'that in any remark I make, nothing can be further from my intention than to give offence. Inadvertently this might happen, for I am unhappily one of the bluntest of men. All I meant was that you wish to let this place less for pecuniary advantage than because you desire to go abroad.'

'I fear I scarcely follow your meaning.'

'In a word, you did not buy The Snuggery and furnish it with a view to a possible profitable inves-ment.'

'I certainly did not buy it with a view to losing money.'

'That is quite another matter. I repeat, you had at first no idea of re-letting. I know you had not, because otherwise you would have advertised it

in the beginning of the season, when possibly you might have made your market.'

'You are right,' I replied; 'but what has all this to do with matters as they stand?'

'Just this,' he said boldly. 'You want less to make money than not to lose money by taking a tenant, and I want a furnished house at a rent I can afford. If you fail to get a tenant you must either remain here, or leave a care-taker in charge; if I am unable to obtain a furnished house on reasonable terms, I must take an unfurnished house and buy furniture. That, I take it, is the state of the case as far as we both are concerned. And now, having made the ground clear, I can proceed to my proposition.'

As I sat and looked at him, fitting his sentences and shaping the conversation to his own ends, pausing now and then to draw a whiff of that pipe which seemed so difficult to keep alight, I could not help thinking of Mother Rigby and the place whence 'Dickon' supplied the coal which kept the flame alive.

Mephistopheles, as we have seen him represented, was different enough in appearance from this square-shouldered, clean-skinned, bluff-looking Ger-

man; and yet the idea Mr. Rodewald suggested to me was that of something not quite 'canny.'

Upon the whole, I wished I had not been in such a hurry to proffer hospitality. In the middle of the night I knew I should awake and remember, with a sort of nightmare oppression, that this man was resting under the same roof with me; perhaps even then lying with wide-open eyes considering some scheme of narrow diplomacy.

Then, however, I thought of what Mr. Smith had said, and took comfort. Though the tenant proposed was hard as steel, he might be strictly honest. If only one half he stated and implied about himself were true, the taint of original sin which induced me to doubt him must indeed have been strong!

'Here,' recommenced Mr. Rodewald, again referring to his notes, 'I have jotted down something near the amount this place must have cost you. Of course, the figure is considerably above actual value, for I see you are not much of a hand at a bargain, and have allowed for that accordingly.'

'I wish, Mr. Rodewald, you would make your proposition, and let us be done with the business.'

'All in good time,' he answered, laughing. 'I will tell you what I can do in a minute. I have lumped the sum-total of your expenditure at that,' and he pointed to some figures on one side of the paper. 'If you turn over the leaf you will see how I come to that amount. Now I am willing to give you a rent which will pay five per cent upon your outlay, and to undertake to keep the house and land in good order. As I said before, I am not a rich man, but I think I may say without vanity that I am a good tenant.'

And Dickon, without being asked, bringing another coal for his pipe, he smoked away with that keen enjoyment which, indeed, I believe is never experienced save when the light is furnished from the particular 'chimney-corner' Mother Rigby affected.

I glanced at the paper and—kept my temper. Yes, kept it, though the purchase-money was calculated at fifty pounds less than I had paid for the 'Desirable Freehold Residence,' &c. &c.; though he had appraised the value of my chairs and tables at about the price a keen broker would have offered for them very second-hand; though he omitted the

grand piano *in toto,* and made as light of my improvements as though they had been the holiday sport of a foolish child.

He had been making inquiries, exactly as I imagined he would. It is true I knew the business of no one in the neighbourhood, but it is equally true every one in the neighbourhood knew all about mine.

It is perhaps a drawback to the pleasures of the country that, amongst the 'daisies and buttercups,' little birds are continually flying to and fro, carrying stories—false and true—from ear to ear, as far and as freely as the winds do the thistle-down.

Here, however, was a man who must appreciate this rural innocency—this child-like hankering after trivial knowledge.

