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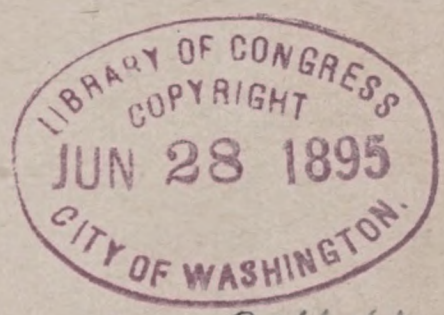
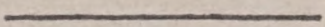
# A RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

*Author of "George Geith of Fen Court," etc.*

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# A RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

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## CHAPTER I.

### DR. DAGLEY'S INDIGNATION.

“EVERYTHING which is—is wrong,” may be a good cry, but is certainly a bad creed, because such a faith can never make its disciples wiser or happier—stronger to fight life's battle, or more resigned under defeat if that battle should go against them.

Nevertheless it was Dr. Claud Dagley's creed, and one which he implicitly believed, with only a single reservation, viz., himself. *He* could but be considered the exception which proved the rule. *He* was the only person who did right in a world full of wrong!

Put into a nutshell, this was Dr. Claud Dagley's Catholic Faith, whereby in some extraordinary way he expected to be saved, both in time and in eternity. If the reader will only consider, it is a more widespread faith than might at first be imagined. It is, in fact, a Personal Religion, the natural outcome of selfishness rather than of self-satisfaction.

All his life Dr. Claud Dagley had desired a great deal, and received—so he thought—very little.



As a child he wanted many things his mother—poor soul!—could not give him; as a boy he craved for much which neither of his grandfathers would give him; and after he came to years of discretion his soul longed for wealth and consideration, which he was unable to compass for himself.

Other men rolled by in their carriages, he had to pursue his discontented way on foot; other men had balances at their bankers, he could barely make his two ends meet with a struggle; other men could take life easily, he in order to live at all was forced to work like a galley slave!

And yet he was young, clever, handsome, well-educated, well-mannered. Truly, as he himself would have said, he had reason for believing in his dismal creed, for if good looks, good connections, good health, talents above the average, almost exhaustless energy, and an industry which had never yet failed him at school, at college, or in his profession, only sufficed to secure him bread and cheese, of what use could these great gifts be? That was what Dr. Claud Dagley often asked himself, and when himself could not answer, he fell back upon those thirty-nine or more pessimistic articles to which he had long previously subscribed, and considered them proved like an algebraic solution.

On the May evening when he is presented to the reader it was small wonder that his heart burned within him and his spirit felt like fire, for he had but just received one of those stinging slaps in the face which well-to-do people are often in the habit, quite unconsciously, of administering to those not



overburdened with this world's goods, and consequently unable to return a nastier tit for a nasty tat. The trouble came about in this wise. In the days of his comparative innocency, when he was wont to talk about his grandfather Samson Dagley, of Dagley Park, Shropshire—ere he understood the Dagleys were determined to ignore the lad, their close relation, born in lawful wedlock—Dr. Claud Dagley chanced to be at school with a fellow older than himself, called Philip Manford.

Manford was not very bright, and young Dagley, ever quick and sharp, helped his senior over many a difficulty, and piloted him safely across several creeks of learning where he must otherwise have come to signal grief.

The mere act of giving and taking always involves a sort of friendship, and though neither youth was devotedly attached to the other, the pair became chums, and maintained a desultory correspondence long after they entered upon the estate of manhood.

Manford went to India, and Dagley eventually to Guy's, after leaving which seat of medical learning he took the regulation voyage—pay ten pounds a month—ere settling down in a street in North Kensington as that extraordinary product of modern civilization, a "shilling doctor."

Needless to say, Claud Dagley did not think it necessary to inform Philip Manford, or, indeed, any one who had known him in the days when Hope and he were running joyous races together, of his precise standing in the profession he had chosen; therefore when, after six years' absence, Mr. Man-



ford returned home invalided, the latter's first idea was to write and inform his friend that "Filey" (a local practitioner) "who is an old donkey, doesn't know what to make of my symptoms, and advises me to consult some London physician. My father and I will therefore go to 82, The Boltons, S.W., next week. Could you come over there on Thursday, at any hour convenient to yourself, and let us have a talk? You always were able and willing to help me, and I am sure you can help me now."

That man must be stony-hearted indeed who is not glad to meet after years the friend of his youth. And Dr. Dagley felt extremely happy at the prospect of seeing Manford again, and being able to be of any service, however slight, to a man occupying so good a position.

Therefore, Thursday afternoon found him at The Boltons, and talking to his old schoolfellow as though they both were boys once more.

"Now, I want you to find out what ails me," said the elder man, after a quarter of an hour devoted to sentiment and gossip. "I don't think there can be much wrong. Yet I feel fit for nothing, and the deuce of it is no two men I have consulted can agree on the subject. Now, I will just tell you how I feel, and then you can judge."

Dr. Dagley was accustomed to cut all details of symptoms exceedingly short when indulged in by his shilling patients, but Mr. Manford, being a horse of quite another color, was allowed the length of a good long tether. Then his old friend stethoscoped and tapped and pounded and kneaded him, felt his



pulse twice, asked him several questions, and afterward sat silent for a minute.

“Well—your verdict?” asked the invalid.

Whatever may be the drawbacks to a shilling practice, it does undoubtedly possess the great advantage of making a clever practitioner acquainted with all sorts of diseases. The rich have no monopoly in the ills that flesh is heir to; and as Dr. Dagley had an exceedingly large, though not very remunerative, circle of patients, it naturally followed that he had seen as many diseases—and forms of those diseases—as any man of twenty-seven summers need have desired.

He knew perfectly well what was the matter with his friend, and did not hesitate about telling him.

Dr. Dagley never did hesitate about telling any one anything, no matter how unpleasant the thing might be; consequently, scarcely a week passed that some one did not leave his house having just received sentence of death or of incurable illness during life.

It was not sentence of death, however, or of painful, hopeless, lingering illness he had to pronounce upon Philip Manford, but what he felt bound to say was serious enough.

The trouble he indicated has nothing to do with this story, and consequently need not be specified. It had to do with an organ which has always presented, and still presents, mysteries to the medical profession; and though Dr. Dagley believed he knew more concerning the subject than any one else—more even than Dr. Kassiner, the great specialist, who professed to have made that puzzling portion of the



human economy a life-long study—he could not promise complete recovery.

“I will do my best, however,” he finished, blotting off a prescription he had written while delivering his opinion.

“I see no reason why you should not be as well as ever within a twelvemonth, and many reasons why you should; but as I tell you the organ at fault is one we do not yet quite understand. No, diet is of little avail; you may live just as you have been in the habit of doing. There are only two things I must caution you about—avoid getting a chill and do not over-fatigue yourself.”

Now, if there be one thing more than another to which a man in delicate health pins his faith it is diet. Even the old donkey “Filey” had interdicted pastry, coffee, raw fruit and salads. Therefore if he had in his ignorance advised abstinence Dr. Dagley must be more ignorant still to permit indulgence. Mr. Manford was touched by his friend’s interest in the case, but felt he had failed to master it.

After all, no young man likes to be told he is the *bona-fide* possessor of a critical illness, which necessitates coddling himself like a consumptive girl; for which reason Mr. Manford sought comfort where most patients find consolation. He refused to believe his physician!

Unconscious of what was passing through his patient’s mind, Dr. Claud Dagley returned home feeling more than pleased with himself. He had been welcomed warmly, he had been thanked cordially, he had diagnosed the case, he believed, correctly, he



knew he had written what is called an "elegant prescription," and though he had received no honorarium, he nevertheless looked forward to a goodly check, all the more goodly because delayed.

Next week, he had told Mr. Manford, he should like to see him again, therefore it proved no surprise when by the first post on Wednesday morning this note reached him:

"DEAR DAG: I want to see you very much, in order to talk over things. Can you spend to-morrow with me? If so, let us meet at my club, Junior Army and Navy, St. James' Square—noon.

"Yours,  
"P. M."

Dr. Claud Dagley, again obedient to those traditions which often prove so misleading, telegraphed that he would appear in St. James' Square at the hour named. Very reasonably, he imagined Mr. Manford wished to put their relations on some settled footing, and amused himself by considering the amount at which it might be safe to appraise his services. He imagined that his friend would say: "My father and I are quite aware you would rather not accept any payment, but still, old fellow, business is business, and you must let us try to make some return for your skill and kindness. We know any money acknowledgment will seem wholly inadequate, nevertheless——" and so on, in almost every form of words, which all, however, rang to a pleasant golden tune. Out of gratitude Mr. Manford, senior, might even, after a time, advance a sufficient amount to enable Dr. Dagley to take up practice at



the West-end. Stratford Place was the locality he had always hankered after, and it may at once be said that as he sat on the top of an omnibus, monarch of all he surveyed, and of many things not visible to his actual sight, he rented and furnished a house in that desirable locality, bought a carriage, selected his horses, and prescribed for hundreds of anxious and believing patients, who waited for his verdict as men of old listened to the utterances of an oracle. The dream did not end at Piccadilly Circus. It kept him company to St. James' Square, where he viewed with approval the comfortable luxury of his friend's club.

The thickness of the carpets, the massive character of the stair-rods, the seductive ease of the arm-chairs, did not offend the prejudices of one who expected soon to become a member of that club, or of another equally good.

He was in the best of spirits, and readily fell in with a suggestion made by his friend that they should take a stroll into the Mall and see the ladies going to the Drawing-Room.

"It is a pretty show," said Mr. Manford, and Dr. Dagley agreed, though of his own knowledge he knew nothing about the matter.

"Well, and so you are really feeling better?" he remarked, as they strolled along side by side.

"I feel a different man," was the answer.

"Ah! I thought that medicine would do you good," rejoined the other, complacently. "You have taken it regularly?"



"I took it regularly till Monday morning, and then——"

"And then, I suppose, finding it had done you good, like many another silly person, you thought you would drop it," retorted Dr. Dagley, exasperated.

"No, no, you quite mistake," stammered the other. "When I told my father what you said, it made him so anxious he took your prescription himself to be made up, and mentioned to the chemist—an intelligent person—about my complaint. 'Why does not your son consult Dr. Kassiner, the great—the only authority on this subject?' he asked. 'None before ever made it a specialty.'"

"That is true, at all events," commented Dr. Dagley, in a fine spirit of irony. He was in such a rage ten thousand demons seemed choking him. He was in such a rage he could not even think what this preamble meant. He only knew, if his power to do that chemist an ill turn had been equal to his will, fire from heaven would have consumed him on the instant.

"So when my dear old dad found on Monday morning that I was not getting a bit better he insisted on carrying me off to Cork Street," went on Mr. Manford, blissfully unconscious of the wild fury his friend was striving to control.

"Oh! he did, did he?" returned Dr. Dagley, with a sarcasm his friend quite failed to see.

"He did. You are not offended, old chap, are you?"

"Offended," repeated the other—"dear me, no; on the contrary, pleased."



"I felt sure you would be," said Mr. Manford, with the most perfect good faith. "I knew all you wanted was to see me hale and hearty."

"Of course; and Dr. Kassiner is going to make you hale and hearty?"

"Yes; when I told him a medical friend thought I could not hope to get strong under a twelvemonth he quite laughed at the idea. I showed him your prescription, and he remarked it was very good—as a palliative—but that he would give me something to touch the disease. I had his mixture made up by Corbyns in Bond Street. He said their drugs could be thoroughly relied on."

"Yes," observed Dr. Dagley, with a savage satisfaction at finding the South Kensington chemist had been bowled over.

"And I do feel so grateful to you for telling me what was wrong," went on Mr. Manford; "but for that I should never have heard of Dr. Kassiner."

"I hope he will soon put you to rights," replied Dr. Dagley, mendaciously.

They had not yet reached Pall Mall, but already not a vestige remained of Dr. Dagley's air castle. Gone was the house in Stratford Place, gone the furniture, horses, carriages, servants, patients—nothing remained save the hideous reality of his practice among the poor in North Kensington!

They went and saw the show in St. James' Park; afterward they returned to the club and partook of a poor luncheon, for Dr. Kassiner had ordered a strict diet, and Dr. Dagley said, very truly, he did not mind what he ate. Then they repaired to the Aqua-



rium, where they spent a dreary time; finally Mr. Manford thought they "ought to be getting back," and took tickets for both to South Kensington, which perhaps he imagined was close to North Kensington.

When they stood outside the station Mr. Manford, instead of asking his friend home to dinner, held out his hand, and capped the day's injuries by saying:

"I know you will excuse my leaving you in a hurry, but the fact is I did not know it was so late, and the governor and I are due at Lord Dalewood's for dinner. Thank you for giving me so much of your time. I hope I have not bored you awfully."

As a man, having just had a bad tooth out, might bravely say the operation did not hurt, so Dr. Dagley, after the walk, a meagre luncheon, the Aquarium, and endless confidences concerning, and dissertations upon, his friend's complaint, answered he had enjoyed himself very much, and turned away, convinced that if this world had ever been started as a going concern, which he did not for a moment believe, it had by some means or other been thrown hopelessly out of gear.



## CHAPTER II.

### AMABEL OSBERTON.

THOUGH feeling most deadly tired, as after such a day who would not have been, Dr. Claud Dagley knew nothing except a long walk could act as a sedative on his jaded mind.

He had tested the effect over and over again, and always with success, and in the present instance Cromwell Road was scarcely gained before a reaction ensued—a sort of delight at having got rid of Mr. Manford and his symptoms, at being once more free and rid once more of all society trammels.

Everything here below has its compensations, and the shilling patients, whom he was able to bully with impunity, seemed by contrast with Mr. Manford charming. The “howling swell,” if only sufficiently thorough, does not make a bad Bohemian; and the man who had thought to make the Manfords a stepping-stone to fortune did not feel utter sorrow when he had to leave the son to his fate and the father to his folly.

“Some day they will find out,” he muttered, and took courage.

Meantime they could not rob his pint of bitter of its relish or his poor position of its power.

His rough-handed patients had that night a pros-



pect of coming off very badly; but who may forecast the future?

Certainly no one who lives in London. For there is it not merely impossible to tell what a day may bring forth, but even the next minute?

When he turned up Queen's Gate on his way to Hyde Park, Dr. Dagley's professional eye was attracted by the walk of a woman in front, who likewise was proceeding toward Kensington Road.

It was not a reel or a stagger, neither did it resemble the uncertain certainty that marks the progress of one utterly blind. Dr. Dagley did not understand, therefore he quickened his pace, in order to overtake the pedestrian, in vain.

The faster he walked, the more speed she put on—a spasmodic speed, as he quite understood, which could not last. She was a genteelish-looking, slight, poor body, dressed in shabby, well-fitting clothes; a totally respectable woman he would have thought, had it not been for that occasional “heel over,” which, when connected with the after “spurt,” puzzled him immensely. In all his experience, which had been large, he had never come across anything like it. Therefore, as she hurried, he followed on faster; but when he was within measurable distance of that poor, lean, strangely hurrying woman, she flung out her hands as if to catch hold of something, only to clutch empty air and fell to the ground.

In a moment Dr. Dagley was beside the poor creature, and had propped her up against the pillar of a portico. Even then he found it necessary to support her, for she was in a swoon—a delicate, youngish



woman, with small, pretty features, shabbily dressed, but neat and clean.

“Can we get any water?” inquired the doctor of a policeman who happened to be close by.

“I’ll try, sir,” answered the man, and, ringing an area bell, he was soon supplied with what he asked for.

“It is a clear case of semi-starvation,” said Dr. Dagley, looking at the head which hung down helplessly like a broken lily. “I imagined at first from her walk she might be drunk, but this is nothing of that sort.”

“No, she seems respectable,” was the reply.

“I don’t know what we are to do with her,” rejoined the other, casting a glance up the utterly respectable street and its unpromising lines of handsome houses.

Apparently Policeman Z— did not know either, for he also glanced up the street, and down it too, in order to say—nothing.

Though there had scarcely been a person in sight when the woman fainted, not two minutes elapsed before the ubiquitous London boy was well in evidence. He came running up from the Cromwell Road—he sped like an arrow from a bow down from the Park—from afar he scented the sensation as a bird of prey scents carrion, and in his wake there followed a whole army of professional sightseers—men, women, and children, sweeps, bakers, soldiers, till it almost seemed as though an invading force had taken possession of Queen’s Gate, and never meant to leave it again.



“Stand back. Keep off and give the woman a chance—let her have air,” commanded Dr. Dagley, as one having authority, but his tone only produced a momentary effect. A near view was what every one wanted; in these gratuitous open-air shows it always is, and what people mean to have, moreover!

The ubiquitous boy had, of course, secured the best place, and held it to a varied accompaniment of “Where are ye a-shovin’ to?” “Keep yer elbows to yourself,” “Who are you, do you think?” and various other sarcastic and disparaging remarks; and meantime the woman showed no sign of recovering consciousness, and a joyous excitement held the on-lookers spell-bound, for they made sure, if not dead, she was dying.

It was when popular feeling had almost touched straining point that a carriage and pair turning out of the Kensington Road into Queen’s Gate all at once converted the crowd into a crush. Those who stood on the pavement were suddenly invaded by the sight-seers who had been glad to obtain back seats in the road, and the policeman and Dr. Dagley found their work cut out to keep their charge from being trampled under foot. It was all over in a moment; the carriage pulled up, the people ebbed out into the horse-way again, the policeman swept back the boys, and cleared a passage to the house. The footman descended from the box and stood solemnly on guard, while first a middle-aged lady alighted, and then a girl who had that day been presented to her Queen.

No greater contrast could be imagined than between that girl in the flush of her young beauty—



fresh from what had seemed like fairyland—and the death-like figure huddled against the pillar of the portico.

“Oh! what is it—what is it?” asked the girl, horror-stricken.

“It is only a half-starved woman, who has fainted,” said Dr. Dagley bitterly, raising his hat as he spoke.

“Poor soul, bring her into the house; don't let her lie there,” cried the girl, in accents of the tenderest pity.

“Amabel! Amabel!” exclaimed the elder lady, who had swept on through the open door.

“May we take her in?” hesitated Dr. Dagley.

“Most certainly. Johnson, help the policeman.”

“Thank you, I can carry her myself,” said Dr. Dagley, who suspecting Johnson did not care for the task, lifted the woman as though she had been a child, “she is no great weight.”

“Amabel, what are you doing? What would your father say?” remonstrated the lady who had previously cried “Amabel! Amabel!” and was now standing on the staircase.

“I cannot tell, aunt,” was the reply, “but I do not think my father would leave her out on the pavement. Will you kindly bring the poor creature in here?” she added, turning to Dr. Dagley, and opening the dining-room door as she spoke.

But at that point the butler procured a diversion by suggesting that “the cloth was laid.” His tone was respectful, but firm, and implied, if Miss Osberton did not understand the thing that was fitting, he comprehended “what was what.”



“I had forgotten,” she said, accepting his implied rebuke with perfect sweetness. “The library will be better,” and she led the way into that apartment, where Dr. Dagley laid his light burden on a couch.

To make assurance doubly sure the butler, who had grave doubts about the whole business, locked the dining-room door and put the key in his pocket, for, as he afterward observed to Mrs. Graham, who, though nominally housekeeper, really ruled Mr. Osberton’s establishment, “There is a lot of silver about, and that chap who made himself so busy may be a swell mobsman for aught I can tell.”



## CHAPTER III.

### AMABEL BEWILDERED.

“How long she is coming to herself!”

“H—s—sh.”

It was Miss Loveland's “own woman” that had ventured on the first remark, in a very audible though whispered aside to Miss Osberton's maid, who reminded the speaker she ought to keep silence.

Both had entered the library with a purpose—one to convey a message from Miss Loveland to her niece, intimating it was time to dress for dinner, which message really covered a hint in the interests of propriety; the other to see her young mistress did not “mess up” the beautiful dress worn that day at Court, “for Miss Amabel takes as much looking after as a child, and more,” added Fidgin to her fellow-servant—which statement was perfectly true.

Miss Amabel, indeed, needed as much looking after as ten children, being the sweetest, most thoughtless, most impulsive, most tender-hearted, least conventional bit of femininity in the world. Well trained, she must have developed into a noble woman, but if a girl were ever thoroughly spoiled by relatives, friends, and teachers that girl was Morgan Osberton's only child.

“I wonder where she has been,” said Amabel, softly speculative.



Dr. Dagley had taken no notice whatever of the remark or the reproof—indeed, beyond declining their offers of assistance he had not taken the slightest notice of either of the maids; when Miss Osberton spoke, however, he looked up and asked:

“Why should she have been anywhere?”

“I do not know,” answered the young lady, coloring slightly, then went on to offer the weak explanation:

“I never saw any one in a fainting fit before.”

“But you have seen people asleep, I suppose?” said Dr. Dagley, jumping to her meaning with the same rapidity that he jumped to his shilling patients’ symptoms.

“Yes, of course.”

“And when you looked at them did it ever occur to you they must have gone on a journey?”

“No; but that is a very different matter.”

“May I ask in what way?”

“I cannot exactly explain, but I feel——” At which point she paused.

Dr. Dagley smiled, and did not continue the subject.

Something in his smile and in his silence impressed Amabel with a sudden sense of inferiority, which was a new experience to one whose lightest word had ever been listened to as though it bore the stamp of genius. Utterly matter-of-fact, Miss Loveland characterized her niece’s little fancies as “strange ideas,” while Mr. Osberton heard Amabel’s vague notions with the same sort of feeling as that which makes many a foolish parent assert his equally foolish child is “too clever to live long.”



Dr. Dagley was under no delusion of this sort. He came on the field unprejudiced, and looked at Miss Osberton through the glasses of common-sense. Her beauty did not blind or her grace appeal to him, though, standing there with her train thrown over her arm, as ladies ere a different fashion came in were wont to carry the long skirts of their riding-habits, she made a fair picture, the expression of surprised wonder his manner had evoked adding a fresh charm to her lovely face.

“When in doubt play trumps,” says an old authority. “When routed by the enemy in front make an attack on his flank,” is a favorite feminine device, and one Miss Osberton instinctively adopted.

“What is your reason for supposing the poor creature has been starved?” she asked, softly.

Dr. Dagley pushed up the thin sleeve which covered the thinner wrist he was holding, and remarked:

“She is not much over thirty, and her arm ought to be round and plump as yours. Yet look at it, ay, and look at this,” he added, pointing to his patient’s throat, which, as he had removed her shabby bonnet and unfastened one or two buttons of her bodice, was fully exposed to view.

“It was *semi*-starvation I said,” he went on, “the cruelest form of want; because starvation kills quickly, whereas *semi*-starvation keeps the victim lingering. This woman must have endured a long agony!”

“How dreadful!” exclaimed Amabel, a sentiment which each of the two maids echoed after her own fashion.



“It is monstrous!” declared Dr. Dagley, upon whom the appearance of modest luxury and assured wealth in Mr. Osberton’s house had been for some time acting like a spur. “Monstrous that in a so-called Christian and civilized country, within the sound of church bells, within touch of fabulous riches, men, women, and children should be perishing from absolute lack of food. And they die from cold and exposure in streets lined with well-warmed, well-lit houses, inhabited by happy, prosperous people, who sit down every few hours to well-cooked, well-served meals. The poor bear up as long as they can,” he added, with a fine scorn, “and when nature refuses to bear up any longer, they just leave this world quietly. There is an inquest, and the rich say ‘How shocking!’ but go on eating and drinking and making merry all the same.

“I ought not to talk about such matters, however,” he went on, in an access of rage intensified, no doubt, by a sudden recollection of the many things Mr. Manford had failed to do for him, “because I see so much of the suffering and horrible injustice of which this world is full that I forget myself, and often say what gives offence. ‘The poor shall not always be forgotten,’ we are told, however, and the rich had better set to work to right what is so terribly wrong while there is still time to bestir themselves.”

Bewildered by this torrent of wholly unexpected eloquence, the maids stood amazed, while Amabel’s color changed from white to red, from red to



white, and from white to red once more, in a fashion which showed the many phases of feeling through which she was passing. Though she had done her uninstructed best, it was borne in upon her that this strange doctor thought she could only be considered to have failed signally, and to deserve the sweeping condemnation just passed upon all who were not paupers. She did not know where she had gone wrong, and was humbly groping about in search of information.

It is true she was the daughter of a wealthy father and a highly connected mother, but as she had been given no choice concerning the position in life of her parents, her rank could scarcely be accounted a sin. She had been "presented," and bloomed for her brief hour a fair flower in a garden of fair women, but surely that was no crime. Though he lived in a good house and ate two well-cooked, well-served meals at home on most days of his life; though he clothed himself in the best of broadcloth and tweed, the modern equivalents for purple and fine linen, Mr. Osberton did not in the least resemble Dives, for he was always giving to modern Lazarus not merely those crumbs the Eastern prototype failed to receive, but substantial food and medical attendance, and many ointments for his terrible sores, and teachers to instruct his children, and clergymen to show him the strait and narrow way.

As a matter of fact Amabel's rich father gave much more than a bare tenth of his income in charity, and the daughter was searching for words



in which to say how generously he subscribed to hospitals, missions, restoration funds, relief societies, refuges, reformatories, and all the long list of charities the existence of which a wealthy man is never permitted to forget, when Dr. Dagley arrested her still unspoken sentence by raising his hand and exclaiming: "At last! my patient is recovering consciousness. Coming back, perhaps, from the first stage on her journey to the Unknown!"

At any other time this suggestion must have so riveted the attention of a girl who loved in her spare moments to cultivate the Unknown that she would have eagerly pursued the subject, but she had not at all recovered from the shock of Dr. Dagley's attack, or thought of any form of words which might serve to explain how utterly mistaken he was in imagining her wide-hearted, generous, sympathetic father resembled that Dives of old who could feast calmly while one starving and suffering sat at his gate, untended save by dogs!

Dr. Dagley took no notice of her silence. His whole attention chanced at this moment to be concentrated on the patient, who was fluttering uncertainly back to consciousness like a bird weak on the wing.

To two of the spectators there seemed something intensely fascinating about the whole position, about the half-opened eyes that could not see, the parted lips that failed to speak, the living creature that was unable to stir; the handsome young man who so resolutely refused all offers of assistance.



And yet how gladly would either, or for that matter both, the maids have taken some part of the trouble off his hands. They, who had not always been over anxious to nurse their own friends, would then have proved more than willing to minister to the needs of an utter stranger, to bathe her brow, to fan her face, and support her head—to do anything, in fact, calculated to bring them prominently to the front.

After all, as they rightly felt, it is better to be subordinate actors than interested spectators, but Dr. Dagley would have no one on the boards save himself. Even Miss Osberton, who, spite of the impediments of her rich dress and long train, had ventured to hand scent, smelling salts, a fan, a cushion, and various other supplies to the good looking and autocratic medical gentleman, was relegated to a back place. It was hard, very hard indeed, to stand for so long a time saying nothing, doing nothing, seeing virtually nothing; but all at once there came a slight break. The woman tried to move her head a little, and gave up the attempt as hopeless; opened her eyes wide, then closed them as if the light were too strong; then said, in a faint whisper, "Did I die? Am I in Heaven?"

"Oh! no," answered Amabel reassuringly, "you are among friends."

Dr. Dagley smiled grimly at the unconscious humor of the girl's reply.

"Ah!" with a deep sigh, "I thought I saw the blessed angels wearing their crowns and carrying their harps of gold."



Dr. Dagley glanced around. "What does she mean?" he said, half aloud.

"The gilt lettering," suggested Amabel.

"Very likely," he agreed in a matter-of-fact tone. "And you are the angels—*her* good angels, at all events."

"Can I be of any use?" asked a cracked voice at this juncture, a voice which was not strong or loud, but that had power enough in its disagreeable tone to rout the two maids and leave the newcomer in possession of the field. Even Amabel at the sound of that voice winced a little, as one possessed of a fine ear might shrink on hearing wrong notes in music; while Dr. Dagley, utterly undaunted, perhaps because wholly unconscious of having erred, turned and surveyed the most recent arrival critically. "Housekeeper," he thought—"making the sixth servant I have seen in this house. Mr. Osberton's monthly outgoings must tot up to something considerable," but even as he thought he answered:

"No, I thank you, my patient is better; she has spoken."

"Oh! what a good hearing," cried Mrs. Graham. "I came to know if I could help, because Miss Loveland was getting so anxious, sir."

"Most kind of Miss Loveland," returned the doctor, with that manner which puzzled and threw back Miss Loveland's niece.

"She do look bad, poor thing," continued the housekeeper.

"She may well look bad," was the quick retort. "She fainted from inanition."



"Beg pardon, sir."

"I beg yours. I ought to have said from want of sufficient nourishment."

"Dr. Dagley means the woman has been almost starved," broke in Amabel, unable to contain herself longer.

"Dear me, miss, how dreadful," said the housekeeper, who had dandled Amabel as a baby, played with her as a child, and humored her as a girl. "If that be the way of it, sir," she continued, addressing Dr. Dagley, "might I make so bold as to venture—a cup of good soup would be of advantage, or—or—anything else in the way of nourishment we have in the house?"

"I shall be most grateful for a little soup. A few spoonfuls will do more for her than all the eau-de-Cologne in London," which was an ungrateful speech, but then Dr. Dagley could not be accounted a grateful person.

The housekeeper departed to order that light refreshment she had suggested. During her absence, however, Dr. Dagley did not speak, or Amabel either. A feeling of shyness, which was not natural to the latter, held her tongue-tied, though she felt there were many things she wished to say; and to her it proved quite a relief when the woman again broke the silence, this time by asking: "Where am I? How did I come here?"

She seemed frightened, and struggled to rise, whereupon Dr. Dagley, thinking she might fall off the couch, put his arms round her, and answered with reassuring calmness:



“You are in a house in Queen’s Gate. You fainted just as I was passing, and this young lady kindly permitted me to bring you inside.”

Amabel’s heart gave a great bound. After all, this stranger thought she had been kind! What he said could not have been any direct allusion to her father or herself, but perhaps was meant for next door, where the people were indifferent, or the house over the way or further up the street. Anyhow, it was evidently not Morgan Osberton, or Amabel his daughter, Dr. Dagley had taken up his parable concerning, though it might, owing to a misconception, be her kind, tender aunt; and accordingly the girl’s sensitive heart plucked up enough courage to say: “Indeed I felt much grieved to see you so ill, and was glad to try and help you a little.”

“God bless you, dear lady, but I am ashamed to have put you and this good gentleman to such trouble.”

“Now don’t talk any more,” said Dr. Dagley, imperiously. “Save your strength—you will want it all.”

It was a thrilling experience, Amabel felt. She had gone “slumming” with that renowned if mistaken philanthropist Miss Arabella Kirconnell, and been greeted everywhere with the enthusiasm a certain class of poverty gladly extends to youth and beauty, and age and ugliness when it thinks money to be given away lurks behind; but this was better by far.

Without fatigue, without that horrible journey across London, without vile smells and the terrible sight of dreadful women and gutter children, she



had the delicious sensation of believing she was a most useful unit in the world's economy.

She remembered, dear innocent soul, how kindly the Queen had looked upon her that day—as well the Queen might, for the young girl possessed every woman's grace likely to find favor in the eyes of the most womanly woman that ever ruled over England—and thought that gracious lady might be pleased if she knew the girl who had been permitted to kiss her august hand was striving a few hours later to solace one of her Majesty's humble subjects.

It was a self-conscious thought, a thought born of the simple egotism of youth, yet harmless withal, and one which filled Amabel's foolish heart with happiness and kept her silent while Dr. Dagley propped his patient up on what the butler considered that desecrated library sofa, and remarked: "You are getting on, and will be much better presently." As he spoke Mrs. Graham returned, almost effacing herself in the effort to give precedence to Miss Loveland, whom she had not seen till they met in the doorway.

With a courteous movement of her head in acknowledgment of her housekeeper's civility, Mr. Osberton's sister-in-law entered the library and crossed over to her niece, who said, "Oh! Aunt," in a tone which might have meant anything."

Hearing her exclamation, Dr. Dagley turned and bowed profoundly. "Quite with the old manner," decided Miss Loveland, somewhat mollified, while at one and the same time she acknowledged



his salute and glanced at the card lying immediately under her eyes:

DR. CLAUD DAGLEY,  
Upland House, Chesterton Road,  
North Kensington.

“Now, where and when did I meet a Claud Dagley?” she wondered, ere addressing herself to the matter which had brought her downstairs.



## CHAPTER IV.

MRS. VINK.

AFTER all, it was Mrs. Graham who stepped into the breach. She had an uncompromising back, a bust like a deal board, a lean, scraggy neck, steel-blue eyes, an aggressive nose, and wore a bustle, an article of attire not at that time affected by her less worthy sisters. Her cap gave additional severity to her tall, uncompromising person—altogether she did not in the least seem an ambassador of peace. Nevertheless it was she who broke the ice and rendered a disagreeable position pleasant.

“Cook” (“number seven,” checked off Dr. Dagley, mentally) “will send up the soup directly, sir,” she said; then, addressing Miss Loveland, she added: “I know, ma’am, you would like everything done that was possible.”

“Oh! of course,” answered the lady. “How is the——”

“Better,” supplied Dr. Dagley. “She has recovered sooner and seems stronger than I could have dared to hope. She will be fit to leave here ere long, I trust, but I really do not know how she is to get home, she is so very weak.”

“We must have a cab for her,” declared Miss



Loveland, who at that moment would cheerfully have chartered fifty cabs. "Where does she live?"

"I have not an idea."

"No?" politely interrogative.

"No," with decisive firmness "I saw her for the first time this evening as she walked, or rather tottered, up Queen's Gate before me till she fell fainting at my feet."

"How kind you were to help her as you did!" exclaimed Amabel.

"Not at all," he answered, with another "society" bow; this time, however, not so profound, altogether less pronounced. "On such occasions some one must play, however badly, the part of 'Good Samaritan.'"

Miss Loveland took no verbal notice of this remark, because most earnestly she hoped that when next the ancient play referred to was put on any stage, that stage might not be Mr. Osberton's house.

"I live in Rackham Street, lady," at this juncture interposed a faint voice, that sounded as if it came from a great distance.

"Out Kensal Green way?" inquired Dr. Dagley.

"Yes, sir, back of Marylebone Infirmary—between that and the gas works."

"Far from here?" asked Miss Loveland, delightfully ignorant about all unfashionable localities, as befitted her position.

"A long way," answered Dr. Dagley, shaking his head.

"A good four miles," supplemented the faint



voice. "I walked from there to Onslow-crescent to see if I could get a little money that is owing to me, but the lady was not in—out of town; and then, as I was walking back again, I came over queer all at once, and——"

"Now just keep quiet," said Dr. Dagley. Amabel reddened painfully. She felt as though it were she who owed that money, and had caused a woman to come "over queer." Miss Loveland held her peace. She was wondering when the "unhappy person" would be well enough to go.

The soup made its appearance ere long, Mrs. Graham having urged upon cook the importance of haste, and never surely did soup prove a more welcome diversion.

It was strong and savory, such a splendid restorative moreover, liberally laced with sherry, that the exhausted woman seemed to swallow health with every spoonful, and when friendly Mrs. Graham took the empty basin out of her hand she gave a long sigh of satisfaction, and said, "Thank you, ma'am," in a manner calculated to win any housekeeper's heart.

Then, much to Miss Loveland's relief, she began to tie on her bonnet and button up her jacket.

"Are you a widow?" asked Dr. Dagley, who had noticed how much too large her wedding ring was, and how it was kept on by a wad of white sewing cotton wound round and round her thin third finger. He was a man who noticed everything. A man whose eyes were quick and keen as those of a bird or a navy.



“No, sir,” she answered, “but we have had hard times. My husband has been so long out of work.”

“What is your name?”

“Vink.”

“Well, you had better get to bed as soon as possible after you return to Rackham Street, and I will try and look in to-morrow morning.”

“God bless you, sir.”

“These ladies have done far more for you than I could,” answered the doctor with a gesture, which included Mrs. Graham, “and you are now going to be sent home, which is a real charity, as I am sure I don’t know how you would ever have got there by yourself.”

“Indeed, I don’t think I can ever be grateful enough for all your Christian goodness, my lady,” exclaimed the poor creature, steadying herself by laying one hand on the table as she essayed to drop a timid curtsey.

“Do not try to stand—sit down till the cab comes. You had better send Serry for one, Mrs. Graham,” said Miss Loveland.

“Excuse me, ma’am, for the liberty, but if you remember you said this would be a convenient day for him to have the afternoon and evening.”

“So I did—dear me, how vexatious—and there is no one else who can go.”

“They must at least have eight indoor servants,” thought Dr. Dagley, politely impassive, “and yet not a creature capable of calling a cab.”

Again Mrs. Graham proved the forlorn hope.



"I will put on my bonnet with pleasure, ma'am," she was beginning, when Dr. Dagley interposed.

"Allow me to do your errand of mercy," he suggested. "I am going to Kensington Road, where I shall be sure to find a four-wheeler almost immediately."

Miss Loveland almost beamed upon him.

"How *very* kind," she said, with that leisurely grace of manner railways have almost swept away, substituting something better, it may be. "Thank you *greatly*."

"Delighted to be of the slightest service," and with another bow, "quite in the old manner," he would have passed to the door which Mrs. Graham, whose heart was completely won, rushed to open, knowing the peal Miss Loveland rang would not be instantly answered, had not Amabel impulsively arrested his progress across the hall with as sweet and appealing a "Dr. Dagley" as man need have desired to hear.

The words did not move him, however, though he, of course, turned at her summons.

"I only wanted to say one word," she began all in a pretty flutter; "you told Mrs. Vink you would probably see her to-morrow, and as I am sure she must be badly off, will you—will you—take charge of this," trying to thrust a dainty purse into his hand, "and help her as you think best."

He stood looking at the girl for a second ere he answered hesitatively.

"I feel sorry to refuse, Miss Osberton, but I believe it is better for each person to be his or her own almoner, and in any case——"



“I understand,” she interrupted, tears springing to her eyes. “I cannot, however, be my own almoner, and if that feeble woman be not properly helped her face will haunt me. It is impossible for any one to imagine what I feel. Oh! do—do take this, and when it is spent send to me for more.”

“I cannot do what you ask,” he answered, just as he might have answered a child; “but one thing, since you wish it, I will do, namely—find out what Mrs. Vink really wants and how she may best be assisted. Then you shall hear.”

“And you will really let me find all the money that may be needed. You won’t pay it yourself.”

In this world there was nothing less likely. Nevertheless, Dr. Dagley did not think it necessary to state he never parted with a penny he could avoid.

“I shall certainly not find the amount that may be necessary,” he replied, and went as if he were in a hurry to go—as if he did not wish to stay; went considering a problem which had often before perplexed him—why a doctor is the only laborer not considered worthy his hire?

Twice in one day he felt he had been done out of a fee, and yet he was aware he would have felt mightily offended, and with reason, had Miss Osberton offered him in consideration of his “great kindness” that secret tribute money so dear to good physicians.”

Fact is, a man out of sorts with the world is like a man out of health. Nothing pleases him.

Nothing pleased Dr. Dagley at all events on the day when he heard Mr. Manford, junior, had gone over to Dr. Kassiner.



Just as he reached Kensington Road an empty cab came crawling up the hill, which he at once dispatched to Queen's Gate, where Mr. Osberton's butler, known in private life as Mr. Berriss, condescended—sorely against his will—to contract for the conveyance of Mrs. Vink and her wretched fortunes to Rackham Street. Further, with the dignified manner of a person greatly injured and silently protesting, he held the front door wide open—to have done otherwise he felt might be to suggest the existence of some disgraceful secret—while cabby assisted his fare across the pavement and into his vehicle.

Mrs. Vink, very white and tottery, hugged with her left arm a bottle of wine to her heart, while tightly clutched in her right hand she held a sovereign presented by that “dear young lady” Amabel.

The poor woman was still so weak and dazed she scarcely seemed to understand the great things which had been, and still were being done for her.

The cabman, noticing that she was what he styled “dotty,” said tentatively as he shoved her in: “All right, missus?”

“All right, thank you kindly, sir,” she answered, settling herself in one corner of the cab, and humbly trying to take up as little room as possible.

Cabby looked her over curiously, and thought, “This is a rum start,” but Mr. Berriss had paid him the fare, and told him where to drive, for which reasons he mounted to his seat, commanded his horse to “gee up,” and started without more ado for the wilds of North Kensington.

“I would not for a ten-pound note that such a thing



had happened," said Mr. Berriss to Mrs. Graham, whom he collided with as he retired to his own especial pantry, "and that upsetting valet of Wacegrove's passing just at the time! You should have seen the sneer on his face. He'll pitch a fine tale round the neighborhood about the goings on here. When next we meet it'll be 'Who was the Duchess I saw you showing out the other day, Mr. Berriss?' I declare I feel as if I would like to give notice to-night," which was a state of mind Mrs. Graham had to strive to compose, and did not find her task light.



## CHAPTER V.

### MRS. VINK GETS HOME.

MEANWHILE Mrs. Vink was proceeding by many devious ways to Rackham Street. Under the best circumstances the journey from South to North Kensington is one of ups and downs—one calculated to try the patience of both horse and driver. There are hills which may be avoided, and hills which may be sought; and as the cabman knew but little of the locality which is so fortunate as to call Rackham Street its own, he naturally selected the broad Notting Hill Road, and so let himself in for what he afterward called “a very pretty thing.”

“If I had known, I couldn’t have done it for double the money,” he explained. “However, once bit, twice shy. Nobody catches me straying Ladbrooke Grove way again with a born idiot for a fare!”

The distance had not mattered much to Mrs. Vink, for lulled by the unaccustomed movement of the cab, and soothed by the nutritious soup and worn out with the day’s proceedings, she fell asleep at a very early stage, and slept on peacefully till at the corner of Rackham Street she was awakened by a frightful disaster—a disaster so great she at first failed to realize exactly what had happened.

It was that unlucky bottle of wine! given to her



with such kindly intention, meant to be taken half-a-glass at a time twice a day! No one who has proved by experience the perversity of inanimate objects can doubt they take a strange delight in springing unpleasant surprises on human beings. Had Mrs. Vink tried to break that bottle of wine by letting it roll to the bottom of that cab she would probably have failed in her endeavor, but left to its own devices the feat was accomplished as easily as possible. There it lay on the floor of the cab with its neck broken, deluging the mat, and making the vehicle smell like the dock vaults.

“Oh! dear, oh! dear,” cried Mrs. Vink, rapping vehemently upon the window which gave a full view of the driver’s broad back. “Stop! Stop! Stop!” as if any cabby in London could make that broken bottle sound again or replace the precious vintage intended to “do her so much good.”

Badge 100,002’s attention was ere long attracted by the persistent tapping, and, putting his face close to the glass, he shouted while slackening speed:

“Is this the house?”

All the answer he received, however, was, “Oh! Stop, stop, stop,” uttered in the shrill accents of one in agony; “Please, please stop.”

She really looked like a woman distraught, and though he knew he had not arrived at the number mentioned by Mr. Berriss, cabby pulled up, jumped somewhat clumsily to the ground and opened the door, exclaiming as he did so:

“What the dickens is wrong now?”

“It is the wine, sir—the wine—I must have lost



myself for a minute and the bottle fell and got broke—and——”

“Here’s a pretty go!” commented the cabman, and then there ensued a pause, during which he surveyed with disgust the ruin that had been wrought, and Mrs. Vink sobbed hysterically.

“Well, you must be a precious fool,” remarked the irate Jehu, at last. “If you knew you couldn’t keep awake why didn’t you put the bottle safe behind the cushion? You haven’t as much sense as would carry a snipe across a bog—a child of three years old would have known better. Come out of it,” he added, suddenly swept away by a white wave of passion; “that is, if you think you have done harm enough. Who do you suppose will get into a cab that stinks aloud of wine, and who is to pay me for my loss of time, and who is to put it right with my master when I get back to the yard? I’ll have to go and tell him the whole gospel truth, which he’ll not believe no more now than if it was Ananias speaking to him.”

He had her on the curb-stone by this time and was flinging the pieces of broken glass into the roadway, finishing his performance by shaking the dripping mat so close to her that some of the drops of wine spurted into her frightened face.

“Oh! please, sir, don’t be so angry,” she entreated. “I will pay you—I will, indeed!”

“That is a good one, too! You look a likely sort,” he retorted, with a fierce scorn.

“The dear young lady gave me a sovereign as well as the wine—why!” and with a start of horror she looked into her empty right hand.



“Do you mean to say you’ve lost that, too?” exclaimed the man, who had good reason for perfectly believing her story. “Well, of all the out and outers I ever did come across——”

“It must be in the cab,” she cried, and in a second she was back in the vehicle grovelling on her knees, scanning the floor, searching behind the cushions. “I can’t have lost it. Look if you threw it out with the glass—or perhaps it fell on the mat. Oh! look, sir, and I’ll pay you honest. A whole sovereign—what will I do—what will I do at all?”

Then ensued a very bad five minutes, during the course of which Mrs. Vink hovered in an agony of doubt between the side path, the gutter, the roadway, and the cab, and Rackham Street turned out its juvenile population to join in an unavailing search, undeterred by Jehu’s “None of that now,” “Stand back, you young scum, or I’ll lay my whip across your shoulders,” with many other pleasing expressions to the same effect.

“If that ’ere sovereign ever was a passenger in my cab it ain’t there now,” said the driver at last, firmly repulsing a final attempt to re-enter the vehicle, “and as for my having chucked it out with the broken glass, or shaken it off the mat, that is all rubbish. I am not going to stop here all night to please you or anybody else. The best advice I can give you is, next time you get a bottle of wine and a sovereign to the back of it, take better care of your luck,” and, having thus spoken, he shut up both windows so as to preserve the delightful aroma, and was proceeding to lead his horse round, when a new actor appeared



on the scene, Mr. Vink, in an unwonted state of compulsory sobriety and extremely cross because the stinginess of his mates and the low state of his own pocket had prevented him from getting drunk.

"What's up?" he asked, garnishing his simple inquiry with those flowers of language which British workmen often love to strew along their arid verbal path.

Without any hesitation Jehu told them. In like artless fashion, similarly adorned with meaningless but florid words, he recounted all he knew of his fare's adventures from the time he first saw her at Queen's Gate till the moment when she arrested his progress, "screeching and yelling."

"And she's made my cab no more good to me for hours and hours. If I disinfect it, people'll think I have been taking a patient to the smallpox hospital, and if I don't I'll have the police down on me for turning it into a private bar."

"Where's the money she lost?" interrupted Mr. Vink, who had gone into a mental calculation of the pots of beer and halves and three outs of gin that sovereign would have paid for.

"I know nothing about her money," was the answer. "If she ever had it, and hasn't it now, she's lost it as she did the wine. Look here," flinging one of the cab doors open, "as you are her husband, just have a search for yourself—more satisfactory to all parties; take my number if you like; I don't care who knows it. There is nothing in the cab but the scent of that ——— wine. Quite sure? then I'll be off and get paid by somebody," and, suiting the ac-



tion to the word, the diplomatic Jehu, who knew his rights and his wrongs as well as any man in London, drove off, leaving Mr. Vink to walk his wife home to the following accompaniment:

“I’ll teach you to spill good wine over honest men’s cabs. I’ll learn you to sling sovereigns about as if they were brass fardens! I’ll show you the way to waste good money on four wheelers! I’ll give you ‘what for,’ going to gentlemen’s houses the minute my back’s turned.”

These were many and various promises, but Mr. Vink fulfilled them all so efficaciously and expeditiously that within a quarter of an hour after their unlooked-for meeting his wife was a mass of bruises, and he himself—escorted by two policemen—well on his way to the station.



## CHAPTER VI.

### RACKHAM STREET.

NEXT morning Dr. Claud Dagley awoke, if not in a better, in a more sensible mood.

The previous evening had brought quite a rush of patients to his modest surgery, and although twenty-one of them only represented a guinea, still "mony a pickle maks a mickle," and the young man, though discontented, was wise enough to recognize the fact.

He diagnosed each case with a rapidity and decision which would have appalled an ordinary West End physician; but he understood his business, and was in no temper to endure that maundering over "strange feelings" and imaginary symptoms which must often send those who have to listen to the drivel of well-to-do folk almost distracted.

Dr. Claud Dagley had no intention of being driven mad, and erred, perhaps, in his manner of repelling useless talk. At all events, one poor worm that he had been snubbing cruelly turned at last, and said, quite good-humoredly:

"If I *am* bad, you needn't snap a fellow's head off, doctor; 'tain't my fault," while another, in the act of taking up his bottle—the shilling fee included not merely advice but medicine—observed solemnly, in the tone of one given to out-of-door preaching:



“This is the first time I have been here, and I take God to witness it shall be the last.”

“When you find what I have done for you, my friend,” returned Dr. Dagley, coolly, “you will tell God you made a mistake.”

Altogether it had been a profitable and rather exciting evening, which threw a gleam of sunshine across the close of a disappointing day. When at last Dr. Dagley shut the world out and sat down to supper he felt life was very much better worth living than he had imagined a few hours previously.

He always slept well, having a finer constitution than the owner of such pessimistic ideas deserved; and that night, being thoroughly tired out, he slept the peaceful, dreamless sleep of childhood, and awoke, as has been said, able to take a fairer view of things.

It was natural, and perhaps right, he mentally admitted, a father should be so anxious about his Benjamin that he felt constrained to consult the highest recognized authority concerning his son's illness. It was equally natural he should consider Dr. Kassiner instead of Dr. Dagley that authority. “But just let him wait a little,” thought the young man, not, it is to be feared, altogether sympathetically, “and then he will know who was right. Meanwhile——” Well, meanwhile, he decided, it would be advisable to maintain friendly relations with men who went to dine with Lord This and received cards for her evenings from Lady That.

His own people, *i.e.*, his father's people, visited many lords and ladies on equal terms; but as his own people refused to recognize his existence no useful



purpose would be served by considering what his kith and kin had done or were doing. The business laid out for him was to climb fortune's tree unassisted by the Dagleys; and there were few things he more ardently desired than, when he had accomplished his task, to see one of that distinguished family enter his consulting-room and wait trembling for the verdict.

In his way a great physician is a sort of earthly Providence, who can reverse the decrees pronounced by lower tribunals, give hope to those wasting in despair, and pass sentence of death where no thought of death had previously found entrance. It was this *rôle* Dr. Dagley desired to play in that big mansion his soul yearned for; he wanted to feel the scales of Fate quivering in his hands, and to know, not that poor men and women, but the mightiest in the land, were hanging on his accents as though he had been some inspired prophet of old.

Every man has his castle in the air, and this was Dr. Claud Dagley's, which pleased him mightily at times, and made him sad at others—just as the castle seemed near or afar off. One day the towers and pinnacles faded almost out of sight; the next they approached within measurable distance. That morning success, in imagination, came very near indeed.

All he needed, he told himself, was just what most people need—money enough to try his experiment. It has been thus with great minds, as indeed with little, since the beginning. Archimedes no doubt would have attempted that trifling enterprise of shifting the world had a credulous capitalist turned up about the time his plan began to make a noise, and



in like manner Dr. Claud Dagley was only waiting for a capitalist in order to show mankind a better order of physician.