Reedbourne must approve him, and he approve of Reedbourne. What a man this to enjoy the gossip of the trains—to listen to the petty tattle of the frequenters of the lecture-hall, and the clubs attached to the better class of public-house! What a man to feel the origin and the meanness of Sir Burke Robinson, themes not too high for him to enter on; and the length and colour of Mary Jane's

petticoat, not beneath his attention! What a detective he would have made! All these thoughts, and many more to a like effect, passed through my mind as I sat silent, looking at the paper he had given me, and wondering, with that sort of second consciousness we sometimes seem to possess, whether I should decline his offer peremptorily, or close with it on the spot.

But for Smith I must have elected the former course; but I did most heartily wish to get away, and Smith had said the man, though he could get blood out of a stone, would stick to any bargain he made, and prove in every respect an admirable tenant. I could leave Reedbourne with a clear conscience and an easy mind. I might pack up and depart. Already my thoughts had transported me across the Channel—already I was essaying in strange tongues to express my wants—already I was treading the streets of unfamiliar towns, when Mr. Rodewald broke in upon my reverie.

'Well,' he said quietly, 'what is it to be?'

I came back with a start to The Snuggery and to present events. If I had just returned from dreamland, it could not have seemed stranger to me than

it did to find myself sitting in that familiar room with Mr. Rodewald for *vis-à-vis*.

'Have you made up your mind?' he asked, finding I did not immediately answer. 'Is it to be "yes" or "no"?'

'There is no account taken here of the piano,' I said. 'Add ten pounds to your offer, and you can have the house and the use of everything it contains for one year.'

'Bravo!' cried Mr. Rodewald. 'I agree;' and he held out his hand.

As he was so extremely cordial, I could do no less than give him mine; and thus our bargain was concluded.

Within ten minutes he had drawn up two copies of an agreement, which we signed in the presence of Mrs. Brooker, who regarded us during the ceremony as if we had been engaged in celebrating some vague and mystical rite.

Mr. Rodewald folded up his copy and placed it in his pocket, and I did the same by mine.

'I suppose,' said the new tenant, as he stood with his chamber candlestick in his hand, 'there is

some place near here where I can have a good swim in the morning?'

I shook my head, and answered,

'Not nearer than the Thames, I am afraid.'

'Thames—nonsense!' he exclaimed. 'That Reed seems deep enough, in all conscience.'

'There is only one good bathing-place upon it,' I explained; 'and the man who owns the land makes some difficulty about a right of way.'

Mr. Rodewald put down his candle again.

'What do you mean?' he said, interested and alert upon the instant.

'He wants to stop up a path leading along the river's bank.'

'And has he a right to do so?'

'I imagine not. The "oldest inhabitant" remembers the path being used by the public as long as he can remember anything.'

'Then of course he can't stop it up.'

'I don't know who is to prevent him,' I answered.

'Why, the people of Reedbourne. They must value that path.'

'I daresay they do; but still, I suppose, they

do not care to fight the battle. Labourers and shopkeepers have not much cash to spare for lawyers.'

'But I referred to the gentry—to those interested in the soil—those willing to spend some money for the purpose of retaining such a privilege.'

I laughed aloud.

'My dear sir,' I said, 'the gentry of Reedbourne are perfectly indifferent on the subject. What can a field-path more or less signify to people who never walk—who, I am sure, must have lost the use of their legs years ago?'

'What do you mean?'

'That everybody drives. A carriage of some kind is the seal of distinction; walking is the sign of the beast. If you want to become famous here, Mr. Rodewald, you had better keep a donkey-cart rather than no conveyance at all.'

For a moment Mr. Rodewald's brow darkened. Into my speech I knew I had flung a certain amount of malicious meaning, and he was not so stupid as to fail to notice the fact. Immediately, however, his face cleared, and quite beamed with smiles as he bade me good-night.

I do not think I am wrong in imagining that Mr. Rodewald went to bed with the determination of conquering Reedbourne.

For some time I heard him marching about his room, as if he were crushing the pampered inhabitants under his feet.

Fancies of this kind, concerning the greatness one may achieve in strange places, are very pleasant sometimes, and help to while away a leisure half-hour agreeably enough.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RIGHT OF WAY.

Next morning, before Mrs. Brooker had exchanged her night-cap for the more fashionable, though not more elaborate, head-gear she wore during the day, Mr. Rodewald was astir.

The hour was early; but even had it not been, I hold no discredit is reflected upon me by the fact that I was still steeped in slumber. For many a long year I punctually entered the office of the 'Home and Foreign' precisely as the clock struck nine; but that feat of continuous punctuality, so far from spurring me on to deeds of greater daring as regarded early rising, rather increased my natural man's love for the silken joys involved in a morning nap.

Most entirely do I agree with Elia in considering early rising a Pagan observance.

If a man must get up, if 'he have a suit to solicit or affairs to manage,' why, he must be astir

and about his business whenever necessity calls, and there is an end of it; but to tell me that, of his own free will, a rational being elects to rise with the lark, is to tell me something which I am, of course, bound to believe, but which, I confess, I cannot understand.

Why, morning is the very best part of all the night; the light soft sleep which visits the eyelids when the sun is up and looking after his business is the sweetest and most refreshing in all the hours of rest.

It is easy to forgive a visitor almost any other sin than that of early rising. Let him in his own house get up with the lark, or the musical thrush, which is a very much earlier bird than the other less indefatigable songster; but in no strange man's house has he a right to bestir himself at such hours that he finds the establishment, so to speak, in curl-papers.

I might have known, even from my slight acquaintance with him, that Mr. Rodewald was just the person to seize the opportunity afforded, by the fact of a household being off guard, to take undisturbed note of its shortcomings; but I had never

thought of the possibility of any one getting up early who could lie in bed late.

When he went down-stairs, Mrs. Brooker was, as she afterwards told me, 'huddling on her clothes;' and, although the time my housekeeper devoted to her morning toilette was painfully short, I'll be bound it proved long enough for Mr. Rodewald to take note of such details as might have escaped his observation overnight, and to form more decided opinions as to my utter incapacity to rule a household.

'He come into the dairy,' explained Mrs. Brooker, when she subsequently alluded to the circumstance —'come into the dairy as cool as if it belonged to him, and says, "Mrs. Brooker" (he had got my name as pat as could be), "Mrs. Brooker, *would* you be so very good as to give me a cup of milk, and tell me the nearest way through Mr. Milter's farm to the Reed?" I was not away a minute getting a tumbler, but he knew everything that was on the shelves by the time I came back, as well as I do.

'Lor'! the questions he did ask, to be sure; what this was for, and that; why I had not glazed pans, and what I used for scalding out the wooden vessels.

You remember, sir, there is a tray up on one of the shelves with some old musical glasses, I think you call them, half of them broken; they are in the darkest corner, quite out of sight, in a manner of speaking; but he asked me why they were laid away, and if nobody cared for them, and made the remark it was a pity we had no lady about the house, or young daughters, to take an interest in things of that sort, and suchlike.'

'And what answer did you make, Mrs. Brooker?' I inquired, wondering whether she told the signal failure trying to interest *one* young girl in the musical glasses, to say nothing of Shakespeare, had proved.

'Well, sir, I was busy; and I thought, as he made so free with questions, I would be as free with my answers; so I just said, "For my part, I wanted no ladies, young or old, about any house I lived in."

"What! not fond of your own sex, Mrs. Brooker?" gibing like.

"No, I ain't," I said; "and for that matter, sir, I'm none too fond of yours."

'At that he went away, laughing, as fast as ever he could walk, swinging his towels as he went.'

This was afterwards, as already stated, when Mrs. Brooker knew for certain Mr. Rodewald had taken The Snuggery, and meant to dispense with her services.

On the morning when my guest rose so early to go, like an innocent lamb, out all alone into the meadows, Mrs. Brooker, condoning his sins—which, from her point of view, were many—bestirred herself to prepare a breakfast worthy of the excellent appetite we knew Mr. Rodewald possessed.

Everything was ready, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, in readiness. The kettle boiled, the board was spread. Water-cresses, fresh from the brook; lettuces, with the tender crispness of youth visible in their white and firm, but not too gigantic, hearts; fruit, nestling among cool leaves; honey in the comb; cream, golden, and in abundant quantity. These things, with a few roses arranged in an antique china bowl, gave a look of homely prettiness to the table, covered with a snowy cloth.