If fancies could be photographed like facts, surely people would oftentimes be ashamed to see the actual presentments of their imaginary children.

Untroubled by any fear of anything, save the dread that no great capitalist might soon realize the harvest lying ready for his sickle in Chesterton Road, Dr. Dagley made a good breakfast, and regardless of all recognized canons of digestion—he was young, however, and as a rule men do not think about their digestions at seven-and-twenty—almost immediately bent his steps toward Rackham Street, which, indeed, did not lie very far away.

He knew there was such a street—it would be difficult for any one resident in the district not to know something about so celebrated a thoroughfare, since, although but young, in a very short period after coming into existence it managed to achieve for itself much the same sort of proud distinction as that which haloes Latimer Road and the Potteries, in its own neighborhood, and the “Come Over and Help Us” parishes lying further out of London, due east. It had a Mission all to itself—and the police were more than vaguely aware of its whereabouts, the benevolent knew it and paid periodical visits, but Dr. Claud Dagley had never trodden its pavement before.

In truth, the inhabitants of Rackham Street, when they required medical advice and drugs, preferred to have both free. This is not an unusual desire nowadays, and perhaps the Rackhamites, at the period



this story opens, were only a little in advance of their time.

One of Dr. Dagley's fixed rules was a shilling down. "No money, no medicine." He gave no credit. Other men in a like line of business might, if they pleased, charge an optional fee, namely, "One shilling down—one and six for booking." He never booked. He had no time for such nonsense. If any man said to him—which, however, no man ever did twice—"I have not a shilling," or "I have forgotten it," Dr. Claud, the people's friend, would answer: "Go and get one, then," or "Go back and fetch it." He knew well the class he had to deal with, knew perfectly they could almost always beg a shilling, or find something to pawn that would fetch the required amount. If they could not beg or "make" the money, why, then they might go to the hospital, the infirmary, or—further still.

To many patients he had given the choice of those three alternatives, and, as a rule, they produced the money. A lot of time must be wasted if a man elects to go for advice to a hospital, and time is money. An infirmary lacks the delights of home; and "further still" the treatment to be expected is so uncertain that it seemed better to get a shilling by hook or by crook than to face travelling so far to meet with something perhaps far worse than even Dr. Claud Dagley.

This only applied to the worthy folk who resorted to Uplands House Surgery. In Rackham Street there was a considerable amount of leisure, wherefore many of the residents could afford to wait at hospitals, and



recruit at convalescent homes, and avail themselves of such advantages as modern infirmaries have to offer—all at the expense of those rich Pharisees who, according to Dr. Dagley, did not consider the poor.

Though there might be diversities of opinion as to how and why the dwellers in Rackham Street and its dependencies chanced to be so poor, concerning their poverty no doubt was possible. For the most part they were all either half-starving or within sight of semi-starvation. As a rule, not a man, woman, or child, when he, she, or it awoke in the morning, refreshed by the pure air wafted from Wormwood Scrubbs, could have told where the day's food was to come from; and yet somehow it did come. Nobody died there from absolute want. On the May morning when Dr. Dagley turned into it from the upper end of Ladbroke Grove Road, Rackham Street looked the picture of decently poor respectability.

Laundry work chanced to be plentiful at that time, and most of the women were off to their daily toil. Many of the children were at school, the bulk of the men away touting for odd jobs, or wearing the boots off their feet looking for regular work it was in the last degree unlikely they would ever secure. Muslin curtains concealed the nakedness or untidiness of front parlors from the curious eyes of passers by. Doorsteps were hearthstoned, and where there was no doorstep the pavement bore that white arc which, in some parts of London, is considered the crest and sign manual of superior breeding. Dr. Dagley surveyed the quiet thoroughfare, and drew his own conclusions. Any person who knows London can decide



the status of a neighborhood quite as speedily and certainly as one who has been about in the world can guess the position of those with whom he comes in contact. It was not the street in which he expected to find Mrs. Vink located. He had thought she might have achieved a deeper depth of poverty, though scarcely of social standing.

It was not long ere he found the number she had given him, where a lame little lad was deftly sweeping out the narrow passage.

"Does Mrs. Vink live here?" asked Dr. Dagley.

"First floor, sir," answered the lad, who was not ill-looking or ill-mannered.

"I may go up, I suppose?" said the newcomer, in whom all the terrible experiences of his professional life had not quite killed every instinct of courtesy.

"If you please, sir."

As far as the first landing the stairs were covered with oilcloth, beyond that point they were bare, which fact Dr. Dagley noticed as he stood for a moment hesitating at which of two doors to knock, one, he concluded, giving entrance to a sitting-room and the other to a bedchamber. He did not hesitate long. Utilizing his knuckles as a knocker he rapped on the former, which was slightly ajar. From the inside came the sound of some one talking in an even monotone—some one who did not take the slightest notice of his summons.

He knocked again, more sharply, and waited. Still no answer was returned; then—patience not being his strong point—he pushed open the door and without crossing the threshold looked in; and saw——



A room very scantily furnished, because at every remove, and they had accomplished many, the Vink family were in the habit of shedding some feathers, till finally it seemed as though they would leave themselves as bare as a hen at the end of a bad moult.

Even the carpet seemed to have shrunk from its original dimensions, for it only covered a small portion of the floor, in the centre of which stood a Pembroke table covered with oilcloth. On the mantelshelf were plenty of ornaments—penny shepherdess and lamb type, funeral cards, and cheap photographs; such being the style of decoration wherewith a “love of art” has infected the people.

For the rest there were a few chairs, a rim clock that had long wearied of chronicling the passage of time, and a flower-stand, in which there was only a spindly spiræa, perishing for lack of water.

The room looked as much in want of water as the plant. Evidently the boards had not been scrubbed for days; a cup and saucer and plate, which appeared to have been used that morning, graced the table; while in a child’s chair—several sizes too small for her—sat a little girl, nursing a huge and originally, no doubt, very fashionable doll—that had, however, in the hands of its present owner, come to look as though it had passed the night walking through muddy streets in a ball dress, and been taken up as drunk and disorderly into the bargain. It had a touzled wig of light-colored hair on its head, and, in spite of the loss of a leg, a broken arm, and what the inhabitants of Rackham Street would have called “a mask of dirt” over its originally pink-and-white face,



kept smiling fatuously as the girl poured forth her soul in that curious monotone which had puzzled Dr. Dagley. Standing outside the door he could have sworn some querulous woman was retailing her woes to a sympathetic gossip, and, though not prone to feel surprise, the sight of that child, with a shock of streaming yellow hair, discoursing to her disreputable doll, did take him aback.

She had caught the fretful, plaintive voice of a much older person to perfection, and was rehearsing all alone—but greatly to her own satisfaction—some scene in which she had without doubt often played a part.

“I don't know what we are to do at all—do you, Dollie dear? I am sure I have said all I can to him, and I might just as well have held my tongue. I have gone on my bended knees to him, Dollie, and held up my hands like this,” dropping Dollie on her knee while she showed how she had put her little hands together in unavailing supplication, “but it was all of no use. The next night he came home more drunk than any lord ever could have been. What'll we do, Dollie? I have told him I will give him this,” and she clenched her fists. “I will, too, one of these days.”

“Is Mrs. Vink at home?” asked Dr. Dagley at this juncture, thinking he had heard enough of one subject for the time being.

The little girl, unconscious any one was near, started up all in a fright, knocking over the small chair, or rather dropping it from her person, as she rose.

“No,” she answered shortly.



“When will she be in?”

The girl only shook her head in reply.

“Where is she gone?”

“I don’t know.”

Dr. Dagley turned on his heel impatiently and walked toward the window, which commanded a good view of the beauties of Rackham Street architecture, while the sole daughter of the house of Vink propped herself against the table, where she found employment in tracing patterns in the dust on the cover while looking furtively at the visitor.

“What is your name?” inquired that individual, presently.

“Aggie.”

“Vink, I suppose?”

The young lady neither admitted nor denied the impeachment, only nodded her head reluctantly.

“How old are you?”

“Seven.”

“Don’t you go to school?”

“Yes.”

“A school where manners are not taught, clearly,” he commented. “Why did you not go to school this morning, then?”

“Mowher,” pronouncing the word in the extraordinary way many children of the same class affect in London—“mowher had no time to curl my hair.”

With distinct disfavor Dr. Dagley surveyed the yellow fleece ere he said:

“Pity she does not cut it off.”

Now Miss Vink’s hair had been to her, ever since she could remember anything, a glory. It had been



praised, envied, marvelled at—on the strength of it she had been called pretty, and given pennies, or, at the worst, halfpennies. Small marvel she looked at the person who made such unpleasant remarks with a sort of incredulous horror.

“What is the matter with you,” he went on—“why do you look in that absurd way? Take your arm off the table—stand straight, and let’s have a look at you.”

As if under the spell of some magician, Agnes did as she was told, and stood upright, Dollie smiling in her arms as absurdly as ever.

“Humph!” commented Dr. Dagley, eyeing her from head to foot, “nothing much wrong there, at any rate,” but he did not add where he thought there might be a good deal wrong.

After that he went downstairs again, having first made a general statement to the effect that it seemed of no use his stopping any longer; and when he reached the bottom of the flight, looking up, he caught Aggie peeping after him through the balusters.

“I am not gone yet, my dear,” he said, in a tone of malicious triumph, then, turning to a man who was just coming out of the ground floor front room, he added:

“Perhaps you can tell me when Mrs. Vink will be back?”



## CHAPTER VII.

### MR. KOBELL EXPLAINS.

“WITH pleasure, sir,” answered the ground-floor tenant, removing, as he spoke, a faded crimson velvet smoking cap adorned with a gold tassel, which conferred a ghastly sort of rakishness on one apparently journeying as fast to death as consumption could take him. “Mrs. Vink,” replacing the once gorgeous headgear with quite an air, “will not, I imagine, return for some little time. She has gone out on a little business—to the court, in fact.”

“What court?” asked Dr. Dagley, utterly at sea.

“The police-court, sir; last night she got her face painted in such a manner that the artist will this morning have to account for his method before the magistrate.”

“We cannot be speaking about the same person,” said Dr. Dagley. “The Mrs. Vink I wish to see is in a very poor state of health, and——”

“Some charitably-disposed individual sent her home in a cab yesterday evening; you, sir, possibly?” interrupted the man—Dr. Dagley disclaimed the suggested praise—“at all events, I perceive we mean the same Mrs. Vink. But perhaps you will walk in, sir—I cannot stand for very long at a time. I have been ailing a little lately, but a kind lady has promised



to give me a letter for Brompton Hospital, where I shall soon be put to rights. That is," he added, shutting the door close, "I feel I can speak more freely when I know the little tinker upstairs is not listening to every word."

"Is that her pleasing habit?"

"It is, sir. She is as deep as a draw-well and as sly as a fox. If I were her father I'd swing for her."

"She is not worth that, surely?" said Dr. Dagley, deeply interested in sentiments he fully shared.

"I know she is not," was the reply, "but still I should be bound to swing for all that."

"She seemed to me rather soft. I could get no information out of her of any kind."

"Trust her—the st—— ahem—toad. She took you for the School Board or a tallyman."

"How very complimentary!" ejaculated Dr. Dagley, vexed, and showing his vexation in spite of himself.

"Men of that sort gets themselves up like regular toffs nowadays, and of course a child who has not been out in the world could know no better," exclaimed the man, eagerly apologetic. "She has always been brought up ignorantly—couldn't return a straightforward answer to a civil question if she was paid for it, I do believe."

"She didn't return one to me, anyhow—but no doubt you can tell me the little I want to know concerning her mother, who undoubtedly was very ill yesterday."

"She was worse last night, and worse still this morning," answered the candidate for Brompton



Hospital. "My wife told me she was a sight to behold; but for all that she would go to the court, where she'll do more harm nor good. She will, as sure as my name is Jesse Kobell."

"Perhaps, Mr. Kobell, you will be kind enough to explain your meaning. I am utterly ignorant, remember, concerning the events of last night," said Dagley, mildly urgent.

"So I conclude, sir," was the reply, "and of my own knowledge I am as ignorant as you, for I retired to rest early, feeling fatigued. I often do feel fatigued now, and no doubt shall till the Brompton people have picked me up."

"No doubt," answered Dr. Dagley, for this statement was put in the form of a question.

"They are very clever there?" The pitiful earnestness with which these words were uttered might have touched any one less inured to such pleading tones than Dr. Dagley. To him, however, sickness and death were but necessary items in the day's work, and meant no more than the poor rigid body for which he is called to perform the last offices means to an undertaker.

"I believe so," was his diplomatic reply.

"A man I know," went on the weak voice, hoarse by reason of the disease which was killing him, "told me about a friend of his who had been given over by three doctors, and went to Brompton with only about half a lung. I am not near so far gone as that. Well, it is close on two years since they took him in hand, and he is alive now and walking about as well as if nothing had ever ailed him."



"Yes," said Dr. Dagley, who had so frequently heard the same legend from "other lips and other tongues" he did not feel inclined to contradict it—without a fee.

"As I was saying," resumed Mr. Kobell, quite satisfied with the answer, "I felt fatigued last night, and therefore did not hear much of the fray myself. Perhaps I may have dozed off, and, anyhow, it did not last long indoors."

"But what was the fray about?" asked Dr. Dagley, somewhat impatiently.

"So far as I can understand, the same charitable individual who chartered a four-wheeler for Mrs. Vink—not you, sir, you say?—gave her a sovereign and a bottle of wine. And then, what do you think she does?" asked Mr. Kobell, dropping suddenly from the loftily florid to the confidentially loquacious.

"It is impossible for me to guess," answered Dr. Dagley, trying hard to keep his temper.

"Blest if she doesn't go and break the bottle and lose the sovereign!" Having worked up to which grand climax, Mr. Kobell threw back his head with a jerk that caused the tarnished gold tassel to vibrate for several seconds, and waited to see the effect his communication produced on his *vis-à-vis*.

"I am not at all surprised," said Dr. Claud Dagley, after a scarcely perceptible pause—"and then?"

"Well, sir, then comes down the cabman," answered Mr. Kobell, disappointed, "who goes on dreadful about his cab stinking of wine, and is wild at the woman for saying she has lost a sovereign which can't be found, and in the very middle of the



fun who should appear but Mr. Vink, who hasn't had a stroke of work for a month, but is just into a job to-morrow. He's a hearty man as likes a good supper, which he seldom gets, and is partial to a drop of drink; and trudging along without a bite or sup or a farthing in his pocket, he hears his wife has done away with a good pint of old wine and a whole twenty shillings, so after all it was not quite unnatural that he should begin to bash her. Whenever he takes to that game she always starts squealing like a pig being killed, which makes him far worse, and so they come down the street, she screeching and he hitting, and so up these stairs, where she managed to give him the slip, and ran out into the street again screaming murder at the pitch of her voice—for a little woman it is wonderful the noise she can make—and he a-following.

“As ill luck would have it, a new policeman was on the beat, who interfered, and then Vink struck him, and the man having to blow his whistle for assistance, the poor fellow was walked off to the station.”

“And a very good thing, too,” commented Dr. Dagley.

“Begging your pardon, sir, I think not; for it would be hard to find a better or quieter chap than Vink, unless he's in drink or his temper is up.”

“And his wife has gone to beg him off?” suggested the listener, wisely declining entering into any argument.

“She has gone to intercede,” said Mr. Kobell, by way of a more elegant rendering; “and, as my wife



told her, she had much better have stayed at home. In the first place, she never went to bed, but sat up all night crying, as if that could do any good; in the next, she has had nothing to eat, because, although my wife made her a lovely cup of tea and a nice bit of buttered toast, she said she could not touch food—indeed, she put it stronger, sir, and I'd take my solemn oath that young image had the whole lot herself."

To Dr. Dagley the feast indicated did not represent a wild debauch; therefore he made no comment on Mr. Kobell's statement, but only asked, after a moment's pause:

"And when Vink has no work, how do he and his family live?"

"God alone, who feeds the ravens, could tell you that," answered Mr. Kobell, solemnly. "Somehow they are fed, though, just as everybody about here is fed seemingly by a miracle. Many and many a one turns out in the morning not knowing where the next bite is to come from, and yet the next bite does come. Often when I'm all alone I sit and think over the whole puzzle, and it seems to me like the manna in the wilderness, just so much for the daily need and nothing to spare. There's one thing to be said, however, about Mrs. Vink," added Mr. Kobell, a little viciously—"she looks so awful bad, people help her when they would not give a scrap to anybody more in flesh. It is quite true, sir. Those lean kine come off a great deal better than they deserve, because it's their own fault they have no flesh on their bones. Then Mrs. Vink does needlework for her old mistress



and her mistress's friends, but she won't what I call 'turn out.' My wife could have got her a job over and over again at the laundry, but no, she really couldn't. She had been nurse, if you please, at a solicitor's in Cranley Gardens, while my wife was cook to Sir Frederick McMunn, where I was head coachman."

Unwilling to enter into the subtle distinctions of rank thus introduced into the conversation, Dr. Dagley contented himself with remarking he thought Mrs. Vink hardly looked strong enough to stand all day over a wash tub, which objection was at once met by a statement from Mr. Kobell to the effect that if a woman would not eat she could not work.

"But perhaps Mrs. Vink really cannot eat?" said Dr. Dagley, always strong in opposition.

"Pish!" exclaimed Mr. Kobell, contemptuously, "give her what she likes and she can eat well enough!" Dr. Dagley thought of the soup and felt half converted, though he would not have said so. "But if she has no money to buy dainties or is a bit put out it is grizzle, grizzle, grizzle—from morning to night and night to morning. If Vink was the devil I pity him," added Mr. Kobell, in a sudden burst of confidence, "and that is the truth, sir."

"How much do you suppose they will fine him?" asked Dr. Dagley, rising.

"I could not say, sir. I have no knowledge of these sort of cases. If she had not gone over I think he might have got off easily, but, as my wife says, when the magistrate sees that face——"



“Ah, yes—perhaps even want security for his good behavior.”

“Most likely; and if you come to think over the matter, sir, what good can he do by banging her about?”

“Judging by results, none at all,” was the answer. “May I trouble you to tell Mrs. Vink when she returns that should I be unable to call this afternoon I will try and do so to-morrow morning?”



## CHAPTER VII I.

### DR. DAGLEY INTERCEDES IN VAIN.

HAMMERSMITH seems a far-off locality in which to try a man for beating his wife at Kensal Green. Nevertheless, it was to that police-court Dr. Dagley took his way after leaving Mr. Kobell.

Time was not money on most mornings to the shilling practitioner. In the former times many men were able to advise patients gratuitously early in the day and secure a good living by visiting later on others who had to pay a fair price for having pulses felt and tongues examined, while at present there are several physicians "running with the hare and hunting with the hounds"—in different words, setting aside certain hours for eighteenpenny clients, and filling in the rest with such half-crowns or five shillings as sick folks in a different rank of life feel disposed to pay.

Dr. Dagley's practice, however, knew no such distinctions—it was one in which any man, whether peer or sweep, possessed of a shilling, was free to enter his consulting-room. He asked no question as to means, and wanted to know nothing about them beyond the sight of twelve pence in silver.

He had gone to North Kensington with his eyes open, knowing perfectly well the "family" practi-



tioners in that highly respectable locality were as many as the land could bear. It is difficult at this period of the world's history for any profession to find a spot which is not fully or over stocked, and Dr. Dagley, who had taken counsel with a multitude and not found safety, was wise enough at last to see his only chance of making a living was to strike out a new line for himself.

That line seemed often bad enough, but previous hospital experience told him there was a deeper depth, namely, attending the sick poor at their own homes; therefore he evaded that part of his work as much as possible, and had secured a fair amount of freedom by charging for such attendance a triple fee, which, like the other "honorarium," he expected to assume the form of prompt cash.

It was for this reason he had ample time almost every day at his own disposal, time to read, time to write, and attend meetings, to see old friends, to take care he did not drop out of the recollection of those who had known him in days when he never foresaw men with grimy hands would come to ask his advice, and poorly dressed, bedraggled women would bring their puny babies, as well as their own many diseases, for him to heal.

A mixture of motives induced him to take the first train from Notting Hill in order to hear how matters had gone with Mr. Vink.

In the first place, having taken the thing up, he wanted to see it through; in the next, there was something about the Vinks which rather amused him, and in such a life amusement counts for a good



deal; and beyond all this he had a vague idea the Osbertons might prove of help to him, and he stood badly in want of help. He was not in a position to let any chance slip by, and as it seemed to his mind the Vink business contained possibilities he accordingly, half-unconsciously, determined to drift with this stream and see where it would take him.

He thought much and seriously concerning Miss Loveland as the train bore him through an unlovely district to Hammersmith, and the longer he thought the more he felt attracted by the idea that she was not like other women of her age and standing—that she might prove a good friend—even a fairy god-mother. Ever that dream castle in Stratford Place was present with him; and why the Prince of Darkness did not appear and offer to strike a bargain for the young doctor's soul can only be accounted for by the fact that, as the Irishman said: "He knew he could have it any time."

At all events, people who could afford to waste a bottle of wine and a sovereign on an unknown woman ought not to be neglected. That portion of Mr. Kobell's narrative had made a deep impression on Dr. Dagley; and he was walking briskly along, still busy with the thoughts which had kept him company from Notting Hill, when he met a woman whose face he could not see—because hidden behind a sopping muslin handkerchief, it was crying piteously. But for the latter circumstance he might have passed her unnoticed, for there were many people on the pavement, but her unrestrained grief caused him to look back, and then he recognized the shabby jacket—



once jaunty—the formerly coquettish bonnet that had fallen so low in the world, and the figure Mr. Kobell generally referred to as “skinny,” but more eloquently spoke of as belonging to “lean kine” when discoursing in his best manner.

“Why, Mrs. Vink, what *has* happened?” exclaimed Dr. Dagley, retracing his steps till he found himself abreast of the distressed woman.

At the sound of her name she stopped, and, removing her handkerchief, showed a face which proved how honest and thorough Mr. Vink could be when he took such “painting” work in hand. When to the general effect capable of being produced by so able an artist was added the moist atmosphere of tears, the whole picture became so terrible that, accustomed though he was to unpleasant sights, Dr. Dagley felt a throb of righteous indignation.

“By Jove!” he exclaimed, and then stopped, while Mrs. Vink again took up the wail of grief surprise had for a moment stinted to a series of choking sobs, and began crying as if her heart would break.

“Why do you go on like that?” he asked, a little impatiently. “Try to control yourself. What is wrong now? Can’t your husband pay the fine? How much is it?”

“No fine at all, sir—no fine at all,” she gasped. “He’s got fourteen days!”

“Here’s a lark!” exclaimed a rude street boy, who was walking in the horse road, and his statement, though irrelevant, did not seem wholly inappropriate.

“Fourteen days!” repeated Dr. Dagley, who had



not been prepared for anything of this sort; "that's stiff."

"Yes, sir, and him going to a job to-morrow, after having been out a month." Mrs. Vink paused to mop up her tears, which were falling like rain. "Whatever we are to do I can't think," she resumed, in a tone so like that employed by the charming Aggie, Dr. Dagley could scarcely refrain from smiling. "We're back with our rent, and we've pledged everything almost but the clothes we stand up in—as you can see for yourself, sir." And she made a fruitless dive after a pocket, which eluded her search as though playing at hide and seek.

"Don't trouble yourself. I take all that for granted," said Dr. Dagley, who had seen too many pieces of old rag wrapped round a bundle of pawn-tickets produced for his benefit not to know what she was fumbling to find. "And so," reverting to the former question, "the magistrate sent your husband to prison."

"He did, sir, though I walked every step of the way here, that weak I could scarcely drag myself along."

"What possessed you to come at all? Hadn't you sense enough to know the state your face is in would go more against him than any word you could say in his favor?"

"No, sir; for I told the magistrate I fell and hurt myself."

"And you expected him to believe that story?"

"I did, sir, but the gentleman went on dreadful to Vink; and though I wanted to go down on my knees and beg him for God's sake to let him off, he



wouldn't; no, not even when I said there never was a better husband living, or a fonder father—he wouldn't, he wouldn't!" and she began to weep again. "The sergeant, who knew us well when we lived Latimer Road way, spoke up quite pretty for Vink, but it was all of no use."

"I should think not when the magistrate looked at your face."

"And they wouldn't let me get near him to say good-by," she went on.

"Probably your husband did not feel in the mood to say 'good-by' to you."

"He did not speak one word, sir; stood like one dazed, and went out of the dock quiet as a lamb—oh! dear, dear, whatever shall I do?"

"What you ought to do is go straight home," said Dr. Dagley; "this will pay your fare," and he put a few coppers in her hand. "I shall try whether I can do anything in the matter, and see you this afternoon. Now do give over crying all; the tears you shed won't undo the harm you have done. Get home as fast as you can," he added imperatively, ere turning on his heel he walked away.

After a short time he stopped to look whether she had followed his advice. Afar in the distance he saw a poor, shrinking figure crawling along, closely hugging the houses as though she would fain creep through one of the walls in order to hide her grief; stopping every few yards, as he conjectured, to wipe away blinding tears; never altering her course, however, but holding straight on—a pitiable object, and yet one which provoked him beyond measure.



Incapacity always provoked Dr. Dagley. Imagine, then, how often his temper must have been tried during the passage of even one short day!

Satisfied at length that Mrs. Vink had no intention of retracing her purposeless steps to the police-court, he quickened his own in order to reach that haven. Several times before, it so chanced, he had been there, as a witness for prosecution or defence—to state the extent of injuries inflicted or received, or to give an opinion as an expert. Therefore he was known to the magistrate in a professional sort of way, as well as to the officials, and also to many members of the Force; and, if only for this reason, he felt rather confident of success when he made a direct appeal on behalf of the erring Vink. Just as he reached the door a policeman, often on duty in Ladbroke Grove Road, chanced to be coming out.

“Ah! Benson,” said the doctor, acknowledging his salute, “no doubt you can tell me the ins and outs of Vink’s case.”

“Wife beating; just got fourteen days, sir,” replied the man.

“I know that—met Mrs. Vink between here and the station, and she told me the result—but what I want to know is why he wasn’t fined.”

“Not our regular magistrate, sir; another gentleman—says he means to put a stop to it.”

“Stop to what?”

“Knocking women about.”

“He has his work before him, then.”

“No doubt of that, sir.”

“Do you mean to tell me,” went on Dr. Dagley,



flaring out in his best manner, "that any man in his senses thinks it is a good work to send a poor fellow to prison for losing his temper, to deprive him of employment, and leave his wife and child to starve or go on the parish?"

"So it would seem, sir—but here is Sergeant Slyth, who knows more of the case nor me," and so saying Benson slid diplomatically to one side, belonging to that prudent portion of the human race who think it unwise to "curse the rich in thy bed-chamber," and believe "a bird of the air shall carry thy voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter."

"I am just going in, Slyth, to try and get the magistrate to reconsider Vink's case."

"No use, sir, I am afraid," answered Slyth.

"Wherein was he worse than any of the other men who are haled up continually for the same offence?"

"Can't say, sir. You see, it was Mrs. Vink—who, like a good many more, is always just where she is least wanted—that did the trick. If she'd been his worst friend she could not have done more than bring such a face into court—a face that half a pound of steak might have made quite respectable."

"I suppose she had not the wherewithal to get half a pound of steak?"

"Likely enough, sir—for he has been long out of work. Still there was no need for her to lose a sovereign, let alone break a bottle of wine, and kick up Meg's diversion when the man lost his temper; and beyond all she ought not to have come here. It was a great pity."

"It is always a pity when people have no sense,"



remarked Dr. Dagley, at which sharp truth Sergeant Slyth first grinned and then decorously—coughed.

There could be no doubt but that the sympathy of the Force was with Vink. In such a case, however, what could sympathy effect?

The sitting magistrate pooh-poohed Dr. Dagley's appeal for mercy and offer to pay any fine which he might feel would meet the justice of the case.

“Fourteen days is a very lenient punishment for such brutality,” he remarked.

“The man, who has been out of work for a month, will lose a good engagement he was to have entered upon to-morrow morning.”

“He ought to have remembered that a little sooner. Whatever he may lose, I shall certainly not let him off with a fine. Men must be taught they cannot brutally ill-treat women with impunity. So far as lies in my power I mean to put a stop to wife beating.”

“Long ago,” said Dr. Dagley, meditatively, as if he were dragging some corpse out of the Atlantic of memory, “a man well known in his day—rather for his absurdities than his wisdom—expressed his determination to ‘put down suicide.’ Some years have come and gone since then, yet suicides are more plentiful than ever.”

There was a titter in court—small things amuse people who, merely to kill time, sit listening to the drivel of talk which goes on in such places, and this inevitable titter annoyed the magistrate greatly.

“I must beg you to retire at once, sir,” he said, even before the little stir of merriment had been



“suppressed.” “Once for all, I shall not substitute a fine.”

It was fortunate, perhaps, that Messrs. Slyth and Benson were not in evidence when Dr. Dagley obeyed the magisterial decision, or they might have heard some remarks concerning “one power that was” the reverse of complimentary.

Dr. Dagley, who liked to have things his own way, passed through a crowd composed of persons satisfied he was one of the right sort, more convinced than before: “’Twas the very worst world that ever could be.”



## CHAPTER IX.

### DR. DAGLEY REPORTS AT QUEEN'S GATE.

WHETHER his pessimism were the natural outcome of a very unpleasant temper, or his unpleasant temper the result of a too constant contemplation of a state of society in which everything needed remodeling, is a problem concerning which only an Ibsen dare hazard a conjecture, but when all was said on both sides capable of being said, two certainties remained, viz., that Dr. Claud Dagley was most pessimistic and had an extremely unpleasant temper.

Old families mating in and out eventually decay, but old families mating incongruously often develop such a "sport" as Claud Dagley. Vaguely one can prophesy what intermarriages of the first description will produce, but no human being is able to foresee what the latter mating may bring forth.

In the present case it had introduced to the world an individual who looked on men of his father's rank in life with the eyes of a Socialist, and who regarded the class from which his mother came with a distaste not to be expressed in words. The poor he despised for being poor; the rich he hated because they were rich; those who belonged to the middle category, and, like Agur the son of Jason, desired nothing better, he regarded with supreme contempt; contentment being in his estimation one of the cardinal sins.



“But for discontent,” he often said, “we might still be living naked in the woods. Discontent is only another name for progress and prosperity. A contented nation turns its potatoes out into a hoop on a kitchen table, and eats them with no relish save a pinch of salt; a discontented people have tea and bacon for breakfast and steak and ale for dinner. Don't talk to me about the blessedness of contentment!”

Those who honestly believe in *morality* as a God mighty enough to regenerate this sinful world, might have found a shocking example in Claud Dagley of its utter impotence to save when disassociated from other qualities. He was a moral man; he did not drink; he did not swear; he did not desire his neighbor's wife, or daughter either; he was not gluttonous or a sluggard; he had not buried his talents, and yet when the great Roll Call sounds, many a thief, many a Magdalen, will surely be bidden to take a higher seat than he.

For he had no love in his nature; he never loved the mother that bore him, or any other created being, except himself; and as we were told nigh upon nineteen centuries ago a man who hath not love is as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

It was this that made life so hard to him, this that at times urged him along the London streets with as deep a feeling of utter hopeless wretchedness as ever drove those of old time who were possessed by seven evil spirits out into the lonely wilderness.

The ills which men less gifted, less favored by Heaven, accepted meekly and bore patiently were to



him as gall and wormwood. Power was the one thing he desired, in which respect he perhaps more nearly resembled the Devil than that God whose work he so often dared to criticise, and any rebuff such as the magistrate sitting at Hammersmith administered, drove him to the verge of fury, and sent him walking to Kensington at the top of his speed. Walking always exorcised—for a time—the demons that too often held possession of Dr. Dagley, and, therefore, when he reached Queen's Gate he felt just like any other less-gifted person, only a trifle exhausted, because temper does take as much out of any one as fatigue or grief.

This question—of the effect produced by mind upon body—was one upon which he often pondered and wished he could solve; but then, he wished so many impossible things that it was merely another item added to an already overwhelming number.

If a person begin the day pretty early it is astonishing to consider the amount of work that can be got through before one o'clock, which hour had not struck when Dr. Dagley turned into Queen's Gate. He never intended to pay an afternoon call, for the visit he proposed being simply one of business seemed especially suitable to the morning hours; "like a little account," as he said to himself, bitterly.

His knock was answered, not by the redoubtable Berriss, but by a boy adorned with many, many buttons, whom he rightly concluded to be Serry, referred to on the previous day in one of Miss Loveland's short sentences. This youth said he did not know whether Miss Loveland was at home, but he would inquire.



"Give her this, please," returned Dr. Dagley, scribbling a few words on a card.

The boy took the card, and asked Dr. Dagley to walk this way, which meant into the dining-room, utterly devoid of plate and bare of all needless accessories, as dining-rooms are wont to be at that hour.

In Queen's Gate silence reigned. Inside Mr. Osberton's house there was a great calm, broken only by the sound of a mellow piano and a rich contralto voice. Dr. Dagley sat in the dining-room, the door of which was not closed, and listened to the stillness, which affected him strangely. Presently the boy returned to say Miss Loveland was at home, and would he walk upstairs. As his feet sank into the stair carpeting Dr. Dagley felt that life seemed natural—far more natural than prescribing draughts for dreadful patients, and looking at limbs in sad want of soap and water.

"Dr. Dagley," announced the page, flinging open the door of a back drawing-room, where Amabel sat dressed in the loveliest shade of blue imaginable, while her aunt, in a rich morning dress, was entering from the larger apartment through parted curtains, which she dropped behind her.

"Then *she* is the musician," thought Dr. Dagley, which conjecture was at once right and wrong, for although Miss Loveland had been trying over a new song, there was nothing to choose between the vocal gifts of aunt and niece.

Miss Loveland acknowledged the visitor's bow stiffly. Miss Osberton returned his greeting with a faint smile. Looking from the elder lady to the



younger, Dr. Dagley instantly realized there must have been rough weather in Queen's Gate, though he could not in the least understand whence the storm had come.

"I have taken the liberty of calling," he began, feeling more than ever as if he were in Mr. Osberton's house to ask for that little account, "because I thought you might like to know the latest news concerning Mrs. Vink, and it is difficult to explain such matters by letter."

With an air of utter weariness, Miss Loveland sank into a chair—at the same time intimating Dr. Dagley might follow her example. This Dr. Dagley immediately did, perhaps from a desire to prove that the lady did not impress him in the least. Already that little dream concerning a fairy godmother had melted into air. If ever a carriage drove round any corner to convey the North Kensington doctor from his shilling patients, it would not be horsed by Mr. Osberton's sister-in-law; and, quite satisfied or dissatisfied on this point, he sat down, and waited.

"It is really extremely good of you to come here," began the lady in answer to his little speech, "but I do hope you will not be annoyed when I say frankly I trusted we had heard the last of Mrs. Vink."

Dr. Dagley rose instantly, and, making a clutch at his self-control, which seemed in danger of vanishing, just caught it.

"I am sorry," he managed to say, and his voice did not sound like his own. "I did not know—I beg to apologize, and to wish you good-morning."

"Oh! do not go," entreated Amabel.



"I must ask you to be kind enough to allow me to explain," added Miss Loveland, with an admonitory glance toward her niece. "Pray be seated."

"Thank you," he replied, but he did not seat himself; instead, he remained standing, holding his hat in his hand, ready and anxious to leave the room at any moment. Amabel grew quite nervous; Miss Loveland, on the contrary, understood and accepted the position gladly. She meant to be rid of the Vink worry, but at the same time she felt this very gentlemanly young doctor, who was so quick to take a hint, deserved to be treated with courtesy; therefore she went on at once to say:

"The cabman you were kind enough to send for your patient returned last evening while we were at dinner, and asked for more money, though he had been fully paid before he left here. Our butler reasoned with him, but it was of no use. Finally, he became so impertinent that, fearing Mr. Osberton might hear the disturbance, the housekeeper sent ten shillings in order to get rid of him."

"You do not hold me answerable for a vague cabman's *laches*, I hope," suggested Dr. Dagley in a tone of polite anxiety, which only thinly veiled the fine sneer his words implied.

"By no means, believe me. How *could* I after all the trouble you took and have taken?" answered Miss Loveland, quite as if she were speaking the truth, though, indeed, for many hours she had at intervals been talking like a person who believed the cabman and Dr. Dagley were one. "Of course I quite understand you know nothing of the man, who, Berriss



declared, was positively dreadful. He actually had the audacity to say he wished Mr. Osberton would come out and smell how his cab reeked of wine."

"You should make allowances, Miss Loveland," said Dr. Dagley. "This poor, ignorant fellow did not know the sort of person he was insulting by such a terrible proposition. Really, I am sure he meant no impertinence. Like his betters, he was only thinking about himself and his own affairs, and for that reason felt anxious the gentleman from whose house he took his fare should understand the true state of the case. I have no doubt whatever but that his cab did smell abominably. Mrs. Vink managed to spill a whole bottle of wine and lose a sovereign in it. Gold has no smell, or that might have been traced by its scent."

"Silly creature!" exclaimed Miss Loveland, ignoring, after the charming wont of her sex, the whole of Dr. Dagley's speech excepting just the little scrap that bore on the topic uppermost at the time in her mind, "and then—but I do so wish you would sit down."

"Thank you"—very pleasantly—"I really cannot remain. The few words I came to say will not occupy a moment—when you have quite finished."

Miss Loveland looked at her unwished-for visitor and thought: "What a strange person—what an unaccountable person!"

Never before had any young man, familiar with his P's and Q's, talked to her in a tone of such easy equality. He was not disrespectful, but he knew no reverence—yes, that was his want—the modern want.



He seemed actually to hold that dreadful cabman blameless, when every one knew he had been frightfully impertinent, and made use of such language as Mrs. Graham declared—but that possibly was a mere flight of fancy—caused her hair to stand on end, and excited wonder why fire did not fall from Heaven on the delinquent.

“Cabby did not return again after a brief interval and demand more money, surely?” asked Dr. Dagley, as a gentle reminder, when he saw that the recital of her sore experience had sent poor Miss Loveland’s wits wool gathering.

“No—but Berriss gave notice!”

“Really!” exclaimed the other, much amazed. “And why, if I may ask?”

“He said he should be grieved to go, but that he could not stay in a place where women in Mrs. Vink’s sphere of life were made welcome in a gentleman’s library, and cabmen could come and go as they liked, swearing as if Queen’s Gate were the New Cut.”

“I sympathize with Berriss. The whole thing must have seemed very hard to a person in his ‘sphere of life.’ He is not going, however, I hope?”

“Mrs. Graham talked to him for more than two hours this morning, and at last he consented to stop. She had to assure him, however, that nothing of the same sort should ever happen again.”

“Therefore, the next time Mrs. Vink feels inclined to indulge in a fainting fit she had better select some other thoroughfare,” commented Dr. Dagley. “I ventured to call because last night Mr. Vink, aggravated by the same cabman who tried your butler’s



righteous soul, and maddened by the loss of a sovereign and a bottle of wine—like many another man far above him in station, Vink seems to appreciate good vintages—so far forgot himself as to strike his wife, and, in consequence, had this morning to face the Hammersmith magistrate, with this result: fourteen days' imprisonment for himself, and loss of work he was to enter on to-morrow; wife—person you saw—and child left destitute with a bundle of pawn-tickets. Having been so very kind, I thought you might like to know the exact position; therefore I came, and can only beg your pardon for having added to your annoyance."

He had moved toward the doorway as he spoke, and now stood there, a tall, handsome, self-possessed fellow, who looked as though all he desired was to uphold the poor and needy, to champion the cause of the orphan and helpless. As a matter of fact, there was nothing under Heaven less in his mind at that moment than God's "dear poor." Still, poverty is always a good stalking horse, and one under cover of which he was too fond of firing at those wicked persons who rejoiced in an abundance of this world's goods.

"But, Dr. Dagley—Dr. Dagley," cried Miss Loveland, so far carried out of herself that she crossed the room and actually laid her hand lightly on his arm, "the poor woman and her child must not starve."

"They shall not," he answered, in a lordly sort of way (he had cast up the probable expense and thought it worth incurring, in order to show this rich lady what a very little body she was). "A man told me



this morning the poor were fed in Rackham Street by a miracle, like the Jews in the wilderness, and I quite believe him."

"But one would wish to take some part, however small, in that miracle."

"It is far better often not to interfere—injudicious help is worse than no help at all." Miss Loveland thought of the wasted wine and the missing sovereign, and took this tat for her first tit as meekly as a saint. "Even this morning, owing to imagining such poor interference as mine could be of any avail, I prepared a great disappointment for Mrs. Vink." Dr. Dagley had scored so triumphantly he could afford to be generous. "I went to Hammersmith, meaning to pay whatever fine might be inflicted, and when I found the nature of the sentence entreated the magistrate to reconsider his decision, which he absolutely refused to do. Therefore, Miss Loveland," he added, with mock humility, "I did no good whatever—I shall have to tell Mrs. Vink I am unable to help her husband at all, and I stand before you a confessed failure."

"We cannot command success," said the lady, "but you have done your best to deserve it! Indeed, your kind thoughtfulness toward that poor woman makes me feel ashamed of my own irritation when your card, with its pencilled line, was brought up. Pray forgive me."

"I have nothing to forgive, and only regret I should again have intruded Mrs. Vink on your notice at so unfortunate a time. It is to be hoped neither she nor her poverty will ever trouble you in the future."



“But I want to be troubled—at least I want to help her. She can't live without food while her husband is in prison. Will you kindly be our almoner, doctor?” and Miss Loveland drew forth a dainty purse, which he, however, waved smilingly aside.

“I will see to all that,” said the man who believed nothing was right. “Do not distress yourself; the Vinks shall not starve, or discompose Mr. Berriss again, if I can prevent so great a misfortune. It requires time and thought to disburse money for another, and I have neither time nor thought to spare. Will you allow me to thank you for your courtesy, and to wish you good-morning?”

“Good-morning,” returned Miss Loveland, extending her soft white hand, “and believe that I admire your philanthropy.”

Dr. Dagley took the soft white hand with due respect, and bowed diplomatically. The whole business struck him as an interchange of official red tape between two of the same order. Then he bowed once more, this time to Miss Osberton, who, at a sign from her aunt, rang the bell, which, however, neither Berriss nor Serry seemed to hear, probably because they were wrangling in the basement. Therefore Dr. Dagley opened the front door for himself, banging it afterward with a force which brought both butler and page immediately to the front.

Thus the “shilling doctor” shook the dust of Queen's Gate, which was unworthy, off his shoes; thus, not without credit, he left those who failed to recognize his merits, and taking train, the modern equivalent for wings, pursued his way back to Notting Hill—



from which station he at once bent his steps to Rackham Street, where he found Mrs. Vink still sobbing at intervals, and the charming Aggie advising her doll not to marry, "because, you see, this is what comes of it."

Dr. Dagley swept the child's chair, Aggie, and dolly aside without ceremony, and, seating himself, proceeded to deliver a lecture to Mrs. Vink. First he ordered her to stop crying, then he said: "I did all I could for your husband, but it was of no use. Your face was enough to send half-a-dozen men to prison. What under Heaven took you to the court I cannot imagine, unless it was the desire every foolish woman has to go where she is least wanted, and of all the foolish women I ever met I think you are chief."

It was hard on Mrs. Vink, who thought herself most sensible, to hear this candid opinion, but Dr. Dagley's tone and manner produced such an effect that she admitted, with a fresh burst of tears, she might not have been over-bright; "but then, you see, sir, Vink was so long out of work."

"Don't tell me," retorted Dr. Dagley, "I know all about that; it is the way with the whole lot of you. While a man is earning good wages you spend every farthing and never put a penny by. If we were as sinfully thriftless, I wonder what would become of us. Then, when you had money given to you, you lose it, and could not compensate a hard-working man for making his cab unfit for any one to ride in; consequently, he went to Queen's Gate, and made such a disturbance Miss Loveland was barely civil to



me, as if I were answerable for your folly; then you must needs get your husband a fortnight's imprisonment, and now, instead of making the best of a bad business and cleaning up your place a little, you sit down and cry!"

"Well I may cry," sobbed Mrs. Vink, "with my husband away, and not a bite in the house, and the rent behind, and the poor dear child——"

"Stop that," interrupted Dr. Dagley. "If you ever read your Bible, which is unlikely, you would know when the five foolish virgins found they had no oil in their lamps they begged of those who had and did not get it. Nowadays, unlike them, such idiots as you often do get it, which is the thing that ruins you all. You are going to get now help for fourteen days. As I had indirectly a share in bringing about this trouble, I mean to give you—not money to fling about, but money's worth to keep you from starving, as well as some medicine. Good afternoon; I will call again in a few days, when I shall expect to find you have at least scrubbed your floor," and with this parting shot Dr. Claud Dagley departed in a mild rage, for he had reckoned the whole matter out more at length, and found, including rent, his proposed charity would cost him fully one pound ten shillings—otherwise, the fees of thirty patients—which was a good sum to pay for his whistle.

Nevertheless he did not quite grudge so unwonted an expenditure. When upon the one side he entered the utter discomfiture of Queen's Gate, and on the other his own triumphant occupation of Rackham



Street, it could scarcely be said it was he who came out the loser.

“Got your order for Brompton?” he asked Mr. Kobell, whom he encountered as he ran downstairs.

“No, sir; but it will come to-morrow, no doubt.”

“Ah!” thought Dr. Dagley, who had heard the same sort of story many times before, and preached little sermons upon it, which all bore reference to the indifference of the rich, and the way everything in this world was mismanaged!

He spent a fairly profitable evening—though so many men, women, and children did not attend as on the previous night—and it was after ten o'clock before it was possible for him to shut the world out, and sit down to supper. Some letters which had come by the last post lay on the table, and among them one directed in a lady's hand.

Dr. Dagley's fair correspondents were not numerous. So good-looking a practitioner had love made to him as a matter of course, but such North Kensington missives of affection had somehow not exactly the look, or the feel, or the faint delicate perfume of the letter he looked at curiously.

“I wonder who this can be from,” he thought, as he opened it, and turned to the signature, “Amabel Osberton.”

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Dr. Claud Dagley.



## CHAPTER X.

### AMABEL "COMES OUT."

THERE was "revelry by night" in Queen's Gate. From Mr. Osberton's house, which was brilliantly lighted, there came that strange murmur which is like the rush of many waters heard from afar; from out the open windows floated at intervals the melody of some wonderful voice, secured at much price for the occasion; red cloth was laid across the pavement, carriages set down and drove off.

In the hall, Berriss, assisted by Mr. Osberton's footman and a magnificent individual, lent by Baron Questo, reigned supreme; the library, which had once been put to such vile uses, was now graced by the dignified presence of Mrs. Graham, who, supported by Fidgen and Miss Loveland's own woman, dispensed tea. Serry seemed a pervading presence, for he was everywhere at once. A supper, which would have wrung tears of pity from an anchorite's eyes, was spread in the dining-room, for no expense had been spared—no expense ever was spared when Mr. Osberton entertained, and this chanced to be an entertainment on a very special occasion, namely, the coming out of Amabel, only daughter, only child, of a very rich man.

Properly speaking, on the afternoon when she was



presented, Miss Osberton took her first orthodox step into Society; but then, of what avail is it taking one step unless that be followed, and pretty promptly, too, by another?

No person knew better what was expected from those placed by Heaven in a certain rank than Miss Loveland. The grand-daughter of a Peer, the daughter of an Admiral who had taken to wife a certain widow whose first husband was a very poor and proud Lord, the only people she ever really mixed with were, as Baron Questo tersely phrased it, "of that sort." All her younger life had been spent in trying—on very small means—to keep up the traditions of her family, and when Mr. Osberton married her pretty sister, and so rescued them both from the practice of petty economies and the necessity for small deceits and little pretences, out of very gratitude she made it her business to fit him for the high position to which he had attained.

And with remarkable success: a pervert often develops greater zeal than one born in the true faith, and Mr. Osberton had long adopted the whole shibboleth of fashion as though to the manner bred.

It was not for himself, however, he desired that fickle dame's favor—no—but for his daughter, the one creature, since death, perhaps in mercy, snatched away prematurely the wife whose heart he never possessed, he had left to love on earth. For her he labored, for her he made friends, for her he did many things he would never have done for himself, for her he poured out money like water, for her he bade beauty, rank, wealth, wit, talent to his house, and



held high festivity on that night when she "came out," and there was revelry in Queen's Gate.

The rooms were packed, and yet still fresh guests kept arriving, till even the staircase became difficult of ascent. People hemmed into one corner, catching a glimpse of some friend half-a-dozen yards distant, might perhaps manage to nod and smile, but could not hope to speak.

Everybody almost who had been invited came, and but that many went soon away the guests must have overflowed into the hall, where, as a matter of fact, several remained without attempting to pass upward, greatly to the discomfiture of the conservative Mr. Berriss.

Baron Questo was among those who thus presumed on intimacy. The Baroness, less happy than her lord, sat upstairs in a recess fanning herself, utterly cut off from every one she knew.

Truly a most successful evening. Well might Miss Loveland's heart swell with pride. Had the drawing-rooms in Queen's Gate been four times larger, she could still have filled them to suffocation; and what might any hostess desire more?

Baron Questo was discussing the most recent "big smash" with a recently knighted City man, rich with all the spoils of modern commercial Egypt, when the Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Burt Craden arrived. "How do you do?" said the Baron, breaking off his City chat in order to intercept their progress; "going to venture up? Much better stay here. It is a black hole of Calcutta sort of thing, I am told, aloft—well—if you will. Tell me, is your nephew better, Mrs. Craden?"



"We hope so," answered the lady; "he is under Dr. Kassiner, you know."

"I did not know—delighted to hear it—impossible to be in better hands. He will soon set him to rights." After which interesting conversation husband and wife passed on, and the Baron immediately resumed his City talk at the very point where he had broken it off.

"These monster concerns are becoming a great source of danger," he said, oracularly. "I prophesied long ago what would happen—what has happened. The crowding out of small men, the absorption of everything by a few great houses, is a very bad thing. We shall soon have but two classes in the City—clerks and capitalists. There is scarcely such a thing as a middleman—a smaller trader—left."

"It was the Stores began it all," said the other, gloomily. "If Government had set its foot down at the first as it ought to have done——"

"Pooh! Government!" interrupted the Baron; "what is the use of talking about Government now, when the masses, instead of being led, drive their rulers just whichever way they please? Are you much in?"

"No; I got a hint nearly a year ago, and managed to work out."

"You were fortunate," answered the other, wishing his friend had passed on the hint. "How late you are," to a gentleman going up the staircase.

"Yes, my uncle is in town, and I could not get away earlier."



"Who is that?" asked the City knight, anxious for information.

"Don't you know? Saughton, son of John Saughton, one of the firm of Saughton Brothers, the great iron people. This man is enormously wealthy, and he will be richer still when his uncle, Lord Wreedmere, dies. Beaconsfield gave him a peerage because he had so much money he did not know what else to do with him." And then Baron Questo was about to add another piece of information, but, remembering himself just in time, refrained, and only said:

"Best fellow living—would do a kindness to his worst enemy if he had an enemy, which I do not believe."