But it was in the kitchen that Mrs. Brooker's best welcome lay. There were the fish, well floured, and ready to pop into the hissing pan; there were rolls Mrs. Brooker's own hands had prepared for the

delectation of our visitor; there were likewise eggs, fresh from the nest; trim rashers of bacon; mushrooms gathered that morning in meadows where the mist had lain white and low overnight; and a few kidneys, procured with difficulty from the local butcher, who stated it to be his opinion 'some folks believed sheep had a dozen of them apiece.'

Time passed on, and still Mr. Rodewald tarried. Nine, half-past nine, ten, half-past ten, and still no Mr. Rodewald.

'I do hope he ain't gone and drownded hisself,' remarked Mrs. Brooker, who had gone through all a cook's stages of impatience, irritability, resentment, and anxiety. 'Whatever gentlemen can want going and bathing themselves in a dirty river—and I am sure the Reed is none so clean—when they could have a pailful of nice soft water at home, is a puzzle to me.'

'He's coming,' said Matthew, at this juncture appearing with some runners for dinner. 'I see him as I crossed t' fold-yard, walking fit to break his neck, his head bare, and a-wiping his head as if he were rubbing down a horse.'

In an instant all was activity. Upon the air

there arose an odour of coffee—a goodly smell of cooking. Bacon frizzled, fish browned, a cake was brought smoking hot out of the oven; as if touched by the wand of an enchanter, everything seemed to be set going. Mrs. Brooker, bustling about, gave Matthew fifty commands in a breath, while I, leaving the kitchen door, whither the sound of my housekeeper's lamentations had drawn me, walked across the hall, and out into the air to meet my visitor, who came on to meet me at full speed.

'Thought I was gone to the bottom, I suppose?' he cried, panting from the rate at which he had walked. 'I am very sorry to have seemed so rude, but I could not help it. Look at my clothes.'

Thus requested, I did look at them, as, indeed, without being requested, I had done previously.

'What has happened?' I asked. 'Have you met with an accident? Where did you pick up those things?'

He burst out laughing.

'Neat, are not they? I flatter myself I should create a sensation if I walked down the Poultry in this costume. Will you allow me to sit down with you as I am? There is a hunger upon me which

is simply indescribable. Let me have a crust of something to eat, and I will tell you all.'

When he had quite done, he pushed back his chair, drew out a pipe, different from that he had used on the previous evening, filled it from a pouch which likewise looked strange to my eyes, asked for a match, indulged in a few puffs, and began:

'When I left here this morning (it seems ages since), I went out in the best possible temper. I was softened by the tender beauty of the early day. My thoughts went back—back to a summer long ago, when I was young, and walked through the pleasant meadows—not alone—but, there, what do I talk about such things to you for? The only mistress whose smile you ever tried to win was the "Home and Foreign;" the only love-letters you ever wrote were answers to intending insurers.'

He paused for a reply, but I only inclined my head.

'But, bah! what has all this to do with my adventure?' continued Mr. Rodewald, waving his hand as one who should say, 'Sentiment, I can now dispense with you.' 'I went on and on till I came, as I had been told I should, to a gate—a quite new

gate—made of barked and divided pine, securely hung on its hinges and safely padlocked. Over that gate I vaulted, and was proceeding quite at my leisure through a very large field, where many cows were grazing, when I heard some one shouting, "Hi, there! turn back—turn back! no road this way!"

'Looking to see whence these sounds came, I saw in the distance, hurrying along a different path from that I was traversing, a person waving his hat, and gesticulating violently.

"You must go back," he said. "This is private property, and no one has a right here except by permission of the owner."

"Indeed!" I answered. "May I ask who says so?"

"I say so," he replied.

"And may I further ask, who you are who say so?"

"I am the owner, Saul Milter;" and he struck an attitude, feeling, apparently, he had made a point.

'I put my hand in the breast-pocket of my coat, pulled out my case, and presented him with a card.

"There is my name and address," I said, "and if you consider you can take any action for trespass against me I shall be happy to hear from your solicitor. Good-morning, Mr. Milter. I am delighted to have had the opportunity of making your acquaintance."