"He is not much to look at," remarked the man who had contrived to "work out."

"No," agreed the other; "and it is a pity," he went on thoughtfully.

It was quite true. Mr. Saughton's features might have been fragments of different faces picked up in some second-hand shop devoted to the sale of such articles, so little did they match, so whimsically incongruous was the effect produced when they were fitted into place; and yet the beauty of the soul that looked out of his lack-lustre eyes, and the wistful tenderness of the smile that often played about his unlovely mouth, might well have made any one forget how very plain nature had made him, and remember only he was the best fellow living, always doing good, wondering how he could do more good.

He did not shower away his wealth in heavy thunderstorms of benevolence; rather his quiet actions



resembled the blessed dew, which, stealing silently down when there is no one by to note its falling, refreshes weary flower, opening bud, drooping leaf, parched earth, and scatters over the green springing grass drops of moisture more beautiful than the brightest gem that ever glistened in Royal crown.

He had known the Questos all his life, and Amabel Osberton during the whole of hers, for he had as a boy made daisy chains to bind her, and driven her in traces gay with buttercups and dandelions, and fashioned wonderful swords and parasols and butterfly cages for the child out of the rushes that grew so thick in that never-to-be-forgotten dell deep in the heart of Chasemead, Baron Questo's place, hard by the silvery Thames, where England's famous river flows calm and broad, a few miles above Henley, swiftly to the sea.

In that dell lay the fairy lake which had been the birthplace of Amabel's tender superstitions and superficially mystical fancies. There had Saughton, steeped in German lore, told her how the little people danced by moonlight on the sward, and slept all day in the flowers that starred the mead, hiding themselves so deep in the bells that no one could ever find them, though many a sprite had been killed by clumsy fingers that hoped to discover their secret hiding-place; there came down the stream that fed the lake; there, on the stump of a willow which overhung the water, a kingfisher had often been seen, but would never be seen more, because he was shot one morning "very early, quite dead;" there were thickets of wild roses, that bloomed gloriously in their season, suc-



ceeding blackthorn, and hawthorn, and guelder balls, and all the white loveliness of spring.

What a sweet, sweet dell it was—what happy hours he had spent there when Amabel was a motherless little tot, and he a boy home for holiday time to the Questos, who seemed so much more kind than any kin he had ever known.

It all came back to him with such a rush as he went up the staircase that he had to stop for a moment on the first landing, lest the wave of memory, sweeping on, should wash his composure away with it.

Then some one spoke to him, and he answered mechanically, but the spell was broken, and he walked forward toward the drawing-room door—slowly, by reason of the crush.

"I was afraid you were not coming," said Mr. Osberton, grasping his hand.

"My uncle is passing through town, and I could not get off sooner," was the reply. "What a crowd you have to-night."

"Yes, but that, I suppose, is the correct thing, is it not?"

"Nowadays it would seem so. How is Amabel?"

"Charmingly, and longing to thank you for that exquisite fan! My dear boy, you ought not to be so extravagant."

"Don't you know——?" but there Mr. Saughton paused. They were standing apart, just outside the throng, for the guests with one consent had left a little space clear for them at the foot of the next flight of stairs; yet Lord Wreedmere's nephew felt he could not say what was in his heart within sound of that



babble of tongues, within view of so many decorously inquisitive eyes.

"Yes, I know," answered Mr. Osberton confidentially. "When we last spoke I said she was too young; but I don't care how soon now, Edward—when you think well——"

"We can't talk here," answered the other, hurriedly. "I will see you to-morrow."

"Very well," was the reply; "now go and find her." And Mr. Saughton went.

He was trying, poor fellow, to regain his mental equilibrium after a blow which might well have shaken a stoic. There never had been any engagement or understanding between himself and Amabel Osberton. Her father did not wish it.

"She is too young," he said, when Mr. Saughton first mooted the matter, and, as the girl grew in beauty and in stature, the lover acknowledged to his own heart it would be more than unfair to take advantage of her inexperience, and let her bind herself by any promise she might afterward repent.

His feeling was quixotic, perhaps, but then Mr. Saughton could only be considered the embodiment of chivalry, which did not die, as many suppose, when knight-errantry went out of fashion, but is just as much alive in this prosaic nineteenth century as in the age men like to talk of as "golden;" though, in truth, if we could only recognize the fact, each age must be golden which worships God, and loves man, and respects women, and hates wrong, and boldly defends the right! Whether he did well in leaving the girl ignorant of his real feelings was a matter to



which he had never given a moment's consideration.

He knew his personal deficiencies—who knew better?

Nature had omitted to make him handsome or of a stately presence; nevertheless, he believed Amabel, though doubtless she admired such gifts, did not value them unduly.

And he had been part of her life, all her life; tenderer towards her than brother ever was to sister; more indulgent than even her own father, more sympathetic than her fondest friend; constant as truest lover in the pages of her favorite romance, devoted as husband to dearly loved wife—and he felt no real doubt but that his boyish attachment had borne fruit.

His faith in everything coming right eventually had been certain, if timid, till the evening Mr. Osberton decided his daughter should come out at that wonderful party in Queen's Gate—when over dessert, in a much older part of fashionable London, one of those wet blankets who delight in smothering the sweetest joys humanity can know said:

"It is not wise of you, Edward, to think so much about Miss Osberton. She is not for you."

Mr. Saughton looked in amazement at the person—a woman—who made his pleasant speech ere he asked: "Why not?"

"Well, for one reason, because it is a case of May and December."

"But, my dear aunt—" the person who stepped thus boldly along a road loving friends had feared to adventure on was no less an individual than Lady



Wreedmere—"I am only Amabel Osberton's senior by eleven years."

"A greater disparity than twenty or twenty-five would prove later on," was the retort, which contained such an amount of disagreeable truth that Mr. Saughton had to pause ere replying, weakly:

"There is no one else."

"Not now, perhaps, but there will be ere long," which stunning and unexpected statement struck the modest lover dumb.

"And besides," interposed Lord Wreedmere, who had been patiently biding his time, "I think you owe something to your family."

"In what way?" asked Mr. Saughton, utterly dazed.

"In this way," said Lord Wreedmere, resting his elbows on the table and fitting the five fingers of his right hand into the five fingers of his left—an attitude which Mr. Saughton knew of old portended no good—"you could consolidate our position."

"I did not know our position required consolidation," said the unhappy young man.

"Every family does," was the imperious reply, "every family, whether new or old. Our own royal house," proceeded Lord Wreedmere, speaking as though he were a cousin, or an even nearer relative, to the Prince of Wales, "always try to strengthen their position by suitable alliances."

"Doubtless," answered Mr. Saughton, meekly, "but then, you see, I am not one of the Guelphs."

"Through the gracious sovereign kindness of the Guelphs, however," returned Lord Wreedmere, roll-



ing the august words about in his mouth as though they had been dainty morsels of food, "you are now one of the great order of noblemen—at least you will be when I die. Even at this moment you are heir-presumptive to my title, and therefore it behooves you to strengthen our position by the only means within your power, namely, by a desirable marriage."

"Yes," interposed Lady Wreedmere, "because you have not hitherto been of the slightest use to your family."

"You succeeded to a great fortune, which should have enabled you at once to take a high place in society, yet, as your aunt says, you have done nothing, literally nothing, in that way, or indeed in any way."

"I am sorry to have proved such a disappointment," said the young man.

"You need not be disappointed if you will listen to good advice and seek a wife among our old nobility."

"Which is exactly, I am sure, what Miss Osberton will do—I mean, she will marry a man able to give her a far higher rank than that her father occupies. I hear the Duke of Hightowers would not disapprove of such an alliance for his third son. The Hightowers are very short of money."

Mr. Saughton looked helplessly from uncle to aunt, and then fixed his eyes on the tablecloth.

"You have been so particularly fortunate in every respect that I fear you are in danger of forgetting there are other persons in the world who have a right to be considered," went on Lord Wreedmere. "You have done nothing for your family, who have done



much for you. As I remarked just now, you succeeded to a large fortune, which others worked to amass. Possibly it may occasionally have crossed your mind that *you* did not make the money you enjoy."

"I know I never could have made it."

"I am glad you have the grace to acknowledge even that. Let us go a little farther. You enjoyed educational advantages your father and I lacked; what have you to show for all the years you spent at school and college?"

"Not a thing, so far as I know," put in Lady Wreedmere.

"I never hear of my nephew making a great speech, I never see his name in the papers, no one ever compliments me concerning his talents—he is not even in Parliament," went on Lord Wreedmere, as though addressing a large and interested audience.

"No, I am not in Parliament," agreed Mr. Saughton, who was growing very nervous.

"Have you tried to get into Parliament?"

"I do not wish to get into Parliament."

"There, you see. If a man have no ambition, no desire to rise, no thought save how he may remain hopelessly mediocre, what is any one to do with him?"

"Nothing, save insist on his marrying a well-born, clever, sensible wife, like Lady Janet Haverhill, for instance," supplied Lady Wreedmere.

Mr. Saughton remained silent.

"The whole trouble began when your poor father so unfortunately appointed Baron Questo sole guardian," said Lord Wreedmere, who had been passed



over himself in consequence of a fraternal quarrel. "But for that you might never have known the Osbertons, or fallen in love with a girl young enough almost to be your daughter."

"And who will throw him over the minute she gets a chance," interrupted Lady Wreedmere. "Of course till this season she has never had a chance, living in the heart of the country, like a sort of nun; but now that she has been presented, she will have plenty of offers. I don't admire that style of beauty myself—still, no one can deny she is handsome."

"She is lovely," declared Mr. Saughton.

"She has spoilt your life, whatever she may be," returned Lord Wreedmere. "Here you are, at nearly thirty-two, without a wife, without a career, without a purpose; you have done nothing, as your aunt truly says; you have not travelled to see the inhabitants of other lands, you are ignorant of Courts, diplomacy has no attractions for you. If you had gone into the Church you might have been on the way to a bishopric ere now, if you had chosen politics a future possible prime minister—but no, you have wasted your youth, you have mooned away years that can never be recalled. Other men have made their mark on our country's history—but you! Why, you have not even written a book."

"No, I have not written a book," Mr. Saughton confessed.

He was longing to get away, longing to be alone, in order that he might think over the terrible idea his aunt had presented for consideration. Whom could she have heard speaking about Amabel? Up



to that evening, if no approval were expressed concerning his choice in love, at least such consent as silence implied was accorded to it.

When at last he found himself out in the night, he felt like one who had unexpectedly received some dreadful blow. Why, of course, Amabel, his Amabel, would be admired by all who looked at her lovely face and form, heard her sweet voice, and saw her simple, winning manner; and he was *not* sure of her. He had been deceiving himself; misled by hope, he knew not how far he was wandering away from the consummation of his desires. He ought to have spoken years ago—girls are not won by men who treat them like sisters, and feel so modest of their own merits they fear to put their fortune to the test. Lady Wreedmere had torn the veil from before his eyes, and he saw himself one in a race where there were many competitors, one in which he was more likely than not to be outdistanced.

This was why he had to pause for a moment on the first landing in order that the wave of tender recollections, sweeping over his soul, might not bear all calmness with it. This was why he could not answer Mr. Osberton with the exultant gladness he would have expressed a few hours earlier. This was why he could not push into the rooms, but stood looking at the crowd like one wishing to enter paradise, but wanting courage, bade "I dare not" wait upon "I will."

Yes, it was just as Lady Wreedmere had insinuated it would be. Already the fortune-hunters were buzzing around rich Mr. Osberton's daughter—men



young, handsome, distinguished, well-born, accomplished, likely to strike a girl's fancy and to return it. There was the Duke of Hightowers' third son, and her Grace, his mother, to boot. There were many great ladies, also with sons—there were beautiful girls, but none so lovely as Amabel. How exquisitely fair she looked, with a new expression on her face he had never seen it wear before—what a strange scene it was he looked upon as one might who felt he had neither part nor lot in the world he surveyed! He was not jealous, he was not angry, only dazed. After a time, he knew, sensation would return and bring pain with it, but just for the time he was numbed, and could only wonder why any one gave parties or went to parties, why every person did not live far from the madding crowd in quiet dells and talk about fairies.

All at once Amabel, looking up, caught sight of him and smiled.

Then the sun he thought obscured forever came forth from the dark bank of clouds Lady Wreedmere had piled upon his life, and shone gloriously.

Suddenly there was a move in the company. Many people went down to supper—Amabel among the number, escorted by that third son; but Mr. Saughton did not follow. He was happy, he felt content, and, making his way to the corner where Baroness Questo sat still fanning herself, he explained how it chanced he was so late, and remarked on the number of guests.

"Yes, I never was in such a crush before, and I hope I never shall be again," answered the lady. "I



do feel so sorry, but I knew how it would be when Mr. Osberton refused to take my advice. A small party and select, I told him, would be the proper thing—a little dancing, a little music, just a few very good people; and now you see every one nobody wants is staying; those who are really nice and desirable just looked in and went away. I never saw such a mixture. Poor Miss Loveland looks ready to drop. When I found half London was going to be asked, I entreated her only to send a certain number of invitations at a time, because, as I told her, most of these people would be sure to come, and then what will you do? Mr. Osberton, however, was so much afraid of giving offence—afraid, I suppose, of somebody at Tunbridge Wells hearing somebody else at Elstree had got a card before him—that all the notes were posted on the *same day*—the *same day*, if you believe me—and the consequence is this mob. St. James's Hall would have been the proper place for such a gathering. People, however, must manage their own business as they think best. Amabel might just as well, or better, have 'come out' on May Day as queen of the revels. There would at least have been breathing room in the streets, which is more than could be said of these rooms till now."

The maligned rooms continued to clear, the rush of arrivals had ceased, and departures rapidly made a perceptible difference in the atmosphere as well as in the number of guests.

Soon Mr. Saughton was able to approach Miss Loveland, who did indeed seem wearied to death, and



later on he esteemed himself happy to find he was alone for a moment with Amabel on the balcony.

Most sweetly, anxiously almost, she thanked him for the fan; such a magnificent fan—such an exquisite fan! Every one admired it so much; it was more than kind of him to think of her. She had never seen a fan like it.

There was a nervous hurry about her manner, which accorded in some strange way with that new expression, which made the man's heart go out in a great rush of love to the girl who stood there speaking her pretty words, and touching the fan as she talked of its beauty, and desire there and then to tell all the story of the years.

"Never mind," he thought, "to-morrow I shall see her again," and he glanced wistfully down at the fair face which was upraised to his.

"Are you very tired, Amabel?" he asked, tenderly. "You look pale, dear," and involuntarily he laid his hand on her shoulder—a thing he had not done since she came back from France "quite grown up."

He could not be mistaken. She shrank from his touch. Any one less sensitive might not have noticed the slight instinctive recoil. Then she stood quite still; but the black clouds had all gathered again, and there was no sun shining for Edward Saughton anywhere when he left Queen's Gate in the light of a summer morning.



## CHAPTER XI.

### MR. SAUGHTON TAKES A HAND.

IT was a month later, in the very height of the season. June's roses were fading to make way for the more gorgeous coloring of July, and Amabel Osberton had drunk deeply of that cup of pleasure which is never filled so generously anywhere as in London.

Every shining hour was improved, and the hours of darkness likewise. As she drove home from some great party she saw the heavily laden market carts, with the fresh moisture of the country still upon them, toiling slowly onward to Covent Garden; then, after a few hours' sleep, she woke again to resume the task Society lays on all her votaries, that of incessant movement. Functions, concerts, galleries, *matinées*, afternoons, evenings, garden-parties, "at homes," succeeded each other with the rapidity of an express train.

Owing to causes which are never clearly understood, but that probably have a not remote connection with the bank-rate, some seasons are more successful than others; and the summer when Amabel Osberton was formally introduced to the world proved especially brilliant. There were great people in London; great spectacles to be seen; the weather was perfect; no pestilence raged, or panic threatened, and any one



seeing the pageant of fashion moving through the streets might have supposed he had found a golden city free both from sickness and sorrow—a city where poverty could not come, or death enter, or care find a lodging.

Everything brightest and happiest in life was presented to Amabel's view. She went everywhere, she saw everything; her father and Baroness Questo believed she was enjoying her first season as thoroughly as a young girl should; and, indeed, what was there to detract from her enjoyment?

Mr. Saughton did not "speak" on the day following that crush in Queen's Gate; in fact, he had not spoken at all. Instinctively he felt he would not much serve his cause by pressing it at that particular time; that he had better learn how to woo the girl before attempting to win her. He did not know much about women, did not understand their little moods and caprices; all he was sure concerning he summed up in one sentence:

"I love Amabel, and, if need be, I would wait years could I but have her for my very own at the end."

Of necessity, he saw her less frequently than formerly. He did not go to all the parties she attended; modestly he stood on one side and let her continue the triumphant progress she was making unimpeded by him, and perhaps Miss Loveland did not feel altogether sorry to note his frequent absence. She was in the main an excellent woman, but of the world worldly; and no doubt Lady Wreedmere's sentiments would have found a true echo in her heart.



Her niece might make a much better match. In the simplest way possible Amabel was walking over the London Course. She had admirers in abundance, admirers desirable as well as the reverse; admirers whose names were in the papers and who were spoken of as rising men; admirers who were good to look at and had money in their purses, and were connected with great people, and met all Lord Wreedmere's requirements.

Truly if Amabel's head had been turned, no one could have marvelled, and yet the girl kept her head; she did not seem spoilt in the least, or changed, save that she had grown more reticent and less impulsive; she was quieter also than of yore and occasionally became, for no apparent reason, silent and thoughtful, all of which things Mr. Saughton noticed.

"Do you think your niece is quite well?" he asked Miss Loveland one morning when he sat alone with that lady in the room where Mrs. Vink imagined she saw angels carrying golden harps.

"I do not fancy she is ill, but she is changed," was the answer. "She always, as you remember, had her moods—her times of gayety and depression; a mere trifle sent the scales either up or down, but they did not last long. Now, when alone with me, at all events, she is usually depressed, or, perhaps, I should say silent. She will sit for half an hour and not speak a word unless I ask a question."

"Perhaps constant visiting takes too much out of her," suggested the lover, anxiously. "The life she is leading at present must seem very different from any she knew before."



“And yet, in a quiet way, she went out a good deal last year. No, she is not out of health, Edward. The fact is Amabel is offended with *me*.”

“But that is impossible.”

“Impossible or not, it is the case. Since the day she was presented she has never been the same girl. You know how sensitive and impressionable she is; but what, perhaps, you do not know is that when once she gets an idea into her mind, there is no driving it out; she is quite like her dear mother in that respect. My sister was the sweetest creature living, yet she would brood over a notion for months; and while the fit, for I can call it by no other name, lasted, reason and persuasion were alike useless.”

“I confess I do not exactly understand,” said Mr. Saughton—nor did he. That as a child Amabel indulged in little tempers which usually took the form of fretting he was well aware, but he had never known her sulk; and if the conduct Miss Loveland described were not sulking, he felt at a loss how to classify it. “Did anything disagreeable occur when she was presented? From what Baroness Questo told me I thought all went merry as a marriage bell.”

“So it did. Nothing could have gone better till we got home. As we drove back from Dorset Square Amabel talked the whole way. I felt delighted to find the child so happy, little foreseeing—” Miss Loveland paused, and put her handkerchief to her eyes with a gesture of such genuine grief that Mr. Saughton could not resist saying:

“I wish, if you have no objection, you would tell me exactly what happened on your return that day.



Even if I can be of no help in putting matters straight, it might prove a comfort if you confided in an old friend. A good talk is often a great relief."

"It is," agreed Miss Loveland. "I feel I want to speak, and I dare not say a word to Mr. Osberton, who would be sure to think I was to blame. In his opinion, as you are aware, Amabel can do no wrong; and indeed, dear love, she has done no wrong, only acted a little foolishly. She always did let her heart run away with her head, still she ought not to be offended with me for pointing out where she was injudicious."

"I feel sure you are quite mistaken. She could not be so ungrateful—she could not be ungrateful if she tried."

"I never said—I never thought she was ungrateful—oh! how shall I explain?" and Miss Loveland looked helplessly at Mr. Saughton, who answered, "Just try to tell me what occurred on your return home."

Thus entreated, the lady began her story, nothing loath.

Mr. Saughton was a good listener, and an even better sympathizer. She had known him since his boyhood; and, although she did believe her niece might make a better match, there was no man she liked more. She could talk to him at length, for he was not given to interrupt, and she really was longing to open her mind to some one; therefore she described in picturesque language, which would no doubt have met with Mr. Kobell's complete approval, the scene which greeted her when Mr. Osberton's



carriage stopped opposite Mr. Osberton's house in Queen's Gate.

"I saw a miserable-looking object sitting on the steps, leaning against the pillar, her bonnet half off her head, and she herself supported by a respectable-looking person, who said the woman had fainted. Of course I did not stop, but passed on, and was actually across the threshold when I heard Amabel say—Amabel, remember, wearing the dress in which she had been presented to the Queen, and therefore a conspicuous object for a crowd, composed of all the tag-rag of London, to stare at—'Bring her inside.'"

"Amabel said that!" exclaimed Mr. Saughton.

"Amabel said that," was the solemn reply.

"God bless her," he ejaculated.

"You don't mean to tell me you think she was right; that you consider that it was proper for a young girl to take such a decided lead at such a time among such a set of people; that you believe a gentleman's house should be turned all at once into a refuge for the destitute—a home, perhaps, for pick-pockets or——"

Miss Loveland stopped just in time. Her anger had well-nigh caused her to use a word which propriety forbade her uttering, at least when conversing with a gentleman. Though not fifty years of age, she belonged to the old school, and held fast to those rules of decorum which, whether for good or for evil, no longer fetter the speech of a younger and more advanced set of pupils.

"Murderers," kindly supplied Mr. Saughton, perceiving her embarrassment. "Believe me, I have no



desire, even had I the ability, to decide what would be the right course to pursue in any supposititious case. All I say is God bless Amabel for her Christian charity and womanly kindness. Don't be vexed with me, I think it was a fitting ending to such a bright and lovely day that she should extend help to that poor waif. But you have not finished your story, which opens so beautifully—what happened afterward?"

"When the woman was brought into the hall," said Miss Loveland (thinking the while to herself: 'All men in love are the same; this man is crazy about Amabel. If she took it into her head to give the blind, and deaf, and lame tea upstairs, he would consider her a sort of saint'), "Amabel suggested the dining-room would be more comfortable. Fortunately Berriss, who has some sense, made the best of a bad business, and asked the gentleman—I fancy he was a gentleman—he spoke like one—in here. And then Amabel actually remained with an unknown female and a strange man. I sent my maid and her maid, all to no purpose. I desired Mrs. Graham to go and offer her services, so as to relieve her young mistress, but vainly; so at last I had to walk downstairs myself to see what was to be done. I found Amabel with her train thrown over her left arm handing water, and eau-de-cologne, and embroidered handkerchiefs, and fans to the man, who said he was a doctor, and who, I must say, took a great deal of trouble about a poor, wretched creature that might have just come from the nearest workhouse. There she lay on the couch, while Mrs. Graham was fuss-



ing around, and trembling lest Mr. Osberton should come home before we could get rid of such an unwelcome guest. You know what he is about infection and disease, and for all any of us could tell the strange woman might have been sickening for smallpox, cholera, or the plague, for that matter."

"It certainly was a very awkward position," remarked Mr. Saughton, who could feel for others even when he did not exactly feel with them. "And then?"

"Why, then, when hours and hours, so it seemed to me, had passed—the time was not really long, though it appeared long I felt so excessively anxious—the doctor left, promising to send a cab for his patient, which he did; and at last I thankfully saw her leave the house with a sovereign, Amabel's gift, and a bottle of old port, which Amabel also told Berriss to bring up from the cellar.

"I told her at the time it was perfect folly to give either to a person she knew nothing about, and that the doctor knew nothing about. No person can consider the poor more than I; but still, charity ought to have some sense, and whether Amabel choose to be offended or not, my opinion about her conduct remains the same."

"And was that all the trouble?" asked Mr. Saughton.

"Indeed it was not—far from it," answered Miss Loveland, who, having now warmed to her theme, proceeded at great length to relate those further events which had arisen out of the sovereign and bottle of wine. Nothing was forgotten: the return



of the cabman, the wrangle with Berriss, the dread of butler and housekeeper lest sounds of the fray should reach Mr. Osberton's ears, the ten shillings reluctantly offered for the sake of peace and contemptuously refused till Serry was within an ace of being dispatched for a policeman, the threatened resignation of Berriss, Dr. Dagley's visit in order to communicate the tidings of Mr. Vink's arrest, the fact that Miss Loveland lost her temper, the additional fact that Dr. Dagley refused to disburse any money for her to the Vinks—mother and child; Miss Loveland's hope that the whole thing had blown over, and her sad conviction Amabel was still nursing anger in her heart—all these things were set forth in due order for the listener's benefit, and, it may be added, to his great astonishment.

The cause did not seem proportionate to the result. As the story was told, he felt that the younger woman's resentment could but be considered unintelligible. At the same time he remembered that as a man seems many diverse men according to the point of view taken by the spectators or himself, so a story is capable of assuming protean forms when told by different lips and listened to by various ears; for which reason, without any disparagement of Miss Loveland's veracity, which indeed in this instance was above suspicion, he felt he could not quite swallow her narrative unless many grains of salt were sprinkled over it.

Therefore, he sat silent for a minute quietly thinking ere he asked:



“And have you never heard anything of these unfortunate Vinks since that morning?”

“Never.”

“They have not made any appeal for help, direct or indirect?”

“No.”

“And this kindly doctor has not sent, or come, or written?”

“We have neither seen nor heard from him since the morning I spoke of. We know nothing more about any of the people who appeared in the disagreeable little play. To confess the truth, however,” added Miss Loveland, with a nervous laugh, “sometimes I wish we did; often, indeed, against my better reason. I think I might have done wisely to indulge Amabel’s whim on that unlucky day instead of setting my face utterly against it.”

“What was her whim?”

“Why, first of all, the poor child proposed that we should order the carriage and go straight off to Rackham Street.”

“And you?”

“Said I should do nothing of the sort, that Dr. Dagley distinctly stated he intended to relieve the Vinks’ wants, that he had refused all offers of assistance from me, and that, therefore, I did not intend to meddle in the matter further.”

“Hearing which——?”

“Amabel wished to proceed by train to North Kensington, taking Mrs. Graham with her.”

“Yes?”

“Of course I could not permit any such escapade.



I told her Dr. Dagley was a much more competent person to deal with the Vinks than Miss Osberton, and asked her not to trouble me about them."

"Which request silenced without convincing, I suppose."

"It did not convince, though it silenced her so far as that she said nothing more to me then; but while I was lying down the same afternoon, for the whole affair had utterly shaken my nerves, she took Mrs. Graham into her confidence, and asked that invaluable woman to carry help to the creature who had caused us so much trouble."

"She must have been very much in earnest. And Mrs. Graham?"

"Mrs. Graham, who never thinks of herself, and has the kindest heart possible, consented to go if I would give her leave. When she spoke to me, however, I felt the time had come to make a stand, and flatly refused my permission. I said she could do as she pleased, but if she went she must quit our service; and I then sent for Amabel and spoke to her more sharply than I ever did before. I don't know when I felt so angry."

"Here is the milk in the cocoanut at last," thought the patient listener, but he merely remarked:

"I regret you did not mention all this to me earlier, because I could so easily have carried out Amabel's wishes, and perhaps saved you some anxious hours. Let me still go to North Kensington as your ambassador, and find out what can be done for these unfortunate people. Then, when we have really helped them, you can, without any loss of dignity,



hold out the olive branch, which I feel satisfied will be accepted eagerly. After all," he added, with a smile, "yours is only a lovers' quarrel, which we are assured is the renewal of love."

"You are kind," said Miss Loveland. "I wonder if there ever were any one so good as you; but it is giving you a great deal of trouble."

"Not any," declared Mr. Saughton; and his statement was quite within the truth. Nothing he could do for Amabel seemed a trouble.

"Let me see," he went on. "Unfortunately I have an appointment which I must keep this afternoon, but to-morrow morning I will start on my mission and let you know the result immediately."

Mr. Saughton, in correct visiting dress, or in orthodox swallow-tail with its proper adjuncts, could not by any stretch of imagination be regarded as an Adonis, but in a suit of gray tweed he certainly looked his very worst, a man who might have been anybody, *i.e.*, anybody not in a good rank of life.

It was for this reason, probably, that when Mr. Kobell, a good deal thinner and worn, perhaps with waiting for that long-deferred "order," while feebly taking his matutinal stroll along the narrow hall and back again, caught sight of some one standing on the doorstep clothed in light-colored garments, and wearing a white straw hat with a black band round the crown, he failed to recognize that "something"—I don't know what—his experience while in Sir Frederick McMunn's service had taught him to respect, and which he was wont afterward to declare "struck him at once."



We are all apt to forget, and no doubt Mr. Kobell forgot, or remembered with sorrow, that he did not raise the dissipated-looking smoking-cap as he answered, not over civilly, the stranger's inquiry, "Will you kindly tell me whether Mrs. Vink lives here?"

"She did—but she's gone."

"Indeed! that is unfortunate; but perhaps you can give me her address?"

"I can't, for one reason, because I don't know it myself," and Mr. Kobell was about to turn on his heel when the glitter of a diamond changed the whole situation.

It was in a ring Mr. Saughton wore on the fourth finger of his left hand, and as he raised that hand unthinkingly to smooth his mustache all the brilliant colors flashed to light.

"I don't know it myself, sir," said Mr. Kobell, reconsidering that intention of turning his back on one he had not recognized as a possible angel, "and I took it hard that, after all my wife had tried to do for them, they should go off without even saying good-by. It cut us, sir; it did."

"You do not know what troubles they may have been passing through," suggested Mr. Saughton, consolingly.

"Oh! didn't we?" scoffed Mr. Kobell. "Even if Mrs. Vink had been minded to keep her troubles to herself, which she wasn't, there's that child—Aggie, I mean—was as good as a town-crier; but, pardon me, sir, won't you walk in and take a seat?"

Mr. Saughton accepting this hospitable offer, Mr.



Kobell threw open the door of his reception-room and waved a lordly invitation to enter.

It was a dear little parlor, scrupulously clean, fairly well furnished. A spotless drugget concealed the shabby carpet; pictures from various Christmas numbers hung on the walls; a little old, though not valuable, china, inherited from Mr. Kobell's grandmother, was placed where plates and cups could be seen to best advantage. Altogether a room evidently "greatly beloved," and one which touched Mr. Saughton immensely.

He knew the wonderful striving of the poor after respectability, their craving for what they believe to be beauty; and when on entering the well-cared-for room he uncovered his head, it was quite as much in recognition of the marvellous struggle those badly off make to keep abreast of the times, as because of the inbred courtesy natural to any man reared in a decent station.

"As I was saying," continued Mr. Kobell, after he had inducted Mr. Saughton into a chair which commanded the best view of all those art treasures dear to his own heart, "trouble didn't take the Vinks off at five o'clock in the morning without 'thank you,' or 'we're obliged,' but ingratitude did. The way my wife waited on that woman tongue couldn't tell; making cups of tea for her, and boiling eggs, and broiling morsels of ham when she had none too much of anything for herself! It angers me to think about it. It was a dirty trick to serve any one who had tried to befriend her. I never was so amazed in my life as when I found they were gone: no noise, no carrying



of furniture downstairs. Vink just took a window out and slid all his sticks into the street along a plank he brought home with him over night—not the first time he had done the trick, I'll be bound; and then Mrs. Vink and Aggie must have crept out of the house like mice, for we knew nothing of what had been going on till a woman came in to wash the rooms. Did you ever hear of such a thing, sir?"

"I think I have, when rent was due and money short," answered Mr. Saughton.

"They had paid their rent, that is the fun of it, directly he had done his fourteen days. I suppose you knew he was in trouble over thrashing his wife."

Mr. Saughton nodded.

"He got into work, and while he was in prison mother and child lived, as I may say, on the fat of the land. Dr. Claude Dagley, for some reason best known to himself, took the case up, though I told him the kind Mrs. Vink was. He knew she could not be trusted with money, so he sent her in goods; and what does she do then, do you suppose?"

Mr. Saughton did not venture to hazard a conjecture.

"She runs up and down the street trying to sell them; wanted my wife to buy a little leg of New Zealand lamb for a shilling. 'Have nothing to do with it,' I said, 'nor her potatoes, nor cocoa, nor moist sugar, they are not hers to sell, and for two pins I'd tell that gentleman the way she is deceiving him.' I did not, but he found out for himself that she was getting money from some one else; it is amazing to me how those lean, grizzling sort of wo-



men can impose on gentle folk, while people who turn a brave face to trouble are left to meet it without help."

"I am afraid you are exhausting yourself," said Mr. Saughton kindly, as Mr. Kobell for the second time broke into a fit of coughing, after which he had to lay his head against the back of the sofa while he gasped for breath.

"It takes me sudden sometimes," returned the sick man, referring to his cough. "Five weeks ago I was promised an order for Brompton Hospital, where I know they would put me to rights, but it has not come yet, and it seems to me it is not going to come."

"You wish to get into Brompton Hospital?"

"Yes, sir; they tell me the doctors there are wonderful clever, and I did hope—but I have nearly given up hoping."

"I would not do that," answered Mr. Saughton. "I cannot think that it is good for you to talk so much, though, and therefore I will only ask you one question. Do you imagine that Dr. Dagley, you mentioned just now, could give me the Vinks' address?"

"They won't lose sight of him in a hurry, I should say, though he did give it to her straight."

"Give what to her?"

"A piece of his mind. I never was better pleased than to hear the way he went on. We could not be off hearing, because the doors were all open on account of the heat. It happened promiscuous, sir, on a Sunday, the next day as ever was after he had sent in that leg of lamb she wanted my wife to buy," and



Mr. Kobell having bribed his poor voice with a couple of lozenges, started on his narrative afresh.

To advise Mr. Kobell to refrain from speech was as useless as to tell hens not to cackle.

“On the Saturday night,” he began, “when my wife came back from Portobello Road, where, intending to make a meat pudding for our Sunday’s dinner, she had gone to buy some ‘block ornaments’—it is wonderful what a lot can be got for a few pence—she said to me, ‘Mrs. Vink has come into a fortune, I should think.’ Then, of course, I asks ‘why,’ and then she says, ‘because I heard her price a duck and put down half a crown to pay for it.’

“‘Never,’ I said, for indeed it struck me as a thing incredible, out of all reason. ‘She did not see me,’ says my wife, ‘so I walked behind her and watched while she bought half a peck of peas and some new potatoes. “You are a nice article,” I thought to myself, “with your duck and your onion-stuffing and your peas and mint. I wonder what dinner your poor husband will be getting to-morrow. No wonder you said you did not care for New Zealand lamb.”’

“And sure enough, sir, next day such a smell of cooking rushes downstairs just as the folks were about coming out of their churches, as made me set the front door wide open, for having eaten but a poor breakfast it made me feel faintified, and by and by the duck was done to a turn, and the peas and potatoes boiled, and the pair of them had just sat down to their feast when Dr. Dagley flashed in from the street and ran upstairs; he is a wonderful quick gentleman, and knocked sharp.



“‘Come in,’ she calls out, never thinking of him—and then all the fat was in the fire. How he went on! He did not wait to pick his words; he let her have them as they came. She never heard so much truth in any five minutes of her life before as she heard then while the dinner was cooling.

“He never stopped; he just held on as hard as he could go till he had done, when he tore downstairs again and was off like mad. But he went on helping her, all the same. As I said before, she’s the sort as gets help. The self-respecting ones may starve!”

Mr. Saughton made no comment on this story; he only said, as he took his leave, “I will get you an order for Brompton Hospital and send it immediately,” which he did within twenty-four hours, together with five shillings, “to pay Mr. Kobell’s fare.”



## CHAPTER XII.

### EDWARD SAUGHTON MAKES A POINT.

WHEN Mr. Saughton called in Queen's Gate to "report progress" he was rejoiced to find Amabel in the room with Miss Loveland, both ladies being engaged in finishing an elaborate piece of embroidery. He well knew how much better the poorest story sounds if heard first-hand—how flat any narrative falls when repeated; and although he had not much of a tale to tell he felt glad it should have even such a poor chance of success as freshness could impart.

"What lovely work!" he exclaimed, looking at the rich pattern spread out before his eyes.

"It is effective," agreed Miss Loveland, "and I feel rather proud of our industry."

"For a bazaar, of course?" suggested Mr. Saughton.

"Yes; the Burt Cradens are trying to found a village reading-room and library, and we are endeavoring to help a little. You don't know the Burt Cradens, I think?"

"I regret to say I have not that pleasure. Who are the Burt Cradens?"

"He is one of the Silcombe family, and she was a Miss Manford, a great friend of mine in the years gone by. Mr. Craden had some post in Brazil, and



consequently they were but seldom in England till lately. We met again, however, this season, and were delighted to renew our former relations. She is a dear, sweet creature, and her girls are charming. Amabel is going to a small dance at their house in The Boltons on Saturday evening, and will remain over Sunday, so I can have a rest, which I shall be glad of, for I assure you a chaperon's is not an idle life at this time of the world," she added with a laugh.

"I am certain of that," answered the young man in all sincerity. "And so," he added, "this exquisite work of art is for the Burt Cradens' bazaar? How I wish I might contribute something—not made by myself, however!"

"This work of art, as you kindly call it, is certain to be raffled for," observed Miss Loveland; "therefore when the time comes you may buy a ticket, since you desire to be generous."

"But is not raffling gambling—does not it come within the pains and penalties of the law?" asked Mr. Saughton in mock alarm.

"Everything is legal—Christian-like—proper at a bazaar," explained Miss Loveland.

"You relieve my mind."

"Even cheating, giving short change, and flirting," went on the lady.

"How very strange! And are you going to cheat, give short change, and flirt?" he added, turning to Amabel.

"I shall not be there," she answered. "It is proposed to hold the bazaar at Mr. Craden's place in Yorkshire."



“But Mrs. Craden wants her to go down and help, which I think she very likely may do, after all,” added Miss Loveland.

Amabel did not answer “yea” or “nay,” only threaded her needle afresh with golden silk and continued her delicate labor.

After a slight pause, Mr. Saughton drew his chair a little nearer to Miss Loveland and began: “I have done your errand, and am able to return a fairly favorable report. Vink is in work, his wife better, and his child well. The whole family has left Rackham Street, where I heard how very thoughtful Dr. Dagley had been for their comfort. Indeed, you need not have made yourself unhappy concerning them; they wanted for nothing.”

For a moment Amabel sat with her needle suspended, then she went on with her stitching, and a golden leaf sprang into shape, while Mr. Saughton continued:

“I was unable to ascertain in Rackham Street where the Vinks had gone, and, therefore, called on Dr. Dagley, whom I was fortunate enough to meet just when he was leaving his house. We walked together as far as Westbourne Park Station, and he told me Vink fully intended leading a more sober life. I then mentioned a plan which had occurred to me for helping the man to help himself, of which Dr. Dagley approved. Afterward I saw both Vink and his employer, when I explained my idea more fully, and, having first obtained the employer's permission, made a certain offer to Vink, which it seems to me he would do well to accept. In any case, however,



Miss Loveland, you may set your mind quite at ease about these people. They have my address in case of need, and—what is much more to the point—Dr. Dagley has promised not to lose sight of them. They could wish for no more competent adviser, I feel certain.”

A person who knew Mr. Saughton well, once remarked: “It is not what Saughton says that makes his talk pleasant; it is what he leaves unsaid.” And, indeed, the observation contained a profound truth, for when a man always tries to avoid disagreeable facts, or if compelled to speak about them does so in the most aerial way possible, though his conversation may be sometimes devoid of “sparkle,” it must also lack that terribly acrid, brackish, unclean taste which so often seems the only flavor good talkers leave us.

It was because Mr. Saughton excelled in leaving “things unsaid” that his narrative contained no mention of Mr. Kobell and the Brompton order, or Mrs. Vink and her duck, out of both of which incidents he might have made a not uninteresting and amusing interlude.

Placed in similar circumstances, he would never have purchased any delicacy for himself, but he failed to see why Mrs. Vink should not buy, stuff, roast, and relish a duck if she felt so inclined and capable.

“It is a poor heart,” as we often hear, “that never rejoices.” If, under the then conditions of her life, Mrs. Vink felt she could rejoice over a roast duck, Mr. Saughton thought she had a clear right to do so.

He was, in fact, what most people consider an absolute contradiction—a democrat-conservative,—and



that interference on the part of the charitable rich which must so often drive the extravagant poor almost out of their senses seemed to him intolerable.

“This is supposed to be a free country,” he often said; “the sumptuary laws have long been repealed, therefore why should we try to revive them? And yet we are always in private life trying to revive them, thereby doing no good and causing ourselves and others much annoyance.”

Mr. Saughton also refrained from saying anything about the many vials of wrath Dr. Dalgey was represented to have poured on Mrs. Vink's head the while that well-cooked duck was cooling. He was not given to repeating stories, perhaps because he did not believe more than half of them and wished to forget the other half he thought might be credible; also, owing to his dislike of mentioning any other person's error, he held his peace when he might well have spoken concerning the rudeness with which Dr. Dagley had repulsed his first advances.

The tenant of Upland House could be extraordinarily uncivil, and when he met a stranger on his doorstep who said he came from Miss Loveland and desired to be furnished with Mrs. Vink's address, Dr. Dagley at once decided to consider him an enemy who had come to spy out the land.

Indeed, it was not till after the best part of the Golborne Road had been traversed and explanations freely offered by Mr. Saughton that Dr. Dagley consented to treat that gentleman as a friendly power.

There were those who believed and did not hesitate to tell Lord Wreedmere's nephew he did wrong in



thus turning the other cheek when smitten, but he had a way of remarking:

“There was once a servant who owed his lord ten thousand talents, and, being forgiven, went straight out, and, seizing his fellow-servant by the throat, said: ‘Pay me that thou owest,’” which silenced many, though they were wont to shrug their shoulders subsequently when they spoke of that “poor fanatic.”

On the morning, however, when he carried his news to Queen’s Gate, reticence served his purpose much better than gossip could have done.

There was not a discordant note in his beautiful message of comfort, and Miss Loveland felt soothed by his melody, though she failed to understand “how,” as she remarked to Mr. Saughton, “he always managed so well, and contrived to perform everything his friends asked in such a satisfying manner.”

“Indeed, I cannot thank you sufficiently,” she said, “for I have been feeling most unhappy for a long time past about that poor creature.”

“Have you, my dear aunt—my dear, dearest aunt?” exclaimed Amabel, and in a moment her arms were round Miss Loveland and she was embracing the good spinster as though she never meant to release her again. “And so you really did send Mr. Saughton to inquire, and he was good enough to go?”

“Indeed he was, Amabel, you may be sure of that; and as for the rest, I have been wretched ever since Dr. Dagley came to tell us that man had been sent to prison.”



“But why, aunt?”

“Why?” was the answer. “Well, to mention no other reason, because I thought you would never be friends with me again, that I had hopelessly alienated my dear child.”

“I!” repeated Amabel, bewildered, “I never be friends with you! I hopelessly alienated!” and she dropped on her knees, hid her face in the folds of her aunt's dress, and, unmindful of Mr. Saughton's presence, forgetful in truth that he was present, seized Miss Loveland's fair soft hands and kissed the white fingers, and rained tears upon them till her aunt said:

“Hush, hush, dear, all is well now; so long as you love me as much as ever nothing can be a grief; but I have so sorrowed over our estrangement, for if I did speak sharply it was only for your good.”

“When did you ever speak except for my good?” returned Amabel. “When I seemed annoyed it was simply because I knew I had acted foolishly and could not help thinking of all the harm I had done! Oh, forgive me!” and then there were more tears and kisses, and Mr. Saughton judiciously moved over to the *jardinière* and affected not to hear, but to be wholly absorbed with the flowers till such time as the ladies had finished their happy confidences and remembered his presence.

Then he said he must be going, and left the lilies and the roses in order to take leave of Miss Loveland, who would not, however, hear of his departure.

“It is ages since we have seen you,” declared the lady, who was given to polite exaggeration; “you must stay and have some luncheon.”



Mr. Saughton wavered.

“Oh! do,” entreated Amabel, and he yielded.

He never afterward could exactly recall how it all came about, but within ten minutes of that awkward time when he was admiring the flowers and feigning not to hear, Amabel seemed to have put off her old self, and sat talking to him freely and frankly as of old.

They were alone, for Miss Loveland suddenly remembered she must write a couple of notes. Perhaps she thought she owed Mr. Saughton something and wished to pay it; perhaps, as is quite likely, she did not, having got her turn served, think at all; in either case, however, the fact remained that after many days and weeks he and Amabel were once again speaking to each other just as had been their wont in the pleasant long ago.

To his mind she never looked fairer or sweeter than when confessing her mistakes and excusing them, explaining how the terrible contrast between herself and that “poor half-starved woman” had hurt, and caused her to act foolishly; whereupon Mr. Saughton offered consolation as he was wont to do. He never took sides, never tried to comfort by saying one had done right and another wrong, but somehow set matters straight by suggesting that every one wished to do the best he or she could.

Quietly, like the softly stealing shadows of evening, peace returned, for a time, at least, and took up its abode in the foolish heart it had forsaken; and then a terrible thing occurred.

Misled by the girl’s manner, tempted by the tender



beauty of eyes still moist with recent tears, deceived by words which perhaps deceived no one more than the speaker, he plunged into that love tale kept back for years: told how he had remained silent merely in deference to her father's wish; said what pain and sorrow that silence had been; spoke of how he had always loved her; how unworthy he felt himself to be, but still—and then he paused.

“I am so sorry,” said Amabel.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### REJECTED.

HE looked at her.

She had dropped that beautiful piece of work and sat with her hands clasped—pale to the lips which had just given utterance to those unexpected words.

There was a throb of pain in them Mr. Saughton could not hear, because his own heart was beating so wildly that for the moment it rendered all sounds inaudible save what seemed a mad rush of waters threatening to overwhelm him.

“Because I care for you?” he managed at last to say.

“Yes.” The monosyllable was spoken almost in a whisper, but it dropped straight down into his soul like a pebble thrown into a well.

“Yet surely you have always known I cared for you.”

He was not a brave lover—not one likely to win a lady’s favor by strength of will or might of tongue, nevertheless he had courage enough to strike that one telling blow.

“Not in this way,” she answered, “at least not till quite lately.”

He did not ask when she had eaten of the fruit which teaches maidens that unwritten knowledge of



good and evil they never afterward forget—for, indeed, the question failed to suggest itself. He only said:

“Since you came to London in May?”

“Not till then——”

“And it has given you pain?”

“It has made me miserable,” she replied.

“Poor child!” he exclaimed, “and,” as an after-thought, “poor me, too!”

“Oh! do not say that,” she cried, “it hurts me so sadly.”

“My dear, I would not add to your trouble by a feather’s weight if I could help doing so. All I want is clearly to understand: you are quite sure you cannot love, never have loved me?”

“Not in the way you want, though I have always cared and always must care for you as the dearest, truest friend—the kindest brother——”

He stopped her with a gesture—the wound was more than he could bear to have touched, even by her soft fingers. Then followed silence for a moment, the sort of silence that may ensue when we hear the nearest to our heart has been suddenly stricken dead.

Just as the pause became unendurable Amabel broke it. In such cases it is always the woman who speaks.

“I thought,” she said, “that you understood—that all was settled—that you were going to be again the dear friend I remembered, and felt so happy till—in a moment——”

“I spoiled everything by showing you I did not understand—that nothing was settled—that I never



could be to you merely a dear friend; though, Heaven helping me, I hope always to remain your friend," he finished for her.

"We did not talk about such things in that dear dell at Chasemead," she said, evasively.

"Did we not?" The sad wistfulness of his words was indescribable.

"No," with the courage of despair; "you only told me fairy tales and sweet stories of gnomes and wood-elves, and such like."

"Ah, child! you were always, even in those days, a fairy queen to me."

"I know that *now*, which is just what makes me so sorry," and she covered her face with her hands.

How cruelly unfeeling women can be! How utterly incapable they sometimes seem of realizing the agony another heart is enduring!

This woman, fair, tender, soft, was at that moment perilously near ruining a man's life, yet all she could find to say was "I am so sorry"; the while, though indeed "very sorry," her thoughts were really full of herself, devoted almost entirely to herself.

After the first shock the man rose superior, as a man worth calling by that name always does.

"I told you at first," he resumed, "that I knew it was presumptuous of me to ask you to be my wife, but I love you very dearly, Amabel. I do not think you will ever meet with any one who could love you more. Are you quite sure—quite sure you can give me no hope?"

"Oh! don't, *don't*," she cried.

"So sure as that?" he returned, quite gently, though



on receiving her answer, he unconsciously moved a little farther back, after the fashion of one who receives a sudden blow.

It was her former shrinking recoil put into words. No need for further speech, he felt, at least from her.

"No" repeated a thousand times could never have had the force of those shuddering words.

"Well," he said, rising, "I will not press you further. Love cannot be forced any more than it can be killed. Good-by, Amabel. God bless you, dear."

"You do not mean good-by really?" and she held the hand which clasped hers as if she could not bear to let it go.

"I do mean it," he answered. "There is no good thing I do not wish for you, but I could not come here to see another happy, as I hoped to be."

"But there is *no* other. I do *not* intend to marry any one. I *never* intend to marry at all!"

"That only means, you never intend to marry *me*," he answered, with a grave, sad smile. "Good-by once more. When *he* comes, may he be deserving!" And then all was over and Amabel free.

When Miss Loveland returned, her first question was: "Where is Edward Saughton?" and her next: "Why, what is the matter? Has he——? Have you——?"

"Yes," the girl answered, sobbing, "and he is gone—he won't come back—ever." Then Miss Loveland quite understood.

"Did he tell you so?" she asked.

"He did. Oh! aunt, it was really dreadful."



“I wonder what your father will say,” remarked Miss Loveland, with great presence of mind.

“I forgot about my father,” exclaimed the girl.

“I do hope Edward will tell him. I should not like to be the one to break such news.”

“Do you think he will be very angry?”

“I am afraid he will be very much vexed.”

Whatever Mr. Osberton's feelings may have been, he did not express himself angrily. Miss Loveland had not to break the news, for the rejected lover, ever mindful of Amabel's feelings, went straightway from Queen's Gate to the city, and told his story in such a tender way that the father's wrath was at once averted.

He spoke of the girl's youth and beauty, of her brilliant *début*, of how foolish he had been to imagine an “old plain fellow” like himself could win such loveliness, till he well-nigh persuaded Mr. Osberton his daughter was to be held excused.

“Still, there is not a man living I would rather have given her to than you,” he said.

“And I would have tried to make her happy,” answered the other. “But such happiness was not for me, so there is no use in talking more about it. Do not worry the child, do not spoil her first season; let her enjoy herself while she may. As for me,” but there he suddenly stopped; “it does not matter, it does not matter at all,” he added hurriedly, and after that he went.