'And raising my hat, I would have passed him, but that Mr. Milter, a coarse brute, with a red face and a vulgar tongue, barred my passage, and declared, with an oath, he was not delighted to make mine, and that he would be —— (many things unfit for ears polite) if he let a —— (many other things which would sound disgusting, were I to repeat them), beard him, Saul Milter, on the land he had bought and paid for, by ——'

"I don't want to beard you," I explained. "I only want to go and bathe."

"Then go and bathe somewhere else, and be —— to you!"

'I told him I did not want to go somewhere else and be ——; that the Reed was quite good enough for me.

"Well, you ain't a-going to the Reed through my fields," he persisted.

"Indeed! who will prevent me?"

"I will," he said. "Look here, you had best go back; you had, upon my conscience. I don't want to do you a damage."

"You had better not try," I suggested, and endeavoured to pass him.

'After that I can scarcely tell you what happened. We had a bit of a scrimmage, I know. He was not gentle, and my blood was up. The minute he laid his hand on me I laid my fist on him, and with such effect that he soon gave up the struggle, and went on his way, holding an old cotton handkerchief to his nose, while I proceeded on mine without further interruption.

'You remember, perhaps, in the little wood which surrounds the ruins of what was once a caretaker's cottage, there is a great oak-tree by the water's edge, with a rustic seat beautifully placed, so as to command a tranquil view. Upon that seat I placed my clothes, and, plunging into the Reed, had such a swim! I went a long way up the stream, all fringed with alders and reeds and rushes, and long grasses and wildflowers. Ah, my dear

fellow, you do not know the amount of enjoyment you have lost by not knowing how to swim!'

'No doubt,' I agreed.

By this time, short as had been our acquaintance, I was so accustomed to Mr. Rodewald pointing the moral of his utterances by some pitying or disparaging allusion to myself, that I almost looked for such conclusions to his sentences.

'It was delightful, floating back with the stream. Without any exertion I was carried once again to the point from whence I had started. I knew by the sun it must be more than eight o'clock; so without further delay, though the water was tempting, I made for land, and sought my towels, which I had left on the bank. They were gone—there was not a sign of them; then I looked towards the bench where my clothes should have been—it was empty and bare! Conceive, if you can, my feelings. There I was, in a strange place, without a rag of clothing, out of sight and sound, as I imagined, of anybody who could help me. For a moment I stood appalled; but I need not tell you that it never takes me long to make up my mind how to act in a difficulty. I decided what to do

instantly,' he went on. 'I must go back into the water, and, since help was unlikely to come to me, let the river bear me to help. If I trusted myself to its guidance I could not fail to reach some habitation; so after one more look around, I was on the point of launching myself again, when a "Holloa!" caused me to turn my head and glance across stream. There, almost hidden among the overhanging branches of some drooping willows, growing close down on the bank, I saw a boat which I had previously overlooked; indeed, had it not been for the figure of a man who stood up in it and parted the branches, I could scarcely have discerned it then.

"Lost your togs?" he remarked.

"Yes; do you happen to know what has become of them?"

"I don't," he answered; "but Steve here does;" and so saying, he pushed the boat out from under the shade of the willows, and taking his sculls, pulled across to my side of the river. It was a toy-boat, painted blue and red and green, like a humming-top, and it looked too small to hold both the man who had spoken to me, and a lad of twelve years old or thereabouts.

"Now, Steve, open your mouth, and tell the gentleman what you told me."

'Steve, thus entreated, dipped one dirty finger in the water, and began drawing it backwards and forwards along the gunwale of the boat.

"Come, open your mouth," said his master. "You saw Dan Byers make up a bundle of clothes that were lying on the bench, tie them up in a towel, and go off with the lot."

"Yes, I see him," answered the boy.

"And you shouted, and asked him what game he was up to. And he told you to mind your own business, did not he?"

"Yes, or he'd crack me over the head when he got me ashore."

'At this point I asked who Mr. Dan Byers might be.

"He's old Milter's bailiff, or foreman, or whatever you call it," answered the gentleman in boating costume.

'I thought for an instant; I was indeed still thinking when my new friend asked,

"Had not Steve better run up to the farm and

ask for your belongings? You can't stay in the water all day, you know."