This was the reason why Mr. Osberton took his disappointment more in sorrow than in anger, though he looked at Amabel with eyes full of a vague anxiety while he said:



“I saw Edward to-day, dear; and I am afraid you have made a great mistake. Heaven grant you may never know how great a mistake!”

She felt too much moved by his gentleness to answer him then, but after dinner father and daughter had a long and confidential chat, the only confidential chat the girl could remember ever having taken place between them.

“Indeed, indeed, dear father,” she said, when forced at last to speak in her own defence, “I tried—I did try to care for Edward in the way he wanted, but I could not. He had always been such a friend, such a companion, I found it impossible to think of him as a future husband. Besides, it all came to me with such a shock. At The Grange I never dreamt of such a thing—no one spoke to me about love and marriage there; but it seems to me since we came to town this season no one has talked of anything else. Love and marriage,” she repeated—“why, for myself till quite lately both seemed far off as death; but when people began to talk as if it were a settled matter that Edward was to be my husband, I did not know what to do, and it is impossible to tell you what I felt when he came into a room, and I saw people smiling at each other, and knew surely I could not marry him. You are not cross with me, are you?” and she nestled to his side, and putting a coaxing arm around her father’s neck drew his face down to hers.

“Not cross, my darling, but grieved—cut to the heart. I had never given myself a moment’s anxiety concerning your future—never troubled myself about



a vague possible husband appearing out of the mist to ask for my child—because I knew Edward Saughton loved her. It is just four years since he asked my consent to speak to you, but I told him he had better wait, that you were too young, and I have repeated the same words twice since. He has been silent and constant through the whole of that time.”

There came again one of those pauses which are occasionally more eloquent than words—there had been several in the course of that after-dinner talk, while the father sat with his untasted wine beside him, and Amabel turned her bracelets round and round, or looked with great unseeing eyes at the roses and the ferns that so lavishly adorned the table—then suddenly, as if moved by some sudden inspiration, Mr. Osberton said:

“I wonder whether I was wise to stay his tongue, whether if I had let him speak when he wished, your answer would have been different?”

“Oh! no, no, no,” cried the girl, her face flushing crimson, “I was but a child in those days.”

“That is precisely what the Baroness remarked at the time,” observed Mr. Osberton, missing the faint clue Amabel’s changing color might have given to one of her own sex; “she said I was keeping you a child too long, and that I should one day repent doing so. She told me all her girls had got over their foolish love fancies before they were sixteen, and were afterward able to look rationally out on life; but I did not want my little daughter to have any foolish love fancies, for I hoped that when the proper day



came she would give her whole heart to Edward Saughton."

"And now I have disappointed you," Amabel sighed.

"It can't be helped, dear; you could not fancy him, so there is an end to my fondest hopes—and of his, too, poor fellow! I always wished for a son, and I could have adopted him! I always wished you to marry a man *sans peur et sans reproche*; and where will you ever meet one more bravely loyal than the man you refused to-day? My heart is very sore for you both—for the daughter I have, for the son I hoped to have! When you bring the husband of your choice to me, Amabel, I trust he will be some one nearly as good and reliable as the man you have known from your childhood and never found wanting."

"Never," she murmured, "never once; he was always tender and true;" but though the rejected suitor's merits were thus present in her mind, Amabel did not hint at reconsidering a decision which had given so much pain.

Mr. Osberton evidently felt this, for he went on: "Money is very well in its way—I should be the last person to decry it—so is rank, so is genius; but worth is greater than them all. Now, Edward Saughton is rich; he will have rank; he possesses talent, though not precisely of that description which makes a noise in the world, and, above and beyond everything, he is most worthy—so worthy that I pray you may never have reason to repent this day's work with anguish of heart."



Then Amabel, very sorrowful, repeated that she did not ever intend to marry, but to stay with her father and aunt for the term of her natural life, and she again rehearsed at length Edward Saughton's good qualities, and tenderly sang his praises, bitterly lamenting she could not love him as he deserved.

But she never dropped a hint concerning how and when and where she had first begun to learn something of the meaning of that verb she was to conjugate to her undoing. Perhaps she did not know herself, for Love does not always take his victims into confidence; rather he often elects to lure them to their doom along mysterious paths, into which they are enticed by many a strange and curiously subtle stratagem.

It was thus, most likely, with Amabel; as she truly said, she had not thought of love till that great teacher actually took her in hand; but then, ah! what a pupil she proved!

How she sped in her education, how swiftly she learned all she had better never have known—how to conceal; how to deceive those who were near and dear; how to trust unconditionally a stranger who had no letter of recommendation save a handsome face, a goodly person, and a ready, though not always agreeable, tongue.

Yet she told her father she meant never to marry, and believed what she said!



## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE BARONESS QUESTO INTERFERES.

MR. Osberton and his sister-in-law were disposed to possess their souls in patience concerning Amabel's rejection of Mr. Saughton's suit—the former, perhaps, because he was not without a latent hope that all would come right eventually, the latter because she believed her niece might do better—not so Baroness Questo, whom nature had endowed with a temper which compelled her to utter many plain and often unpleasant truths when that temper was crossed.

She heard nothing of the matter until the Saturday following the event, when, after making some formal calls "round and about that quarter," viz., South Kensington, she thought she would look in at Queen's Gate on the chance of finding Dulce Loveland at home.

Miss Loveland was at home, and, not expecting any visitor, on the sofa, deep in a novel.

When she heard a carriage stop, however, and then the thundering knock and ring which proclaimed some one possessed of authority had come that way, she left her snug nest, peeped through the muslin curtains, and, seeing the Baron's retainers in resplendent livery—the Baron's tastes were a little loud—knew the tug of war had come.



Well! it was bound to come some day, and the sooner the better, because, she knew, every hour the Baroness was kept in ignorance of what had happened, the greater would be her indignation; therefore she just "shook herself out," if I may use so undignified an expression, looked in the mirror to see she was all right, smoothed her hair, preened her ruffled feathers, and stood at attention until Berriss, flinging the drawing-room door wide, announced "The Baroness Questo."

"Well, Dulce, how are you?" asked that lady, who had come quite quickly upstairs, "without a sign of age on her, though she is getting on for sixty," said Berriss subsequently to Mrs. Graham. "I was in the neighborhood and could not resist the pleasure of calling; yes, I will have a cup of tea, if not giving you too much trouble; your tea is always good."

She was in the best of spirits; nearly every one she had called upon chanced to be out, and thus she was enabled to clear off many scores in a very short space of time. "I have been paying such a lot of duty visits that it seemed quite a comfort to see a door one knew—what delicious little wheaten cakes. Positively I must try to coax your cook to give me the recipe; I wonder where she got it."

"Out of her own head, I imagine," answered Miss Loveland, rejoiced to find matters were going so well, but not forgetful of the certain breeze ahead, "and I am sure she will be most happy to let you have it; she is not at all disagreeable in that way."

Miss Loveland did not mention the way in which her cook was disagreeable; she never did take the



outer world into confidence concerning matters of this sort, and she was right.

"It is those alone who wear the shoe that know where it pinches," and policy often suggests a wise reticence concerning the fact that it pinches at all.

"Positively," said the Baroness, taking another of the tiny cakes and an additional lump of sugar, likewise a little more cream, "you are a most fortunate person; you never seem to have any trouble with your servants, never to be in the same case as other folk."

Miss Loveland thought of that awful episode with the invaluable Berriss, but only said meekly she had been very fortunate.

"Indeed, yes, dear," went on the Baroness. "When I think of those sad days when you and your poor sister were forced to look so often at a sovereign before spending it, and then nine times out of ten had to refrain from spending it at all, and consider the safe, pleasant lines on which your life has fallen for nearly twenty-two years, I do feel very thankful on your account, and a little proud of myself, too," which was natural, perhaps, as she had brought about the Loveland and Osberton marriage.

Naturally, also, Miss Loveland thought her friend might as well have left her speech unuttered. A person may be very grateful for blessings vouchsafed, and yet not experience ecstatic delight at hearing them recited.

This was Miss Loveland's position, so she changed the subject by remarking that it had been a lovely day.



“A lovely season altogether,” returned the Baroness; “just that delightful sort of weather when one hates to be in town, and longs, with a homesick kind of feeling, to get out of London and away to the seaside, or the moors, or the mountain, or anywhere. I am quite longing for August, when we intend to go to Norway.”

“That will be very pleasant.”

“Yes, I have never been there.”

“Nor I,” said Miss Loveland, whose mind was full of the impending revelation.

“How nice if we all went together! Do try whether you cannot persuade Mr. Osberton to take a needful holiday. He would find himself all the better for a thorough change. Tell him also that Amabel will require bracing after the amount of fatigue she has gone through. I thought her looking quite ‘peaky’ the other night at Mrs. Lester’s. By the bye, is she not coming down? I want to give her a message from Augusta.”

Here was Miss Loveland’s opportunity, and, though not a brave woman, but one too much given to avoid unpleasantness, on the present occasion she faced it with the courage of despair.

“Amabel has gone to the Burt Cradens’. They have an early dance to-night.”

“Which begins a little after five o’clock?” suggested the Baroness, sarcastically.

“Of course not,” returned Miss Loveland, “but as she was going to this dance and to stay over Sunday, Mrs. Craden, who had tickets for that great concert to-day—you know the Cradens have tickets for every-



thing—asked her to luncheon in Bolton Gardens, so that she might go with them.”

“Oh, indeed,” remarked the Baroness, with Arctic coldness.

“I felt very glad when the poor child seemed to jump at the idea,” said Miss Loveland, who knew a battle could not be much longer deferred; “it will do her an immense amount of good to be with such bright and happy people, for even a little while, after this sad affair.”

“What sad affair?” inquired Baroness Questo, sharp as a needle.

“Did you not know she had refused Edward Saughton?” asked Miss Loveland, innocently, as though she believed the matter to be one well known to the multitude.

“No. How should I know?” retorted the lady, in a tone which proved she was, in common parlance, “neither to hold nor to bind.” “For Heaven’s sake, Dulce, speak straightforwardly—that is, if you can—and tell me exactly what you mean.”

Which was a very nasty speech, because it held precisely that amount of truth which renders a speech especially disagreeable.

Miss Loveland was frequently in the habit of not speaking quite straightforwardly. She had a plausible way of shirking things, and of dressing them up for her own purposes, which, whether “bred in the bone” or born of the terrible struggle between pride and poverty that marred her youth, proved particularly obnoxious to Baroness Questo, who was the



very soul of truth, and sometimes as unpleasant as truth too often is.

On this occasion, however, Miss Loveland did not desire to conceal or imply anything, and therefore answered with more spirit than she usually displayed in such encounters.

“Were I to talk for ever”—the Baroness made a little gesture of alarm, and smiled in a satirically deprecating manner, as one who should say, “Do not suggest such a dreadful idea, please”—“I could tell you nothing more than that Edward Saughton called on Thursday morning to let me know the result of some inquiries I had asked him to make concerning a working-man’s wife. Amabel chanced to be in the room, embroidering, and when I pressed him to remain for luncheon and he refused, she said ‘Oh! do,’ whereupon he consented.

“I had not the faintest notion a proposal was imminent, and only accident caused me to leave the pair alone together. I wanted to send off a couple of notes, and also to tell Mrs. Graham Mr. Saughton was stopping for luncheon, as Amabel and I do not generally have anything very elaborate at that meal. I could not have been absent more than fifteen minutes, yet on my return I found Edward gone, and Amabel looking the image of despair. Then in a moment light flashed through my mind, and I asked—I am sure I don’t know how, if he had—and Amabel—I do not know how, either—gave me to understand he was gone, and would never come back!”

“But surely she gave some reason.”



“None whatever—except that she was very fond of, but could never think of marrying him.”

“Why not?”

“You know all I know now,” was the reply. “She says she is never going to marry at all, would like to join a sisterhood and devote her life to the poor.”

“Fiddle-de-dee!” exclaimed the Baroness, contemptuously.

“Amabel is crazy, quite crazy about the poor,” said Miss Loveland in explanation.

“Did I not warn you what would happen when you allowed her to go slumming with Miss Kirkconnell?”

“She only went once, and I think was glad her father told her she must not go again. He gave her twenty-five pounds to send to the Rector for those of his parishioners who were most in need, but forbade any more East End visiting. No, it is just a craze, and till it is past one must bear the crotchet as well as one can.”

“I should not bear it for a moment!” declared the Baroness. “But the truth is, you and her father have ruined the girl. You kept her back for years; why she ought to have been ‘out’ long ago. What did I say to you when she was seventeen? That she was getting a very old ‘baby.’ What did I say to her father when he told Edward Saughton she was too young? That he would repent his folly some day. Well, people must manage their own affairs. You may be very sure I shall not interfere with Amabel’s again.”

Which is a statement people very often make when interference has proved abortive.



Miss Loveland knew the Baroness' manifesto was a mere *façon de parler*, but she meekly held her peace, happy to think the threatened storm was blowing over.

"Amabel must be mad, stark, staring mad," resumed the Baroness, who apparently had reserved to herself the right to criticise, though she had renounced advice. "She will never have such another chance. Her foolish head has been turned with flattery. I dare say she thinks she can marry whom she likes—she will find herself mistaken. She is pretty, I grant, but she does not know how to make the best of her advantages. You might have taught her that, Dulce. She is a rich man's only daughter, of course, but Mr. Osberton is not a millionaire, and, as my husband says, if things in South America take another bad turn, she may not be an heiress after all."

"Have things in South America taken a bad turn, then?" asked Miss Loveland, anxiously.

"Why, bless me, where have you lived not to know they are always taking bad turns there? And your young lady may find some day she is not such a catch after all, and be sorry enough to have refused Edward Saughton. Only to think of it! after all these years—my dear Edward, my dear Edward—the best, the kindest, the truest—" at which point the Baroness broke quite down, and walked to the window.

Here was a pretty state of things!



## CHAPTER XV.

### AN INTRODUCTION "IN SOCIETY."

NEVER before in the whole course of their intimate acquaintance had the tables been so completely turned! On many a previous occasion Miss Loveland had wept tears of regret, sorrow, anger, and been ultimately soothed and comforted by her friend, but for Baroness Questo to be so much affected as to turn her back and hide her face was an unprecedented departure from all established canons, and one which touched Mr. Osberton's sister-in-law curiously.

Conscience rarely troubled her much, for as a rule she felt sure what she did was right. While she watched the Baroness, however, a doubt sprang up whether some blame might not attach to her in the Edward Saughton business. The Baroness had been to him like a mother, and she felt his rejection as a mother might; further, she had been a good friend to two girls who lacked useful friends. She had been stanch to them, to Mr. Osberton, to Amabel. No one could accuse her of inconstancy or double dealing. With many daughters to marry, she never made an effort to secure Edward Saughton for one of them. She stood loyally aside, knowing Amabel owned all his heart, and fully believing when he asked her he would have.



She it was who presented Amabel—who had a small select party in Dorset Square in her honor on the same afternoon; she it was—how swiftly thought sometimes flies—how fast and far it travels back along the road of life when no one wants it to take so unpleasant a journey!—who not merely made the Osberton-Loveland marriage, but provided the trousseau, just as a real mother might have done, and the wedding breakfast, and managed to rake in presents by means of a little diplomacy, and got a goodly company together, and had everything properly put in the papers—the dear Baroness! And this was the result!

“Pray do not take the matter so much to heart,” entreated Miss Loveland, touching her friend’s face timidly.

“Let me alone,” returned the Baroness. “I shall be all right presently. I did not suppose I could ever have given way so utterly,” she added, after a pause, “but it came upon me without preparation, and I cannot bear to think of my boy bearing his disappointment all alone. Once he turned to me in every sorrow of his life, but he has not this time, when I know he must want comfort more than he ever did. Oh, Ned, Ned, my poor lad.”

“I had the sweetest note from him yesterday,” ventured Miss Loveland, “saying, although he could not visit here as formerly, he hoped if I ever wanted him I would remember he was more than ready to come. I thought it very thoughtful; in the midst of his own trouble, too.”

“When did he ever forget any one because he was in trouble himself? The most unselfish creature liv-



ing! What can Amabel be thinking of? Well, Edward will have to get over his disappointment as best he can, and so shall I," and then she walked back to her chair and sat silent for a minute.

"Dulce," she began, at last, "I said a little while ago people must manage their own affairs, and so they must, but I should consider I had failed in my duty if I went away without telling you how very wrong I consider it is to let Amabel be so much with the Burt Cradens."

At the first words of that well-known exordium Miss Loveland's heart leaped for joy. The storm had not blown over, only worked round, and was about to descend; but what did that signify? Baroness Questo was herself again, and conscience, so lately pricked into wakefulness, might drop to sleep once more.

Things were to be just the same as ever, only without Edward Saughton—who would no doubt find comfort elsewhere. It was the Burt Cradens now.

"Why?" asked Miss Loveland, meekly. "They are in a very good set."

"They are in all sets," retorted the Baroness, "and as for why, is your memory so short that you cannot remember what Margaret Manford was in the old days—a shameless, selfish flirt? She rested not till she had caught that poor Burt Craden. If ever there were a case of spider and fly, that was one."

"I always thought her a most agreeable person," remarked Miss Loveland, "and I think her delightful now."

"Ugh!" exclaimed the Baroness.



"One can only speak as one finds," said Miss Loveland, enjoying her poor little hour of triumph, "and I must say the friend of my girlhood has seemed more charming than ever to me lately."

"No doubt—no doubt," returned the Mentor of Miss Loveland's early womanhood, "for you have a rich niece—or at least," viciously correcting herself, "a niece who, it is supposed, will be rich."

"Do you mean to imply Margaret Craden has any designs in that quarter?" laughed Miss Loveland. "Which of her five daughters do you suppose she wishes to marry Amabel?"

"She has a nephew," in such a tone as the Tragic Muse might be supposed to employ.

"She has several—many married, many not in England, one ordered home for his health, engaged to his cousin."

"To which cousin?"

"Constance Manford—General Manford's daughter."

"I dare say! a likely story! Why, those Manfords have not a halfpenny among them, and Philip, being a younger son, must marry money."

"He has a good appointment, and his mother was an heiress."

"Of course, if it is a match Mr. Osberton would approve for Amabel, there is no more to be said. I should have thought, however, such a prudent father—blessed with good old-fashioned ideas as to what a woman and a lady ought to be—would not have liked his daughter to visit familiarly at a house where all sorts and conditions of people congregate—freshly



imported singers, wild-haired pianists, questionable Counts, and adventurers from all lands."

"But, my dear Baroness, you have singers and pianists at your parties."

"That is quite a different matter. I engage them professionally, they do what they are paid for, and go, whereas they run in and out of the Burt Cradens' like tame cats."

"They are fond of Margaret, you know; and——"

"They are not fond of me. Thank you, my dear; I do not desire the friendship of Bohemia."

"You quite mistake my meaning; all I intended to say was that Margaret Craden, who has an enormous connection, is able to make things pleasant for strangers when they first come to London, and therefore she lays herself out to welcome talent the moment its foot touches our cold shores."

"You need not proceed, Dulce; I know exactly what she does. She 'introduces them,' as she says, and for ever after, as people are not so ungrateful as the world thinks, they are glad to go to her house and sing songs, and play pieces, and do conjuring tricks, and give her paintings, and dance skirt dances, and perform gratuitously for the amusement of her guests, long after the time has arrived when each minute means money or the loss of it to them. I know all about it, Dulce. Margaret, from the days when she wore short frocks, was perfectly wide awake; she always knew exactly what she wanted, and took care she got it. She is a plausible, unsafe person, and her girls are like her, but if you and Mr. Osberton like such acquaintances for Amabel there is no more to be said."



"Indeed, indeed, my best, dearest friend, there is much more to be said. In the first place, it was not I who sought a renewal of intimacy with the Cradens."

"Oh! don't talk to me, you poor, silly creature; Margaret came, saw, conquered. She is certainly a very clever woman, and I congratulate you on the interrupted friendship so happily resumed. Take care, however, it does not cost you many other friendships, perhaps more desirable, if less to your taste."

"How unkind you are," exclaimed Miss Loveland, roused beyond endurance. "I wonder if ever any one said so many disagreeable things as you."

"Truth is often disagreeable," was the reply; "and as for Mrs. Burt Craden and her honorable husband, they are far from being so highly thought of as you seem to suppose. Those behind the scenes know they are up to their ears in debt. Mr. Craden is nothing better than a 'guinea pig'; ask Mr. Osberton the meaning of that phrase. Not another shilling can be raised on Erlesmere Priory. It is a perfect scandal to see the way the daughters are allowed to run wild, and to meet Mrs. Craden at so many great parties, knowing, as one does, her family, like so many gypsies, are going here and there and everywhere, except into society befitting their rank. However, as I remarked just now, I congratulate you!"

Baroness Questo never erred on the side of reticence when discussing the shortcomings of poor human nature. She was in the habit, when once she began, of emptying out her vials of wrath completely; and on the occasion of that visit which had begun so



pleasantly she relieved her mind by raking up such a number of disagreeable reminiscences that ere long Miss Loveland was sobbing like a whipped child.

Then her candid friend relented, and a great peace ensued; a peace which lasted till it was time for the coachman's impatience to be relieved. He had been walking his horses up and down for the benefit of Queen's Gate, and brought them from Cromwell Road at a trot when Serry appeared on the doorstep and signalled the long visit was over at last.

"I never thought to go from this house with so heavy a heart," were the visitor's parting words, as she kissed Miss Loveland in token of forgiveness and reconciliation. "I must write to Edward, and I do not know what to say to him. Not one of my sons is dearer to me than that poor fellow. However, nothing can be worse for a man than living in a dream—following a delusive shadow. Yes, it is better that he knows the worst, knows what a foolish, unfeeling little minx he nursed in his bosom till she turned and stung him," after which terrible summing up the speaker departed without affording Miss Loveland the opportunity of reply. Candid friends, though estimable, are sometimes trying!

It was late that evening before the Baroness found an opportunity of informing her liege lord of what had occurred.

"Yes, I know," he said. "I saw Saughton to-day, and he looks very bad; what is the young lady's reason?"



"So far as I can learn she has none, only talks some nonsense about wishing to be a Sister of Charity."

"Aei—aei—aei—i," commented the Baron; who, though born an Englishman, had inherited many curious exclamations, as well as a great deal of money and a love for gorgeous coloring, from his foreign ancestors.

"I confess," went on his wife, "I am quite at sea about Amabel. I cannot understand her at all."

"I can," was the reply; "she is in love with somebody else. That is always the meaning of the Sister of Charity business."

"No, you are wrong; Dulce says she has never shown the slightest partiality for any one of her numerous admirers."

"Dulce—pouf—that for Dulce!" and the Baron snapped his fingers; "very likely she has shown no partiality for any of the admirers Dulce wots of, because she feels none; but depend upon it she likes somebody. There is always a young man round the corner."

"I do wish, Louis, you would not speak of the girl as though she were a cook!"

"Pardon! sorry to have annoyed you, my dear. I am aware she is not a cook, but possibly I may venture to say, without giving offence, that she is a woman."

It chanced, at the very moment when Baron Questo delivered himself of his original statement in Dorset Square, Mrs. Burt Craden, at the Boltons, was saying in her most charming manner:



“Amabel, I want to introduce to you my nephew's old friend, Dr. Claud Dagley; Miss Osberton—Dr. Dagley.”

That was all; the pair bowed distantly, as though they had never seen each other on any previous occasion. Then Dr. Dagley asked if he might have the honor, and Miss Osberton shyly accorded the favor.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### CLAUD FINDS AN OPENING.

NOT for years had Dr. Dagley appeared to so much advantage or to so little disadvantage as on the occasion of Mrs. Burt Craden's early dance. It was not that he felt elated to be there, but the reason why he had been invited gratified his vanity immensely. Nothing had been said on the subject, it is true, but he knew as well as if he had been present at the family conference that the card sent from the Boltons signified dissatisfaction with Dr. Kassiner.

This was only what he had anticipated, but he scarcely hoped the disillusion would come so soon. Well versed though he could but be considered in the worst part of this world's lore, he failed to estimate at its full weight the dislike well-to-do people entertain for paying fees unless they get proper value in return.

And, Dr. Kassiner being particular about his fees, it came to pass that Mr. Manford got tired in due time of offering guineas by stealth, and not finding them yield much, if any, benefit to his son.

It was when he had reached the transition state—or rather the doubtful state in which, though he felt disposed to give Dr. Kassiner up, he could not quite make up his mind to take Dr. Dagley on—that his



sister bethought herself of sending out invitations for a small and early dance.

“Any one you would like me to invite?” she asked, good-naturedly. Mr. Manford had not remained long in town on the occasion of his first visit, and when he returned in order to see for himself the marked improvement in his son's health he had been led to expect, took up his quarters at the Grand, and from thence viewed actual results both with sorrow and with anger.

So far from having gained ground his son seemed to have certainly lost it. He really felt shocked to see how ill he looked, and all Dr. Kassiner's hopeful assurances served only to convince him the great physician, in this case at all events, did not understand his business.

Wherefore, when Mrs. Burt Craden asked that question about her Saturday dance, he answered, moved by that wave of semi-intention which influences so many things:

“If you do not mind, I think you might send one to Dr. Claud Dagley—Phil is very fond of him, and the poor fellow has had a rough time and might appreciate a little attention, besides.”

“Oh! certainly,” replied Mrs. Craden, who quite understood, and forthwith a card was dispatched.

“I am glad you were able to come to-night,” said Philip Manford, as he walked back with his friend to Gloucester Road Station. “I thought I should see such a lot of you while in London, and now it seems to me we have scarcely ever met.”

“That is always the way in modern Babylon,” an-



swered Dr. Dagley. "Here time travels by express, and when the journey is finished, and our leave expires, we find we have seen nothing, done nothing, heard nothing in comparison with what we intended to see, do, and hear. Over the pavements life is only a long grind. But for the chance that I have a young student from St. Mary's Hospital staying with me till he gets a vessel, I could not have got off this evening. He consented, however, to act as representative."

"You must be coining, Claud."

"Oh, yes, of course," with a forced laugh.

"Is not Miss Osberton a lovely girl?" was the next irrelevant observation.

"She seems a quiet young woman," answered Dr. Dagley, dispassionately.

As the Misses Craden could not be considered quiet young women, it was somewhat difficult to determine whether this remark were intended as a compliment to Amabel or a back-handed slap to those frolicsome damsels.

"Quiet young woman!" repeated Mr. Manford indignantly. "What an icicle you are!"

"Is she not quiet, then?" asked Dr. Dagley.

"Of course she is, and everything else that is sweet and lovely. Why, man, where are your eyes? She is as beautiful as she is unaffected, as graceful as she is good. If she had not been out of the market, I would have had a try for her myself; but when another fellow is first favorite—a rattling good fellow, I believe, into the bargain—there can be neither honor nor glory in entering for such stakes."



"Do you mean that Miss Osberton is engaged?"

"Certainly. Have you forgotten all I said about a beautiful girl you would meet at my aunt's?"

"No, I remember you told me something about somebody I was not to think of, but I did not connect her with Miss Osberton. Fact is," went on the young doctor, speaking the honest truth, "girls are articles so much out of my way that your talk did not make the slightest impression. I have other and more serious matters to engage the whole of my attention. Between me and matrimony there is a gulf fixed which I have neither power nor desire to cross."

"Wait till you fall in love, then there will be such a transformation scene Dr. Claud Dagley won't know himself."

"I took the complaint very early in life," answered Dr. Claud Dagley, with a gravity befitting so serious a theme, "just as I did measles, and think it is no more likely I shall ever again be laid up with the one than with the other!"

"Really, old chap, were you badly hit? I never suspected the fact."

"You were not at hand, and if you had been it would have made no difference. For the rest, I was so badly hit that—but what's the good of talking? Of course," he went on, "she was nearly twice my age, and only playing with me, but I believed in her. Heaven did not seem more true to me than that wretched, unwomanly woman, who sold herself for diamonds when she might have had a heart."

"My dear Dagley, I am grieved."

"Don't grieve, then, only remember for the future,



when you imagine you are making a good jest, you may be touching a wound that is very deep indeed. And now I think I shall say good-night. You ought to be at home and in bed; you should not have come out of that warm house in so thin a coat. Will you never learn common-sense?"

"Never, I fear, unless you will undertake to teach it to me. As my father truly says, I require as much looking after as a child."

"A grown man should be ashamed to repeat such a speech. If your life be of no value to you——"

"But it is," interrupted the other, "of the greatest possible value; and we won't say good-night just yet, for I am not staying with my aunt now, but at the Grand, where my father would be very glad if you could come and dine with us any evening you may chance to be at leisure."

"Wants a travelling opinion," thought Dr. Dagley, with a vivid memory of that other day when he had lunched badly and dined not at all, and returned home feeless because Dr. Kassiner, who had herds and flocks in the way of patients, had snatched his "one ewe lamb," to wit, Philip Manford.

"Many thanks, I shall be glad to dine with you," was all he said, however.

"Could you come to-morrow?" very eagerly.

"Well, no," was the answer. "Mrs. Craden was good enough to ask me for luncheon and to go to Chiswick afterward, so I fear I must decline dining with you."

"Whew!" whistled Mrs. Craden's nephew. "I say, old fellow, don't think me officious if I give you



a word of warning. My cousins will be next door to paupers. They are all being brought up to do something—very badly—for themselves, and I don't think that is the sort of wife you want—eh, Claud?"

"I have told you I do not want any wife," was the answer. "I find sufficient difficulty in keeping myself, and feel certainly no wild longing to clothe, feed, lodge, and indulge the caprices of anybody else."

"No offence was meant."

"And none was taken; but I may as well tell you at once I consider all the chaff people seem to think funny about love and marriage the worst possible taste. No one except an idiot would jest if a man said he were going into a business partnership, and a matrimonial partnership is a far more important matter. Next to birth, marriage is the most serious incident in any person's life."

"No doubt you are quite right," answered Philip Manford meekly, thinking: "What a lot of crotchets Dagley has developed, poor fellow! I only hope my aunt won't succeed in landing him."

"I was not chaffing you at all," he went on aloud, "only trying to give a friendly warning. My aunt is an extremely clever individual; and really, when one thinks of it, five daughters on hand are enough to make any mother do what she would not otherwise think of. That was all I meant, and I spoke just because I knew or believed you ought not to marry a poor woman. Had Miss Osberton been free——"

"Scarcely five minutes since you said you would have had a shot at her yourself," interrupted Dr. Dagley. "I quite understand what you mean, but



it may save us both a lot of trouble if you will just believe I have no thought of marrying, or desire to marry. I could not afford the doubtful luxury of a poor wife, and rich girls do not grow on branches that hang so low any passing hand can gather."

"There is a good deal in that," said Mr. Manford; "and now good-night, really. I have only time to catch my train. My father will write to you."

"He will," thought Dr. Dagley, "and before many days are over, or I never was more mistaken in my life." Having arrived at which cheering conviction, he turned from the station and bent his steps along Queen's Gate to the Park.

As he passed Mr. Osberton's house he looked up. There was no light in any of the windows; for all sign of life, one dead might have been lying in every room. Dr. Dagley, who for such a strong-minded and self-reliant person was singularly impressionable, felt strangely affected by the influence of the hour and the sight of so many houses gloomy and silent. In its way it seemed like passing through a village churchyard at midnight, and the solitary pedestrian hurrying on shivered, as if he felt some stranger's foot walking over his grave that was to be!

Next morning, however, he awoke in excellent spirits. Bright sunshine had chased away all those gloomy phantasms that flourish and perish swiftly as Jonah's gourd. He was not so old but that the cup of pleasure, even though it contained no more generous liquor than luncheon at the Boltons, still seemed sparkling to him.

His fast from good society had been a long one,



and there is a charm in setting foot across a decent threshold, in sitting down to a well-cooked, well-served meal, in being waited on by velvet-footed servants—aye, even in the babble of many voices, talking foolishly it may be, but with the accent of persons to the manner born, that only those who have perforce lived for years the strictly anchorite existence to which necessity had bound Claud Dagley could ever properly understand.

Even the Misses Craden, noisy, flighty, slangy, seemed an agreeable change after a long course of shilling patients. They were, at all events, nicely dressed, and good to look at. Their chatter was not of hard times and outlandish diseases, but related to men and women well known in the world of fashion, of alliances arranged or recently contracted, of artists, authors, actors, of the last new play and most recent novel, of Sandown and Kempton, of the river, of the raciest scandal, of everything, in fact, under heaven save of sickness and sores, and livers gone wrong, lost lungs, failing sight, defective hearing, and all the many ailments to which flesh is heir.

To the one chronic complaint, shortness of money, that haunted the Cradens like a family ghost, no reference was made.

That skeleton they always kept judiciously out of sight. Writs, summonses, and lawyers' letters were not brought in with soup or served as *entrées*, rather Mr. Burt Craden locked them away and dispensed hospitality quite at his ease, regardless of the rising flood of debt which threatened to engulf him.

Altogether it was a delightful Sunday; after



luncheon the whole party adjourned to General Manford's place at Chiswick, where they played lawn tennis and squabbled over the game in a most natural way.

"And these are rational beings!" said Dr. Claud Dagley, in an aside to Amabel.

Next minute, however, he was in the thick of the controversy himself, and won glorious opinions from the girls by reason of his skill and coolness.

"He is quite too too," said Maud that night, when hair-brushing time had come.

"And *awfully* handsome," capped Helen, who was "going in" for fiction.

"Well, I don't know," criticised Marjorie. "It would be all right if he had a rackety look. He is far too proper. Give me a man like the pater, now; no one would think he ever went to bed before morning. There is something about a clean healthy face such as Dr. Claud's that repels me. My sympathies require to be enlisted. What do you say, Amabel?"

Amabel said she did not know in a tone which her friends evidently took to mean that she did not care, for with one accord they cried out: "Disagreeable thing!"



## CHAPTER XVII.

### CLAUD CONSULTS A SOLICITOR.

THE hill of success is steep and the road to wealth long. But the first never seems so steep nor the second so long as to him who imagined he could scale the height at a rush and secure riches while still young enough to enjoy them after youth's strangely improvident fashion.

Because those who think to carry fame by storm and have faith in some vague Tom Tiddler's ground, where gold may be swept up like autumn leaves, forget that Fortune is not generally a weakly, amiable benefactor, but rather a stern taskmaster, who works his followers like slaves and only gives happiness—if he ever give it at all—after hours.

Dr. Claud Dagley had believed fully that talent—his—must make its way; that if he labored unremittingly, in the very nature of things he should ere long reap golden grain. One man's idea of a good harvest, however, differs from that of his neighbor, and although any person who understood the difficulties with which the young soldier of fortune had to contend would have said, and rightly, his progress was marvellous, he himself felt it could but be compared to that of an inferior tortoise.

The Saturday evening and Sunday afternoon spent



in a society he felt he adorned and to which he believed he was superior, intellectually at all events—in which opinion who might say he was wrong?—filled up the measure of his discontent.

Most of us are brave enough to fight ill-fortune, but quite another sort of courage is required when we are called upon to face the contrast between our actual position and what society supposes that position to be.

In many worldly encounters Claud Dagley had proved himself sufficiently valiant, but when it came to a struggle between birth and means he knew the battle was going against him—that he had not the money, in a word, to travel first-class, and, therefore, unless he could book resignedly third, it would be wise not to travel at all.

Safety lay for him in the wilds of North Kensington, and temptation to expenditure among the gardens and terraces and squares of Brompton; nevertheless, he felt the latter sweeter than the former, and could not turn back to his shilling patients, and existence devoid of almost everything which makes existence pleasant to a young man who had thought to conquer circumstances, without striking another blow for success and that dream-practice in Stratford Place.

It was for this reason that a few mornings after the Hon. Mrs. Burt Craden's little dance Dr. Dagley took train at Westbourne Park for King's Cross, whence he made his way to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where a certain Mr. Hernidge (firm Hernidge & Chitwell) had offices.

It is an excellent thing to have a good solicitor,



but the pleasure is somewhat alloyed when the client has no business, bad or the reverse, to ask his solicitor to transact for him. It is like keeping a *chef* and being unable to furnish provisions for him to cook never so cunningly. That was how matters stood between Mr. Hernidge and Dr. Dagley. The solicitor would have undertaken the conduct of a great lawsuit for the young man willingly, but there was nothing to go to law about.

No one can take his relations into court merely because they refuse to hold any communication with him, and this was precisely the cause of disagreement between Dr. Claud Dagley and the Dagleys of Dagley Park, who left their kinsman severely alone.

To Mr. Hernidge had fallen the ungracious task of informing the lady's great-grandson not merely that a certain Dame Dagley, widow of Sir Montfort Dagley, who was knighted somewhere about 1825, had left him nothing, but that a score or so of his own unopened letters were quite at his service. He had written those letters hoping to remind the old lady that Colonel Claud Dagley, deceased, was once her favorite grandchild, and also indirectly to inform her there was another Claud Dagley alive, steady as his father had been wild, industrious instead of idle, who passed all his examinations with credit, who improved his opportunities, on whom money might safely be spent, who was possessed of many talents which he did not bury, who, given the chance, would turn out a credit to his family, who was willing, means being provided, to embark on any career which might best recommend itself to his aged rela-



tive, with the result that all this bread, cast in faith upon the waters, came back to him after many days, stale and unprofitable, together with the intimation that his great-grandmother—after cutting Colonel Claud Dagley out of her will because of the marriage he chose to contract—had gradually sunk into a state of dotage which would have rendered the most touching epistles utterly useless, and accounted for the accumulation of correspondence Mr. Hernidge was instructed to return to the writer, with an assurance that any letters addressed in future to Dagley Park, or the town house in Mayfair, or the family solicitor, would be refused.

It was not a nice commission, by any means, but Mr. Hernidge discharged it with a tact and consideration which took off some of the sting, and inspired the rejected Dagley with a feeling for that gentleman as near akin to gratitude as he was capable of entertaining.

In truth, Mr. Hernidge was taken with the young fellow's good looks, good manners, and manly acceptance of the Dagley rejection, and tried hard to procure for him even a little of the wealth Dame Eleanor left behind—without success.

The Dagleys, uncles, aunts, and cousins, did not care in the least whether their undesired relative were handsome, or clever, or persevering, or likely to turn out a credit. They would have none of him. They knew what a scandal and a trouble Colonel Claud Dagley had always been—what a sharp thorn in the Dagleys' side, what a black sheep in that hitherto respectable fold.



They remembered the joy which filled their souls when Dame Eleanor's son, being the last of the entail, decided to pass over his first-born and leave the estates to Bertram. They knew how, long after Claud had spent his portion like the prodigal he was, and been solemnly informed the family possessions would never come to him, he raised money on the strength of what he represented as his certain inheritance, and triumphantly defrauded creditors in number as the sands of the seashore.

"The national debt," said his father, "would scarcely last him for a year," and, indeed, it might have puzzled any one to imagine the amount of money Colonel Dagley could not have spent without leaving a trace behind. There were few expedients for "raising the wind" he had not tried. There was little mean or despicable he had not resorted to. Even his marriage originated in a desperate attempt to extract money out of one he believed to be the real Simon Pure, but who was, in fact, only Simon Pure's jackal.

His debts never troubled him in the least, and when death tapped him on the shoulder and said imperatively "Come along!" he left more genuine mourners bewailing their deceased acquaintance than many a saint.

Then there ensued an exceedingly bad time for Mr Bertram Dagley, who had but just succeeded to the broad lands of his forefathers. The creditors that started up, the claims that were put in, the tissue of lies, many of them in plain black and white, which was exposed, the false pretences, the dishonorable shifts, were enough in all conscience, without the ad-



ditions of a sister-in-law who came of "dreadful people," and a nephew who was a fact the Dagleys refused to recognize.

It could not excite much surprise that to the Colonel's creditors, wife, and son one measure was meted out. They were all swept off the board; and though young Dagley, egged on, as was mistakenly supposed, by his maternal grandfather, persisted in writing from school and college those letters of which mention has been made, that really mattered not in the least, for Dame Eleanor never read them, and if she had would not have been touched at all save by a feeling of irritation.

Those who are fond of stating that blood is thicker than water thought the Dagleys erred in not recognizing their brother's son; upon the other hand, those who occupied the same high social platform considered they acted with exceeding wisdom.

To young Dagley—at the time of Dame Eleanor's death, about eighteen—the family decision came as a crushing blow. Pride, however, or anger, or strength, or a mixture of all three, enabled him to bear being shut out of the fold with a certain dignity which veiled wild rage and a still wilder desire for revenge.

"Tell Mr. Dagley, the man who stands in my father's shoes, who owns the lands which ought to have come to me," he said, quietly enough, "that he need not be afraid I shall intrude. His message might have been more courteously worded, but at least it leaves me free to follow the bent of my own inclinations."



“To go where?” asked Mr. Hernidge.

“To study medicine,” was the answer. “Had my family deigned to acknowledge me I should have tried to fall in with their views; as it is, I need not consult or consider their prejudices.”

“A doctor’s is a very good profession,” said the solicitor, kindly. “I hope you will get on.”

“I shall be sure to get on,” was the confident answer, because the lad had still to learn how steep is the hill of success and how long the road to wealth; there was no one to tell him, no one who knew, and if there had been, probably he would not have believed—youth never does believe; consequently he had to find out all the steepness, all the dreary length, for himself.

For four years he studied hard, prepared for his exams, and passed them. Then he went the orthodox voyage—nay, two voyages—and afterward cast about to see what he could do, taking a situation for a short time as assistant to a doctor who had two distinct sets of patients. This experience gave him the idea he afterward developed in North Kensington, and at the end of nine years from the time when Dame Eleanor Dagley went over to the majority he was well established at Uplands House, able to pay his way and to bank a few pounds now and then, but still as far from fame and fortune as ever.

It was concerning this he wished to see Mr. Hernidge, of whom he had never lost sight, reporting himself periodically in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and feeling he could never quite cease to be a Dagley so long as he kept *en rapport* with the Dagleys’ solicitor.



“Well, and how are you?” asked that gentleman cheerily, at the same time giving Dr. Dagley’s hand a hearty shake. “I have not seen you for an age. Making your fortune rapidly?”

“No, it tarries by the way. It is about that I want to speak to you.”

“How many thousand people there are in London,” thought the lawyer, “who would discourse on this same subject,” but he only said aloud:

“I shall be delighted to listen—or advise. Now, what is the trouble?—but pray sit down; I really cannot listen properly or advise at all while you keep walking up and down the room.”

“And I find it difficult to think and talk unless I am on the move,” answered Dr. Dagley as he took a chair. “The whole business is this: I can’t get on as I could and should for want of money.”

“No uncommon want, considering the bank rate is almost nothing,” remarked Mr. Hernidge. “When money is cheap, if you notice, no one ever has any,” which was one of those general propositions calculated to irritate a man very particularly in earnest.

“The bank rate makes little difference to me,” returned Dr. Dagley, putting an iron curb on his tongue. “If it were high as it could well rise, it would not take a sovereign from my receipts or add one to them.”

“You may account yourself fortunate, then. Very few persons could say as much.”

“To a certain extent I suppose I have been fortunate; many men placed as I am would consider they had succeeded well. Many men regard a roof



to shelter them, food to eat, money sufficient to pay their way—success. I do not.”

“It is a colorable imitation, at all events,” commented Mr. Hernidge, coolly practical.

“True, a colorable imitation; but what I desire and am determined to have is the genuine article, and if I could but lay my hand on any one who could finance me, any one willing to find sufficient capital, I know I should ere long be at the top of my profession.”

“Yes,” said Mr. Hernidge, slowly, “yes.” But whether he uttered this monosyllable as an inquiry or a mild form of dissent, or as a note of admiration, it might have puzzled a conjurer to decide.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MR. HERNIDGE GIVES ADVICE.

ANY man who has been out in the world, more especially the great world of business London, must be simple exceedingly if he fail to recognize in the words "Capital wanted" a signal warning him there is danger ahead, and that he would therefore do well to run cautiously over the conversational metals.

Because, although there is nothing more certain than that most people are sorely in want of capital, there is nothing less certain than that its possession would prove of permanent benefit to them, or—to the lender. Quite the contrary; as a rule, borrowed capital generally acts the part of a lever in raising a man only to hurl him with greater force to destruction, and to ruin those who went in for high interest.

All these things Mr. Hernidge knew, but he contented himself with saying "Yes" enigmatically. He never had snubbed this unlucky scion of a great house—it was most unlikely he ever would; on the contrary, he felt very sorry for him, and meant to—listen.

"If you tell me exactly what you have in your mind, I will give you the best advice in my power," he began at last, after vainly waiting for something to which he could—listen.



“Well, the position is just this,” answered Dr. Dagley: “I have been working up a practice for four years—perhaps not unsuccessfully; but I feel I have reached the limit of what I can do where I am, and I desire to make a change.”

“You desire to sell your practice, in other words?”

“I could do so, no doubt. I should do so, of course,” was the somewhat confused reply—for Dr. Dagley had never previously given the sale of his practice a thought; when aiming at an eagle, men despise a crow. “Fact is,” he went on hurriedly, “I am getting tired of constant drudgery; my youth is passing—has passed—and if I do not make haste I shall be an old man before I attain any position worth speaking of.”

“How do you propose to better your position?” asked Mr. Hernidge.

“That is precisely what I came to talk to you about. Without vanity, I may say I know more about my profession than most men.”

“No doubt you are right in your idea.” It was a nice observation on the part of Mr. Hernidge, who made this pleasant speech less because he believed Dr. Dagley to be a paragon of medical learning than for the very good reason that he had a glimmering of the very little most men really know about any subject.

“Every day,” went on the doctor, warming to his theme, “I see and hear of physicians, wholly or partly incompetent to deal with the diseases they profess to treat, who are yet netting huge incomes. I should like to meet them in a fair field and show



them what I could effect in the way of curing patients. For this I need money. If Galen himself were to set up in my suburb and give the whole district a clean bill of health within three months, he would not be thought a bit more of than—I am; and I have cured Heaven only knows how many bad cases—hopeless cases, so called—that drifted to me as a last resource.”

“It must be very gratifying to feel you have restored so many persons to health.”

“It is, and it is not,” was the frank reply. “Of course professionally I feel proud to have succeeded where others failed, but personally I ask myself, What is the good of it all? What is the use of wasting my youth and spending my strength if I am never to get riches, or standing, or fame, or anything but hard work in return? Do you know any one who would invest in me, Mr. Hernidge? Who would find the capital if I found the labor? Who would set me up, in a word, at the West End and give me the chance of showing what I could do? I would repay him with good interest. It is a thing which is done every day. I am told there is a monkey riding many a big practice, posturing and grinning on many a great physician’s shoulder, but I should not mind that. All I want is a chance—a chance—a chance. I could rise quickly enough if I were only given that!”

In his excitement the young man had started up, and now stood before the solicitor, tall, straight, handsome, as goodly a specimen of a modern young Englishman as any one need have desired to see. Nevertheless, Mr. Hernidge, though not unapprecia-



tive, looked at him somewhat sadly. Enthusiasm is for the most part wasted on middle age, which often remembers it too was once enthusiastic—and the result.

“Do you mean to tell me there are persons who ‘speculate’ in medical gentlemen, and share their profits if any accrue?” asked the lawyer, politely incredulous.

“So I understand, precisely as there are people who speculate in a singer or a—a——”

“They don’t invest in lawyers for a rise, if that is what you were about to say,” remarked Mr. Hernidge, dryly, seeing his visitor was at a loss for a word. “Did your informant add where these adventurous individuals were to be found?”

“No. I have never been able to ascertain any names or addresses, but I am assured there are such persons, and that the whole thing is a part of a regular system.”

“It may be,” replied the other, “but I confess I feel sceptical. I am not in a position to say you are wrong in your statement, but it is one I should be slow to credit. The case of a singer is different—there is the voice, you know.”

“Yes, but a clever doctor is an even safer speculation,” and then there ensued an awkward silence, while Claud Dagley thought what fresh argument he could put forward, and Mr. Hernidge wondered how he might most easily let the young man down.

“What amount would be required to make a good start?” asked the solicitor, after a few moments, merely by way of saying something.



“I do not know exactly—a few thousands; not all at once, of course.”

“And what security should you propose to give?” went on Mr. Hernidge, rather taken aback by such an airy mention of thousands.

“Oh! I would insure my life,” answered Dr. Dagley, as confidently as though a policy of insurance were a freehold estate. Many people who have paid one premium speak as if it ought to be considered just as good.

Mr. Hernidge leaned back in his chair, and shook his head gravely. Here was something tangible to grapple with at last.

“Bad security,” he said, “very bad. As a smart American once observed, ‘That cannot be reckoned a good security which a man must die to realize.’”

“I only meant as collateral,” explained Dr. Dagley.

“That I quite understand,” replied Mr. Hernidge, suavely, “but still altogether out of our way. The fact is,” he continued, trying to make his refusal as pleasant and impersonal as possible, “we have practically no clients who desire to find outlets for money. As a rule, what they want is to obtain advances for themselves on real estate; and if I may venture to say so, without giving offence, the advance you wish to obtain is on personal property.”

“Much more secure than real,” retorted the owner of that personal property, which he conceived to have been derided.

“Very possibly—you ought to know best about that; still, as you see, not in our way—not in our way at all.”



There is one thing no person decently born and bred can fight against, namely, politeness; which, although scarcely Christian, is not a bad representative of it. No man of the rank and file can dispute with real Christianity, such as that which influenced Mr. Saughton, and no man of the better class is able to argue with politeness; which latter truth impressed itself on Dr. Dagley that morning when, in the pleasant offices overlooking the trees and grass of Lincoln's Inn Fields, he mooted his notable scheme to Mr. Hernidge.

It was for this reason he held his peace when he understood the lawyer's civility meant "No" decisively. He felt suffocating with rage and disappointment, but still, there being nothing to fight, he did not say a word.

"It seems to me you are doing very well," observed Mr. Hernidge, "very well indeed. I consider you have done wonders. Why cannot you be content to go on quietly for a while?"

His questions seemed to loosen the string of Claud Dagley's tongue, though he still kept the iron curb of good manners upon it.

"Because," he answered, "if I go on as I am going I shall be an old man before I am a rich one—before I have a chance of showing what is in me."

"All things come to him who waits," was the crazing reply; "and for the rest, I wish I could make young people understand how very little money can do."

"And I wish I could make rich people understand what it is to be poor," was the retort. "To have to



think of shillings, aye of pence, to have to deny one's self in every direction, to have to work hard for mere daily bread, to see no hope in the future, to know others with half the brains are winning the world's prizes poverty may not even enter for, to feel youth slipping away and taking with it the power to make a name in the world, and at last even the inclination to make a name at all. Oh! I have seen it. I am not talking at random."

"I have seen it also," answered the lawyer, "but not with such as you. I prophesy that to the end you will be as industrious, as impatient, as ambitious as you are now, as eager to scale higher and higher Alps; but you won't get on any the faster for making too much speed. The worst of youth is, it thinks it has not a minute to spare, that with years stretching ahead it cannot endure to wait for anything."

"It has not the time to wait," was the answer. "If a man is to do anything at all, he should do it before he is thirty. Age may well sit down in the evening of life with folded hands, but in the bright morning-time, who dare do anything of the kind?"

"If you are so very anxious to leave a practice which seems to pay pretty well," returned Mr. Hernidge, "why do you not ask your informant where those financiers are to be found who float medical gentlemen to success?"

"I have asked, and asked to no purpose. It is a well-known fact that there are men who speculate in doctors, as you happily phrased the business, but naturally both principals keep the matter as close a secret as possible from the outside world."



“And so there you are again,” observed Mr. Her-  
nidge, sympathetically, for, although he thought  
Claud Dagley foolish, he could not but compassionate  
his folly and his disappointment.

“And there I am likely to remain, apparently,” re-  
plied the young man somewhat bitterly, as he took  
his hat, which was a specially good one, and almost  
new.

He always was particular about his hats, and, in-  
deed, his dress generally.

“If I were you—” began the lawyer.

“Yes, if you were I?” interrogatively.

“I would marry a rich wife.”

“An heiress would be extremely likely to marry a  
poor doctor,” ironically.

“I don't know that she would be unlikely to marry  
a man sure to make his way,” was the reply.

“I should not like to owe my fortune to a wife.”

“Better owe it to your wife than to a money-lender;  
better go and hang yourself than begin life with a  
millstone of debt about your neck.”

“I would sooner hang myself than marry an old  
woman for the sake of her money.”

“Why old—or plain, or unpleasant? A few thou-  
sands do not change a pretty girl into an ugly one, or a  
good-tempered one into a shrew; think of it—a suit-  
able wife would be the making of you. On your side  
there is everything but money, and there are plenty  
of nice young women in London and elsewhere who  
could supply that; which reminds me, I was just  
going to write to you when you appeared. My father  
has elected to give one of his big parties next week;



should you care to look in? If so, here is your card. He is making a new departure and inviting ladies also. I don't know that any one of them is unmarried, or if unmarried that it would be of much use for you to think of her; but the evening might give you a little entertainment, and my father would be delighted to see you. Will you come?"

"Thank you, yes. Might I bring a friend?"

"Certainly; what is his name?"

"Manford," was the reply, "Philip Manford."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### MR. VINK AGAIN.

WHEN his visitor departed it was with a feeling of serene self-satisfaction that Mr. Hernidge again addressed himself to the draft he had been reading before Dr. Dagley's arrival.

"Yes," he soliloquized, "my suggestion will turn his thoughts into a better channel, poor fellow. A wife is the thing for him, and a capital husband he will make. Why should he not marry an heiress? He has everything in his favor—youth, good looks, good manners, talent, perseverance. Not a word against him that ever I heard—steady at school, at college, at the hospital—steady now, I'll be bound—steady as Old Time. What a handsome, well set-up young fellow he is! Yes, a nice wife with money is the thing he wants, and that he'll have, too, before he's a year older, or I never was more mistaken."

Which latter sentence so greatly pleased the usually astute gentleman, he felt constrained to repeat it once again, happily unconscious that Dr. Dagley, striding along Gray's Inn Lane as fast as his legs could take him, was mentally anathematizing the Dagleys' family solicitor, calling him an ignorant and prejudiced old donkey, and resolving solemnly, first, that he would never marry at all, and second,



that if he did, it should be a woman possessed of no more wealth than Griselda of immortal memory. He would not owe his position to the best wife in England—not if he knew it. Not even to gain the practice, the fame, the wealth he so much coveted would he do such a thing.

What he wanted was, inverting usual business proceedings, to get so much capital advanced in exchange for so much value to be given. He had no desire to cheat any man of his pound of flesh. Honestly he meant to pay it. Honestly he intended to work, honestly to hand over the money he received for that work, merely deducting a few necessary expenses.

Position, after all, was what he valued more than riches; to be talked about, to be run after by the great and learned, by the noble and the beautiful—ah! that would be living, that would be life indeed.

Meantime he had gained nothing by his journey to Lincoln's Inn Fields save an invitation to one of old Mr. Hernidge's parties, which by experience he knew were wearisome to an extent. Still he felt glad to have been asked.

"It is just the sort of out-of-the-way affair Phil will enjoy," he considered; "for the patriarch," as he irreverently styled Mr. Hernidge senior, "has known after a fashion everybody worth knowing in the course of half a century or so—at all events, most people worth knowing passed through his rooms on their way to fame," and then he fell a-musing; it might be that he himself, while passing through them, was all unconsciously on his way to fame.



The idea had not occurred to him before, in connection with the antediluvian establishment in Bloomsbury, but now that it did he hugged the fancy as an augury of good. Others, no doubt, even when at lower water than he, had gone in bad spirits to that house, to which they returned once or twice when abundantly successful.

Yes, it must be a sign Fortune was relenting for him to receive again an invitation to the once much-talked-of house in Bedford Square. He knew how he could word his note to Philip Manford—he would lard it with the names of well-nigh forgotten celebrities; he could mention Grote, and liken Mr. Hernidge to him, though indeed he well knew there was no likeness between the two men save that both had been bankers. He would touch lightly on the difficulty of obtaining cards for such gatherings, speak of Bohemians and Philistines, say the rising generation of scientists, doctors, artists, authors, actors, and divines would be well in evidence, and finally beg Phil, always supposing he *felt well enough*, for the sake of the fun not to neglect such a chance of seeing one phase of London life which might never present itself again.

He was so busy, indeed, mentally composing the short but pregnant epistle he intended to indite that he passed the door of a medical friend ere he remembered a sentence uttered by Mr. Hernidge had determined him to call on that old fellow-student.

When he recollected it did not take him long to retrace his steps and ask whether Dr. Granger were at home.



“He has just been sent for, sir,” said a trim maid-servant, “but if you come in I am sure he will see you,” at which moment Dr. Granger himself ran downstairs, and then there ensued the customary “old man,” and all the rest of it, that sometimes means much and sometimes means nothing.

“You are going out,” said Dr. Dagley, when the first greetings were over; “I will walk with you in any direction.”

“Awfully good of you,” answered the other. “I am bound for Charlotte Street.”

“All in my way,” was the reply, and they walked together toward Tottenham Court Road, talking as they went of this, that, and the other—how Smith had failed, and Jones succeeded, and Robinson married, and Jackson died, till, *apropos* of nothing Dr. Claud Dagley said:

“By the bye, didn’t you once tell me there was some one who found the money to start Dr. Drewton?”

“Oh, yes! everybody knew that Drewton had not a penny to bless himself with, and yet all at once he blossomed like the rose. Good house in fashionable neighborhood, man-servant, carriage and pair, and so forth.”

“And who was the confiding capitalist?”

“God knows—there *must* have been one, however.”

From Charlotte Street the curious young man pursued his way first to Edgware Road and then to Paddington, in both of which localities he received equally unsatisfactory answers to perfectly straightforward questions.

“Of course everybody knew,” was the gist of the



replies, but as it turned out nobody unfortunately knew.

"It was said." "It was reported." "It was well understood." "There could be no doubt about the matter." "Such transactions were taking place every day." "Why, that was the reason Crookwood left England—things did not go well with him, and the man behind was giving no end of bother."

"Who was the man behind?"

"Never heard—family squared him somehow."

The story was always the same, with a difference. Had the unknown financier been a will-o'-the-wisp he could not have led the man who sought him a more maddening dance. Now he was here, again he was there, anon somewhere else.

"It is a mystery to me," remarked the Paddington practitioner, "how fellows meet with chaps who think nothing of forking out their thousands. About three years ago I was hard up for fifty pounds, and went to one of those philanthropists who advertise in the papers. Bless my soul, if I had asked him to take over the national debt he could not have made a greater bother. He wanted this, and he must have that, and it was only after a deuce of a fuss I extracted forty. Then I did not know an hour's rest till I had gathered the amount of my promissory note, which was—what do you think?"

"I can't think. Tell me."

"What with one thing and another the loan of forty pounds for two months cost me fifty. Work that out, my sonny, and see if the game be worth the candle. No, better trust to the tender mercies of one's natural



enemies—butcher, baker, grocer, tailor, landlord, even the tax-gatherer, than to the precious balms of Moses and Isaac. That such men lend large sums to doctors there can be no question. Why should they not, when if even the interest alone be paid for two years they recoup themselves and receive ten per cent addition? I am told when you want money you should always ask for a large sum. Extortionate philanthropists despise people who only require moderate advances.”

“Who was the usurer you applied to?”

“I shall not tell you. If you are hard up, you had better face anything than get into the toils of sixty per cent.”

“I am not at all hard up,” was the unexpected reply; “my question was simply one of inquiry, because a gentleman I know seemed doubtful when I told him many of our great doctors had been financed to success by members of the tribes of Israel.”

“They have, though,” was the confident answer.

“If you could get me some certain information on the subject I should feel grateful,” said Dr. Dagley; “my friend is so incredulous.”

“I will bear the matter in mind,” was the reply—after receiving which assurance Dr. Dagley took train at Bishop’s Road and returned to North Kensington, just as far forward and just as wise as when he left it.

The credulous capitalist, in whom he still firmly believed, seemed as hard to find as a needle in a pottle of straw!



When he reached home young Bayford, who looked in aggravatingly good spirits, stated that a man called Vink had called.

“What did *he* want?” asked Dr. Dagley, in the irritable tone that might have been expected from a person who was not merely disappointed but hungry.

“To see you, I think—at all events, he refused my poor offers of medical advice, and said the person he wanted was Dr. Claud Dagley *himself*, as though I had posed for you. Vink is really a delightfully natural person.”

“His family are natural enough, at any rate; whether ‘delightfully’ so, must be a matter of opinion.”

“Then he has a family?”

“He has both wife and daughter—unhappily,” was the gloomy reply.

Mr. Bayford, being a wise young man, merely said: “Here is your chop, which I will leave you to enjoy,” and retired.

When Dr. Dagley, having finished his chop, entered the surgery to see what was “going on,” he found not merely that Mr. Vink had called again, but was awaiting his leisure in the outer room.

“Pray send him to me,” he observed to Mr. Bayford, “and let’s have it over,” in compliance with which request there entered a short, stout-set, decent-looking man, who had evidently made an effort to brush himself up out of respect to the impending interview.



“Servant, sir,” he began with an unmistakably country bow and accent.

“Mr. Vink?”

“That is my name,” as though he took a modest pride in having a name at all.

“And what can I do for you?” which, indeed, was a question Dr. Dagley might well ask, for he could not see a sign of illness or any lack of strength about this new arrival.

“I think you’ve done enough, sir, for me and mine,” answered Vink, in tones which, though gruff, were evidently sincere. He had beaten his wife, he had got shockingly drunk, but yet, looking at the fellow, Dr. Dagley felt there was grit in him—that drunk or sober, in his seven senses or in none, he was worth a score of Mrs. Vink. “I have been coming round many and many a time to thank you,” went on the delinquent, “but I never seemed to be able to fit it in, for I didn’t like to call in the evenings, just when you are busiest, or on Sundays, when likely you are away or resting yourself. We are a bit slack this week, though; and for that reason I asked for the afternoon and got it, which is what made me so bold as to come back again when told you were out. I hope you’ll excuse the freedom, sir.”

“Oh, certainly!” answered Dr. Dagley. “I am very glad to see you, Mr. Vink—won’t you sit down?” and he pointed to the patient’s chair, which was placed at right angles to his own writing-table.

“Thank ’ee, sir,” returned Mr. Vink, modestly retreating to a seat so near the door that it almost seemed as though he had it in his mind either to



defend the position or meant to occupy it simply as a point from whence escape would be easy.

Carefully putting his handkerchief in his hat and placing both under the bench he had selected, he smoothed down his hair and waited, feeling he had done everything which politeness required.



## CHAPTER XX.

### A CALL FROM MR. VINK.

“I AM glad to gather you are in work, Mr. Vink,” said Dr. Dagley, finding his visitor did not speak.

“Thank you, sir. Yes, I am still at the same place I dropped into after I had done my lot.”

“What extraordinarily good fortune!”

“Not such good fortune as that my missus should light on a gentleman like you, who looked after her and the young one while I was away.”

Dr. Dagley waved aside the implied thanks with a lordly gesture which seemed to say not that thanks were unnecessary, but that he was above them.

“If I live to a hundred,” went on Mr. Vink, who having just got up steam saw no reason why he should slacken speed—indeed, he regarded Dr. Dagley’s silent disclaimer of further thanks as a mere invitation to continue—“I shall never forget meeting a bobby I knew *that* morning, when the London houses, and the London men and women, and the ground under my feet, and the blue sky overhead looked different from what any one of them had ever looked before. ‘Hillo!’ says he. ‘Hillo!’ says I quick, just like that, ‘but don’t keep me, for I’m in a hurry to know where my wife and the kid are and how they’ve been getting on.’”



“‘Make your mind easy about them,’ he says; ‘they’ve been living like princesses of the blood,’ or ‘the blood royal’—I could not charge my memory to the extent of declaring which. ‘How’s that?’ I asks, struck all of a heap, as well I might be.

“‘Why, all along of the gen’lman as spoke up for you, and did everything he knew to get the magistrate to inflict a fine, and offered to pay it, too—Dr. Claud Dagley, in Chesterton Road.’”

“‘We don’t know him except by name,’ says I, ‘and he don’t know us at all—you must be under some mistake.’

“‘Am I?’ says he. ‘Go home and find out whether what I tell you ain’t right,’ and so I did go home straight away, and heard how my wife had fallen in with you, and that there had been no want at all, and the rent kept and everything; and I don’t know what to say to you, sir—I don’t.”

“You have taken the pledge, I believe?” observed Dr. Dagley, who did not seem disposed to help Mr. Vink to express his gratitude, perhaps from a vivid memory that expressions of the sort often are only prompted by profound faith in “favours to come.”

“No, sir.”

“No?” in a tone of genuine surprise.

“I could not do it, sir,” was the reply. “A man needs something—now, don’t he?”

“That depends on the something,” was Dr. Dagley’s cautious rejoinder.

“Well, sir, it’s this way: suppose a man is a hard-working man, as can’t get his victuals regular, what’s he to do?”



Again Dr. Dagley declined to commit himself. The case as put was too vague.

“Or if he has the luck to find his meals ready he needs something more than a bit of bacon, or a stew, or even once in a while a piece of steak.”

“You mean something to drink, I conclude.”

“I do, sir; there’s a stay in a pint of beer there ain’t in anything else at the same price; and so after thinking things over—I had plenty of time for thinking in those fourteen days and nights—I said to myself: ‘What you’ve got to do, Bill, is to draw the line,’ and so I did, and I’ve stuck to it.”

“To a certain quantity a day?” suggested Dr. Dagley.

“You’ve hit it, sir; I knew I could not do without a glass at my dinner, and a glass or more at supper; but I set my foot down, I wasn’t going to get drunk again—and I ain’t. I hadn’t even seen half a pint *that* evening. But I was so mad to get drunk, the smell of the spilt wine, and the sovereign being lost, too, drove me beside myself.”

“I can partly understand,” said Dr. Dagley, interested, for the drink craving was one to which he had given the most earnest attention. He believed every statement advanced concerning it to be utterly wrong, as, indeed, he considered most statements made by other people, and held a vague theory upon the subject himself, which he hoped to reduce to practice at some not remote period. For these reasons he listened to Mr. Vink with at all events a semblance of sympathy which encouraged his visitor to proceed.

“There was plenty of time to think, as I remarked



just now, in that fortnight, which was about the longest fourteen days I ever spent, and the notion got into my head, if I held on as I had been doing worse would come of it."

"You were about right there," commented Dr. Dagley. "A man can as easily kill his wife as give her a black eye—and really your wife's eyes were shocking."

"I know it, sir; I saw her when she stepped forward in court—and I saw her many a night after when I couldn't sleep, but was wide awake, think, think, thinking. It was one of those nights I made up my mind never to get drunk any more, and never to lift my hand to her again."

"If you can only keep those excellent resolutions you will do," said Dr. Dagley, dryly, as Mr. Vink paused, amazed apparently at the gigantic nature of his self-imposed task.

"If I hadn't promised myself *faithful*," went on Mr. Vink, with a stern repression which showed the restraint he was putting on his words, "it would have been the old business over again, and worse, when she hindered me taking that offer you got me."

"That *I* got you, my friend! You are laboring under some delusion."

"From the gentleman you sent to Somers Town."

"Oh! now I comprehend; but I did not send him. He asked me for your address; and as he came from the lady who interested herself in Mrs. Vink, I thought I might give it to him."

"That is all right, sir; I didn't know. He spoke as if it was along of you he wanted me, but I may



have took him up wrong. It was a fine offer he made me, and sorry enough I felt when I'd to say I couldn't go where he wanted."

"You did refuse, then?"

"Had to. When I told my missus, she was like one demented. Leave London, not she! Bury herself in the country! No; if I wanted to go I might go myself, but she'd never do such a thing. She had enough of the country when she spent two months with my mother; wild horses wouldn't draw her into such a lonely, miserable place again. It was then, sir, I did feel it hard not to give her '*one*,' but I only said: 'Have your own way, my girl; we'll see where it will take you.'"

"And she?"

"Went on for a good bit, but I took no notice of her. I *would* marry, and I must put up with the consequences."

There ensued a short silence. For once Dr. Dagley was carried out of himself, and sat considering the mess Mr. Vink had walked into—and not merely Mr. Vink, but many and many another man and woman.

"If you want to go," he asked at last, "why don't you go without your wife? You could send her up so much a week."

Mr. Vink shook his head. "I'd be better away, but I can't go."

"Why not? Mr. Saughton's offer seemed to me a good one."

"It was first-rate, sir; easy work, regular wages, the back lodge to live in, coals and wood, and a bit



of a garden. I'll never have such a chance again—never no more.”

“Of course, if you can't leave your wife——”

“I could leave *her* well enough—but there's the child.”

A vision of Aggy in the chair so much too small for her recurred to Dr. Dagley with such distinctness he really could not speak for a minute, and, while he was searching for words, Mr. Vink went on: “She's the only one left out of six, sir; all the others died, or rather, to put it plain, were killed!”

“Killed!” repeated the listener, scarcely believing he had heard aright.

“There's more ways of killing a child than giving it poison or putting a knife to its throat,” explained the man. “If you trail an infant about till twelve o'clock at night in all weathers, and it ill with bronchitis or something else of the same sort, there is not much fear but it will die; and that's how mine all went one after the other, till my mates began to chaff me and ask how much the young ones were insured for, and what I had to the good after settling with the doctor and undertaker, which didn't seem pleasant. So when Aggy was three months old I took her to my mother, down in the country, and she kept her till she had turned two; and the child would have been there now only my wife made such a disturbance I had no peace. There never was a woman like her for getting what she wants—by hook or by crook she'll have it—but it serves me right,” finished Mr. Vink, gloomily.

Dr. Dagley made no comment. Vaguely he



wondered whither all these confidences were tending. Experience had taught him confidence usually ended in an appeal for help, but Vink did not seem a member of the noble fraternity of beggars. One never knows, however; and silence was always wisdom.

“I *would* marry her, though,” stated Mr. Vink for the second time, as if the information could not fail to gratify Dr. Dagley. “She was a nurse,” he went on, in continuation of his artless autobiography, “and a slimmer, trimmer, genteeler, pleasanter-spoken young woman nobody would have wished to meet with. Lor! the fuss she did drive with me in those days, to be sure—you’d have thought when we were walking out I was Emperor of China, no less. Everything I did was right—to think the time could ever come when not a blessed thing I said or did but seemed wrong! Others looked deeper into her nor me. My old mother, after she saw her, said:

“‘She is a pretty creature, but not the wife for you, Bill.’ That is what my old mother said, she did.”

“It is what many mothers have said, I believe,” observed Dr. Dagley.

“Anyhow, her prophecy came true,” was the answer. “My notion of a wife was a woman who’d see after me and keep my clothes clean and mended, and the home tidy; while her notion was to be always dressing herself or making her dresses, or being out showing off. It was not her fault, I dare say, for she’d been, as I told you, a nurse; and most likely you know, sir, a nurse seldom makes a good



wife—just the same as a cook rarely gets a good husband.”

“I never married a nurse, and I never was husband to a cook, so I am no authority,” answered Dr. Dagley.

“Well, sir, it’s true what I tell you about the way she carried on, and that and nothing else drove me to drink. The home was never comfortable, and there never was a meal ready. Either she was out, or just home, or she hadn’t expected me, or she was ill, or she was cross, or she was busy with her fallals. She hadn’t a notion that, when a man comes back after a hard day’s work, he wants something more than a table covered with ribbons and laces, and to hear a nicer speech than ‘Give me a shilling or two, Bill; I want just to run round to the draper’s.’

“I got sick of it. Sometimes when I’d get home of a winter’s night I’d find no fire at all, and no wife either. She’d be out enjoying herself, and—I might shift as I could. It was that drove me to drink, sir, it was. I’d been a steady fellow, and saved up money to make a nice home; but now it has come to this,” and Vink let his head drop despairingly.

“Don’t lose heart,” said Dr. Dagley kindly for him. “I dare say your wife has considered matters also, and determined to turn over a new leaf.”

“Not she,” returned Mr. Vink, scoffingly. “Any person, to hear her talk, might suppose me to be dirt under her feet. If it was not for the child, I’d leave her to-morrow.”

“Sometimes love for a child is only another form of selfishness,” was the reply. “You think nothing



of the woman who bore the child to you, but you care for the child because you regard it as part of yourself—while young, at any rate.”

“My wife thinks nothing of me; and if a man does not care for his child, what is he to care for?”

“That is not for me to say,” answered Dr. Dagley; “but there is one truth I shall take the liberty of telling you. If you want to have any comfort with your little girl, break up that child’s chair she is so fond of when you get home, and cut her hair short—cut it round the nape of her neck.”

The unfortunate Vink looked at the speaker in amazement.

“I’m not tired of my life yet, sir; and it would be as much as it’s worth to do either of the things you mention.”

“You would be wise to do both, notwithstanding,” was the confident answer, which caused Mr. Vink to break into a hysterical laugh.

Dr. Dagley remained unmoved. He saw nothing to laugh at.



## CHAPTER XXI.

### MR. BAYFORD MAKES A PROPOSITION.

“IF there was more gentlemen such as you, working folk would find this world a sight easier to live in.”

Thus Mr. Vink some ten minutes later, as a graceful finish to the conversation, or rather monologue, which, finished, coincided so entirely with Mr. Dagley's own opinion, he did not feel constrained to contradict it.

During the course of that final ten minutes he had learned Miss Aggie's favorite chair was one of those sentimental pieces of furniture presumably civilized people, in a so-called Christian land, first exalt into idols and afterward fall down before and worship, to the great dismay and discomfort of other civilized persons, who do not believe relics, whether made of mahogany or lead, or anything else, ought to be regarded as gods.

Three children of a tender age had occupied the same painted chair before Aggie chanced to be thought of, and it was the tender reminiscences associated with those “poor lambs,” to quote Mrs. Vink's own expression, which invested that inartistic piece of furniture with power sufficient sometimes to stay the redoubtable Bill's uplifted hand, and send



him with uncertain gait to the nearest public-house, or drive him in the character of a stricken parent to some remote seat, where he would remain sternly silent, presumably thinking of the "young ones" who had spent their miserable existences travelling about London in trains and 'buses till unearthly hours, when, like an Irish heroine celebrated in song, they should have been "snug in bed, sound asleep, and snoring." Likewise Dr. Dagley heard that Vink, inspired no doubt by his excellent example, had, since he "came out," stopped all money supplies and catered for the household himself. Imitation is the sincerest flattery, and Dr. Dagley felt really gratified to know that, in consequence of his own action, Mrs. Vink's life was as little roseate as even he could wish.

Compulsory temperance and unwonted self-restraint were rapidly achieving their usual work, and converting the man who had been formerly a spendthrift and often a brute into a miser and a bore.

There is no such aggressive saint as a sinner converted, and Mr. Vink was well on the straight road to be a very pretty saint indeed.

"I've been getting our things back," explained the reformed delinquent, who had waxed painfully confidential. "When I was out of work we were forced to put most of them away"—Dr. Dagley nodded in token of comprehension—"and I've started a bank account, and hand over something, great or small, to the young woman at the post-office nigh our works every week. My greatest trouble," he went on after a slight pause, made possibly to see if his



listener dropped with surprise, "is the book, for I dursn't leave it at home, and I can't well always be a-carrying it about with me more nor which *she'd* get a hold somehow, so my master keeps it in his safe for me. He's a real good sort. It was him as wrote the letter for me to Mr. Saughton, and put it together wonderful," added the speaker, who would have said, and justly, he did not set up for grammar.

He knew how to work with cold iron—a wonderful thing to consider when one remembers what the touch of metal is like on a raw winter's morning; but he was little of a "schollard," and did not conceal that fact from Dr. Dagley.

"Learning was not much thought of in my young days," he explained; "but things is different now, and I have made up my mind Aggy shall get it. She's wonderful quick—can pick up in a way that would surprise you."

"Would it?" thought Dr. Dagley; but he only answered aloud: "I dare say—but get her hair cut, nevertheless. It is bad for a girl to have such a mane while she is growing."

It was when the interview was drawing to a close that Dr. Dagley chose for some reason to put in a word for the belittled wife; possibly for the mere love of contradicting, since the argument he advanced was quite at variance with his own conviction.

"You are rather hard on Mrs. Vink, I consider," he took advantage of a short lull in Mr. Vink's eloquence to observe. "Your wife can't be so indifferent as you try to make out, or she would never have gone with such a pair of eyes to plead for you."



“Don’t you run away with any notion of that sort, sir,” was Bill’s reply. “She never is so miserable as when at home, and never so happy as when she’s trailing about the streets. Bless you, if I was a-going to be hung to-morrow morning she, as never cares to get out of her bed in decent time, would be away at cockcrow to see the black flag hoisted; like as not she’d take the child with her,” he added, with a break in his voice caused by the pathetic picture himself had painted; after which came that complimentary speech recorded at the beginning of this chapter.

“I’ve been taking up a lot of your time,” he went on, rather awkwardly, “but it has been a sort of comfort to open my mind; and thank you, sir, for listening to me so patiently.”

“I am glad to have seen you, Mr. Vink,” was the mendacious answer, “and I hope if you ever think I can be of any service you will not hesitate to let me know.”

“I won’t indeed, sir,” said poor Mr. Vink, with the most perfect good faith, “and I thank you kindly;” and having so spoken, the reclaimed “lost sheep” wiped his feet carefully on the mat, a to his mind indispensable ceremonial, and departed.

“Well, has the good Vink gone?” asked Mr. Bayford a little later, putting his cheery face inside the surgery door.

“He has e’en so,” replied Dr. Dagley, adding an unnecessarily pious form of thanksgiving, which amazed his young friend into inquiring:

“Was it so bad as that?”



“Worse. I have been listening for nearly an hour to that man's drivel about himself, his wife, and a child they call Aggy.”

“And did he not amuse you at all?”

“Amuse!” repeated Dr. Dagley; “no one not constantly among the poor can imagine how intolerably wearisome they are. Their egotism is beyond belief.”

“But I thought you always made such short work of them.”

“I do of my patients. If I did not I might spend a whole evening over a single case; but Vink is not a patient, though he has been graduating, I believe, for delirium tremens. There must be some backbone in the fellow, however, for he has become a reformed character in the matter of drink, and after doing fourteen days for what people in that rank call ‘bashing’ his wife, has made up his mind to refrain from chastisement for the future.”

“Because he repents him of the evil?”

“Because he dreads a longer term of imprisonment more likely. He is getting on very fast in the direction of that high morality which sages teach us would be the salvation of the working-classes, and I should not feel at all surprised one of these days to learn he has turned street preacher or temperance lecturer.”

“May I be there to hear!”

“A very little eloquence of that sort goes a long way, believe me. A self-inspired preacher has usually no message to deliver worth hearing, and a stump orator is in like case. Vink, however, said one thing



which I believe to be true—namely, that if he were going to be hung his wife would attend to see the show.”

“Did you ever hear the story of the man who, in those good old days people like to talk about, lay in Newgate under sentence?”

“I have heard many stories, but possibly not that you refer to.”

“His wife went to see him, and there was quite a touching farewell. As she tore herself away she said: ‘Well, good-by, dear. When Monday comes I’ll bring the children up to see the last of you.’ ‘For God’s sake, don’t,’ entreated the unfortunate wretch. ‘Just like you,’ she retorted, ‘you always did grudge the poor dears a bit of pleasure.’”

Dr. Dagley smiled faintly. There was such an amount of truth in the grim jest that even his cynical nature could not laugh at it.

“You are a cup too low,” declared Mr. Bayford, disappointed that his well-meant anecdote fell so flat. “Come and have some tea—that will set you to rights.”

“I must send off a couple of notes first,” was the reply. “Don’t wait for me. I’ll be with you directly.”

Mr. Bayford was really a delightful person to have in the house. Always willing, never obtrusive, always contented, always cheerful, always at hand if wanted, never in the way when his absence was desired, his sunny, kindly temperament presented the most marked contrast to Dr. Claud Dagley, whom he



well nigh adored as the best, cleverest, handsomest fellow he had ever met.

They were the antipodes of each other, and yet got on capitally. Dr. Dagley, indeed, liked having him at the Uplands greatly, and did not feel at all sorry that the desired ship proved so long about turning up. He was some one to speak to, some one to know was lying comfortably overhead at night, some one to greet in the morning, some one who never rubbed him up the wrong way, some one in the habit of puzzling out his pessimistic remarks over a pipe, which he had a nice way of smoking in as profound a silence as even his host, with whom the world had gone all wrong, could desire.

Often Dr. Claud Dagley caught himself wondering whether the lad's only sister were such another—which was folly.

Still he could not help considering that, if she did resemble her bright-faced brother, she would make an ideal wife mated to a husband in her own rank of life.

The Bayfords were not quite gentry, and perhaps one reason why Claud Dagley took so kindly to Richard Bayford was that the latter looked up to him, while he looked a little down on his young visitor.

The two notes did not take long to write. One was an answer to a gentle reminder from Mrs. Burt-Criden that he had half-promised to join their party at Old Windsor, that Tuesday next was the day, Weybridge the place of meeting, and that she "so hoped" they should have the pleasure of seeing him.



The second inclosed Mr. Hernidge's invitation, and said all he had planned to say on his way back from Lincoln's Inn Fields—though in fewer and more telling words.

When he had closed and stamped these missives he went out and posted them. Then he returned to tea—only just made, and as he liked it. Really Mr. Bayford studied his little fancies and humored them as a mother might have done.

“What do you suppose I was considering while you were out?” asked the younger man, finding his host seemed indisposed to originate any conversation.

Dr. Dagley shook his head, and answered:

“I have no gift as a thought reader.”

“I am not so sure of that,” returned the other. “But in any case I think you could scarcely guess that I have been sketching out a way by which you might double your income.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Dr. Dagley, surprised, but not enthusiastic.

“Yes. You see, you give the whole evening to shilling patients; give your mornings also, and the thing is done!”

“Yes; but if I give my mornings, where are the patients to come from?”

“Look here, Dagley, you have run away with a notion, which is always a mistake, if you will allow me to say so. Lots of people besides mechanics, and so forth, are ill, and want to be made better at a small cost.”

“I know that, and they go to Dr. This and Mr. The Other, and get cured, or not cured, as the case



may be, at from a half a crown to five shillings a visit."

"Yes; but there is another class, a large class, unable to spare half a crown, that would thankfully pay a shilling; the small shopkeepers, those who let lodgings, those who, though really worse off than workingmen, have still an appearance to keep up, which the so-called laboring-classes have not."

"Are you aware this is a poor neighborhood, and not a stone's throw from the place where we are talking there is a parish which contains eight thousand souls, while not a household in it is rich enough to keep a servant?" asked Dr. Dagley, as if his question disposed of the matter.

"I was not aware, but does not what you state only prove the truth of my contention? There must even in that one parish be a deep vein of patients, still unworked; men out of health, delicate women, sickly children, who, though they would not care to rub shoulders with coal heavers and bargemen in your waiting-room at night, would gladly walk round earlier in the day and pay a shilling for your advice."

"And may I ask," said Dr. Dagley, "how, when I find my evening patients and the cases I must attend at their homes such a tie that I could not even have gone to The Boltons the other evening unless you had been here to take my place, you suppose I should be able to see and make up medicine for the number of people you think would pour in?"

"Let me stay with you," was the unexpected answer. "I have thought the whole thing out; I don't want that vessel. I would much rather be



here. I shan't require any money, either; only teach me something of what you know, and I will be more than satisfied."

"I don't think you understand what you are talking about."

"I do; it may seem very presumptuous of me to make such a proposal, but I am sure I could be of some use—at any rate, I would try. I have not offended you, have I?"

"Well, no," said Dr. Dagley, with one of his rare smiles; "a man must be strangely constituted who could take offence at such an offer; but the fact is, I am sick of this practice—tired of the whole business."

"Something has put you out to-day," was the philosophic comment.

"Yes; I have been disappointed, but that is no novelty. I cannot answer you now, I must think the proposal over. One thing, however, is certain—if you stay here it can only be on the condition that I pay you."

"I should like to know what for?" said Mr. Bayford.



## CHAPTER XXII.

### CLAUD DAGLEY GOES EAST.

JUST as on a previous occasion Dr. Claud Dagley had found, when, after a busy evening, he went upstairs, a letter in an unknown hand awaiting his leisure, so on that night he found a note which had come by the last delivery.

It was from Mr. Manford, asking him to a quiet dinner on the following Sunday evening at half-past seven.

Dr. Dagley twisted the note, and considered whether he should reply to it at once. "No," he thought, "Phil will have my letter to-night. Let him answer first"—which Phil did without delay. He said he should be delighted to go to Mr. Her-nidge's, that he was ever so much obliged for his friend's kind thought, that he felt sure the party could not fail to interest and amuse him greatly, and that both he and his father were looking forward to Sunday, when they hoped to see Claud as early as possible.

That was enough. Dr. Dagley instantly wrote to thank Mr. Manford for his invitation, which he regretted being unable to accept, as he had already arranged a visit to the East End. He would, how-



ever, if convenient, look in later in the evening, and remained very faithfully, etc.

Then he composed his mind till the time should arrive for him to play the last card remaining of a poor little pack. In the event of that failing he must consider what it was best to do. He could not and he would not go on treating all the many ills to which flesh is heir for a shilling an ailment, but before arriving at any decision concerning the future he intended to wait and see if help came out of the East.

Six o'clock had struck on the Sunday afternoon following his visit to Lincoln's Inn Fields when Dr. Dagley, with a distaste not to be easily expressed, turned into the little enclosure bounded on three sides by small two-story houses, and on the fourth divided by a low railing from the road, poetically called "Arbour Square," and much in favor with master mariners, laundresses, and gentlemen and ladies who, owning modest incomes derived from weekly rentals, "lived private," as the curious phrase goes.

It was there, at all events, one gentleman, Dr. Dalgey's maternal grandfather, lived very private indeed, with only a working housekeeper—Mrs. Barchard by name—visiting not at all, and visited only at rare intervals by any one.

How he occupied himself in that house no one knew—not even Mrs. Barchard—who was wont to state he was "always and ever at his writing;" which did not mean he was of a literary turn, since Mr. Lahan entertained a refreshing contempt for all books and their makers. He did not even spend a penny a week on *Lloyd's Newspaper*, contenting



himself with scraps of press gossip he was able to pick up in trains, or 'buses, or tramcars, or in those modest eating-houses where he partook of such cheap meals as exhausted nature demanded.

No, his writing was purely arithmetical and commercial. It related simply to business of some sort, which, judging from his shrivelled-up appearance, had failed to return a fair day's wage for a fair day's work. His petty cash-book was kept to a nicety; every night he entered the day's outgoings, and balanced both debit and credit sides so conscientiously that if there proved an error of a farthing he would not go to bed till he found conclusively where that farthing had gone.

He was not a miser in the sense of hiding away gold and silver, coppers, and securities, neither did he rummage dust heaps for bones and scraps of old iron, but he was, and had always been, a mean man, who sat in the firelight, and very little of it, to save gas and candle; who made a spill out of any scrap of waste paper to avoid striking matches; who never gave to any charity or poor person; who had reduced his household expenditure to an absurdly low figure; and was, in a word, as niggardly and uncomfortable a person as could have been found in his own or any adjacent parish.

His very method of shaking hands seemed to imply he thought the absurd custom one calculated to unduly wear out his flesh, but still he did shake his grandson's hand, in a limp, flabby, protesting sort of way, which tried that gentleman's not over-patient temper exceedingly.



"Why, you are quite a stranger," said Mr. Lahan, with a facial grimace that did duty for a smile.

"I have been very busy," was the answer.

"That is a good hearing. When a man in business says he has been busy it means, or ought to mean, he is making money."

Dr. Dagley listened to this axiom unmoved. He had heard Mr. Lahan's many wise saws so often, and got the worst of various arguments concerning their applicability on such a number of occasions, that, taught by experience, he now let them glide down the stream of conversation into the pit where proverbs and puns and sage observations all meet a painless and merciful death.

On this occasion he had his reward. It is difficult to answer nothing—and Mr. Lahan accordingly tried a new theme.

"Will you have a cup of tea?" he asked. "Mrs. Barchard can make one in a moment."

"No, thank you," was the reply, "I am going on to a friend, and would rather have nothing at present."

"You'll get something better from him, most likely?"

"I do not think so. I refused to go till after dinner, as I wanted to come down here."

"That was surely a pity—a good dinner is a good thing."

"It may be, but it seems to me there are matters more important than dinner."

"Depends on what the matters are."

With a wild feeling of dissatisfaction which prompted him to take his hat and flee from the house



—Arbour Square—the Commercial Road—and the East End forever, Claud Dagley surveyed what his grandfather called the tea-board; the delf cup and saucer, the stale loaf, the cheap sugar, the cheaper butter, and, finally, Mr. Lahan himself.

That gentleman was said to have Jewish blood in his veins; if so, it was probably the blood of one of the Lost Tribes, for no son of Judah or Benjamin but would have flouted the idea of near relationship to the unwholesome-looking individual who, by some strange freak of fate, was closely connected with the handsome young fellow who sat at as great a distance as policy and politeness permitted from the uncomfortable armchair sacred to Mr. Lahan.

An accident in infancy had marred whatever beauty the latter might ever have possessed. The exact cause of that accident was shrouded in the mists of time—not so the effect, which remained for all men to see in a nose nearly level with his face.

Like himself, perhaps, Mr. Lahan's parents regarded the expenditure of money as foolishness.

Whatever the reason, one thing is certain—no surgical aid was called in to repair the damage, and the child accordingly grew up, not merely destitute of any nasal organ worth mentioning, but with a nervous twitch that produced a strange contortion whenever he essayed to smile—which, it must be added, was not often.

It may be Mr. Lahan conformed so far to the prejudices of society as to wash occasionally, if not often, but his appearance certainly justified the belief that he never washed at all.



Such was the man—personally afflicted, shabby in his dress, unpleasant in his manners—fastidious Dr. Dagley had the privilege of calling grandfather, and there can be no doubt one great cause of Mr. Lahan's dislike to his daughter's son arose from the fact that in the child's early youth he had exhibited an insuperable repugnance to the caresses of Mrs. Dagley's male parent, screaming himself almost into fits whenever the individual in question adventured on any affectionate but ill-judged advance.

Few things rankle like the repulse of a child; indeed, there are some natures that never forget or forgive it, and Mr. Lahan, who was as little devoid of human vanity as most people, returned "the brat's" aversion with a very hearty feeling of antipathy.

"Before I received Mr. Manford's invitation," began the younger man, repressing with a mighty effort the annoyance he felt, "I had determined to come here to-day; both because, as you said just now, it was long since my last visit—nearly two months—and also because I wanted to ask you a question."

"There is not any harm in that," returned Mr. Lahan, immediately scenting danger; "what may the question be?"

There was no use in beating about the bush, so Claud Dagley came to the point at once, and said:

"Simply whether you can give me the name of any respectable capitalist?"

Mr. Lahan paused as though in deep thought, but from under his eyebrows he shot a keen, swift glance at his grandson.



"In London," he answered, after that pause, "there are many respectable capitalists, but I don't think I could name a better man than Rothschild."

"No doubt, but he is not the kind of capitalist I mean—some one smaller, now—who lends money at a fair rate of interest to men like myself."

"Have you been outrunning the constable, then?" asked Mr. Lahan, in a tone of well-feigned anxiety. "Claud, Claud," which word he pronounced as though spelled with an "o," "take heed where you are going."

"I have no debts, and I have money—though but little—to my credit at the bank."

"It is not for yourself you want a capitalist, then?" and an ill-natured listener would have been justified in saying Mr. Lahan felt somewhat disappointed.

"It is solely for myself I want to find some one willing and able to lend money on not exorbitant terms," was the cool reply.

"And why, in the name of all that's wonderful," asked Mr. Lahan, "if you are able to pay your expenses and put a trifle by, do you need to borrow?"

"To make more money."

"You are not going to speculate, are you?"

"I am; not in stocks or shares, in mines or mills, but in myself—there is money in me, and I should like to meet with a man who would join in working the Claud Dagley vein."

"It's to be hoped you'll find him, then, though I'm sure I don't know where you are likely to do so out of Bedlam," was the damping retort. "As for me, I have no acquaintance among capitalists, if that's



what you came here to ask, and I've no more money than I need."

"Believe me, I never supposed you had."

"I bought an annuity a while ago," went on Mr. Lahan.

"You could not have made a better investment."

"That is as it may be, but I am not so well as I was, and it is scarcely probable I shall ever get younger; and what with all the new-fangled notions about drainage and over-crowding and general sanitation, house property has come to be more plague than profit, so when I got a fair bid for my little estate at Poplar I just took it, and laid out the two thousand pounds it fetched as I said."

"At your age two thousand pounds ought to yield two hundred a year for life," was the nasty rejoinder: nasty because, spite of Mr. Lahan's remark that he was but little likely to get younger, his grandson well knew he disliked any reference being made by others to his age.

"That'll be about the gross, I believe," confessed the old man, rather taken aback by the extent of his junior's information, "but then income-tax and lots of other things have to come out of it—however, it will serve me my time."

"I hope you may live to enjoy the little income for a great many years," said Dr. Claud, with bland politeness. "And so you really cannot think of any capitalist who would be willing to help me? All I need is some one to give me a 'leg up,' I could manage for myself afterwards."

"I dare say you could. I am very sure indeed you



could," was the enigmatical reply, which hid, however, a world of disagreeable meaning. "I know no money-lender now, however; and, to be quite plain, if I did, I would not bring you together. Once I had for a friend a man—the very best friend man ever had. We did business together for years, and but for something which came between us we should have gone on doing business for years more. If we had, I might have been fairly rich long ago. Can you give a guess as to what the something was that parted us?"

Dr. Claud Dagley could have done so, but remained silent.

"It was your father," said Mr. Lahan, in accents which showed the wrong inflicted close on thirty years previously was still unforgiven. "So now you know why, even if I were acquainted with any honest money-lender, I would not be the one to introduce Colonel Claud Dagley's son to him. And I would have you make no mistake," went on the old man viciously, for it was his hour of triumph; "your father's doings are not forgotten yet. To the end of his life, nobody got up a winner after a deal with him, and I doubt whether you could raise a ten-pound note in London, even at a hundred per cent, on the strength of your name—much as you think of it."



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### A PASSAGE OF ARMS.

DR. CLAUD DAGLEY spoke no word in answer. For a few moments, indeed, he could think of no word to speak, so utterly had his grandfather's summing up routed his mental forces. When too late he realized how much wiser he would have been to leave that last card of a poor little pack unplayed; but it is not always mortals know by intuition what is going to happen, and he was quite unprepared for such a piece of strategy as throwing a whole pail of cold water on an unexplained project.

Mr. Lahan's, indeed, might be considered a master-move. When a man means never to say "yes," it is capital policy to say "no" before a single reason can be brought forward in favor of a different answer. All along the line Mr. Lahan had won, but his crowning achievement undoubtedly was scattering all his grandson's hopes to the winds with one final comprehensive sentence.

"I will go abroad, then," that grandson said at last, in his desperation giving utterance to the one alternative he had always, more or less consciously, been holding in reserve.

"Why?" asked Mr. Lahan.



"Because I think you are right—because there is no chance for me here——"

"I thought you told me you were doing well?"

"I never told you anything of the kind. I said I was paying my way and laying something by, but that is not doing well."

"It is very like it, at any rate. What is it you want to be—physician to her Majesty?"

Then Claud Dagley broke out. He repeated what he had said to Mr. Hernidge and more. He let the full tide of personal feeling bear him along till quite of a sudden he stopped, and said quietly: "It never occurred to me till you suggested the idea that my name could be against me. Now I understand. I throw up the sponge and shall go abroad."

"And do you suppose you will not find many men as clever as yourself—may be cleverer—there before you?"

"I may; but I shall be able to fight when not hampered at every step by my own flesh and blood."

"If that's meant for a cut at me, I can only say, instead of hindering, I have helped you to the position you set so little store by; and while we are in the way of raking up old scores, there is a thing or two I'd like to mention."

"As you please. I did not mean my remark as a cut at you; but, if it seems any satisfaction, you can cut at me as much as you like," returned Dr. Dagley, leaning back in his chair, and folding his arms with a *nonchalance* which aroused all that was worst in his grandfather's nature.

"The man I spoke of just now," went on Mr.



Lahan, with indomitable courage, though repulsed rather than strengthened by his young relative's permission to make matters disagreeable, "did not part company with me because of what he dropped over your father. I had served him too well to be sent adrift for no better reason than that. As he told me, 'A man may lose money by anybody, any one may be taken in by a thief; and Colonel Dagley is no better than a common thief; but what I can't forgive or forget is my agent that I trusted being in the swim with him.' That was the rock on which the boat of my fortune went to bits—nothing would convince him but I was as deep in the mire as your father. 'If you swore to me that you didn't know, I would not believe you,' he said; 'has not the swindler married your daughter?' 'With no good-will of mine,' I answered. 'Tell that to the marines—they may credit such a story, but I won't,' was his answer."

It might all have happened but a day, but an hour previously, so intense was the passion, so bitter the venom of Mr. Lahan's manner.

"He did not credit it, anyhow," went on that gentleman, "though no Scripture was ever truer than that the match was none of my making. I would rather have given your mother some decent clerk than mated her with the heir of Dagley Park, as everybody then believed him."

"Pardon me for a moment," interrupted Dr. Dagley, "but I have heard all this before."

"It will do you no harm to hear it again," retorted his grandfather.

"Not the least—or any good," and Dr. Dagley,



who had leaned forward for a moment, relapsed into his former attitude of indolent indifference.

"I did no more business for my principal," resumed Mr. Lahan, taking up the thread of his narrative precisely where he had unwillingly laid it down; "another stepped into my shoes and gathered the harvest sown by me. He is a big man now, drives his carriages, has a town and country house, keeps his accounts at Coutts'. I might have been equally fortunate, and more wealthy, perhaps, but for you."

Dr. Dagley laughed and said: "Really, you are too funny. I know the sins of the fathers are visited on the children, but it was reserved for you to discover an unborn child is answerable for the sins of his father."

"It was a slip of the tongue," exclaimed Mr. Lahan, mortified.

"Occasioned by a thought of the heart," returned Dr. Dagley. "I am aware you never liked me, still you might at least be just—but pray proceed."

"If we come to that, you never liked me," returned his grandfather, glad to shift the conversation a little.

"I'm not prepared to admit anything of the kind—at all events, there can be no doubt I might have learned to care for you."

"You are wrong there. You had always too much of your father in you to care for anybody or anything except yourself."

"If you are as frank with others as you are with me, how fond your friends must be of you," said Dr. Dagley.



“They are, sir, they are. No man had ever more or better friends—respectable friends, that don’t come cadging under the pretence of asking for introductions and such like.”

“Oh! that’s where the shoe pinches. As it happens, however, I did not come here cadging for anything except the name of a likely capitalist. Surely, if a man asks you to direct him to a particular street, you don’t at once jump to the conclusion he wants to steal your watch?”

“Not if he is a stranger; but, if I know the man to be a rogue, I look pretty sharply after my pockets.”

“Am I to take it that you mean I am a rogue?”

“You may take it that you have had a lot of my money, and you’ll get no more.”

“Let me once again declare I did not come here for money. I did not know you owned any worth talking about, and, if I had, asking for it would have been the last thought to enter my mind. But there were some things you wished to mention. It would be perhaps better to do so now, because when I am at the other side of the world you might regret letting this opportunity pass unimproved.”

Mr. Lahan glared at his grandson, who only smiled agreeably. The incongruous pair never met without a tiff of some sort—either Claud came provided with a gift his senior thought too expensive, or with one unsuitable, or with some trifle for Mrs. Barchard the old man considered “fit to turn her head,” or with none at all—a more serious affront—or he appeared at an inopportune time, or could not stay, or arrived just when Mr. Lahan was starting for Poplar;



always and ever there was something amiss, which formed the basis for a lecture and afterward for a dispute. But though their disagreements had been continual, Dr. Dagley could not remember for many years so fierce a "round" as that just concluded.

So far, however, the best of the fray was, for a wonder, with him—and he meant, if possible, to keep his advantage. Stabbed to the heart, for truth is a weapon of so true a steel that it strikes unerringly home, he yet smiled in his grandfather's face, and by so doing added fuel to an already blazing fire.

"You are not gone abroad yet," said the old man, "and it's my notion you won't go; you would indeed be more foolish than I conceive if you throw up for a whim a practice which enables you to keep a roof over your head, to look sleek and well nourished, and to wear a suit of clothes of the finest quality and cut in the latest fashion."

"Never mind my clothes, or my looks either, for that matter," returned Dr. Claud, "but say what you have to say. I shall have to be getting to the Grand Hotel ere long."

"Oh, it's at the Grand you're due, then?"

"My friends are putting up there."

"And yet you talk as though you had been left out in the cold, as if you'd been treated like a workhouse changeling. My word, when I think of your poor mother, when I consider what you'd have been without me and her——"

"Probably not here," commented the young man philosophically.

"Certainly not in a good practice for which you



are ungrateful. What was I going to say—" And he clapped his hands on his forehead in a theatrical manner, though really he did not feel in the least like a tragedy hero, but only a man whose brain occasionally played him the scurvy trick of not responding instantly to the demands memory made upon it.

Dr. Claud Dagley remained obstinately mute. Though he could have hazarded a conjecture as to what was lying dormant in his relative's mind, it seemed to him well to let the old man search for his text without assistance.

Only a few seconds elapsed ere he found both chapter and verse, and at once went on:

"When you talk of being hampered by your own flesh and blood, I feel bound to remind you——"

"I have other relatives besides you, sir," interrupted Dr. Dagley, apologetically—or the reverse.