'There seemed nothing else to be done under the circumstances, so Steve was put ashore on the bank nearest Mr. Milter's residence, and started off. He came back without the clothes. Mr. Milter said if I wanted them I must fetch them; and Dan Byers, Milter's henchman, told the lad if he caught him sneaking across the meadows again, he would give him a taste of his whip, and set the dogs at him besides.'

'Your acquaintance in the boat then, I suppose, supplied the suit you have on?'

'Yes; to quote his own words, he "rigged me out" in some "togs" belonging to his brother.'

'Shall I send to Mr. Milter's for your clothes now?' I asked. 'If you were to write a note we should have no difficulty about the matter.'

'I shall have no difficulty,' said Mr. Rodewald with a smile, which possibly he considered humorous. 'I intend to adopt quite another course with Mr. Milter.'

'May I inquire?'

'I will tell you all about it when I see you again,'

he answered, putting his pipe in his pocket, and rising to depart. 'I must be off now. It is of no use offering me the run of your wardrobe, as I see you are thinking of doing, thank you. I am twice as broad across the chest as you,' and Mr. Rodewald, with good-humoured superiority, looked me over.

'You ought to join a volunteer corps,' he remarked. 'I advise you to think about it. Have you ever done so?'

I said I had not, and that I never intended to think about it; whereupon he laughed, and observed he had no idea I was so touchy.

'By the way,' he added, after we had shaken hands and spoken our farewells, 'I am going to have my agreement stamped—shall I get yours done at the same time? It will spare you a journey to Somerset House; besides, unless you know your way about that lively place, you may lose half a whole morning looking for the right office.'

I knew my way about Somerset House as well as I knew my way about The Snuggery; but it was useless trying to assert oneself before Mr. Rodewald. Meekly I thanked him, and handed over the

document in question, feeling at the same time The Snuggery was mine no longer—that it and all it contained had passed into the possession of a master mind.

About an hour after Mr. Rodewald and I parted, he walked up to Mr. Milter's, accompanied by a policeman.

As was his amiable custom, Mr. Milter opened the door in person, and, even in his changed attire, immediately recognised his antagonist of the early morning.

What Mr. Milter might have said to him had he called alone, it is impossible to tell; for the farmer, seeing that the majesty of the law was come likewise to visit him, considered it better to treat the whole affair as a jest, and so said airily, and with a nod intended to be ingratiating,

'You have come for your clothes, I suppose?'

'No, I haven't,' retorted Mr. Rodewald, who, as he afterwards told me, enjoyed the affair immensely. 'I have come to see you and a man in your employment called Daniel Byers; is he about?'

Mr. Milter thought he was, and turned to seek his *employé*, but Mr. Rodewald interposed,

'You had better stay with us. You can send for him.'

It was not nice. Mr. Milter, one of the greatest bullies in Reedbourne, a man heavy of limb, coarse of speech, slow of thought, and clumsy of movement, felt the effect of Mr. Rodewald's manner, or, as he himself expressed the matter, 'considered it awk'ard.'

'If he had 'ave come cussin' and swearin' and blackguardin',' said poor Mr. Milter afterwards, 'I should a-known what to make of it; but my gentleman, d—— him, was so precious cool and precise, it skeered me like—there, I don't mind saying so—it did.'

'I kept my eye on him,' explained Mr. Rodewald subsequently; 'and the brute quailed—I assure you I could see him blenching.'

'Dan,' said Mr. Milter, when that worthy, with a fine odour of the farmyard pervading his clothes, came slouching round, 'this gentleman wants a word with you.'

'Yes,' agreed Mr. Rodewald. 'Is your name Daniel Byers?'

'I b'lieve it be, master,' answered the man.

'Then I give you in charge for stealing my

clothes; and, Mr. Milter, I give you in charge as an accessory also, for receiving property you well knew to be stolen.'

There ensued a dead pause; then said Mr. Milter, calling to a maid-servant hovering about the end of the passage,

'Susan, there is a bundle of clothes in the parlour—this good gentleman's clothes—bring them here.'

'You had better be careful,' interposed the policeman at this juncture; 'whatever you say may be used against you.'

'I had my joke,' answered Mr. Milter, 'and I suppose this gentleman now means to have his. He trespassed on my ground, and for a bit of a lark I sent Dan for his clothes.'