"I know that, but none so close as I am, much as you'd like to be without me," retorted Mr. Lahan, whose answers fell like a scourge, "and what I want you to remember is that it was I that helped you to your present good position. We'll let 'bygones be bygones' as regards Colonel Claud Dagley" ("Oh, will you?" thought Colonel Claud Dagley's son) "but I'd wish you not to forget that when your mother came crying and sobbing to me about seeing no possible way of sending you to college, I said——"

"All this is more than a thrice-told tale," observed Dr. Dagley, as if speaking to himself, "but a good story bears repetition."

"It does," agreed Mr. Lahan, "and my story is



true, if not good. My wife had fifteen hundred pounds, to the interest of which, after her death, I was entitled for the term of my natural life—you follow me——”

“Yes, as I have done often before. You were generous enough to give up that life interest, and paid my expenses at college out of the principal. On a certain day in September, nearly seven years ago, I came of age, about four o'clock in the morning. Just after the clock struck ten, you and a lawyer appeared with a deed and a check. The latter paid me the balance of my late mother's fortune, the former acknowledged the amount already handed over, and released you from further responsibility. Am I accurate so far?”

“Very fairly, very fairly indeed.”

“As I remember,” continued Dr. Dagley, “the deed did not state that I was bound to repay you the interest you voluntarily relinquished for all those years, but I may say I would most gladly do so were it in my power.”

“There is a world of difference between would and will,” returned Mr. Lahan, “but I did not hand over the money to and for you, expecting to be repaid. I gave up that interest as a gift; and what I should like you to remember is that I did give it, and that whatever learning you own, and whatever knowledge of medicine you possess, comes out of your grandmother's fifteen hundred pounds, which I might have kept till my death, in which case you'd have had to rest content without going to college or qualifying for a doctor.”



"You are quite right," said his grandson, meekly, for the spirit seemed to have died out of him; "it is owing to your help I am even what I am—I have always acknowledged that."

"It has been in a very silent sort of way, then."

"What is the good of speaking till one can do something?" asked Dr. Dagley. "Words without deeds are worse than useless."

"Still, one would like to hear a word now and then," returned Mr. Lahan, "to show a kindness is remembered."

"If I could get a chance in my profession, you would soon see whether I remembered or not."

"I think you have got a chance, and a good one," was the retort; "and I am sure I hope you will make the most of it."

"Are you quite well, sir?" asked Dr. Dagley, struck by something unusual in his grandfather's voice and look, which had hitherto escaped his notice.

"I am not," was the answer, "as I would have told you sooner if you had not been too much taken up with your own affairs to think of me."

"What is it?" ventured the young man. "Can't I be of some service? If you had sent for me, I'd have come over at once."

"Thank you, but I'm taking the best advice. Medicine that costs nothing is worth nothing—at least in my opinion."

"Perhaps you are right in the main, but I am vain enough to think I understand my business."

"Still you are not going to get a chance of doctoring



me," said Mr. Lahan rudely. "I have the best man there is to be had," he went on. "Life is a very important thing, and I don't mind spending money to keep it. I mean to live as long as I can. But you had better be getting off to your friends. I am going out myself shortly, so do not let me be keeping you," which was a way the agreeable old creature had of getting rid of his visitors, under a pretence of considering their convenience.



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### CLAUD DAGLEY HAS THE BLUES.

AFTER all, the Manford-Kassiner business still remained unsettled when Dr. Dagley left the Grand that night. To speak truly, it had never come on the carpet in any tangible form. Mr. Manford, senior, was in that maddening state of mind in which at every turn he showed "I dare not" waiting on a feeble "I will." He tried to induce Dr. Claud Dagley to take the initiative, but that gentleman declined to do anything of the kind. He would not speak either in praise or blame of Dr. Kassiner. Mr. Manford said that eminent physician "thought his patient must have been doing something foolish, as the progress, though fairly satisfactory, was not all he had hoped"; but Dr. Dagley maintained a stony silence, and when Mr. Manford on his own account put forward the opinion that London did not agree with Phil, the other merely uttered the one word "No?" which he spoke with a mark of interrogation. Further, Dr. Dagley seemed tired and depressed—altogether, in fact, a disappointing evening, one Mr. Manford felt it a comfort to relegate to the limbo of forgetfulness; still he was very much in earnest about asking Dr. Dagley to dine with them on the date of Mr. Hernidge's party.



“As you could not join us to-night, come on Thursday,” he entreated; “you may as well have something to eat here as at your own home, and you proposed to call for Phil, which we thought very kind indeed. Do promise to dine with us,” he finished with touching persistence.

Whereupon Dr. Dagley did promise, and went away, refusing somewhat peremptorily Philip Manford's offer of companionship to Charing Cross district railway station.

When he reached North Kensington he was both tired and cross. Though fasting, he did not feel inclined to eat, and much pressing on the part of young Bayford was required to induce him to touch food.

“Just try,” pleaded his lively friend; “you won't know yourself after you have eaten a morsel of this pickled salmon and a slice of beef to follow. I always consider it is putting an affront on Providence to slight the good things sent for our use. Oh! and have some salad—it is first-rate, so of course I need not add that I made it!”

“I often wonder why you are always cheerful and happy,” said Dr. Dagley, as he helped himself again to salmon, his appetite having grown with what it fed on.

“Why should I not be happy? It is only you clever fellows who are never content except when taking prizes about every half-hour in the day that have a right to be miserable—wretchedness is too expensive a luxury for stupid chaps like myself.”

“You are not stupid,” returned Dr. Dagley. “Quite the contrary.”



"Spare my blushes," entreated the other.

"But you lack experience," went on Dr. Dagley.

"Which I am gaining day by day," said Mr. Bayford eagerly. "Who could be with you and not learn?"

"It is very good of you to say so."

"It is the truth. You have taught—you are teaching me—and there are plenty of little things I could do that would spare your time—things I have not cared to offer to take off your hands lest it might seem officious."

"I think you could not be so officious."

"Well, perhaps you are right. I am one of those fellows who understand what a slap in the face means," after which declaration the speaker began ruminating with an intensity which rather suggested he might at some time or other have morally been subjected to the indignity mentioned.

Dr. Dagley on his part did not say more till he had finished his supper, which that night was, for the Uplands, of a sumptuous character. Then he pushed aside his plate, emptied his glass of ale, took out his pipe, filled it, lit up, and began to smoke.

"Sit in the easychair, you will be more comfortable," said Mr. Bayford; and thus urged Dr. Dagley suffered himself to be persuaded.

There was but one easychair in the room, and from the first the younger man had refused to occupy it. Perhaps this fact never impressed Dr. Dagley so forcibly as on that night, when everything outside had gone wrong.

Here, at all events, was one person who did believe



in him, and whom he liked. Though he only came of yeoman stock, though he had not one drop of blue blood in his veins, Dr. Dagley felt Tom Bayford to be "thorough."

Through light clouds of tobacco smoke the son of Colonel Claud Dagley looked at the son of Thomas Bayford, farmer. His face was pleasant, his voice good to hear. An honest, capable, simple, affectionate lad, Dr. Dagley decided ere he asked:

"Were you in earnest the other night when you said you would like to stay on here altogether?"

"Of course I was."

"Quite sure?"

"Certain sure. Why?"

Dr. Dagley leaned forward a moment, then fell back into his previous easy attitude.

"Because," he answered, "I have been thinking the matter over and decided you can stop if you wish to do so."

"Kindly say that again."

"You can stop if you wish to do so."

"If I wish—hurrah!" and Mr. Bayford sprang from his chair and commenced quite a new dance all by himself.

"Gently," entreated Dr. Dagley, "gently, my good fellow."

"I beg your pardon; I'm very sorry, but you have made me so happy."

"If the happiness have worked off a little, sit down and listen to me. I want you to go in for your M.D., and get it too. Don't look disconsolate. Being able to add those letters to your name will



do you a lot of good some day. It shall be my business to find the money."

"Oh! I can do that," interrupted the other.

"May I ask how?"

"I have fifty pounds a year of my own; I'll manage right enough."

Dr. Dagley smiled at the beaming, eager face of his young friend.

"Just as you like," he said; "if you do not want me to pay the fees I will pay you a salary and——"

But Mr. Tom Bayford again intervened. He wanted no salary, he would take no salary; all he desired was to remain at Uplands House and work up a large practice.

"I feel as if I should like to go out and have a turn on Wormwood Scrubbs all alone with my good luck," he said at last. "I can't realize that it is true. Won't I develop that idea of morning practice and drive it along?"

"Do," was the answer; "and then, perhaps, when I go, you will be able to find some one to join you in carrying the whole thing through successfully."

The young fellow's face changed—in a moment the gladness died out of it.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Anywhere," was the reply, "so long as it is out of England—America, Africa, Australia, China, it does not matter to me. I shall not stay here beyond another twelvemonth at furthest."

"Why?"

"Because I'm sick of it."

"Sick of a good practice?" incredulously.



“Sick of a trumpery practice—sick of bad legs, bad eyes, bad heads; sick of underfed children, and horny-handed workmen and drabs of women, and the whole connection, in a word.”

“And what kind of a practice do you want?”

“What I shall never get—a good West-End practice, where I could shovel in guineas faster than I now do shillings, and be run after by the rich as I am by the poor. Oh, if I only had the chance! but there is no hope of that.”

“What do you mean by a chance?” asked the other, genuinely sorry and perplexed.

“I mean money,” was the answer, “a good deal of money. I was told there were lots of men only too glad to finance doctors. I am told the same thing now, but no one can say positively where such men are to be found,” and, with an impatient gesture, Dr. Dagley seemed to throw the whole thing from him, and went on smoking more vigorously than ever.

Mr. Bayford looked at his friend with an expression of the deepest concern.

“When I used to be down in the dumps,” he began at last, almost timidly—“you know one may be in the dumps, no matter how stupid he is—my sister had a comforting way of saying: ‘Something is wrong again, Tom; come into the old schoolroom, and we’ll sit on the hearthrug and talk it over,’ and we did till the trouble, whatever it might be, seemed to grow light. I’m afraid you would not care to sit on the hearthrug; but I do believe, if you would just lie back in your chair and talk till you are tired, it would do you a lot of good. You said the other



night you had been disappointed. Has some one disappointed you again to-day? I know I am only a duffer, yet still I'll try to understand, and, if there's anybody you'd like thrashed, I'll pick a quarrel, with pleasure."

"I could have thrashed a dozen like him."

"No doubt, but perhaps you did not want to soil your fingers. I am not so particular, however; therefore only say the word."

"No, I won't say the word, for it would be the height of folly to pummel a man because he can't or won't tell you where to lay hands on a few thousand pounds."

"That is what you want, is it?"

"Yes, just what I want more than I could explain," and forthwith, spite of this declaration, Dr. Dagley began to explain, and held on for a good ten minutes, while Tom Bayford lent a sympathetic ear to the tale of grievances, such as he had never known—of aspirations he could only dimly understand, and dissatisfaction too vast for him to grasp. It was enough that the man he admired beyond all other men was not properly appreciated; that he wanted something that he had failed to get; and the simple, loyal young fellow's heart throbbed with pain in the desire to help. He did not say "you have this, and that, and the other," his whole being was so tenderly in accord with the speaker that he could think of nothing save that speaker's disappointment.

"A couple of thousand would be no good to you, I suppose," he said after a dreary pause.

"It would be of great good to me; but while I am



about it, I may as well wish for twenty thousand as two, the one amount being quite as attainable as the other."

"But would it be of use?" persisted Mr. Bayford.

"Undoubtedly. Why, if I had only a thousand to begin with I'd try my fortune; yes, that I would, and win it too."

"Because," went on the other modestly, "I could let you have two thousand. Indeed, I think I might let you have twice as much."

Dr. Dagley was so much amazed he let his pipe, which had gone out, drop on the carpet, and forgot to pick it up again.

"Why," he said, "over and over again you told me you were worth just fifty pounds a year."

"Well, and the interest on two thousand pounds in consols is fifty pounds, is it not?"

"And you mean to say you leave two thousand pounds lying at two and a half per cent?"

"Precisely. Nannie has two thousand as well, and I am sure you could have that also," went on Tom Bayford, with as little fuss as though he had been offering his friend two penny stamps.



## CHAPTER XXV.

### CLAUD FINDS A BACKER.

To offer is one matter, to refuse another.

Out of the fulness of his heart the younger man placed all he had in the way of worldly wealth at Dr. Dagley's disposal, who, in the pride and bitterness of his, instantly declined the proffered loan.

Just for a moment hurt and disappointed, Tom Bayford soon recovered from his unexpected repulse, and charged again in a style which proved he did not intend to be easily defeated. Till close on midnight the conversational shuttlecock was tossed backward and forward, the younger player bringing up all his arguments and the elder replying to them as best he might. It was not a very telling method of assault and defence, and perhaps because he felt this Tom Bayford suddenly abandoned discussion and exclaimed:

“I see what the difficulty is, you don't want *me* to be of the slightest use to you. What you would take from some swell money-lender you despise when I bring it. It is very little, I know; but it might start you, and when that was spent we could have Nannie's money. Oh! you don't know how I long to help you—don't thrust me aside because I have no more to offer. If it were ten times as much, you would be more than welcome to every shilling.”



In his excitement he had dropped on one knee and seized Dr. Dagley's hand between his own.

"Get up, you ridiculous boy," said the other, half-amused and wholly embarrassed by such an unexpected demonstration.

"I won't," was the answer. "I mean to stay where I am till we have threshed this affair out."

"What a lover you will make!" observed Dr. Dagley.

"Don't laugh at me," entreated the poor young fellow, "for I feel sorely vexed. You said that amount of money would be useful, and now you tell me you will have nothing to do with mine."

"I do, though I am more grateful for your offer than it is possible to say."

"I don't want gratitude; I want you to take that money. Why won't you make me happy?"

"I might never be able to repay you," which was indeed a most sensible remark, though Dr. Dagley did not attach the smallest importance to his own statement. What borrower ever believes he will find the smallest difficulty in repaying till the conviction is forced upon him, and then he feels assured the fault lies with circumstances, not himself.

"Rubbish," returned his young friend; "and even if you were not, what would it matter? I never want to see the trifle again; besides, you would take it from a money-lender."

"Who would charge me twenty—forty—probably sixty per cent."

"When you have made your pile you may pay me a hundred per cent if you like."



“Really?”

“Really and truly. When you are a great West-End physician, with a row of carriages blocking your street, netting you thousands a year, and much too grand to speak to a poor plodding fellow like myself, you may write me a check for double the amount, and hand me over meantime fifty pounds a year if you are able.”

Dr. Dagley shook his head gravely.

“Then I tell you what I will do,” said Tom Bayford, solemnly releasing the hand he still held and rising to his feet. “I will go away from here. I will find a vessel and sail as ship’s doctor and break Nannie’s heart, and it will be all your doing. Good-by, I shall be off in the morning before you are awake. Good-night. You have been very, very good to me, but I can’t stop; good-by,” and without further leave-taking he strode to the door and had crossed the landing when he was arrested by the words: “Come back, Tom.”

“Why should I come back?” asked the young man, pausing, but not retracing his steps.

“Because—I want you—because I am going to do what you ask.”

As a rule Dr. Dagley slept well; but that night he turned and tossed through the hours of semi-darkness, and only sank to slumber when the early world of London was bestirring itself and awakening the echoes of Ladbroke Grove Road with hoarse voices and heavy shod feet.

It had been galling to his pride to say “yes,” but when once the word was spoken ambition sprang to



the front and claimed a hearing. To its sonorous accents Dr. Dagley lent a too ready ear. What was there it did not promise to him that night? Fame, influence, wealth; just as a man's dream-children are fairer than any born in the order of nature, so the books he writes, the speeches he delivers, the opinions he utters, the lectures he prepares in imagination, transcend anything he afterward sends prosaically to the printers, or speaks amid interruption, or enunciates to unbelieving ears, or addresses to an often unappreciative audience.

The great lone land of imagination, the fee simple of which belongs to all born of woman, was ranged by Dr. Dagley during the hours of that summer night to such purpose that, when he at last dropped off to sleep, he was as in a vision driving through the gates of Dagley Park, which had been thrown open at his approach to save the life of his cousin Hubert.

The chamber-window was open, and a light, fresh breeze fanned the sleeper's forehead as he lay, stirred his hair gently, and wafted a pleasant country atmosphere across his dreams, till imagination, tired out, sank for a time to rest. Then, after a brief period of forgetfulness, the scene shifted, and memory stepped on the boards to show Dr. Dagley some things and people it seemed right he should not forget. From out the past there came two straightforward, kindly business men, joint owners of a ropewalk situated due east—brothers-in-law of Mr. Lahan, who had never liked them.

Where were those men on that summer morning when their niece's son dreamed dreams and saw



visions—one dead across the sea, the other living in a small house in a mean neighborhood, making both ends meet somehow, though how he could scarcely have told. Yet the partners Snowcroft had been well off once—so well off that they could afford to take a pride in young Claud Dagley, and pay many school bills his father professed inability to meet. They kept the “young rascal” in pocket money also; and, when needful, settled tailors’ accounts, which but for them might have remained for years, and then not been liquidated.

They had families themselves, but, unlike many worthy folk, they never pleaded this fact as an excuse for not helping young Claud, who took all their kindness as a matter of course and felt aggrieved when, to quote Mr. Lahan, “they went to smash,” and found it impossible to provide “pocket money” or give assistance any more.

Dr. Dagley’s morning dream was about these unconsidered relatives, and so vividly did it reproduce much he did not wish to remember that for a moment after he awoke it seemed to him almost as if they had come into the room and talked to him. Then the events of overnight recurred to memory: he remembered he had, though not with undue alacrity, agreed to accept the loan of two thousand pounds, and he understood the time so long looked forward to had come at last. He ought to be up and doing—the future with its unlimited possibilities was before him!

No thanks to Mr. Hernidge; no thanks to his grandfather—but merely owing to the amazing faith of a



stray acquaintance, the cup of fortune was at length at his lips.

He would that morning take a turn round the West End; he would go on to the city and make inquiries concerning the expense of life insurance. He had lots of pleasant business to transact, and there was something else—oh, yes! he would go and see Mr. Snowcroft, and take him a little present.

“I am going out again to-day,” said Dr. Dagley to his young friend, who answered, “Are you?” in a tone which suggested he had not quite recovered from the previous evening’s repulse.

“Yes, I am going into the city this morning, and to a picnic to-morrow, and to a sort of ‘At Home Conversazione’ on Thursday; but, after that, I intend to devote myself utterly to business, yours and mine.”

“Yours must always be mine,” was the reply, which did not ring so clear as usual. In fact, the lad’s voice seemed to Dr. Dagley so much like the dull moan of some hurt creature, he felt constrained to put matters right before taking his walks abroad.

“I am afraid, my dear boy,” he began, “you thought me a little ungracious and unthankful, last night; but just put yourself in my place, and then you will understand what it cost me finally to accept your offer.”

“I can’t put myself in your place. I know I’m such a poor sort of fellow I should, unlike you, have said ‘yes’ at once, and that is precisely what vexes me that I could not put the whole thing differently, as you would have done, for instance. I would do



anything to help serve you, yet I shall never, never, never be fit even to black your boots."

"Tom," said Dr. Dagley, laying a hand on the faithful lad's shoulder. "Tom," and then Tom broke down. He had been hateful about that money; he had made too free. He had lain awake for hours wondering how he ventured to take such a liberty. What was money or money's worth when compared with Dr. Dagley? He ought not to have said he would go away. He had let his temper get the better of his discretion, and he begged pardon, and hoped his friend would just take the paltry sum and forget and forgive.

There was nothing more certain than that Dr. Dagley meant to take the paltry sum, and therefore he addressed himself earnestly to smoothing Tom Bayford's ruffled feathers.

A quarrel—spite old proverbs to the contrary—can never be the renewal of love, or friendship either. It usually marks the point where both love and friendship enter on a new phase.

Never again could Tom Bayford be quite the same cheery youth he had been twenty-four hours previously; but he was quite as nice a youth, as ready to work, and wait, and talk, and deny himself as formerly.

He would see to everything as far as he could. Dr. Dagley need not hurry back. He would try to fill his place. He meant to start at once reading for his M.D.

"And I mean to start at once and make both our fortunes," said Dr. Dagley gayly.



He was in the best of spirits, and fully purposed not merely pushing on to success himself, but carrying young Bayford to success also.

“Will you walk with me to the station?” he asked, and as Tom signified he should have plenty of time to write for the money after he returned from Westbourne Park, they paced along Goulborne and Kensal Roads together, talking as they went, or, rather, Dr. Dagley talking, about cases, and symptoms, and treatment, and last, but not least, patients—shilling patients.

“The first thing you must learn in a practice like mine is to harden your heart.”

“To get the coin, in fact,” replied his *protégé*, but he did not put any merriment into that reply. His nature was, in fact, still struggling from that last and worst slap in the face his kindly impulsiveness had ever received.

“He will soon get over the fret,” thought Dr. Dagley, running down the stairs to catch a train which was just pulling up; but Dr. Dagley was wrong.

There are some experiences which cut deep, and the refusal of his well-meant offer left its scar on Tom Bayford for many a day.

While “taking that turn” round the West End Dr. Dagley found a first floor likely to suit his purpose very well. He did not propose to waste money and make ducks and drakes of Tom Bayford’s fortune, as his father had done with his own and every other fortune he could lay hands on. He knew it would be madness to take a house, and believed the place he saw might serve his purpose capitally for a time.



Though he heard that the usual "other party" was after it, he did not recklessly close at once with the landlord, who lived on the premises. He said that gentleman should "hear from him," which, being a general and useful assurance, is one frequently employed in such cases.

After a short ramble through divers thoroughfares more or less fashionable, he found himself in Oxford street, where, mounting an omnibus, he proceeded to the city. He had no difficulty in obtaining much information on the subject of life insurance, and started for Homerton, feeling glad his morning's work was so satisfactorily accomplished.

Homerton possessed one advantage over Arbour square, viz., that of being a quite strange neighborhood to Dr. Dagley. He had no associations, agreeable or disagreeable, with the decently poor streets which now cover the ground on which once stood fine houses inhabited by prosperous city merchants.

Dr. Dagley had not much trouble in finding where his mother's uncle dwelt—a poor abode, truly! Mr. Snowcroft, grown old and feeble, failed to recognize his visitor, but when he learned who he was greeted him with effusion. "And we were so much obliged to you, sir, for what you wrote about John. It got him the berth, and he is doing nicely, thank you."

It was a bitter penance, but Claud Dagley faced it bravely. He remembered the letter in which Mr. Snowcroft asked him if he would "speak for John."

It began "Honored sir" and ended "Hoping you will pardon this intrusion, yours obediently"—a



depth of humility almost as trying as familiarity would have been.

Some kinsfolk can do nothing right. Dr. Dagley felt very certainly none of his did, at any rate; but, even while determining never to revisit Homerton, he comported himself affably; inquired concerning the health of Mr. Snowcroft's children and grandchildren, and even consented to take a cup of tea, which Mrs. Snowcroft offered to prepare for him forthwith, as the "kettle was just on the boil."

It was a hot day on which to sit in a small kitchen and drink scalding tea, but Dr. Dagley did not flinch, politely acquiescing in his uncle's opinion that "there was nothing so refreshing."

"Seen the old gentleman lately?" asked Mr. Snowcroft, as the conversation languished for a moment.

The question might have referred to a historical individual, but Claud Dagley, understanding his grandfather was meant, answered:

"Yes; he does not look very well."

"No; tottery, tottery; won't be here long; getting into years," returned Mr. Snowcroft, who was only five years Mr. Lahan's junior; "failing fast; will go out like the snuff of a candle, and won't be able to take his gold with him; a solemn thought."

"If he could, all his gold would not trouble him, I fancy," said Dr. Dagley, ignoring thoughts and speaking of facts.

"He has what would seem wealth untold to me," was the reply.

"I can't agree with you," answered Dr. Dagley. "He strikes me as being poorly off."



“That is nothing. He always lived as if he had not fifteen shillings a week: was as fond of saving as some are of spending. Ah! well, it won't serve him where he's going—didn't buy a drop of water for Dives, if you remember, sir.”

“I remember; but he is not rich, like Dives. I should call him, on the contrary, a poor man.”

“Poor men can't buy properties at the Mart worth seven thousand pounds, which he did a year ago.”

“Impossible!”

“He did, however—Gorsebank, down in Essex; fine gentleman's house—lot of land—good homestead, farm buildings, and so forth.”

Dr. Dagley laughed and answered: “He must have bought it in for somebody else and earned an honest penny by doing so. He never owned such an amount. He told me yesterday he had invested in an annuity. People able to purchase properties don't buy annuities and deny themselves almost the necessaries of life.”

“As for that,” returned Mr. Snowcroft, “he always was one who tried to make a farthing's worth of butter serve for a whole loaf; but what you say may be right. That idea of his being some rich man's dummy never occurred to me. He always was dummy for another person; by the bye, the way he came to—” but here the speaker was seized with such a fit of coughing he failed to finish his sentence, which, of course, had reference to Colonel Claud Dagley.

“Must you be going?” he went on as his nephew rose to depart. “I thank you for the honor you have



done me in calling. John will be very proud when I tell him who has been here; but what's this, sir?" as he looked at a five-pound note pressed into his hand.

"Just a trifle with which to buy any little thing you may fancy; I wish it were more," and Dr. Dagley hurried away to escape the torrent of gratitude which might have made any other man feel ready to sink into the earth abashed.



## CHAPTER XXVI.

### MRS. CRADEN'S PICNIC.

THE Burt Cradens' picnic proved a greater success than might have been expected. True, at the eleventh hour their plan of campaign was altered, Laleham Ferry being substituted for Old Windsor; but this turned out an improvement, because it is more than possible to have too much of Father Thames on a scorching day and along a portion of the river well-nigh destitute of shade.

Two young men spending their summer holiday at Weybridge were responsible for this change. Mr. Burt Craden thought their boat and selves would be useful, so an invitation was dispatched to them in due course, and eagerly accepted, the Burt Cradens being deemed by many persons desirable acquaintances. When these youths found out, however, what was intended, they said simultaneously, with a wisdom beyond their years:

"Oh, dear, no. Not for Joe!" one adding: "No rowing a party to Old Windsor, thank you, for me."

"Or towing for me," capped the other, wherefore they decided to suggest Shepperton Range and Dumsy Deep and Dockett's Point to Mrs. Craden as desirable localities, laying great stress on the expanse of flat land lying between Shepperton and Chertsey



Bridge, also becoming poetical and German when they spoke of the water lilies that star the river at Dumsey Deep and Dockett's Point.

"That idea won't wash," declared one who, having been engaged by Mrs. Craden as consulting opinion, was called in to say what he thought of the boating men's brilliant proposal. "If it had been Laleham Ferry, now——"

Whereupon all the Craden and many other girls voted instantly for Laleham Ferry. "Such a dear little cottage!" "Such a sweet bit of the river!"

"Thorpe and St. Anne's Hill within just a short walk," added the man learned in Thames lore.

"And Laleham Church and the Arnold graves on the other side of the ferry," said another, by way of an additional attraction.

Thus Laleham had it, and the picnic party repaired thither.

Those who were to meet at Weybridge took tickets for that pretty station, and those who had meant to go to Windsor made as short and not less agreeable a journey to Shepperton.

If many things were forgotten it is only fair to say many things were remembered, among others a new corkscrew, which formed the nucleus of one of Mr. Burt Craden's latest companies, and a wonderful "camping-out" stove, also protected by letters patent, the British public had been invited to support to the tune of a hundred and fifty thousand pounds.

That the former resolutely refused to extract anything save bad language only added to the fun, while the fact that no methylated spirit could be found to



render the cooking apparatus available simply formed a peg on which to hang various witticisms that elicited screams of laughter from uninterested persons, though they could scarcely have appeared funny to the host, who possessed quite a pack of paid-up shares.

"Beggar had the oil left behind on purpose," said General Littleby to Lieutenant-Colonel Trasbank, who, in company with the General and Mr. Craden, was a director of several promising swindles, and so could relish the charitable remark.

Altogether a delightful party, the members of which, unlike the stove, brought their own excellent spirits down by train, and at first enjoyed themselves hugely.

"Quite an informal affair," explained Mrs. Burt Craden to a circle of especially reserved guests, who in many languages hastened to observe "informal gatherings" always proved the most delightful.

If Dr. Claud Dagley had been asked his reason for putting in an appearance at such an affair he could have answered:

"To extend my connection," but the real truth was he came because he expected to be entertained. "Never," so Miss Maud Craden declared, had she sent him in such a "coming on" mood, and if he did not "come on" a very long way indeed, it certainly was not for lack of encouragement.

"He is just too awfully handsome," said the young lady, who, finding the English language too pale and poor to give expression to her admiration, was forced to fall back on the slang of "good society"; "and



what howling running that nasty little Fowkes girl is making with him! No one else is anywhere. She is going to take her captive across the river now. Dr. Dagley—Doctor—Dag—le—y!”

“Yes,” answered that gentleman, standing in the stern of the boat, the tiller ropes in his hands.

“You promised to show me the Nun’s Well.”

“So I will when I come back.”

“Mind you do, then.”

And, this being “quite an informal affair,” they all dispersed—some going up the lane toward Thorpe, some sauntering along beside the river, others crossing to Laleham village, or bending their steps in the direction of Lord Lucan’s park. Every one was supposed to do what he or she liked, with the result that many got very much mixed, and not a few wrongly paired.

Dr. Dagley, for instance, and the little Fowkes girl—Maud Craden and a very High Church young clergyman—Amabel Osberton and a Polish pianist, who in a few hours had developed such an admiration for the young English miss that he felt tempted before they reached St. Anne’s Hill to endow her with a complete opera, an unfinished oratorio, a divine sonata, a still finer fugue, many songs, and himself.

He wearied the girl to death; she longed to be alone, away, anywhere out of that noisy throng. Her heart felt very sad. She had witnessed the departure of that forward Miss Fowkes and Dr. Dagley; she had heard Maud Craden and her sister chaffing him, and listened to his lighthearted retorts.



When flirtation was about he certainly proved no laggard, but took his part in the game as well even as Miss Fowkes, who did everything save propose a clandestine marriage, and who would have married him clandestinely, or in the sight of all men, had he expressed the slightest desire for her to do so.

Could this really be the Dr. Dagley she, Amabel, had first seen ministering to an insensible woman, heard deploring the wrongs of the poor and denouncing the shortcomings of the rich—the man she had set on a pedestal and worshipped in secret; the man who had spoken to her with such grave earnestness at that Saturday night dance and asked the next day at Acton: “Do these people call themselves rational beings?”

She felt sore then to watch him playing lawn tennis with many irrational beings as if he enjoyed it, but she sorrowed and marvelled more now to think he could allow a flirt like Miss Fowkes to lead him where she would. And the Craden girls—she saw them giggling and nudging each other and their respective swains as they talked together, she knew, concerning her and her unwelcome swain. How she hated everything at that moment—London and its unresting whirl, its wearisome parties, its monotony of pleasure, its bad form, its false pretences, its real indifference, its restlessness, its discontent. How much she preferred the country, how glad she should be to return to the Grange! And then she sighed, and her Polish admirer thought she was gasping at his ornate description of a concert in St. Petersburg which the Emperor honored with his presence.



"I am so tired—shall we turn back?" she asked as she saw Miss Craden and her clergyman breasting the steep incline which leads from the Nun's Well at the summit of St. Anne's Hill.

To the ardent lover hill and vale were equal so long as he paced by the side of a young maiden, fond of music, amiable, and presumably wealthy—no doubt wealthy, from little words he had heard drop. In a rich soil genius develops its finest flowers. Heaven, the pianist felt, had a favor to him that day. Even the retrograde movement of his lady fair seemed full of promise; she wished to be alone with him and nature—especially alone with him, however.

Unfortunately, by the way they encountered General Littleby, who, being horribly bored, was quite as ready to turn with the happy pair as one of the pair was to accept his companionship.

"So beastly hot!" he said, with a frank disdain of conventionality.

Amabel agreed the day was very warm indeed.

"Why, in the name of common sense, if Craden must have a picnic," he went on, ignoring the fact that Mrs. Craden's mind was much more set on picnics than her lord's, "couldn't he have organized one in some better place—St. Anne's Hill, for instance; there we should have had shade—or St. George's Hills; ditto ditto—or Ottersham or Chobham, or—or any place, in fact, save Laleham, where the whole show is exhausted in two minutes, and the old church ain't worth the trouble of crossing the river to see? Even Littleton would have been better," he went on grumbling, after a masterly sort



of fashion. "Ever been to Littleton, Miss Osberton?" Miss Osberton had to confess that not merely had she never visited Littleton, but was uncertain as to its exact whereabouts.

"Oh! you should go and see it, then," declared the General. "Such a jolly little place—population has not increased for two hundred years. Think of that, and only seventeen miles from London by road! A friend of mine was curate in charge for five years—rector is non-resident—and during the whole of that time he had not a baptism except of his own children! Very funny little place. Say, Miss Osberton, will you walk over? It is not far from here."

Apparently General Littleby, though far from young, thought the offer tempting, but Amabel was proof against even such seduction.

She was too tired, she said, to go anywhere except to the ferry.

"That is all in the way," answered the General; "when you feel a little rested we can go on to Littleton if you like. Rymill holds some stunning sales there—great fun to see the hunters being tried! You should ask your father to bring you down some day when Rymill has a consignment from Cork or Waterford. You would enjoy the show, I am sure; wonderfully rural and pretty—quite poetical. By the bye, I thought I should see Mr. Osberton here to-day, but I suppose he does not care for this sort of kick-up."

"My father seldom goes out except in the evening."

"Ah! deep, deep," observed the General, who had imbibed a considerable quantity of unpaid-for cham-



pagne, with something stronger to follow. "I always did say Osberton knows how many beans make five, even if there are peas among them. Craden is not in it with him."

Amabel looked surprised, as well she might, at this extraordinary tribute to her father's sagacity.

She was not aware the speaker knew him; nor did he, except by sight and repute.

He knew, however, very well who he was and whom he had married, having, indeed, danced many a time with Amabel Loveland in days when she never thought she would be wife to a city man, and the General, then a lieutenant, had no idea he should ever develop into an extremely dishonest director of various shady companies.

"Miss Loveland used to like picnic parties mightily," continued the degenerate son of Mars. "How is it she is not here, either?"

"My aunt has been a little indisposed lately," said Amabel with as much coldness as she could infuse into her manner.

"Yes," returned General Littleby, quite unabashed. "I remember she was always a 'creaking gate'; quite different from your mother, who went off all of a sudden without sound of trumpet or beat of drum. Such is life! There is no accounting for these differences in families. She was a lovely woman—you are like her, but have a bit of Osberton in you too. Your aunt, though not a patch on your mother, was good-looking also. She must be getting on now. It is twenty years since I saw her last. How time does slip away, to be sure! She is right to take care



of herself, but don't be uneasy. 'Creaking gates keep long on their hinges.' You have heard that before, I dare say."

"Ah! behold the glorious river," exclaimed Amabel's admirer, and for once the girl was glad to hear his voice, and answered;

"Yes, is it not lovely?"

"Lofely, lofely," said the Pole, "and the beautiful roses on the little cottage, and the green, green grass, and the charming ladies and their pretty dresses, and the house on the other bank! lofely, most lofely, just like a scene in an opera!" which was the highest praise the speaker could bestow.

"Have you a headache, dear?" asked Mrs. Craden, noticing how pale Amabel looked as she walked across the turf toward her.

"No; I am only a little tired, and shall be glad to sit down," whereupon the General and the pianist rushed off for camp-stools, returning only to find Amabel seated on the sward at Mrs. Craden's feet.

Finding she declined to move, they wisely decided to occupy the stools themselves, and sat listening to and occasionally joining in the conversation, while the river, sparkling with sunshine, flowed placidly on—ever on to the sea!



## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CLAUD AND AMABEL MEET AGAIN.

THERE are few statements more frequently made and more generally believed than that while in London a man may live and die untainted by the foul breath of scandal, he has but to remove to some small town or village, and he will immediately find the whole population engaged in breaking the ninth commandment to pieces.

Like many other widely accepted statements, however, this is a fallacy.

Wherever men and women are, there false witness will be borne against his and her own immediate neighbor, or what comes to the same thing, against some other person's neighbor.

The denizens of crowded cities wag their tongues not a whit less freely than Jack and Jill in the quiet of the country. Backbiting is a sturdy plant, which thrives as well amid bricks and mortar as in shady hamlets retired from the world; and on that summer afternoon at Laleham Ferry the fashionable folk, who had come so far to see nothing, sat and looked at the Thames rippling quietly by, while their ears and tongues were busy hearing and speaking many things, mostly evil, concerning their dear brothers and sisters in society.



As an authority about the sayings, doings, and thinkings of great people, Mrs. Burt Craden was reverently regarded by nearly every one with whom she came in contact. She had kept herself so abreast of the time, she took such a keen interest in passing matters, she had seen so many strange places, met such numbers of distinguished and odd men and women of every possible creed and color—she was, as General Littleby would have said, and, in fact, did say, such an “all-round,” “up-to-date” woman—that her acquaintances felt it a pleasure as well as a privilege to crowd to any entertainment she chose to give, where they seldom met the same person twice. This was one secret of her success—she constantly shifted her guests, and kept them continually amused and perplexed, while she effectually prevented the forming of intimate friendships among them, which ought never to be permitted by any hostess who does not desire to imperil her own position.

She had such an enormous connection, she could take up whom she would and drop whom she pleased. After a fashion, her house was as the world, where people were always coming and going, and yet had no abiding place.

No wonder she knew all that was occurring in society, and more that was not, for Rumor, with her thousand tongues, never kept silence in The Boltons—the dame went there to talk and fulfilled her mission, wherefore Mrs. Burt Craden had some word to say about everything and every one. The head of a select circle of women who wanted to know all she knew any one, to hear her talk that after-



noon, might have imagined her to be, if not one of the royal family, at least a member of the royal household. She could tell what her Most Gracious Majesty wore, did, thought, said, at any given minute in any day. She could explain what had happened to Prince This and Princess That. Why one went to Windsor and another to Balmoral, and why a certain Duchess stayed away from all the royal residences. Why some one was going to visit this lady, and why some one else was staying away. Why the Prince of Wales meant to buy this estate and the Duke of Connaught to dispose of another. Why a particular theatre was patronized by royalty, and a second had been always severely left out in the cold.

If very little that was said were true, it seemed a reasonably good semblance of truth.

Mrs. Burt Craden spoke as one having authority, and for the most part her admirers listened to her words as though she, and she alone, held the key of all mysteries, past, present, and to come.

There were occasions when she dropped her voice, and heads craned closer and reputations were rent in a whisper, and men, supposed not to know or to hear, smiled cunningly, while many a poor wretch, innocent of sin, perhaps, was sent to the right-about as bare of character as Griselda of clothes.

And then many present were conscious of an agreeable thrill, just as, doubtless, the rabble in Smithfield felt when some heretic, bound to the stake amid smoking green wood, gave up the ghost by the agony of suffocation. For some reason, human



agony has often proved enjoyable to those who do not suffer.

Amabel, however, took no heed either of the suffering or the enjoyment. She did not know of the one—for never a vestal nun was brought up in such utter ignorance of the sins society does not always weep over, as this innocent girl in her soft green dress, which made her look, as the Polish pianist decided, like a dream water-maiden.

She was thinking of one who had disappointed her, who could not be the stern, reserved, devoted, self-sacrificing man that carried poor Mrs. Vink into her father's library, and looked and spoke as if he had never regarded aught save the suffering poor all the days of his life.

That he should permit himself to be made the sport of any one like Miss Fowkes, that he should bandy witless jests with Maud Craden, who even then, on the bank, was awaiting his return, not that he might take her to the Nun's Well and wood, which she and her clergyman had already visited, but back to Laleham Church, a shrine the Rev. Mr. Verslet did not in the least wish to visit, but that Miss Craden had decided he ought to see.

Of all these things, and of no society or other scandal, Amabel's heart was very full when these words suddenly recalled her wandering attention:

“You told me, my dear Mrs. Craden, the name of that distinguished-looking man who went across the river with Miss Fowkes, but I have quite forgotten it. Who is he?”

“He is a Dr. Claud Dagley,” answered Mrs.



Craden, "son of Colonel Claud Dagley, that insinuating gentleman with whom all the girls used to be in love when we were young. Don't you remember?"

"No," answered the other; "my people did not come much into town in the days when I was young."

"Son of Colonel Claud?" broke in General Littleby. "You don't say so? By Jove!"

"Yes, and as steady as his father was wild," went on Mrs. Craden equably, taking no notice whatever of the General's reference to heathen gods, "wonderfully clever, sure, to get to the top of the tree. He has made a gallant fight totally unassisted, for his father's relatives pitched him over and there were none presentable on his mother's side. She must have been questionable in some way, for the Dagleys would never have refused to hold out a helping hand to the lad if all had been right with the mother."

"All was quite right as regards her," declared the General; "a handsomer, quieter, better wife I'd never wish to meet."

"I am glad to hear you say so, for I always understood something was wrong," answered Mrs. Craden, who did not seem in the least convinced. "Whenever a man makes a low marriage," she went on, dropping her voice, and then the heads began to wag again, and Amabel, painfully curious, could only catch a word now and then, such as "women of that kind," "young fellows are so easily taken in," "thought he was a great catch," "ruined his life."

"Tell you what, ma'am," said General Littleby, catching Mrs. Craden up short in a way to which that lady was unaccustomed, "I know all about that



marriage, from Genesis to Revelation, and can solemnly assert, if Colonel Claud were taken in, it was his own greed and folly and selfishness did it for him, and nothing and nobody else. He thought he had caught an heiress, and she—well, she thought she had got a saint till she saw his cloven foot. You need not look at me. I never was in love with her—she never gave one of us any encouragement of that sort; but I know an honest woman when I see her, and she was as straight as any lady here—perhaps.”

The General pulled in not a moment too soon, and the middle-aged ladies looked at each other, coughed, and reddened, all excepting Mrs. Craden, who from long experience had learned to take most things quite as matters of course.

“I am *very* glad to hear it,” she repeated, emphasizing her former statement, “the more especially as I am greatly interested in the young man’s success. My nephew is devoted to him, and I must ask you all as a personal favor to remember that he is quite an exceptional individual, as clever as he is handsome, and as good and kind as he is charming. Therefore, please recollect when you are ill, or your children, husbands, brothers, friends are ill, you must instantly send for Dr. Claud Dagley, of The Uplands, Chesterton Road.”

“I will make a note of the address at once,” observed the General, who never paid anybody. “Only to think after all these years of coming across Dagley’s son—Crafty Claud we used to call him, you recollect, eh, Craden?”



“Recollect what?” asked that honorable gentleman, who, looking unutterably bored, had just come across the grass to inquire if there were any chance of a near cup of tea.

“Colonel Dagley—fellow who let in all the Jews, and for that matter all the gentiles too?”

Mr. Craden shook his head. “Didn’t know him; before my time.”

“Nonsense,” returned the other; and then they began an argument on the subject, ding-dong, ding-dong, till Amabel felt as though her head were an anvil and the speakers a pair of smith’s hammers beating a rough tune upon it.

As for Mrs. Burt Craden, she rested content, satisfied she had done a little more than her duty. She could tell Philip Manford she had mentioned his friend to everybody, and ordered society individually and collectively to consult him.

It was thus Mrs. Craden “made reputations” and secured the lasting gratitude of foreigners, who did not exactly understand what it all meant.

“Dr. Claud Dagley,” repeated the Pole softly to Amabel. “This is the gentleman, I suppose, with the lady who talks and laughs so much. Ah! how she laughs!”

He had reason. As the Weybridge boat came swiftly across the river, Miss Fowkes woke all the echoes with her noisy laugh and shrill voice—but she did not laugh to half so much purpose as Miss Maud Craden, who after a late tea contrived to induce her and Mr. Verslet to go not to Laleham and the Arnold graves, but rather to the Nun’s Well, in spite of the



clergyman's solemn assurance that the Well was nothing to view.

"You will just have time if you go at once," she said to Miss Fowkes, "and"—*sotto voce*—"he is quite a dear—sweet as sweet, not a bit like that stuck-up doctor, who any one can see with half an eye has bored you to death. Ta, ta! don't let Mr. Verslet drag you up the hill," she added quite audibly, and then, when the pair were hidden from sight, she ran along the bank and clapped her hands and laughed with glee.

"Brought down the two bores with one shot. Oh, how jolly! now we will fly. Get into the boat, Amabel; and you, and you, and you," she cried gayly, till the passengers numbered eleven. "Such a sell, I'd give a sovereign to see her face when she comes back and finds us flown."

"But where are we going?" asked Amabel, puzzled.

"Never you mind; be a good child, do as you are told; this is your place, doctor—we are ready, Sturgis," and as she spoke Sturgis let go, the boatman plied his sculls, and they glided calmly across the Thames as though it had been some enchanted river. "But where are we going?" repeated Amabel, who felt at a loss how to interpret the proceeding.

"Shut your eyes and open your mouth and see what Heaven will send you," answered the fair Maud; and as though she had been acting as fugleman the whole of her special party echoed, "See what Heaven will send you."

"Still one might like to have an idea," spoke up Dr. Dagley.



"Be tranquil, my friend," returned Maud, and the chorus took up her word to a melodious strain, which sounded very effective when borne over the water to Mrs. Craden and her friends.

"Our dear girls have such spirits!" she murmured.

"So it seems," said General Littleby, and as no one could tell whether by those three words he praised or blamed a discreet silence ensued, during which some guests finished a cup of cold tea, and others put on their gloves carefully.

When the mad party reached the Middlesex bank, Maud, as leader, gathered up her skirts and leaped on shore without waiting for help from any one.

"Now, good people," she cried, "hurry up, hurry up, if you please; the train is waiting, and we must step out."

"I will follow you to death or victory," said Dr. Dagley; "still, I should like to have some idea where you are going."

"Should you?" she repeated, with a coquettish little laugh, the while she was pressing a note to her mother into the boatman's hand. "Well, come with me and you shall be enlightened," whereupon the chorus, composed of some of her sisters and several rowdy friends, took up the refrain not unmusically, and expressed their certainty of being taken into confidence.

"Now," said Dr. Dagley, facing the party on a stretch of lonely road, "kindly mention the goal for which we are bound."

"Shepperton," explained Miss Maud Craden, with a burst of laughter. "We have got rid of the Fowkes, we have circumvented the Verslet, and, like



the Israelites, we are straying through the wilderness of West Middlesex toward Shepperton and home."

"All right," said Dr. Dagley, "but isn't Shepperton a long way off?"

"Only hop, step, skip, and jump," replied Miss Maud, executing the measure in question. "Hop," she said, "step, skip, and jump; so you see——"

"I do see a very neat pair of ankles," agreed one youth more audacious than the rest, but the remark was received in stony silence. It was well for the Misses Craden that the decencies of society still obtain among some men.

On and on they pressed, till the walk became almost a run, and panting and exhausted, Amabel had to confess she could not keep up the pace.

"Don't try," said her companion.

"Now, good people, what are you loitering behind for?" screamed Maud Craden. "We shall miss the train."

"If so, we can catch another," shouted Dr. Dagley.

"Don't be too sure of that," was the answer; and the nine rushed on, indifferent to the amazed looks and comments of the few persons they met.

After all, Dr. Dagley and Amabel reached the station in time. There had been some sort of garden party at Lower Halliford, and the train was delayed a few minutes in consequence.

It took the last arrivals but a moment to run across the line and find their party ensconced in a first-class carriage—six seated properly and three perched on the arms—a delightful arrangement.

"Go away! No room for you here. Go away!"



cried Maud Craden. "Go away!" repeated the rest with one voice.

"Room here, sir," said the guard, opening the door of another compartment, in which there were only two persons, who did not look at the newcomers pleasantly. Their destination, however, was Fulwell, from which station on to Clapham Junction Dr. Dagley and Amabel were alone.

Long before they reached Fulwell, however, Dr. Dagley had smoothed away Amabel's disappointment. How nice he was, she thought; how wise, how beautifully he talked! Ere long she gathered up courage to tell him what had been in her mind that first day they met. It was really a delightful conversation, one she would always remember.

After they left Putney she marvelled to notice how frequently her companion's eyes turned toward her head, but the reason of his scrutiny did not make itself apparent till he said:

"Are you not going to take those flowers out of your hat, Miss Osberton?"

"How very stupid of me!" she exclaimed, withdrawing the long pins that secured her headgear, which one of the Misses Craden had adorned with meadow-sweet (dead-man's blossom), loosestrife, and some sprigs of berberry. "But for you I should have walked through London decked like a May Queen."

"And a very fair one too," he thought, looking at the downcast eyes, the long lashes, the fair, delicate face, the white, soft hands; yes, though not his style, undoubtedly a lovely girl.



“May I have those flowers?” he asked as she replaced her hat.

“If you wish,” she answered, with a pretty blush.

“Thank you,” was his reply, opening as he spoke his pocket-book and laying the withered blossoms inside a letter. “I will keep them in remembrance of a very pleasant journey—not that I am likely to forget,” and then—how it happened she never could exactly tell—he took her hand and kissed it.

As a sensitive plant withers if touched, so Amabel shrank from the unexpected caress—a deep wave of color swept over her face, leaving it next moment white as death.

“Forgive me! forgive me,” he said eagerly. “I ought not to have done that, but I meant no disrespect. Won’t you forgive me?”

She did not answer; she was shy and soft and fair, and he—perhaps bold.

Anyhow, the matter ended with his pressing his lips once again on that white hand.

Then the engine gave a shriek, the brakes grated on the metals, and the train drew up at Clapham Junction.



## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### ONE GATE SHUTS, ANOTHER OPENS.

NEXT morning, when Mr. Bayford read the only letter which awaited him, his face was a sight to behold. He first rushed through it with a wild sort of incredulity and laid it down as if amazed; then he took the missive up again, and again laid it down; then he pushed his chair back and walked to the window, where he stood contemplating Chesterton Road with apparently great attention for a few minutes; finally he reseated himself, and took up the letter once more.

“Nothing wrong, I hope?” said Dr. Dagley, who, busy at first with his own correspondence, had latterly been watching the young man’s uneasy movements with considerable interest.

“Everything is wrong,” was the comprehensive answer.

“Your sister is not——”

“No, I dare say she’s all right enough. It is—but here, judge for yourself.”

Thus permitted, Dr. Dagley took the letter, which was written in a beautifully clear, old-fashioned hand and read:

“MY DEAR THOMAS:—The use of a trustee is not merely to carry out a testator’s wishes, but also to



stand between a legatee and his folly. For both these reasons I have no power to do what you ask. Your father left £2,000, painfully earned and carefully hoarded, to each of his children, which £2,000 is, on the death of either without lawful issue, to pass to the survivor. Therefore you see I have no option save to stand between you and your folly.

“The £2,000 is not yours to deal with—to all intents and purposes it never will be yours—because there is always the chance that you may die before your sister, or that you may marry and have children.

“You do not mention the purpose for which you want this nest-egg, so I can but conclude it is for some wild speculation.

“If, however, it be with a view to anything tangible, I should not mind advancing, say, a couple of hundred to the son of my old friend, if he can show me sufficient cause for doing so.

“I remain, my dear Thomas,

“Yours faithfully,

“JOHN LAMMING.”

A wild joy filled Dr. Dagley's heart as he ran over the epistle, only to be succeeded by a wilder feeling of disappointment.

He had hated laying himself under such an obligation, but, on the other hand, since he overcame his repugnance, imagination had taken him over so fair a land of promise that for a moment he found some difficulty in returning to the dull workaday world of Chesterton Road, with its bad legs, its bad eyes, its seemingly bad everything, in fact, to the mind of a man who, having desired a great practice, deluded himself for the space of about sixty hours with the idea that he was on the straight way to it.

Had he been riding the wildest of *Phoul a Phookas*,



he could not have come a more awful cropper than he did while reading Mr. Lamming's extremely sensible letter. From the gate of the moon, which, if report speaks truly, is about the distance a *Phoul a Phooka* can carry any mortal before the witching hour, to Mother Earth is not a nice throw; nevertheless, it was one Dr. Dagley received that morning in Chester-ton Road ere he could finish his first cup of coffee.

He had been exalted to heaven, and—ah! well—we need not cast him lower than earth.

It was a bad enough fall, yet he bore it like a man.

Stunned, blinded, bleeding, his first instinct, nevertheless, was to hide the extent of his injuries; and though he had to pause for a moment before uttering the words, he nevertheless managed to say, after an inappreciable delay, quite in his usual tone:

“Your trustee is a sensible man, Tom.”

“Yes, that is the devil of it,” answered Tom, who had a legatee's not uncommon dislike both to sense and law.

“Hush—sh—sh, my dear fellow. He is absolutely right, you know.”

“That fact does not mend matters,” and Mr. Bayford, pushing away his cup, planted his elbows on the table, covered his face from view with his hands, and contemplated an empty plate.

If he had not fallen from heaven to earth, his fall was equally nasty. He felt as if his Pegasus had broken every bone in his body. He had thought he needed but to ask and have, and the dead hand, still holding control, struck him with a cold chill.



"I consider Mr. Lamming's letter as wise and nice a one as I have ever read," said Dr. Dagley.

"Very likely; but that makes it no pleasanter."

"I think it does. Cheer up, old fellow; we'll manage some other way."

"I dare say, and I'll be out of it."

"Tom, what do you mean?"

"That you will manage some other way—something is sure to come to you, but I shall be out of it, and I did so want to be of a little use; it is just my luck, though."

Dr. Dagley had choked back many a despairing thought about his own ill luck, even that awful text which, no doubt, has recurred like the very echo of despair to many a heartsick man and woman with whom the world has gone "all contrary," "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera." It seemed to him then, as it had seemed many a time before, that even the stars were fighting against him, nevertheless he found courage enough to ignore—in speech, at all events—his own personal grievance, and answer:

"Do you think intention counts for nothing, then, dear boy?"

"I don't think it counts for much," was the straightforward reply.

"Well, it counts for this much, at any rate, with me," said Dr. Dagley, "that I know when I lie dying I shall remember better than most things there was once a cheery-faced lad who wanted to give me all his patrimony and could not. Now finish your breakfast."



Spite of the doctor's advice, it was a meagre and mournful meal they ate together.

The flavor seemed gone out of everything. There is an even better sauce than hunger—happiness—and neither man was happy. With tired, sad hearts, they both made a poor pretence of eating, and felt glad when the housekeeper broke in upon a *tête-à-tête* for once destitute of all brightness, with the words: "Mrs. Sprutt, sir; to see Mr. Bayford."

"Number one—new series," said Dr. Dagley, with a creditable attempt at a laugh; but Tom Bayford received the joke, such as it was, with so grave a face that the elder man thankfully left him to interview his patient, and walked down town to tell the landlord of that eligible first floor he had made "different arrangements." Then after this "burst" he returned straight home, read up the previous week's medical journals, made a few notes, looked over his accounts, opened a book which dealt with the obscure disease he believed to be the cause of Philip Manford's trouble and made several copious extracts, that he was lovingly kneading into the shape he wanted when Tom Bayford, with a preternaturally grave countenance, entered the room and laid a little packet on the table, saying:

"This morning's work."

"Oh! come, this won't do," observed Dr. Dagley, undoing the packet, and letting its contents glide where they would.

"Why not?" asked the other in amazement.

"Can't have you creating patients and paying fees out of your own pocket."



“That would be a silly proceeding. No, that is all for value honestly given. I told you I’d drive the thing alone, and I will. It’s the children who ‘tot up.’ I am a great fellow with children: they never cry a bit when I handle them. They always said that at the hospital.”

“But, my dear Tom——”

“I can’t give you what I want, so let me do what I can. Now I am going to write to Mr. Lamming. I suppose two hundred would be of no use?”

“To me? Not of the slightest,” was the uncompromising answer.

“And I don’t want what the dear old fellow offers. We can do better than that, I think.”

“Still it is extremely good of him.”

“Yes, but we can do without any small help, which is never anything except a nuisance. Don’t be afraid, though; my father’s old friend shall have as pretty a note of thanks as my awkward fingers can write—God bless him, he means nothing but what is kind and straightforward.”

“He has done nothing but what is kind and straightforward,” amended Dr. Dagley, trying to give the young fellow just such comfort as he needed.

Swallowing a vague lump in his throat, Tom Bayford walked to the door, where he paused a moment.

“I want to say this,” he began, “that I cannot tell you all I feel—but I do feel it—and I’ll never forget how nicely you have taken Mr. Lamming’s letter; and wherever and from whomsoever you get what you want, remember I am with you to work and to



help—and be just a handy laborer, in fact.” He finished with a suspicious gulp.

Thus, in his vast modesty and absolute disinterestedness, the poor lad took his sore heart away and never brought it into evidence again. He wrote a very pretty note to Mr. Lamming, who docketed and put it away, and said Tom was a chip of the old block, and wondered what he could have wanted £2,000 for; and Dr. Dagley, feeling it was of little use kicking further against such pricks as opposed him, decided to go doggedly forward till some chance offered of getting away from Chesterton Road and England. Perhaps, if he feigned to want no favor from her, fortune might relent. He had been over-eager, he thought—in too much haste. Well, he would be slow enough now. And, as he could not help himself, he went back with such equanimity as he could command to his horny-handed patients—to men who were sorely out of health, and women who stood over washtubs and chared and dragged heavy burdens through life's long day, and bore sickly children, yet who turned a brave face to trouble, and had many a simple enjoyment the world wot not of; and willingly gave time and trouble, aye, and sometimes money as well, and won occasionally some passing feeling of contemptuous admiration from the pessimist doctor himself.

Why did they bear so patiently, bestow so freely? He could not tell. He despised them for their contentment. He felt provoked when a woman, poor and ailing herself, sat up with a sick neighbor, or took in a neighbor's child. He did not understand



the mighty pleasure there is to be extracted from such little deeds of kindness.

“Why should they not sit up or give share of their last half-ounce of tea? It’s all they can do: let them do that,” said Tom Bayford, when his friend was grumbling; and so after a while, seeing how very small impression his remonstrances effected, Dr. Dagley angrily told many a wife and mother they might go to—their own way, he should not interfere to prevent them.

But that was when he had settled down to work again, and ceased going out to parties, and had taken young Manford’s case well in hand, and knew he understood the whole thing well enough to effect a cure.

Worn out with anxiety, Mr. Manford greeted him almost affectionately when, even more carefully dressed than usual, he appeared, according to appointment, at the Grand.

“Come into my room for a few moments, do,” entreated the elder man; “I want to speak to you. It is about Philip,” he went on, when the door was closed against the outer world. “What is your opinion of him?”

“I really cannot discuss Dr. Kassiner’s patient,” was the stiff reply.

“But he is not Dr. Kassiner’s patient or anybody’s now except yours, if you choose to take him. I know I made a mistake. I confess I did not treat you well, but what was I to do? Every one said Kassiner was the great authority, and how could I know? I believe he is nothing but an arrant humbug,” Mr. Manford added in a sudden gust of fury; because



there is no human being so ungrateful as the person who has paid a doctor liberally—unless it be the person who never pays his doctor at all.

Then the listener took up his parable and delivered his blow straight from the shoulder.

He spoke of the time lost, of the money uselessly spent, of the ridiculous way in which Mr. Manford had stood halting between two opinions.

He would undertake the case on certain conditions, but those conditions must be rigidly observed. Of course he did not profess to work without money; money, however, was comparatively indifferent to him. What he wanted was to effect a cure, but he could not hope to do that unless he had a free hand.

At which point Philip knocked at the door.

“You shall have just what you ask for, only give him back to us well,” said Mr. Manford hurriedly.



## CHAPTER XXIX.

### DR. DAGLEY HEARS NEWS.

Two hours later Philip Manford and Dr. Dagley were stepping out, in excellent spirits, for Bloomsbury. They had dined well, and, as Mr. Lahan truly said, though his knowledge about such matters could only be considered theoretical, "a good dinner is a good thing." Likewise they had talked pleasantly, Dr. Dagley of course laying down the law; and Philip, quite satisfied he was going to get well in about a fortnight, indulged in various little sallies, which rejoiced his father's heart, and caused him to bless the handsome young physician who was about to work miracles of healing, and put all those matters right which Dr. Kassiner had suffered to drift so hopelessly wrong.

"Look here, Phil," said Dr. Dagley, as they turned out of James Street into Long Acre, "you are quite in earnest about wanting to be strong?"

"Why, of course," was the answer. "Every man with his full complement of senses must wish to be strong and healthy, and able to take his part in life."

"And yet many men won't be at the trouble of observing a few rules which would make them right and keep them right. Remember I can't cure you without your own consent. I shan't be always at



hand to see you are well wrapped up, to remind you to put on a warm overcoat, to close the window when you are lying beside it in a direct draught, to urge you not to stay out in the garden, though you find it so much pleasanter than the house. I am in sober earnest, remember. Draughts, chills, and exposure are the things you must guard against. You must not drive out in the teeth of a keen north-easter. Be careful, or——”

“I shan't get better, I suppose,” said the other lightly.

“Or you will get a great deal worse—you are in a critical state, my friend. If you wish to preserve your life it will be necessary for you to follow my directions implicitly.”

“So serious as that, eh?”

“Yes.”

They walked on in silence till they had crossed New Oxford Street and found themselves in Great Russell Street, opposite the British Museum. Then Mr. Manford said:

“I believe you can cure me, Claud; and I will do just what you tell me.”

“All right. It was better to speak plainly, that you might know the exact truth.”

“Much better; I did not understand before.”

“See you do not forget now.”

“I will not forget. And so—to return to a livelier theme—you went to Laleham last Tuesday.”

“I did, and was glad you had the sense to keep away.”

“Whole affair a lamentable *fiasco*, I suppose?”



“By no means; but it was the usual inevitable end-of-a-season picnic: Party made up of odds and ends—sort of Noah’s Ark surprise affair—every one in reckless spirits—military element tolerably strong—Bohemia fairly represented—the Misses Craden in great force—father looking worried.”

“So he is, poor devil. Somebody has left him five thousand pounds, and he does not know what to do with it—not enough to pay his lawful creditors even twopence in the pound, and too little for a great flare up; therefore, I imagine he will keep the wind-fall for pocket money, of which, naturally, he requires a good deal.”

“I wish somebody would leave me five thousand,” remarked Dr. Dagley.

“What would you do with it?”

“Make my fortune, lad.”

Mr. Manford laughed as he said: “I thought you were above all that sort of thing—that you were far too wise and matter of fact to wish for the unattainable.”

“It is a mighty gray sort of life that is never colored for a moment by fancy,” was the answer.

“True,” observed Mr. Manford, and they walked on silently to the bottom of the street.

“Miss Osberton was of the party, so Maud told me,” began Maud’s cousin after a pause.

“Yes, looking pretty in a green dress. She seemed a bit fagged and worn, though, I thought. Effect of too many parties, too much excitement, too much flattery, too much turning night into day, I suppose—anyhow, she knocked up easily. I should say she is not over-strong.”



“Very likely. Mother died young; aunt enjoys delicate health. Father hard as nails, I believe, regular city build—solid, rather than picturesque. Very good fellow, though, Baroness Questo tells me. Questo swears by him—lucky dive of his after the Baron. I wonder how many thousand pounds that little plunge has brought him first and last.”

“Did he take a header, then?”

“Yes. When quite a young man saved the Baron's life and made his own fortune in less time than I have been telling the story. By the bye, his one fair daughter has sent her admirer to the rightabout, so she's disengaged at present, if you feel any inclination to go in for her.”

“Thank you, I don't feel the smallest. But why has she proved so cruel? I thought you said all was settled.”

“So every one said. No person ever doubted the fact till we were told it was all off. Never going to marry anybody is the latest statement; going to live always with papa and the dear aunt, and devote herself to good works—so I hear—and so—I don't—believe.”

“And the gentleman?”

“He has always devoted himself to good works, but he resolutely refuses to join her mission to his. Such a pretty tangle; no quarrel, no offence, no misunderstanding; but just after having been looked upon as his promised wife for years she finds it was all a mistake, and that she can't be his wife at all.”

“Mistake his, of course, not hers. If you notice,



in such cases it is always the man who is in the wrong."

"His shoulders are not broad enough," sneeringly. "I feel sorry about the matter—had a higher opinion of Miss Osberton. Don't think she ought to have accepted the position if she felt it irksome. Of course Saughton is nothing to look at, but he has not grown less handsome with time; and though she is a rich man's daughter, where would she find a better husband? No man knows how wealthy he is, and he'll have the Wreedmere title and the Wreedmere estates. I don't wonder Baroness Questo loses herself when she talks of the matter."

"Oh! the Baroness feels the matter strongly, does she?" remarked Dr. Dagley, trying his way.

"She does," was the reply, "because—so my aunt says—she'd have secured Saughton for one of her own daughters had she supposed Miss Amabel—it is a very pretty name—meant to throw him over. But that's my aunt to a T. Trust her attributing a good motive to any one! When Mrs. Burt Craden found out how the land really lay she tried hard—Maud was my informant—to get Saughton to The Boltons. Mr. Burt Craden asked a useful friend to introduce him, and immediately spread his lure, baiting it with the picnic and—Miss Osberton. Mr. Saughton, however, declined, and so again, to quote Maud, the Cradens missed a great chance. 'We would, any of us,' she told me solemnly, 'have sprung if only he would have screamed "Jump!" and think of that mealy-faced Amabel coolly refusing him, and his money and his position and his prospective title, as



though she had scores of dozens of men to choose from.”

“No doubt she had.”

“No doubt she had not,” was the reply; “make no mistake about that, my friend. In the season, her first season especially, every girl has heaps of undesirable offers, but there are not really many good matches going. Miss Osberton, being an only daughter, has, I believe, had some fair offers, but none she cared to accept; and so the season has almost passed—young lady fidgety, aunt disappointed, Mr. Saughton dismissed with thanks, Baroness Questo virtuously indignant, father puzzled. Behold the position!”

“And who understands it?”

“No one. Baron Questo says there is some young man round the corner, but my aunt and the girls declare there is nothing in that. My own notion is she does not know what she wants, did not expect Mr. Saughton to take her at her word, and would like him back again. If pretty misses will quarrel with their bread and butter, however——”

“It strikes me very forcibly——”

“Yes?”

“That you have had a bit of a setting down from Miss Osberton yourself, Master Phil.”

“I? Nonsense; what on earth could have put such an idea into your mind?”

“When we last spoke on this subject the young lady was perfect, could do no wrong. There is no such eye-opener as a snub; and I think you see more clearly now than you did.”



“Why, it would be as rational for me to believe you had received a rebuff!” exclaimed Mr. Manford.

“No, I have said nothing for or against her: I am out of the running altogether. Come, Phil, don’t be ridiculous. If you did manage to offend her royal highness, what does it signify? Only daughters have a way of being touchy, and very likely she has been brought up to think a good deal of herself.”

“No, you are wrong; there is not any fault to be found with Miss Osberton except that the Craden girls picked out long ago—she has no heart, at least for men who love her; could not have served poor Saughton such a scurvy trick if she’d been like other women. He has been nurse, playfellow, slave to her all her life; and now that she is tired of the man, she flings him aside like an old glove. It is all nonsense pretending she did not know—every one knew. He was always at the house visiting them, staying with them, going about with them; and then to be treated in that way.”

“He was too much with them, evidently; no wonder she got tired.”

“But she had no right to get tired. Supposing it had been he?”

“It was not, you see; so there is no use in supposing.”

“Every one would have said he was a blackguard.”

“And rightly, because he ought to have known his own mind.”

“Do you mean to tell me a change of front is not just as bad in her case.”

“I do. To begin with, inconstancy is the privilege



of her sex; further, very likely she did not know her own mind, but went on accepting the position, either from weakness or ignorance, till she found it intolerable."

"It is very good of you to be her apologist; but I shall never think quite the same of her again."

"That is rather a hard saying. It seems to me it was well she found out when she did. Better late than never."

"I don't agree with you."

"Good Heavens, man! do you mean to say you'd have had her marry the fellow if she did not care for him."

"She ought to have cared for him."

"Evidently that is just where the difficulty comes in. However, we need not argue about the matter. It is not our affair, happily. The state of your health is of much more consequence to me, and to you also, I suppose, than the state of Miss Osberton's affections."

"Miss Osberton is nothing to me; only she need not have snapped my head off."

Dr. Dagley laughed.

"If people will venture into the lion's den—" he suggested.

"You are quite mistaken, as I told you before, and what I said was just nothing; nothing in the slightest degree impertinent, at all events. I could not be impertinent to any woman; you know that. But she misunderstood me, or had more than a slight pain in her temper, or something, for she flared up—my word, how she flared up!"



"Phil—Phil," said the doctor, reproachfully.

"I declare it was nothing. If a girl cannot stand a little chaff, she ought not to go to the Cradens'."

"There is something in that," remarked Dr. Dagley, as if struck by the brilliancy of Mr. Manford's idea, "but don't let us waste time talking about Miss Osberton now. I shall look you up the first thing in the morning, remember, so be prepared for me."

"I am not afraid," was the answer. "I know you will soon put me to rights again."

"Not so soon as you think, my friend; you have lost a lot of ground. I think I may be able to make a good job of you, but I shall have all my work cut out; and remember what I said just now: I can do nothing unless you help me."

"I'll be obedient as a whipped child."

"That is the house," said Dr. Dagley, pointing to a big family mansion, the ground and first floors of which were brilliantly illuminated. A few broughams and cabs were setting down, and many guests appeared to be entering the hall-door, from which a covered way stretched out to the carriage road.

"Quite a rush of one to the pit," commented the doctor. "I wonder if you will enjoy yourself at all."

"Trust me," answered Mr. Manford, as they passed into the wide hall, where a staid butler took their coats and hats, and asked:

"Will you have tea, gentlemen?"

Dr. Dagley shook his head, and he and his friend went straight up the fine staircase to those huge drawing-rooms where Mr. Hernidge, senior, held his court.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### AT MR. HERNIDGE'S.

As they ascended, the stir and talk of many people thoroughly enjoying themselves fell upon their ears. Hovering betwixt the front drawing-room door and the landing stood Mr. Hernidge, of Lincoln's Inn Fields, positively wreathed in smiles. No clerk who ever dreaded his frown—and as a business man he could be very stern—would have recognized him in a roomy dress-coat, which did not unduly confine the lines of his comfortable figure; in a white tie that, though neat, was not too severe; in a shirt the exercise of handshaking had ruffled a little; in a pair of gloves the fingers of which were too long and waggled in an absurd manner. He did not look one bit like a busy and astute lawyer as he stood at the top of the stairs, his face dotted over with kindly dimples, and a general airiness of deportment suggestive of “Sir Roger de Coverley,” an Irish jig, a four-some reel, or any other wild extravagance.

“How are you—how are you?” he said, greeting Dr. Dagley with quite an exuberance of welcome; “and I am glad to see you have brought your friend. How d’ye do, Mr. Manford? Know your name very well, though I’ve never had the pleasure of seeing you before. My father is looking out for you, doctor;



find him near the window. Yes, lots of people—lots of remarkable people. See that little woman?" in a confidential whisper. "Ah! she's a wonder; came all the way from Virginia to attend the—— Oh! how d'ye do, how d'ye do? Delighted I'm sure—and your wife too! Really this is kind. Dagley, would you just take Mrs. Brent to my father? I know he wants to speak to her so much. Thank you. Dr. Dagley, Mrs. Brent. You stop here, Manford; I shall want you presently."

"There is a fiction," said Dr. Dagley to his companion, as he elbowed a way to the chair occupied by Mr. Hernidge, senior, "that our kind friend does not much enjoy these social gatherings; yet one has but to look in his face and listen to his genial voice to——"

"Understand the poor man has to make believe a great deal," finished Mrs. Brent in so despondent a voice and with so sad a face that Dr. Dagley, who had been almost out of such society for nearly three years, scarcely knew what to say.

Society changes so much even in a twelvemonth that a man who has been thinking of something else for that period is apt to forget its shibboleth.

"I do not think he has to make believe at all," Dr. Dagley answered with great courage. "There can be no doubt but he does enjoy such gatherings thoroughly; so many clever friends are good enough to attend."

"It may be," she agreed pensively, "he is very adaptive," which reply so completely floored Dr. Dagley he could only press forward toward Mr.



Hernidge, wondering what on earth his companion meant.

They were now within about a couple of feet of Mr. Hernidge, who lay back in an easy-chair, skull-cap on head, looking very frail and white, at intervals feebly greeting such persons as came close enough to claim a welcome.

Evidently after a fashion he was enjoying himself, but after what a fashion! To Dr. Dagley's mind he was a grewsome spectacle: disease smiled knowingly over his head, death mowed beside his elbow.

Desperately the young doctor clove a way to the old man's chair. To do this he had to take advantage of every movement in the throng, to edge in dexterously and maintain a position when he had gained one. And all the time Mr. Hernidge lay back quite impassively, saying constantly, "Ah! how are you?" "so glad," "so delighted," "so pleased," which remarks meant something to those addressed, no doubt, but impressed outsiders with a hideous sense of unreality.

"I beg your pardon, sir," began the new arrival at last, taking a clawlike hand in his, "but your son sent me to you. He said you wished so much to speak to Mrs. Brent, who has kindly come here to-night. No doubt you have forgotten me. My name is Dagley—Claud Dagley—and I am very glad to see you are so much better—but, of course, I am no one."

"No one! why, you are the coming man, I am told."

Mr. Hernidge had a number of these stock phrases on hand, which, though in circulation for half a cen-



tury or thereabouts, he found still extremely useful. Even Dr. Dagley as he answered, "You have been misinformed, sir," felt gratified, while his fair companion determined to know more of him, and learn not merely in what direction he already distanced his fellows, but the particular mode in which he intended to leave them all eventually behind.

No glad light of recognition shone in Mr. Hernidge's eyes as Mrs. Brent asked tenderly after his health, and remarked on the beauty of the weather; rather, it seemed to Dr. Dagley that he was trying to remember the lady and not succeeding quite satisfactorily in his endeavor.

"Poor old chap—he forgets," thought the younger man, and then at that very moment Mr. Hernidge seemed to make a clutch at his memory and catch something, for he said:

"Well, and how's the new book going? Sold out, eh?"

"Not yet; it is only just published."

"Why, I thought it had been on every bookstall for a fortnight—surely some one told me so," and he looked reproachfully at Dr. Dagley, who immediately pleaded "not guilty" to having given such erroneous information.

"It is not likely ever to be on the bookstalls," said the lady; "it is far too matter of fact."

"Why, that is the very thing the public like nowadays; nothing can be too matter of fact so long as it is a little improper. Am I not right, Dagley?"

Dagley answered that he thought it very likely, but he did not know.



“Of course not—fathoms deep in science. And what is the name of this wonderful book?”

“‘Mystic Nine,’” answered its author.

“Good, good,” said Mr. Hernidge, rubbing his hands; “and what do you make of it?”

“The sub-title explains my attempt,” was the reply—“‘Or, Some Curious Properties of Figures.’”

The poor old man, looking utterly bewildered, glanced toward Dr. Dagley for help, but that gentleman could give him none.

He knew they had somehow got into a “very tight place,” but the way out was to him a mystery.

“Some figures have very curious properties, I believe,” he hazarded politely.

“Oh! very; very, indeed,” declared Mr. Hernidge. “And so, dear lady, you have——”

What he was about to add must forever remain lost, for just as he was mentally groping for some appropriate and complimentary remark a pretty woman, gliding up from behind, laid her hand on the skullcap, and said in a voice which matched her face:

“Ah, ha! is this how we go on when I am not here to see after you? ‘When the cat’s away the mice do play.’ What have you to say in defence?” and she actually kissed the old man’s cheek and took his hand and fondled it, exclaiming as she did so:

“What! don’t you remember me? You don’t mean to say you have forgotten Lila—your own Lila?”

“Are you Lila?” asked Mr. Hernidge, beginning to tremble violently, and trying in vain to turn round



so as to catch sight of the speaker. "Why, I thought—I heard——"

"Never mind what you thought or heard, either. Here I am back again—just the same Lila you loved in youth—at all events five years ago, when we were both children. Ah! those were pleasant days, weren't they? Did you get my novel? No! Then I will ask the publisher to have every one of his clerks hung, drawn, and quartered. It's a lovely book and going like an express train; you'd better keep it under lock and key, however—it's not exactly milk for babes, so Mrs. Grundy says. Still Mrs. Grundy and all her relations read it on the sly—people declare there is only one person in London who has not read it. Guess who that is."

"I have not read it," answered the old man, with a feeble chuckle.

"But you will; you are just dying to do so. Who is the one person? Come, guess."

"Can't. Tell me."

"My husband. There—what do you think of that?"

"Mr. ——? Mr. ——?"

"Trent," supplied the vivacious little lady, "but he is only Charlie, remember. No, I did not bring him to-night, for he is frightfully lazy and hates big parties of all sorts; but if you will ask us prettily for dinner in a quiet kind of way he shall come and tell you everything about Africa and the south pole and Japan and Central Asia or any other out-of-the-way place you may desire information concerning."

"Has your husband been a great traveller, then?" asked Mrs. Brent, with a sweet smile.



Mrs. Trent looked at the speaker and did not smile. "Yes," she answered, and said no more.

The incident somehow reminded Dr. Dagley of swordsmen measuring each his opponent's strength and skill.

"Ten to one on Lila," he thought; and even as he thought he caught an expression on Mrs. Brent's face as though she felt she had done her duty toward Mr. Hernidge.

Quietly, therefore, they retired unnoticed except by Mrs. Trent, who followed their retreat with an enigmatical glance.

"I never saw anything so positively indecent," exclaimed Mrs. Brent ere they were well out of earshot. "Fancy her kissing that dreadful old man!"

Now, Dr. Dagley, being of the worser sex, had not considered Mrs. Trent's proceedings so very reprehensible; on the contrary, her manner to Mr. Hernidge seemed to him rather charming, therefore he answered: "It surely was better to kiss an old man than a young one."

"I call the whole scene disgusting," was the decided reply. "And so that is Mrs. Trent. She might well tell him to keep her book locked up. There was a time when it would have been burned by the common hangman."

"Ah! there were dreadful things done in those good old days. Books were burned, and scolds ducked and——"

"Excuse me, but I see a friend. Thank you so much for giving up your time to me. By the bye,



what was it you told Mr. Hernidge you were writing?"

"Prescriptions," answered Dr. Dagley mendaciously, for indeed no medical man ever wrote fewer, "all day long."

"But that is impossible."

"It may seem so to you, but——"

At that critical juncture the ill-assorted pair were separated by a couple who, intent on their own conversation, swept Dr. Dagley out of the way; and indeed he did not feel sorry to part company with irascible Mystic Nine, who he afterward discovered was wife to a gentleman Mr. Hernidge, junior, desired to propitiate exceedingly.

"I tell you what, sir," strenuously observed one of the men who had so unceremoniously usurped his few inches of floor space, "the burning question next session will be neither Home Rule nor Disestablishment, but Sewage."

"Can we have strayed into Colney Hatch by mistake?" said the amazed listener to Mr. Manford, who through some fortunate chance at the moment came close beside him.

"Oh, that's nothing to what I have been hearing," answered the other merrily "Every fad in London has its representative in these rooms to-night. Every one is talking, and no one listening. Further back," and with a movement of his hand he indicated the inner sanctuary, "there are lectures, absolute lectures, going on, to which no human being is paying the smallest heed. Never was at such a gathering before! It is perfectly delightful."



"Let us keep near the landing; we shall be cooler there, at all events," said Dr. Dagley, irate as usual with everything and everybody.

"Wonderful party, isn't it?" said Mr. Hernidge, junior, in the best spirits.

"Most remarkable," replied Dr. Dagley.

Just then, by the worst of all possible luck, there surged up close against Dr. Dagley an anti-vivisectionist group, chief among which was an antique lady, adorned with short sausage curls and spectacles of an old-fashioned pattern. She was strong against the new medical religion, and, it may be, had right on her side; but unfortunately it chanced that the text she elected to preach on referred to certain enormities which were stated by those behind the scenes to have no foundation in fact.

"May I ask whether you have ever been present at a vivisection?" asked Dr. Claud Dagley when the lady paused.

"I—God forbid!" she answered, amazed at his hardihood.

"Then why do you talk about things concerning which you know nothing?" he inquired with the simple directness of a counsel cross-examining, and for the moment there ensued a dead silence.



## CHAPTER XXXI.

### DR. DAGLEY TALKS TOO MUCH.

“I HAVE heard quite sufficient about their awful brutalities,” said the lady, ruffling up all her conversational feathers, as if anxious to fly at the total stranger, whose question had certainly not erred on the side of courtesy.

“Hearsay evidence is inadmissible,” he replied.

“I believe it, at any rate.”

“And I utterly disbelieve it. Further, as a member of the medical profession, I cannot remain silent when that profession is being libelled. Do you suppose a man has two natures—that he can be tender to women and children, spend himself in trying to serve his fellow-men, and yet delight in subjecting dumb brutes to barbarous tortures?”

“Yes, that is exactly what I not merely suppose, but know.”

“How do you know, when you have never been present at a vivisection?”

“I am acquainted with many persons who have.”

“I wish it were possible to bring the whole question into the court, and trace these vile slanders to their source.”

“They have their source, sir, in the callousness of scientific men, who think it nothing that millions of



animals should suffer excruciating agonies if only they, the experimenters, can obtain the delight of a novel experience."

"But you must remember animals do not feel pain as we do," put in a youth with an abnormally long neck, which he carried after the fashion of a gander when about to hiss, and which looked as though it were fastened to his body by a white cravat.

"That also is said, I am aware," replied the lady, with a withering sneer.

"Ah! but it is quite true," persisted the youth, taking a step after his fair opponent as she moved away. "Look at—a—a couple of dogs, for instance, how they will worry each other, and——" from a distance came the sound of his eloquence calmly rolling on.

"You vivisect, I conclude," said a quiet-looking man, who had listened with some show of interest to the short passage of arms between the two partisans, and might have been anybody or nobody.

"No. I have never vivisected, and I do not think I ever shall," answered Dr. Dagley.

"I beg your pardon. I imagined from the position you took up——"

"Solely as an act of justice. I do not consider such statements should be allowed to pass uncontradicted."

"Certainly not, if false."

"They are false—just a cry got up by foolish old women of both sexes; and the curious thing, if you think of it, is that it is only the element of mystery,



or supposed mystery, attaching to the system which has occasioned such an outcry. There are acts of open cruelty committed every hour—every minute almost—that scarcely extract even a passing protest, yet honorable and kindly gentlemen are branded as fiends because they humanely conduct a few experiments calculated, as they imagine, to benefit the whole human race.”

“As they imagine! Are you, then, of a different opinion?”

“I do not think vivisection has proved of much benefit, I confess. I am one of a very small minority, but my belief is that if we vivisected a few hundred or thousand men we should add practically nothing to our knowledge of the human body; the fact is, we are no match for Nature. We are almost as ignorant as we were five thousand years ago; we fancy we have circumvented disease with the modern resources of civilization, whereas Nature has always a card up her sleeve which she plays when we are least prepared for it. Look at diphtheria, for instance, that is a plague of our own vaunted century; eczema, too, in its way, is wellnigh as great a curse as leprosy was, and we can't cure it. If ever a man makes any useful discovery nowadays, it is only because Nature herself lifts the curtain for a moment and gives him a glimpse of the hitherto unknown, which he sometimes is able to grasp before the curtain falls again. In my poor way I feel I can gain more information by comparing and pursuing symptoms than it would be possible to gain from any number of vivisections.”



“But surely in surgery——”

“All the mechanical arts have made enormous progress during this century, and surgery, as a matter of course, has not lagged behind. It is medicine that limps. About disease we still know practically nothing; the more I read and hear the more I realize my own ignorance; the very drugs I prescribe were probably prescribed by some one else thousands of years ago!”

The listener stood silent. Such talk struck him as most unsatisfactory. He was one of those men who, knowing very little actually concerning modern discoveries and inventions, liked, nevertheless, to hear all such subjects referred to reverently. For example it charmed him in a well-filled railway carriage to see a gold-spectacled fellow-traveller look over *The Times* and say:

“Have you read this article, sir, on the subject of aerial navigation? Always knew we would manage it, and now the thing seems good as accomplished. Wonderful times these we are living in! When the history of our good Queen's reign comes to be written it will be something unique.”

Whereupon there ensued a series of wise looks, and nods, and sage remarks, and a general agreement of opinion that Stephenson began it all, or, at least, the Marquis of Worcester and his tea-kettle, and that invention was going on so fast no one could tell where it would stop; and thus they talked till the train stopped, when they seized their newspapers and went off as fast as they could to the buying and selling, the making and losing, which has been England's



business for many more prosaic years than her children care to count.

This, in the quiet gentleman's opinion, was the proper point of view from which to regard modern discovery; to talk of things having been understood thousand of years before seemed to him folly, if not blasphemy. The age they lived in might not know quite everything, but it very soon would. Besides, this flippant young man forgot many matters: forgot how smallpox had been stamped out, and how other diseases were on the fair road to extermination. Diphtheria would no doubt go by the board as hydrophobia and consumption were going. All this he ventured to hint, only to be at once bowled over.

"Smallpox," said Dr. Dagley, "was one of the secrets I had in my mind when I spoke of Nature drawing aside her curtain for a moment. A man of intelligence chanced to see Nature at work, and drew his own conclusions. As for Pasteur, Nature has nothing to do with his system; and I, for one, have no faith in it. We don't know, and he does not know, that the patients he professes to cure ever had hydrophobia. If a dog went mad in the old days and bit a hundred people, we have no statistics to prove how many of that number died. Very few, I suspect. We are only groping. New remedies amuse for a while, but they have no root, and so they wither away; it is only what we get from Nature that can live."

"But each year people grow stronger, healthier, more capable."

"Each year men sicken and die—the young, the old,



the middle-aged. Ever since death came into the world successive generations have been trying to cheat it, with what result our churchyards and cemeteries tell. No, let us do what we will, Nature but laughs at us. Nature is cleverer than we are, and, as I said before, has always an unsuspected card up her sleeve with which to trump our best ace."

"I presume that our greatest enjoyment in heaven—" broke in the long-necked young gentleman who, having apparently got the worst of that argument concerning animal insensibility to pain, had made his way back and stood listening to some of Dr. Dagley's opinions. It was impossible to remain motionless among such a throng, and so the doctor and his unknown auditor were being gradually swayed toward Mr. Hernidge's armchair.

"I presume that our greatest enjoyment in heaven," repeated the youth, "will be gaining a perfect apprehension of those things we are only able to understand dimly here: to climb from peak to peak of knowledge till we at last gain the summit of some mighty crag, from which we can gaze down on the whole of creation and the wonders thereof."

"I cannot say, I am sure," answered Dr. Dagley. "I have never been in the next world."

"And if he had," added a saturnine-looking individual, "no traveller returns, you know."

"I only hope they won't have any barrel-organs there," said Mr. Hernidge, senior, suddenly awaking from a mild doze and addressing his observation to no one in particular.



Poor old man, he had mistaken the babbling of his guests for the awful strains of that diabolical instrument so dear to the hearts of London children.

There was a laugh at this remark, which brought Mr. Manford back once more to his friend's side, because, so he thought, "wherever Claud is there seems to be something stirring," whereas Claud had nothing to do with the brilliant joke which proved irresistible to those who most likely could not have understood a better one.

Mr. Hernidge had never, even in his palmiest days, given those whom he kindly hall-marked as "Bloomsbury Silver and Gold" much to eat or drink. He did not exactly go the length of another popular entertainer of a more remote period, who tried to fatten fashionable London on "water ices and iced water," an elegant, though lowering, diet; but he certainly always was averse to feeding his men, most of whom, therefore, belonged to the low-living and high-thinking class of humanity. Perhaps this might be the reason why, as that evening grew old, people, instead of becoming more, became less talkative; why lecturers, at first vigorous, stinted their eloquence; why inventors bated a little of their enthusiasm concerning patents which were to revolutionize the world; why it dawned upon many unappreciated geniuses, as the witching hour drew nigh, that Mr. Hernidge belonged to a previous generation—which idea will, alas! be revived in connection with future hosts in days still to come. Probably this was the cause why many a man who had nowhere better to go drew near his host's chair and listened, amused, puzzled, or pro-



voked to Dr. Dagley's unconventional notions and Dr. Dagley's unmixed pessimism.

He was in immense force that night. Egged on by the long-necked youth, who, having few opinions of his own, was anxious to hear the opinions of every one else, he advanced the most extraordinary and contradictory doctrines, which were chiefly remarkable for the fault they found with existing institutions.

Mrs. Trent, who had never moved her position, gave the speaker a "hand" on the few occasions when he seemed to be in danger of flagging. Her "Do you really, now?" "Well, that is marvellous!" "What you state is quite new to me!" "Do you hear, Mr. Hernidge?" appeared to Dr. Dagley inspiring as the wildest applause.

Even the old host's "Dagley's a funny fellow, my dear; you must not attach too much importance to anything he says unless you give him a good fee. He keeps his best wisdom for the consulting-room," acted as a spur.

It is difficult to get drunk on water, but Dr. Dagley did not need even that mild stimulant. An audience and the sound of his own voice always proved a more powerful intoxicant than wine, and that night he succeeded effectually in bewildering some of his hearers and repelling others.

As for Mrs. Trent, she regarded him with delighted curiosity. "Oh! you will come and see me, I hope," was her eager invitation. "Always at home on Wednesday and Sunday afternoons. Come some Sunday; my husband will be so charmed to make your acquaintance. Our address? how very stupid! can



any one lend me a pencil?" and when half a dozen were produced she immediately, as Tom Bayford would have said, "planked down" where she lived and when she was to be found, and handed over her card with a sweet "You won't forget, will you?"

After that she looked at Mr. Hernidge, and said with a significant glance toward Dr. Dagley, which his medical intelligence immediately understood:

"Now I must really be going, or we shall have Charlie here in a fine frenzy. Expect me on Saturday for luncheon, for such a talk, all by ourselves."

It was a clever little adieu, and Dr. Dagley admired her tact.

The sound of his own voice had not so utterly deafened him but that he could hear the warning underlying her gay words; therefore he took his leave, and by doing so broke up the ever-increasing circle.

"I think your father is getting tired," he said to Mr. Hernidge, junior, as he left the room.

"How are you? getting all right?" asked the man who might have been anybody, shaking Mr. Manford's hand at the same moment.

"Shall be all right very shortly, I hope," answered Mr. Manford as he followed Dr. Dagley.

"Who is your friend?" said the latter while they were descending the stairs.

"Don't you know that is Mr. Osberton, the fair Amabel's rich father?"

"Oh!" After which exclamation Dr. Dagley held his peace.

Meanwhile, just within the drawing-room door, this short conversation was taking place:



“What is the name of that handsome young doctor who has just gone off with Mr. Manford?”

“Dagley,” answered the younger Mr. Hernidge. “Very handsome, isn’t he, and clever too? He’ll make all the big wigs in his profession sit up after a while.”

“Umph! perhaps,” said Mr. Osberton.

“No perhaps at all,” returned the lawyer, who on such festive occasions was strictly non-professional in his utterances. “He is a tremendously clever fellow.”

“He may be,” was the incredulous reply; “but, if so, it is a great pity he talks so much nonsense. I never thought to hear any sane man say Christians were hypocrites because they cling to life, or any doctor state death ought to be regarded as a blessing rather than a curse.”

“That is Dagley all over,” was the answer. “He is great in opposition. If you had said death was a blessing, he would at once have taken up the other side of the argument.”

“What a pleasant person!”

“Well, you see, we are all the sport of circumstance, and circumstance has been greatly against him. Talk of the football of Fortune, why ever since I knew the young man Fortune has been kicking him from post to pillar, and yet, still, you see, he comes up smiling.”

“Hardly smiling,” objected Mr. Osberton.

“With a brave face, at all events,” amended Mr. Hernidge.

“He may be brave enough, but some friend ought to tell him Fortune cannot be conquered by foolish talk.”



“I often think of a remark my dear father made about Dagley long ago. It is quite as true to-day as it was then. ‘Ah! poor fellow,’ he said, after he had been dining here one evening, ‘the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge.’”

“I do not know what Dr. Dagley’s fathers may have eaten,” answered Mr. Osberton, quite unmoved even by this biblical quotation; “but from his talk I should be disposed to think he had been devouring sour grapes by the ton!”

All unconscious of Mr. Osberton’s censorious criticism, Dr. Dagley was meanwhile pacing the moonlit streets with his friend.

“Let us go back through Soho,” said Mr. Manford, so through Soho they walked. When they turned from the Square into Firth Street the sound of singing, not very strong, not very true, was borne to their ears.

As they advanced the sound came nearer, and at last they met the woman—for it was a woman—walking slowly up the middle of the horse road.

“For luve will venture in where it darena’ weel be seen,” she sang.

Though her voice was cracked, and she no longer young or beautiful, there seemed something strangely pathetic in the strains of that old song, heard after midnight in a deserted street, where the moon was playing at hide and seek among the silent houses.

“Poor soul!” said Mr. Manford, as he fumbled for half a crown.

“She’s beyond any help of ours,” remarked Dr.



Dagley; but it is only fair to add he gave his mite as well.

He walked home from Northumberland Avenue considering the text of a letter he meant to write on his return to Chesterton Road.

It was to Amabel Osberton, and about two o'clock in the morning he went out and posted that letter, thus figuratively "burning his ships" behind him.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### A SECRET COURTSHIP.

THE season was over. Scarcely a creature could have been found in London, save a few millions of moilers and toilers—people, of course, not worth taking into account, though Society, when “in town,” might have found itself at fault without some of them.

It had been duly announced in the fashionable papers that Baron and Baroness Questo were in Norway, and that many other gentlemen and ladies who have nothing to do with this story had taken flight to land more or less remote, but no paper, whether Society or otherwise, thought it worth while to announce the modest retirement of Mr. Osberton and family to The Grange, Oxon, or mention the fact that Mr. Saughton was visiting Switzerland. Mr. Saughton was the most retiring of men, a man who only desired to take his pleasure or his sorrow in quietness; and, indeed, the August of that year found him most deeply grieved. He could not get over his disappointment—change of place could not change the current of his thoughts, which flowed darkly on, bearing the image of Amabel through weary days and sad, sleepless nights with it.

He knew—none better—that he had been living



for years in a fool's paradise, that the girl never loved him, that her fondness—he felt assured she was fond once—was merely that of a sister for brother, a friend for friend, a man for a leal and true comrade—that was all. But when did knowledge come to her? Not at The Grange, certainly not in the fairy dell, not among the woods of Chasemead. Wherever, or however, or whenever she learnt to discriminate between love and its many counterfeits, it certainly was not in the country. There to the last she had been his; that is, he believed she would there, at any minute, have accepted him for a husband—ignorantly.

Not so after her presentation. He did not know the precise minute or locality or association when she ate of the fruit of the tree, but he did know surely, because love taught him, that she had so eaten, and learnt—shall we say?—good from evil.

It was evil rather than good our first mother learnt, and ever since her children have been conning the same bitter lesson.

Mr. Saughton could not tell whether gossip—which is really our world's almost greatest curse—or some love fancy had changed his darling. He only knew she was utterly changed, and that sufficed. Baroness Questo said one thing, Mr. Osberton another. He could not tell which theory might be right. The only terrible truth he realized was that Amabel, his darling, was gone, and another quite changed Amabel had said she could never be the comfort of his life.

This was the reason why no hills or plains, no fair lake or rushing river, filled his empty heart. He



was like a watch which has lost its mainspring—everything seemed at a standstill.

Well, it was better so; it was far, far better he should suffer than that she should have married him, and found out too late what a mistake she had made. He knew such things happened, but not till he brought the shame and the sorrow and the sin and the suffering home to Amabel did he understand fully what terrible misery one step made in error might involve.

No; the present grief was hard enough to bear, but he could thank God who had in His mercy spared Amabel the bitter agony of awaking to the knowledge she had made that one mistake which may never be repaired. When he considered what might have been his darling's fate, he felt for the time being almost comforted; but then the full tide of misery again rushed in upon his desolate heart, where all the promise and beauty of life had been killed by a few words sweetly spoken.

If he were wretched, however, Amabel was not—quite the contrary. She had never been so happy before in all her young life.

It was an enchanted land she seemed walking through, a land illuminated by the sparkling lights of a first love.

“There's nothing in the world,” we are assured, “so sweet as love's young dream.”

Precisely, and there is probably nothing in the world so unpleasant as awaking from that dream.

For Amabel that dreary awakening had all to come. Day after day, and week after week, she still walked on through that enchanted dreamland, where all the



waters were stolen, foolishly, ridiculously, wickedly happy.

She never thought of to-morrow—of the long bill Fate was drawing upon her, and which she would *nolens volens* have to meet some day. She never thought of father or aunt, save as dreadful difficulties which must be faced in the vague future, or of dear Edward Saughton, who might, perhaps, make things easier for her, except casually.

I have no excuse to offer for my poor heroine. It seems to me there can be no excuse, save that men and women, just because they are men and women, lie, and cheat, and thief.

Deceiving, to my mind, is a greater lie than any ever spoken, and the poor motherless and practically friendless girl—for she had discharged the best friend woman ever possessed—continued through all that autumn cheating those near and dear to her.

More than happily she received and answered the love letters of a man who never really cared for her, but thought, as she was fond of him, he would seize the chance which offered.

With her father's kiss still warm on her cheek, and the soft touch of her aunt's hand still lingering on her neck, she "flew"—the word is no exaggeration—to meet her lover.

She had been gently nurtured, she had been tended delicately, she had from her youth upward been shielded by all those conventionalities which ought to keep a girl safe; and yet, at the beck of a man who six months previously was an utter stranger, she forgot the proprieties of her station, and went,



as Baron Questo would have said, "like cook, to an appointment round the corner."

A weak woman is generally a foolish one; and poor Amabel, though a charming and at times strong-willed enough little body, was really quite as feeble as men mistakenly like to believe all the women they love must be.

At all events she passed into the Chasemead woods and paced the fairy dell, not alone, just as the silliest of her sex might have done.

It was a case indeed of—

"Though father and mother and all should go mad,  
Oh! whistle and I'll come to you, my lad."

Claud Dagley had no need to whistle very loud or very long; she had loved him from the first day, though she did not on that first day, or till long after, recognize the malady.

How should she, poor child? Ah, me!

And there was no one to save her from herself.

She knew the hours when Chasemead woods were utterly deserted; in the course of their rambles they never met man, woman, or child. Baroness Questo was absent, having after her return from Norway gone on a round of country-house visits. Miss Loveland was thoroughly enjoying bad health, which necessitated late rising, breakfast in her dressing-room, and various other indulgences she never would have been permitted to partake of in peace had the mistress of Chasemead chanced to be at home.

Baroness Questo was a true friend, but she had a nasty knack of touching the sore spot, and her re-



marks were apt to make invalidism a little uncomfortable, therefore Miss Loveland did not mourn her absence unduly. She was really ill; the season had tired her; she felt vexed that Amabel was still disengaged; and little as she knew about business she could not avoid understanding that South American affairs were in an unsatisfactory condition, and seeing that Mr. Osberton came often back from the city in a depressed state of mind, and was not quite so ready to write checks as usual.

In fact, he had once or twice grumbled when the season's results were placed before him financially, and Miss Loveland did not like the experience.

For all these reasons, and others not necessary to mention, Amabel had that autumn a good deal of time at her own disposal. And she employed it as has been stated.

To do Dr. Dagley justice, it was not he who suggested their meetings should be kept secret—rather, he wished Amabel had seen her way to take him to The Grange, instead of which Amabel was evidently reluctant to do anything of the kind.

For her the present was enough—the stolen meetings once in a week or ten days, the letters she treasured and read and reread, and answered at great length, and managed to post herself.

What did she think the end was going to be? Dr. Dagley put it to her one day; but finding she had no thought whatever excepting how exceedingly sweet the stolen waters were, retired from the conversation discomfited.

He had fully believed Amabel needed only to press



the point in order to gain it, but he failed to convince her of this; instead she grew so agitated, and clung to him in such an access of despair, that he began to feel sore misgivings concerning a few thousands he was longing to handle.

His programme had been an exceedingly simple one. He could easily have made some pretext for calling. With the help of Mrs. Burt Craden he felt he might have done so without difficulty, and in this view Amabel seemed at one time to agree; but now she raised objections, and finally he learned, to his chagrin, that Miss Loveland was actually unaware her niece had met him at The Boltons.

“Do you really mean to say you never told your aunt we danced together at that Saturday party?”

“No, I never told her,” was the reluctant answer.

“Nor that we met the next afternoon?”

Amabel shook her head.

“Nor that we were both at that picnic?”

“No. Mrs. Burt Craden was vexed with her daughters for leaving me, and thought my aunt might be offended if she knew, so I said nothing about the matter.”

Dr. Dagley bit his lip; naturally he concluded Amabel must have mentioned the fact of his presence at the various festivities mentioned. He could not understand a girl not talking, in fact; and now he was face to face with the certainty that a golden opportunity had been missed, that such a chance might not again present itself, and that the stars were once more fighting against him.

“I am sorry,” he said, after a moment’s pause.



“The only course I can now adopt is to go direct to your father—that is what I ought to have done at the first.”

It was then Amabel turned to him in a very passion of terror and implored him not to do anything of the kind. “Some day I will tell him myself. I will go down on my knees and he won't refuse me—I know he can't; but I must choose my own time. If you went to him they would take me away, and I should never see you again—never, never, never.”

“My dear child,” replied her lover, “these are not the days in which people lock their daughters up or send them into convents. No one can separate us if only you keep true.”

“They would,” she persisted, sobbing as if her heart were breaking. “I know they would, and we'd never see each other again, and I should *die*.”

Those desired thousands seemed at that moment to have gone the way all the other hopeful thousands had already vanished. If this were the fashion in which Mr. Osberton seemed likely to take the news of his daughter's attachment for a man so handsome, a young doctor, of good family, and possessed of fine abilities, what on earth was that young doctor to do? It seemed outrageous, and he would have liked to tell Amabel so. Just then, however, he had to soothe her agony of grief, and he was saying something comforting, when it occurred to him there might be a better plan than risking rejection and those terrible consequences Amabel had hinted at not obscurely.