'You carried your joke too far, Mr. Milter, and I believe the magistrates will agree with me in my opinion. Now, policeman, we must be moving.'

'Very well, sir. We have got a fly at the gate, Mr. Milter; will you go in it, or would you rather drive over in your own pheaton? I want to make things as easy as I can—as easy as the law will let me.'

'You are not in earnest, Denham?' said Mr. Milter. 'The gentleman can't mean it.'

'Don't I?' exclaimed the gentleman. 'We'll see whether I do or not. I'll give you a lesson you won't forget in a hurry.'

'You had better not offer any resistance, sir,' suggested the policeman. 'Are you sure, now, you would not rather ride in your pheaton? No, sir, you need not say that. I only want to make things pleasant as possible,' added the man, as Mr. Milter muttered a remark relative to riding in the ——.

By the time the procession had got half-way to the gate, Mr. Milter had recovered himself.

'Where d'ye want me to go?' he asked, stopping suddenly.

'Only to Hampfield, sir,' answered Denham. 'All I wants is to make things—'

'Is that scum going over too?' interrupted Mr. Milter.

'That "scum," as you are pleased to style me, *is* going over too,' answered Mr. Rodewald, 'but I will sit on the box beside the driver.'

I should like to give the whole of the proceedings

before the magistrates as reported *in extenso* in the local papers.

The prosecutor's account of his misfortunes was received with 'peals of laughter,' in which the 'bench joined.'

The 'prosecutor' disclaimed any vindictive feeling in the matter. All he wanted was to convince Mr. Milter of the error of his ways. He had just taken a house at Reedbourne, and he desired for the future to be able to bathe and walk in peace. He would ask the bench, if in accordance with their ideas of justice, to discharge that 'poor man' Daniel Byers, who had acted in ignorance, and under the orders of his employer; and as regarded Mr. Milter himself, why, if he would apologise, and give a nominal sum, say five pounds, to the County Hospital, he, Mr. Rodewald, was willing, if once again the bench approved, to let 'bygones be bygones.'

After some consultation the bench agreed to settle the case on those terms; and everybody agreed Mr. Milter might consider himself very lucky in getting off so easily, except Mr. Milter himself, who would sooner have parted with one of his eye-teeth than with even a sovereign.

'I'd like to ha' given them, one and all, a piece of my mind,' he said, making his way into the hall of the court, when a touch detained him.

'Beg pardon, sir,' remarked the person who had laid a hand on his arm, 'but you must pay the fine and—costs.'

'But I hain't got five pound nor five shilling with me,' expostulated Mr. Milter.

'Then you'll have to wait here till you get it,' was the reply.

'I'd offer to lend you the amount,' gaily remarked Mr. Rodewald, who came up at that moment; 'but, like you, I have not five shillings about me.'

The words Mr. Milter spoke in answer I refrain from recording. The local papers indicated what occurred by letters and dashes intelligible to the initiated, supplementing their account of the case with a paragraph headed 'Exciting Scene Outside the Court,' which paragraph finished with the statement that, through the instrumentality of a friendly 'collector of taxes,' the defendant was at length extricated from a position of much embarrassment.

'Altogether,' wrote Mr. Rodewald to me after a few days, 'I consider I came off with flying colours.

Reedbourne ought to be greatly obliged to me for cutting Mr. Milter's comb. Curious, is it not, that the very first visit I ever paid to the place should prove so remarkable? I assure you the affair created quite a sensation at Hampfield.'

'Yes,' remarked Mr. Smith, who was with me when I received the letter, 'and that is what he wanted. He has set his heart upon compelling the people here to notice him, and he imagines this will prove one step towards his object.'

'Well,' I said, 'if I were in the habit of betting, I should not mind risking a good round sum upon the certainty that the Reedbournians will never have anything to do with Mr. Rodewald.'

'And I,' answered Mr. Smith, 'if I had the money, would be quite willing to stake ten to one in hundreds that, before two years are over, Mr. Rodewald will, in your pretty village, have the ball at his feet.'

END OF VOL. I.

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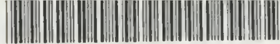
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