“If the matter were past recall?” he suggested, and then waited to see how she received his vague idea.



She knew instantly what he meant—so instantly that he guessed the same notion had occurred to her.

“Oh! then, of course, they could not do anything, could they?”

There was one thing Dr. Dagley thought her father could do, namely, cut her off with a shilling; yet it did not strike him that Mr. Osberton would proceed to such extremities.

There might be a fearful row; but he did not believe the rich man could leave his only daughter long out in the cold.

Anyhow, he decided to consider what had best be done, and addressed himself to the task of consolation with considerable success.

“You would rather, really, darling, that I did not go to your father just at present?”

She put up her fair, soft hand and covered his mouth. “Please don’t,” she entreated. “Please don’t.”

“That would be the straightforward course,” he said, feeling, however, that course did not look particularly pleasant.

“Yes, but we should be separated—forever,” and at the mere phantom of that sorrow she began to cry again.

She had something in her mind she did not tell her dear Claud—something that if she had told might have spared her a good deal of suffering.

It happened one evening at dinner, just before the family left Queen’s Gate, that Mr. Osberton said:

“Baron Questo tells me Mrs. Burt Craden’s nephew has thrown over Dr. Kassiner and gone to a new medical man, who is going to do wonders for him.”



“I am sure I hope he will. I thought that poor young Manford looked extremely delicate when I saw him last. Mrs. Craden then spoke as if they were disappointed with the result of Dr. Kassiner's treatment.”

“They will be more disappointed, I fancy, with the result of the new man's treatment. A more self-satisfied, self-opinionated, disagreeable fellow it would be difficult to imagine.”

“You know him, then?”

“Well, I met him at old Mr. Hernidge's last gathering, and heard him discoursing as I never expected to hear any sane man talk. According to him nothing is right—in his opinion, I should say, nothing has been right since the creation—and was not right then. Science is useless, because it is always going on making some fresh discovery. Knowledge is useless, because we are only travelling round in a circle and finding out in the present year of grace what was probably stale news to Isaac when he went wooing Leah. I quote the gentleman's own expression. He does not believe, evidently, in any one—unless it may be himself.”

“Do you not think there are many persons of the same mind in this *fin-de-siècle* period?”

“I should hope not many. It seems such a pity any one should be so great an unbeliever in his fellow-men. No matter what topic was started, he brought the conversation back to the uselessness of everything. ‘The wisdom of to-day,’ he said, ‘is the folly of to-morrow,’ and every one looked as if he had stated some brilliant and original fact. You'll know who he is,



Dulce. His father was Colonel Claud Dagley, the man that plunged so frightfully and let the Baron in for a whole lot of money. Don't you remember he behaved in such a dishonorable manner that his father, who was the last of the entail, willed Dagley Park away from him?"

Miss Loveland did not look at Amabel; Amabel did not look at her aunt.

It had been quite understood between them that the Dagley-Vink incident was not to be mentioned to Mr. Osberton.

A man's peace is much to him; but if that peace is only to be insured at the price of eternal concealment, it can scarcely be considered as worth having.

"I remember Colonel Dagley very well indeed," answered Miss Loveland, with perfect calmness. "She did not turn a hair," said Berriss, who was in attendance, when he subsequently talked the matter over with Mrs. Graham. "She is thoroughbred, anyhow, she is." At that moment she understood for the first time why the name had seemed so perfectly familiar to her on that evil day when Mrs. Vink was carried into the library of Mr. Osberton's house in Queen's Gate. "He was an exceedingly pleasant man, and made a low match and offended all his relations. And so his son is a doctor, is he?"

"Yes, it would seem that he is," answered Mr. Osberton, "and one I should certainly prefer *not* to consult under any circumstances."

That was why Amabel thought it might be well for her handsome young lover not to ask for her hand in marriage just then; but she failed to tell him so.



## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### EDWARD SAUGHTON LEARNS THE TRUTH.

NOT a swallow had returned to England, nevertheless fashionable London was, after many months, fluttering back, first by twos and threes, and then by half-dozens and dozens, to the familiar haunts.

To those who are "out of it" the law which governs the periodical coming and going of great folks seems very strange indeed, but people behind the scenes understand perfectly why such and such houses are at a particular time of the year given over to caretakers, and why at a different period spotless doorsteps are as much in evidence as decorous butlers.

As was natural, Baron Questo and Mr. Osberton were among the first to return.

City men are never great admirers of a fashion which involves rising before the sun and returning home in the clouds of night, and that season many a city man vowed, and indeed swore, he would make some change before next winter; that for nobody living would he continue to get up in the dark and shave by candlelight.

"Formerly there was some comfort in life for business people," declared Mr. Osberton, "but there is none now," and Baron Questo's utterances were to the same effect.



Baroness Questo was a wise woman, therefore she sympathized with her husband. Miss Loveland was a dependent woman, therefore she heard in silence. She did not much care for London—she never felt quite well there; but if her brother-in-law chose to let The Grange and take up his abode permanently in Queen's Gate, she felt he must do as he thought fit.

East of Temple Bar things were in a very unsatisfactory state: money was tight, discounts difficult, bankers looked askance at bills, one great failure had come like a clap of thunder to remind the tract of country which may be called London's golden heart that storms might rage even there, and bring terror and destruction with them.

Many big firms had been overspeculating and toppled down, bringing lesser houses with them. Business men's hearts were failing them for fear; the old year had ended badly, and the new did not seem inclined to promise any great amount of happiness. It was a weary time—quiet hearts were the exception, and bad pains and tempers the rule. Small wonder that Baron Questo and Mr. Osberton looked grave when they met and shook their heads ominously! No one could tell who would "go" next—misfortune seemed spreading like an epidemic and to be catching as some plague.

Economy was the order of the day, but economy came a little too late.

It is not of much use locking the stable door when the steed is stolen, and in many cases February of that disastrous year proved there was little left to lock up.



"I wish I had taken Congleton's offer for The Grange three years ago," said Mr. Osberton one day, when he and the Baron had been talking very seriously.

"Just as well you did not, perhaps," was the reply. "The Grange is yours still, and the purchase money might have made itself wings."

"True," rejoined Mr. Osberton, gloomily.

"Saughton is in town," observed the Baron, apparently *apropos* of nothing. "That was a pity, if you like."

Mr. Osberton spoke no word, though he was of a similar opinion.

"My wife thinks she is sorry now."

Whatever Mr. Osberton may have thought, he kept silence.

"I have always believed, however, there was some one else."

"You are wrong. If there had been any one else, Dulce would have known."

"That does not follow as a necessary consequence. Whatever may be the cause, however, she certainly has not followed up her first success. Why, the day she was presented I'd have backed her as first favorite of the season; and now——"

The Baron did not finish his sentence, but the impression he left on Mr. Osberton's mind was that in the matrimonial race Amabel might be considered as "nowhere."

"I wish she had never been presented," he said. "I know the Baroness says it is the correct thing, but somehow I feel it has been her ruin. She is not



a bit like the dear girl she used to be. To use a common expression, she is always 'either up in the attic or down in the cellar.'"

"And which part of the house does she live most in?"

"Well, I am not much at home, you see; but Dulce says that ever since she was at The Priory, time the Craden bazaar came off, she has been in bad spirits—dull, listless, and languid. Her aunt is quite uneasy about her; just as if there were not trouble enough——" At which point Mr. Osberton broke off. Perhaps he had said more than he intended; perhaps there was so much on his mind he found some difficulty in expressing himself.

The Baron did not speak for a moment, then: "Look here, Osberton," he remarked, "you had better stop that Burt Craden intimacy. It will do Amabel no good; they have all sorts and sizes at their house—some decent enough, but more who are fishy. The girls are fast even for these fast times. Craden himself—well, you know what he is; in fact, just put your foot down and say you won't have your daughter mixed up with such a set. Dulce ought to have had more sense than even to let her go to The Boltons—but then, as my wife truly says, 'Dulce always was a goose.'"

"It is a curious coincidence," said Mr. Osberton, "that when the Cradens came back last week I told Dulce I did not consider Amabel ought to be so much with them; and then she informed me my daughter seemed to have taken some dislike to the family—whether they in any way offended the girl



when in Yorkshire, Dulce did not know—only one thing is certain, that the intimacy is practically at an end.”

“Ai—Ai—Ai!” exclaimed the Baron, softly thinking to himself: “There is a man in the business somewhere; there has been from the first. I must get my wife to give Miss Amabel another good talking to. In bad spirits, is she? So much the better—so much the better.”

Baroness Questo was a clever woman, but the net result of all her talking to Amabel was only a fit of hysterics, into which the girl broke quite suddenly, protesting she could “never—never marry Edward Saughton.”

“You will never get the chance, my dear,” retorted the elder woman, quite unmoved by tears and gasping sobs and laughter, which in such a conjunction seemed so horribly unnatural. “Make no mistake on that point. He has quite got over his little fret. He was here the other day, looking very well, and full of his plans for the improvement of Temple Bower. Broken-hearted! Oh, dear! no; quite cheerful, and as nice as ever. He is such a dear, kind fellow.”

“Never, never,” wailed poor Amabel.

“Don’t you think it might be time enough to say that when you are asked?” remarked the Baroness. “The question now is—not whether you would marry a man who has no intention of proposing a second time, but who the lover is for whom you threw a ‘tender and true’ gentleman over. It is no use going on with that ridiculous cry. I want a straightfor-



ward answer. Who is it you are in love with? You may just as well tell me now, because I shall find out before very long. You may deceive your aunt, but you can't deceive me," which was very tall talking on the part of Baroness Questo; but then, as she told Miss Loveland afterwards:

"That is the only plan to adopt with girls. If the soft word won't do, bully them; if love won't win their confidence, it must be extracted by fear."

"But if a girl have nothing to tell?" hazarded Miss Loveland.

"Girls have always something to tell."

"And what has Amabel told you?"

"That she has a lover—quite unconsciously, of course; and you must make it your business to find out who he is."

"But how can I do that? I have asked her over and over again, and her answer has always been the same: 'Where could she have met any person to fall in love with?'"

"Then you must cease asking her and take other measures. I will speak to Margaret Craden. Her hateful girls are as sharp as needles!"

"I have spoken to her, and she says her daughters are quite satisfied there is no one. I cannot imagine why you worry me so much about Amabel. I have tried to do my best for her. I have taken as much care of her as any mother would, and I really think in my state of health——"

"Fiddle-de-dee about your health," interrupted the irate Baroness; "there is something much more important than your health at stake—a girl's future.



I don't mean to be unkind, Dulce. I know you are not over strong, but do exert yourself; try to find out who the man is, that we may separate them."

"I do not believe there is any man," said Miss Loveland pettishly; "and as for separating them—where could they ever have met? Amabel has not been away at all—even for a day, except to your house and the Cradens—for nearly a year, and I suppose you will admit the girl could not well carry on a clandestine love affair constantly surrounded by people."

"How about her letters?"

"I see them all."

"How can you see them when you are in bed?"

"She brings them up to me."

"Then she receives them first?"

"Of course."

Now, the Baroness had never allowed any scruples to stand in her way when her daughter's correspondence was in question, therefore Miss Loveland's answer struck her as supremely silly.

"Every note, every letter, every scrap of writing ought to pass first through your hands," she said emphatically. "Just make a rule of insisting on that, and we shall soon get at the bottom of the mystery," which was all very well; but in the first place Miss Loveland was not Baroness Questo, and in the second the steed was already stolen!

With Mr. Saughton, Baroness Questo took quite another line from that she pursued when talking to Amabel. She knew he loved the girl as much as ever—more, perhaps; therefore, she assured him he



had no real cause to feel discouraged. If he possessed his soul in patience, everything would eventually come right—an only daughter never exactly resembled other daughters. Poor, dear Dulce, though the dearest of souls, knew practically nothing of Amabel's nature. Her private opinion, the Baroness stated, was that the girl did not understand the state of her own heart—that she was already repenting having refused him; but though she was really sorry, she required very gentle and wise handling, and as a friend to both she advised him to visit Queen's Gate occasionally and await results.

“Amabel is a very strange girl,” she said. “She had several suitors last year and refused them all. She is not one who would marry anybody; and it strikes me very forcibly that if you give her up, she may marry nobody. You know how Mr. Osberton is situated, and I really tremble to think, in the event of misfortune falling on him, what would become of the poor child,” which last clause was really a stroke of genius on the part of Baroness Questo, for it appealed, without seeming to do so, to all that was highest and noblest in Mr. Saughton's nature.

He did know how Mr. Osberton was situated. The Baron had taken care of that, and the young man's timely help tided the merchant over a crisis it would have been impossible for him to otherwise meet.

“You are freely welcome to that, and more,” said Edward Saughton, as he wrung Mr. Osberton's hand. “Did I not always hope to be your son, and may not a son try to be of some little use to a father?”

“Ah! Edward, why are you not my son?” was the



answer. "I cannot imagine why my foolish child refused you; I am sure she likes you better than anybody else."

And on the top of this assurance came Baroness Questo's clever remark, while more convincing than all, perhaps, was the evident pleasure with which Amabel met him on those occasions when circumstances threw them into each other's society.

A man cannot stay out of the world forever even though a woman has refused him; and therefore it chanced that when the birds of fashion returned to their old haunts Edward Saughton and Amabel, perforce, saw each other once more. And she was pleased. He could not be mistaken; something in the tone of her voice, in the look of her eyes, in her smile, told him she felt glad.

But she had changed, in some curious and inexplicable way. Some people said she was losing her good looks. That was not the change, however, which perplexed him.

He did not think her less fair, but he saw the expression of her face had altered. At times she looked even troubled. He spoke about this to Baroness Questo, who answered:

"She is older. She is putting off childish things; in some way the waters of her soul have been troubled. Dear Edward, if you still love her, I have great hopes."

"If I love her!" he repeated. "She is more to me than she ever was."

"Do come down to Chasemead at Easter," said the Baroness, with a certain significance.



He did not answer for a moment; then, with the memory of his last rebuff sharp upon him, he said:

“It may be too soon.”

“I should try.”

“Then I will,” he returned.

In a long, pleasant path which led from Chasemead to The Grange he repeated once again that tale he had told before; but she heard it differently. There were tears in her eyes, there was grief in her voice, a very agony of trouble in the way she laid her hand on his arm, and whispered rather than spoke the words:

“I cannot—oh! I cannot.”

“Why cannot you, darling?” he answered. “Surely you are not afraid of me?”

“No, you are the best, kindest, truest friend in the world.”

“And I want to be your husband, sweet. Won’t you make me the happiest man living?”

“I cannot—no—I cannot.”

“But why, dear?” He was full of hope, and yet he feared. She did not reject him in the manner she had done. The hand on his arm was not withdrawn when he laid his own upon it, but he felt that it trembled violently.

The girl was, in fact, trembling all over. He would have liked to take her to his heart, but he was afraid of frightening his timid love.

“Wait a moment,” she said. “I want to tell you why I cannot.”

He stood quite still waiting. The little hand was not withdrawn, rather it clasped his, and a great hope filled his heart.



And yet, nevertheless, he feared; he could not tell why, but he did.

Thrice she tried to speak, and thrice no sound issued from her lips. Afterward he remembered she was white as death.

“What is this mighty difficulty, sweet?” he asked, trying to speak lightly.

“You must promise never to repeat what I am going to say,” she began, all in a hurry, after a little gasping breath.

“I promise,” he answered, looking at her with a puzzled tenderness.

“Faithfully, not to tell any one?”

He hesitated an instant, then he answered slowly:

“Yes, I promise faithfully.”

“I cannot marry you. I cannot marry you because——”

“Yes, dearest.”

“I cannot marry you because—I am married already.”

“MARRIED ALREADY?” He could not believe the evidence of his own ears.

“Yes, it is quite true. I wanted to tell you; I wanted you to know.”

“My poor child, what have you done?” he exclaimed—“my poor, poor child!”

She was crying bitterly, and he wiped away her tears as he would have wiped away her sorrow if he could. There was not a soul in sight. The great trees just putting forth a “mist of green” were the only witnesses of that scene.

“Your father?” asked Mr. Saughton at last.



“He must never know.”

“But he will have to know.”

“Not yet—some time, perhaps—but not yet.”

“Amabel, do you wish me to tell him?”

“No—no—no—no!”

“Who is it?”

“I can’t tell you; I can tell you nothing more.”

“This is not a jest to try me?”

“A jest!” she repeated, with streaming eyes—“do I look as if I were jesting?”

They walked on some distance, talking as they went, and then he returned with her to the end of the path nearest her home.

“I feel stunned,” he said, as they parted; “but I am quite clear about one thing, that you ought to tell your father at once. You have tied my tongue, so I can only repeat: *Tell your father.*”



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### CLAUD DAGLEY INSISTS.

AFTER parting from Amabel, waiting only till the last flutter of her dress disappeared from sight, Mr. Saughton took the nearest path to the Thames, where he strode along the bank till miles and miles stretched between himself and The Grange.

Then he stopped to consider. Hitherto he had merely felt—his brain was in such a whirl he could not think—but eventually long habits of self-control resumed their sway; therefore at last he paused and asked himself what he was to do next.

He could not now, as some irreverent latter-day youths express the matter, “serve out the whole of his time” at Chasemead.

How should he parry Baroness Questo’s kindly questions, conceal the secret thrust upon him, keep his promise to Amabel, and yet defend her when his host laughed knowingly and said: “If there is not a John there is always a Tom,” which speech made his wife very angry.

The thing was impossible. He must get away, and as he had never been ready with excuses, and hesitated about telling white lies, or indeed lies of any shade or color, he finally decided to go up to town next morning and—not return. It would



of course be necessary for him to write to the Baroness expressing his regret, and so forth; but writing was quite another thing from an interview.

Wearily he retraced his steps; never did way seem longer, though he had no desire to reach his goal.

What could have induced Amabel to make such a wreck of her life? Who was the man, who could he be, that an only child—a beloved daughter—feared so much to take the tenderest father that ever lived into confidence concerning him?

As he paced back slowly these and many other questions, all relating to the same subject, ran riot through his mind. Sometimes he doubted whether the girl were married at all, but he felt assured she believed the fact. What was the mystery? Where had she met the man? How could she have been wedded to any one save after some informal fashion? These were matters he desired to ponder over without being distracted by the humors and having to listen to the chatter of a house party.

Fortune was kind to him that evening, as the fickle dame often is when her favors are not sought.

“A reply telegram came for you, sir, about two hours ago,” said the footman who admitted him. “The messenger waited a long time, and then the Baroness sent out word he had better go, as she had no idea how long you might be.”

Here was deliverance surer, quicker, than any he could have wrought for himself.

Standing in the hall, he just glanced over the telegram and asked:

“How soon does the carriage leave?”



“To meet the Baron, sir. Fifteen minutes.”

“All right, I will go in it,” and within a quarter of an hour he had packed his portmanteau, made his adieus, and stepped into the brougham which bore him away from Chasemead.

The departure was so hurried Baroness Questo had scarcely time to ask him a single question—certainly not one of the slightest importance—while the short space of time which intervened between the arrival of the down train and the appearance of the up saved the necessity for any but the most hurried explanation to the Baron.

“Yes, I quite see it is better for you to go up to-night,” agreed that personage. “But can’t you come down again—say even from Saturday to Monday? If you can, do, dear boy, let me have a line. We shall be returning to town next week, but I hope to see you here before then. All right, guard, I am not going on. Good-night, Ned. Good-night,” and the train steamed out of the station, to Ned’s infinite relief.

The first thing almost he did when he found himself solitary in his own rooms was to write to Mr. Osberton’s daughter. He had thought the affair over on the way up, and felt what he wished to say it would be well to say at once. This is how he began and ended:

“MY DEAR AMABEL:—On my return to Chasemead I found a business telegram waiting for me, and came to town at once. Since our conversation I have thought of little else, and the more I think the more certain I feel you ought at once to confide fully



in your father. He is your nearest and best friend. Make a full confession to him. Believe me, the sooner he knows what you have told me the better.

“Each hour you allow to slip by without speaking must make what you have to say harder. Go to him the moment you receive this, go to his office, if necessary, only go—don’t delay, child, don’t trust to the chapter of accidents. Tell him what you have done, tell him with such tears as you shed this afternoon, and be sure he will take you to his heart and find some way out of the trouble. I asked if you wished me to tell him; and if you speak the word I will do so, but I would rather he heard the story from you.

“Always your faithful friend,  
“EDWARD SAUGHTON.”

He meant to say much more, but refrained. By her own act she had cut the cord which bound them, and he could not write to another man’s wife as he might to the girl he hoped to win for his own. Not till he sat down to write did he quite realize all Amabel’s confession involved.

He could not be to her even the faithful friend of old, since between them and friendship stood an unknown husband who had supplanted all friends. Nevertheless the letter was sent, insufficient as he felt it to be, and an answer came back from Amabel by the first possible post:

“DEAR EDWARD:—Thank you so much. My father must know, of course. I am only waiting for a suitable opportunity.

“Yours affectionately,  
“A.”

Whereupon Mr. Saughton wrote:



"DEAR AMABEL:—Do not wait for an opportunity. Make one. If you delay longer you will repent your procrastination.

"Faithfully yours,

"EDWARD SAUGHTON.

"P.S.—Ask your husband to call on me, or let me call on him. We could then talk matters over. I would advise to the best of my ability and help him, if help were needed, to the extent of my power. I have written this after much hesitation, fearing to seem officious. Pray do not think me so, but I want to know you are happy again."

Amabel did not delay.

"DEAR EDWARD:—You are kinder than any one else in the world" (she answered), "but you do not understand. *He* wanted my father to know from the first, and I am only waiting a suitable time to tell him. Please do not write again.

"Yours affectionately,

"A."

But Edward Saughton did write again. This:

"DEAR AMABEL:—I cannot intrude my opinion further, but if ever I can be of service to you let me know.

"Faithfully yours,

"EDWARD SAUGHTON."

With which epistle Amabel's most loyal friend perforce retired, leaving the girl between Scylla and Charybdis, or, in more modern language, between the devil and the North Sea. A worse devil than Dr. Dagley she might easily have encountered, but scarcely one who seemed to her more terrible, since



she desired to please him, and yet dared not take the only course likely to compass that end.

As for Claud Dagley, who might hope to express his feelings when he found he had married not merely a RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER, but a girl who was afraid of everything?

He had not so judged her. He imagined the Miss Osberton who said Mrs. Vink should be carried into her father's house at Queen's Gate was made of better stuff. He fell into the error of mistaking impulsiveness for courage. He could not have conceived there existed so weak a woman, probably because he had never realized the fatal weakness of his own character, strong as in many respects that character undoubtedly was.

If it be sad to reflect how many persons there are in this world who fail to obtain what they want, it is also sad to consider how many persons there are who want what it is impossible to get.

A fine discontent would seem to be the cause of more widespread misery than people imagine. It blasts men's lives, ruins their tempers, destroys their chances, obscures the sun's brightness, and clouds the fair face of nature.

Poor Claud Dagley was a good object-lesson concerning its effects. For years he had been as a child crying for the moon. He only wanted a few thousand pounds to accomplish great things, and lo! an unappreciative world not merely refused to grant the trifle he required, but fought against his endeavors when he tried to get it for himself.

Youth was passing, as he truly said—it is a way



youth has—and he seemed just as far off that house in Stratford Place as ever. He could hear of no speculative money-lender disposed to invest in a clever doctor.

Doctors, indeed, just then appeared to be drugs in the financial market; no one wished to have anything to do with them. For a new theatre, a new play, opera, or club, money could be got; but a man, brimful of knowledge, acquainted with all the arts of the ancients, and for that matter of the moderns too, might remain out in the cold forever.

Mr. Hernidge had no client “he could advise to incur such a risk,” which Dr. Dagley considered purely imaginary; his grandfather would not lift a finger to help him; Tom Baysford, though willing, was unable to advance even two thousand pounds; and Amabel, whom he had married in the full belief that she would immediately commence the great work of “pushing him on,” was turning out just as useless and disappointing as anybody else.

Of course he had never asked her to “push him on,” he had never said to her that he wanted six thousand pounds, or even part of that; but when he linked his lot with hers he felt perfectly assured she would at once make full confession to an indulgent father, or allow him, Claud Dagley, to beard the parental lion in his den.

But no; after the knot was tied Amabel remained as weakly intractable as before.

She was always “going to tell,” but never did so; sometimes for this reason, sometimes for the other, she put off the evil hour, till days grew into weeks,



and weeks into months, during which Claud Dagley remained as great a stranger to his father-in-law as before he, in St. Mary Abbots, promised to "take this woman."

He had grown very tired of the whole matter. Over and over again he wrote entreating Amabel to let him put matters on some satisfactory footing, and always her answer was the same: "If you speak now you will spoil everything," which made him wonder exceedingly.

He did not in the least understand poor Amabel's faculty of deferring all that was disagreeable till some remote morrow. It was a faculty Mrs. Osberton had possessed in full perfection, and one which Miss Loveland possessed likewise.

In fact, this characteristic had come to be regarded by the Osberton household in the light of a virtue, and the RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER had grown up with the fixed idea that everything unpleasant ought to be kept from her father as long as possible.

Doubtless this saved the worthy man a great deal of worry, but it also involved more deceit than it is well for anybody's soul to have to bear.

Mrs. Osberton and Miss Loveland and Amabel were all nice, kindly, accomplished women, who presumably at some time of their lives had been taught the meaning of right and wrong; yet it may be questioned whether, save on quite commonplace occasions, the head of their household ever heard a word of exact truth from any of them.

Now, he himself was utterly truthful; he could not have put on what Americans call "a false gloss"



under any circumstances, and therefore Amabel feared him.

She knew his great love, but she dreaded his anger. He had never been really angry with her in all his life, but the unknown always seems terrible, and she shrank like the coward she really was from facing it.

Even a woman cannot serve two masters, and therefore Amabel Osberton found it more than impossible to serve four—viz., her father, her husband, her will, and her deceit.

There can be nothing surer than that she married Claud Dagley with all her heart.

From the first she had loved him, and love, while it lasts, is a madness; so what more is there to say?

Nothing. The whole matter is inexplicable, yet, as the papers tell us, it is what is occurring continually. No class in life, whether rich or poor, gentle or simple, escapes. It is utterly vain to try to explain the inexplicable, or to say why marriages contracted secretly rarely prove happy. Amabel's certainly was proving most unhappy, though Claud Dagley was good and forbearing toward her, as perhaps he had never been to any one in all his life before.

He was wild with himself for his folly, wild with her for her lack of strength, yet he must have been less than a man had he poured all the vials of his wrath on the poor girl's head—the poor girl who loved him so much.

He did not know what to do or how to do it. He wrote reams of letters to Mr. Osberton, which he never posted. He lay awake o' nights planning how



he would ask Amabel's father to grant him an interview, and tell him exactly what had happened; and the result of all his writing, all his planning, was that he felt more and more confident the confession should come from the erring daughter, that it was from her alone it could come with grace.

Dreadful ideas also occurred to him, such as, supposing Mr. Osberton did give his daughter a fortune, would it be strictly tied up, and he, Claud Dagley, consequently not a penny the better? Or would he simply allow her so much a year during his lifetime; or would he allow her nothing?

Amabel had from the first so beautifully mismanaged matters that anything two months after marriage seemed more likely than a good round sum down, without too many restrictions, and the parental blessing! Dr. Dagley was weary of the whole thing. A husband yet no husband, married and yet without a wife, the situation had grown intolerable, and when he found that Amabel expected at Easter he would resume in the country those stolen visits of their early love days, his heart waxed hot within him, and he vowed for good or evil to put an end to such a ridiculous state of things.

"Yes, I will come down," he wrote, "because I want to speak to you very seriously; it is impossible we can go on as we have been doing."

So they met, on a certain Tuesday, two hours before noon, not in the Chasemead Woods, not in the Fairy Dell, but on the opposite side of the river, at a quiet, secluded place Amabel wrote of.

Her greeting was rapturous.



"Isn't it delightful to be here again?" she asked.

"Yes, love, but it would be more delightful to be together always," he answered, kissing the lips which were not so red as formerly, and caressing the cheek which was thinner and paler than of yore.

"Even for your sake I must bring matters to a conclusion. As you lack courage to tell your father what we are to each other, I mean to do so."

"No, no, you must not."

Then Claud Dagley, without any undue circumlocution, epitomized the whole affair, reminded the poor foolish girl of many things she had forgotten, of promises unfulfilled, of intentions never carried into effect, of how two months previously, at the end of their brief honeymoon, she had left him with the assurance: "I will tell my father this week." "And yet you have not told him to this hour, darling," finished her husband, the "darling" being thrown in as jam to a pill.

"Because I could not, Claud; indeed, I could not. All this year my father has been greatly troubled about business, and it would not have been wise to tell him about our marriage."

"Why not?"

She had to fall back on the old story, of which her husband was so weary, for, indeed, he had heard it *ad nauseam*, of how it would not be wise, of how it would be very foolish, of how they had much better wait.

"Till when?" asked Dr. Dagley.

"Well, I have only been waiting till he should hear Mr. Manford was quite strong again."



“But how can Mr. Manford’s health or want of health concern us?”

“In this way——” and then she stopped.

“I insist on your telling me, Amabel.”

“Don’t be angry, Claud, pray don’t be angry—but my father seemed to think it was unlikely you could cure him.”

“Really! And why?”

She did not answer; she took refuge in one of those periods of silence wherein she had been accustomed to seek safety; but the lover now being merged in the husband, Dr. Dagley felt determined to get to the bottom of this mystery.

“Don’t be ridiculous, Amabel,” he said. “Just tell me plainly why your father thought I could not cure my old friend.”

“I am so sorry I said anything.”

“Then don’t be sorry, but explain.”

“The fact is, Claud, my father—but I never meant you to know.”

“Never mind all that; go on. Your father——”

“Oh, Claud, I can’t bear to tell you.”

“You ought not to have begun unless you meant to finish, as I am determined you shall. Your father——”

“Has taken some sort of little prejudice against you.”

“Against *me!*” amazed—“why, I never saw him except at Mr. Hernidge’s.”

“It was there.”

“Oh!” and Dr. Dagley stood still to digest this unexpected intelligence.



Owing partly to his own common sense, and greatly to little Mrs. Trent's sly chaff, it had long before been borne in upon Dr. Dagley's understanding that he had made rather an ass of himself on the occasion referred to. He had been drunk, though not with wine, the music of his own voice had been unto him as the songs of sirens, and stolen away his senses. But all this did not make what Amabel said any the more palatable, and, after that one interjection, he paused for a second ere he said:

"It is a pity we never hear unpleasant facts till too late. Had I known earlier what you have just told me——" But there he pulled up, for he could not finish and add, "I would not have married you," but still it was true.

He would *not* have married her; and now, when he knew, he scarcely saw what course to adopt. To wed a daughter secretly is bad enough, but to have to contend against a prejudice is worse. Mentally, Dr. Dagley confessed he was in a very sore strait.

"I am sorry your father has taken a dislike to me," he began.

"Oh! not a *dislike*," interrupted Amabel.

"For convenience' sake let us call it dislike; but I am glad to know exactly how things are. I begin now to understand."

"You are not vexed, Claud? Of course, when my father knows you——"

"He will alter his opinion. And now, dear, do not let us talk about it any more. I will think what is best to be done."

It was a simple sentence, but one that meant a



great deal. Amabel did not at all understand this at the time, but she was enlightened when, on the morning of Edward Saughton's second proposal, she received this letter:

“I have decided never again to go down to The Grange till your father asks me. I will not see a wife secretly I can claim openly. Come to me. North Kensington is not Belgravia, nor Chester-ton Road, Park Lane, but I will do my best to make you happy. Leave a note behind saying you are married—I will then take the whole brunt of the affair on my own shoulders. We cannot go on as we are.

“Ever your devoted

“CLAUD.”

Now, this note crossed one from Amabel, saying she wished to see him at once.

When he received her missive he simply referred her to his former communication, adding:

“If I wished to come I could not, for my grand-father is just dead, and I have all the arrangements to see to.”

Wherein Dr. Dagley happened to be deceived. Mrs. Burchard, shocked beyond measure at Mr. Lahan's sudden demise, sent off instantly for his grandson, but when that grandson arrived he found the field already in possession of a certain Mr. Samuels, the deceased's solicitor, who was attending to everything, and who after a few days sent a letter to Dr. Dagley stating the funeral was to take place at 3 P.M., at Bow Cemetery, on a date mentioned. Friends were requested to meet at Arbor Square at



2 P.M., and "afford the comfort of their presence," a lordly way of phrasing the matter, which surprised Dr. Dagley, who did not know his grandfather had any friends. When he reached Arbor Square, however, he understood the letter to be a mere figure of what might have been, but was not, for the "friends" had dwindled down to Mr. Samuels, solicitor, Mrs. Burchard, housekeeper, and Mr. Burchard, son of the housekeeper, a ruddy-cheeked individual, who had apparently made his home with pigs and horses, carried for some inscrutable reason a cutting whip, and who, though he spoke no word good or bad, served to make a feature in the lugubrious procession.



## CHAPTER XXXV.

### A SELFISH STEP.

THERE was no place in London, Arbor Square not excepted, Dr. Dagley so intensely disliked as Bow Cemetery, which is regarded by many worthy East-Enders as quite a charming promenade.

The fear of death is constitutional, and Dr. Dagley, being constitutionally brave, did not fear death; but he hated every detail connected with it.

To cease to be here, to pass from the known to the unknown, were changes that held no terrors for him; but the helplessness of the body from which life was gone, the masterfulness of the undertakers who wrought their will with the poor pale corpse, the black pageant, the unlovely coffin, the deep, dark grave, the piled-on earth, all these things had ever been horrible to him.

Why mortality should be called upon to pass through such an ordeal in order to put on immortality was a mystery he could not fathom, a fact he did not care to think about, for although, of course, it occurred to him how infinitely better the final exit might have been managed—had been managed, indeed, as in the case of Enoch, who simply “was not,” and of Elijah, who made a more striking departure in his Chariot of Fire—still, there being apparently little chance that any change in the old



order of going would take place immediately, he felt it mere waste of time to consider that point, which, therefore, he put as far away from him as possible.

It was quite another matter, however, having to go to Bow Cemetery with the lifeless remains of a man he had always cordially disliked, accompanied by three persons utterly antagonistic to him, and the "sad occasion" seemed consequently to bring the whole question of his father's ill-fated marriage once again to the front. "The last time I shall ever have to pass along this road, I fervently hope!" he thought, and then he stole a glance toward Mrs. Burchard, who was mourning in the most orthodox fashion, arrayed in deepest black, and holding a quite new and stiff white handkerchief before her face, to the admiration of all beholders. Opposite sat her son, and Dr. Dagley vaguely wondered what he was thinking of. He still held that cutting whip which even the undertaker had lacked courage to suggest should be left behind, and from time to time struck his boot with it absently.

How clearly Dr. Dagley's memory carried him back to just such another drive in the past—a hearse keeping gallantly ahead, while a coach, containing four adults and one child, followed close behind.

He was then in black for his grandmother, and it was his own mother who occupied the seat filled at that mournful moment by Mrs. Burchard.

Mr. Lahan had a family grave, or, as he more modestly put it, "a bit of ground," in Bow Cemetery, where various progenitors and other relatives of that estimable individual "slept the sleep."



For this reason it chanced that when Mrs. Lahan shook off this mortal coil she came to be personally conducted thither, and because her mother lay there Mrs. Dagley was wont, when her heart grew exceedingly sorrowful, to make not infrequent pilgrimages to the mournful spot.

On these pilgrimages Claud sometimes accompanied her, and it was then he conceived that aversion for the convenient cemetery which remained through all his after-years.

The whole neighborhood teemed, in fact, with unpleasant recollections, and the old man who was now journeying before, in so much more splendid a carriage than he had ever occupied in life, was mixed up with all of them.

Why had Mr. Samuels thought it necessary to ask the comfort of his, Dr. Dagley's, presence at the ceremony? The lamented deceased was nothing to him save, owing to an unfortunate accident, his grandfather. Could he not have been buried without the help of one for whom he had never done anything except relinquish the interest of his wife's money a few years earlier than death would have compelled him to do so? The little he might have to leave was not worth the journey from North Kensington to hear about. Most likely he had willed the furniture to Mrs. Burchard. She was welcome to it. The small amount of ready money Mr. Lahan always kept at hand for emergencies would partly pay the funeral expenses, possibly, also, some portion of his annuity might be due, so it seemed unlikely that his dutiful grandson would have to dip deeply



into his own purse. Mr. Samuels would know all about that, however—in any case, what Mr. Lahan left, or did not leave, was a matter of indifference to Claud Dagley. He was weary of cheese-parings, weary of shillings, tired to death of hope deferred, worn out with considering the Osberton question—of reflecting he had done foolishly in marrying a girl who, instead of leading her father about with a string, seemed frightened to death that he should ever come to know what she had done.

Life bore no pleasant aspect that day. It was gritty as the road—it was detestable as the whole of the East End. Well, he believed that never would he see the neighborhood or his companion again. There was comfort in that thought!

The service did not take long—considering the amount of trouble a man can give during his lifetime, it seems wonderful to think how very little he gives in this world after death.

Quite safely and properly tucked up in Mother Earth, they left Mr. Lahan to his repose, and retraced their way toward Arbor Square, the hearse, deposed from its former high position, following humbly after the mourning coach.

Suddenly both stopped, and Dr. Dagley looking out saw the vehicles were standing opposite a public-house, one of those gorgeous palaces where all sorts of liquid refreshment can be procured, which are so much in evidence along the whole line of route to Ilford Cemetery. Then he understood. When Mrs. Lahan and Mrs. Dagley were buried, the funeral *cortège* did *not* stop. Even for the welfare of his



pocket, Mr. Lahan could never have tolerated such proceeding. Mr. Lahan being absent from earthly affairs, however, on "long leave," a new state of things was inaugurated—"other times, other manners!"

Mr. Burchard opened the door and jumped out, Mr. Samuels looked with a knowing smile at Dr. Dagley and raised his eyebrows. Dr. Dagley did neither. His disgust at being associated with such people was too great to permit of his doing anything save lean back as much out of sight as possible.

The pleasant gentleman who had taken Mr. Lahan safely to the cemetery jumped off the hearse, and entered the Palace of Delights, where no doubt Mr. Burchard acted in a proper spirit. At all events, after a minute or so, he reappeared with a glass containing something with an exceedingly strong smell, which he offered to his mother, who, partly removing the white handkerchief, shook her head. "Come on," said her son, which phrase meant that the liquor was to go down—not that he wanted her to accompany him anywhere.

Thus urged, she swallowed a few drops, coughed, returned the glass, and covered her face once more. Dr. Dagley noticed that, though her eyes were red, he could see no traces of tears.

"Will neither of you gentlemen step inside?" asked Mr. Burchard, with a fine sense of hospitality.

Dr. Dagley only made a gesture of dissent, but Mr. Samuels said, in a temporizing manner: "No, I think not; we had better be getting back."

Nothing whatever was offered to the horses,



though any one, seeing the wild speed at which they tore back to Arbor Square, might have thought they had been imbibing freely.

Oftentimes appearances are deceitful.

The whole party passed into the apartment where Mr. Lahan, when in the flesh, partook of his meals, received such visitors as crossed his threshold, audited his accounts, wrote letters, transacted the general business of life, and seated themselves in position to hear the will read. Mrs. Burchard threw back her veil and unfastened her bonnet-strings. Mr. Burchard assumed the attitude of an indifferent listener, stretching out one leg as if for punishment, and tapping it at intervals with the cutting whip. Dr. Dagley lay back in the same chair he had selected on the Sunday evening when his grandfather told him so many plain truths. Mr. Samuels, choosing the seat generally used by the lamented deceased, produced a somewhat bulky will and began.

Stripped of legal verbiage, the gist of Mr. Lahan's last testamentary utterance was that he left his faithful housekeeper, Catherine Burchard, fifty pounds a year for life so long as she remained single; nothing to his beloved grandson, Claud Dagley, except a few old-fashioned articles of furniture and some ghastly silhouettes; that a legacy of one hundred pounds was to be paid to his friend and executor, Charles Ganon Samuels, together with such costs as might be legally incurred, while to his son, Edward Burchard, he bequeathed the estate known as Gorse Bank Hall, in the county of Essex, and expressed a desire that his said son should assume the name of Lahan,



and be known in the future as Edward Burchard Lahan.

After the payment of his just debts and the various sums mentioned in his will, Mr. Lahan appointed "his said son Edward residuary legatee."

Mr. Samuel's legal chant stopped at last, and for a moment, after the long stream of saids and afore-saids, and all the rest of the jargon which the wisdom of our ancestors seems to have devised for the purpose of obscuring meaning, there ensued a dead silence. Then Mrs. Burchard began to weep abundantly, and Edward Burchard Lahan to tap his right boot with a certain sort of rhythm, as though he were performing a triumphal march.

Dr. Dagley was trying to speak, but could not. Of all the blows Fate had dealt him this seemed the worst.

During the whole time he was working hard—how hard he perhaps only knew—looking for help to enable him to take a high stand in his profession, and make a name of which all connected with him might well be proud—all the time he was trying sorely against his will to act courteously and considerately to a man he disliked, the wretched creature could, without difficulty, have lent or given his only legal relative the sum he required, and never really missed it.

But instead of doing anything of the kind—and here came in the sting—he had waited till that day to take a full revenge on dead Colonel Claud Dagley through his living son, and leave practically all he possessed to a country lout, born out of wedlock, the child of a woman who had been the old hypocrite's



mistress as well as housekeeper, and now sat shedding crocodile tears because Edward Burchard Lahan was a wealthy man.

Back it all came to Claud Dagley how his mother had always disliked Mrs. Burchard—how often she remonstrated with Mr. Lahan about his choice of a servant-manager—and how that gentleman had on one occasion answered:

“If she does not please you, just stop away.”

No, there was no use in contending with Fate; the whole host of Heaven had been fighting against him from his youth up!

Thought is quicker than electricity, and all the foregoing, and more, passed through Dr. Dagley's mind before Mr. Samuels had replaced the will in his pocket, or the fortunate legatee concluded his triumphal performance, or Mrs. Burchard finished her first burst of tearful thanksgiving.

“I suppose there is nothing more I need stop for?” Dr. Dagley said, rising and taking his hat. “I can be of no further service?”

It was wonderfully well done. “Just as if he had never expected a farden,” Mrs. Burchard remarked afterward to Mr. Samuels.

That gentleman inquired if Dr. Dagley's road lay Cityward, and hearing it did, asked if he might accompany him part of the way.

Dr. Dagley answering in the affirmative, both took their leave, Mr. Samuels shaking hands with mother and son, and Dr. Dagley simply saying “Good-day.”

He had never shaken hands with Mrs. Burchard in his life.



“It is very kind of you to walk with me,” he remarked to the lawyer, when, the door closing behind them, all the loveliness of Arbor Square and its surroundings burst upon their view. “I thought you would have wished for a few minutes with your clients.”

“I am not aware that they have any more to say to me than I have to them,” was the reply. “At all events, they know where my office is; and I wanted to tell you how hard I tried to get Mr. Lahan to remember you to some satisfactory purpose.”

“And I am not sorry to have this opportunity of telling you the amount of money my grandfather had to leave quite amazes me. I certainly understood he was making both ends meet on a small annuity.”

“So he was, so he was—grudged himself almost the necessaries of life, starved as one may say—in the midst of plenty. Why he wouldn’t even have proper medical attendance.”

“Yet when I offered my poor services he told me he was having the best advice money could procure.”

“As an outdoor patient at Guy’s.”

“Good Heavens, you don’t mean that?”

“I do; he subscribed in his own name, and then recommended himself under another.” Dr. Dagley mentally marvelled to what use such a man could be put in the next world, but he considered it only decent to refrain from giving expression to such a speculation.

“You are getting on very well, your grandfather told me,” said Mr. Samuels, after he had, figura-



tively, taken away his companion's breath by this latest revelation of Mr. Lahan's meanness.

"I am paying my way, but not making my fortune."

"Ah! well. Who is at the present time? All the professions are overstocked. In my opinion emigration presents the best opening nowadays for a capable young man."

"It is philanthropic, at any rate, on the part of a capable young man to emigrate, and so leave more elbow-room for those who remain in England," was the calm reply.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed the lawyer, "very good indeed! I shall remember that. I am glad you take the old man's will so little to heart. Did all I could, but it was of no use. He never got over the loss of Haylin's business, which was worth a lot to him; could not forgive your father."

"So he frequently told me."

"Yes—yes, I know—felt often vexed to hear him talk as he did. So unchristian!" Dr. Dagley could have screamed with laughter at this conjunction of Christianity and his grandfather, but he refrained, and the lawyer went equably on: "Quarrels should not step beyond the grave—think where he himself is to-day! And now I really must bid you good-by, as I have a call to make close at hand. Am quite relieved you take matters so marvellously well. If ever there should be anything I can do for you, drop me a line. Good-by. God bless you."

Having uttered which tender farewell, Mr. Samuels crossed the recently watered road on tiptoe, and after



making quite sure Dr. Dagley was not watching his movements, jumped into a tram which dropped him at Arbor Square.

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the object of his walk had been to learn whether Dr. Dagley had any intention of disputing the will.

He need not have been in the least afraid. The disinherited grandson never had the remotest idea of flinging good money after bad, though Mr. Samuels afterward assured the fortunate legatee he told Mr. Lahan's natural heir "he had not a leg to stand on," which statement was, to put matters mildly, in the nature of fiction.

Claud Dagley knew his grandfather had fired this parting shot with intention. The only thing which puzzled him was why the old man had ever relinquished his hold on Mrs. Lahan's marriage settlement; but the complexities of the human mind are infinite, and Heaven only knew what vague idea of justice or expediency prompted that sacrifice. Certainly he felt that it left him quite free afterward to do what he liked with his own.

It was only the last drop added, Dr. Dagley felt, to an already overflowing cup. As he walked along the Embankment and Northumberland Avenue, where he had an appointment with Mr. Manford, senior, once again in town, Dr. Dagley felt he could not bear much more.

Had his grandfather left a small sum of money to any person it would have been nothing, but that he should leave what to Dr. Dagley seemed a large sum to a country bumpkin who could stop to drink on the



return from his father's obsequies proved more than he could endure.

To people decently brought up, it is always some lapse of this sort that piles up the agony to a point beyond endurance.

Had the wretched old man left his thousands to found a school, to endow a charity, his grandson, much as he wanted some of them, felt he could have borne the diversion with equanimity, but to know they were left to a fellow to whom two pounds a week would have appeared wealth unlimited, was more than he could stand. He thought with loathing of his shilling patients drawn from the same class in life, and did not attempt to contain himself that evening when he talked to Mr. Manford and his son concerning his position.

As regarded Philip Manford he had scored a wonderful success, a success so great that the young man meant to return to India immediately, armed with warnings innumerable, and prescriptions Dr. Dagley only wished he could have been at hand to vary as required.

All that was settled. No doctor had ever worked harder, no patient had ever done more credit to treatment, and a grateful father and thankful son listened that night to Dr. Dagley's jeremiad.

"This settles the matter," finished that gentleman, "I shall now do what I have long intended."

"Which is—?" suggested Philip Manford.

"Go abroad—to Africa probably, or anywhere that a medical man competent as I am can earn his salt."



Father and son looked at each other, but said nothing.

Then in the easy confidence of friendly conversation Dr. Dagley opened his soul to those whom he believed could sympathize with him.

He was too much in earnest to talk pessimism. He did not deliver any lecture about anything; he just said straight from his heart what he had to say, explained his desires, told his disappointments, and finally, with a hard hand-grip, went out into the night.

When he returned home he found this from Amabel:

“I am so sorry for you, dear, but do come and see me. I shall be where we met last at 11 A.M., tomorrow. Your loving  
A.”

To which he replied:

“I will never again meet you in secret. If I do not hear within a fortnight that you have told your father everything, I shall go abroad.”

Then she answered:

“Don't be so cruel, darling Claud, please. I am only waiting a favorable opportunity, which I feel sure will soon present itself.”

The fortnight passed. She had not spoken.

Then there came this:

“An offer has been made to me of going out to India under favorable auspices, and I have ac-



cepted it; no doubt I shall shortly be able to send for you. Enclosed address will always find me. I think it better to save the pain of saying even a temporary good-by, and before you receive this I shall be on my way.

“Always devotedly,

“CLAUD DAGLEY.”



## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### RUTHLESS FATE.

WHILE their visitor, having delivered himself of a part of his wrath, was returning to North Kensington, the Manfords, father and son, had a long talk, which resulted next day in Mr. Manford, senior, making an unexpected call on Dr. Dagley.

“Philip and I,” he began, “felt very much grieved with what you told us last night, and——”

“I am ashamed to have troubled you about my affairs,” interrupted Dr. Dagley, “but really it seemed as though I could keep silence no longer. A man must speak sometimes.”

“It does a man good to speak,” was the answer, “and it would be strange indeed if we, who owe so much to you, had not been deeply moved by the story of your struggles and disappointments. I did not come here, however, merely to say that we were sorry,” proceeded Mr. Manford, “but to make a proposition, namely, that you should go with my son to India. If you can do so I will most thankfully write you a check now for two hundred and fifty pounds, and Philip will pay a like sum out of his salary. He says there is no regular doctor at Rhejemur, and that a capable man would be certain to get on. We talked the matter over exhaustively last night, and



both of us feel convinced that if you really mean to go abroad you had better go with Philip. Now I have told you our plan—what do you say to it?”

“Wait a minute,” answered Dr. Dagley in a choking voice, “give me time,” and leaning back in his chair he was soon lost in thought.

Mr. Manford did not speak, he did not stir a finger till his son's friend suddenly exclaimed: “I will go with Phil.”

“Thank God!” piously ejaculated Mr. Manford, “then my mind will be easy about him.”

“But I shall not take your check or any part of your son's salary. I have money enough to provide an outfit, pay my passage, and enable me to make a start in India. I have always been a careful fellow.”

“You have always been a wonderful fellow, I fancy,” said Mr. Manford, with genuine admiration.

“I have had a hard pull, but I don't object to hard work. It is only not getting on I mind.”

“You will get on now,” was the answer. “I am so glad you consent; but you must let me send you that check.”

“No, I will accept your kindness, but not your money,” and as he was quite in earnest, Claud Dagley had his way.

When Tom Bayford heard the news who could hope to paint his dismay? Even with tears he entreated his friend not to go.

“Stop here,” he said, “and let us save up enough money for you to start that West End practice.”

“By the time we had saved sufficient we should be both old men and past caring for anything,” was the



reply. "No, I won't stay eating my heart out in England, now this chance has offered."

Hope at that moment was sitting aloft on the ship of his fortunes preening her feathers, and there was no single good thing on the face of God's earth Dr. Dagley failed to think might yet be in store for him.

He saw clearly that from India, with its vague possibilities, he could write much more easily concerning his marriage than from Chesterton Road, with its sordid certainties. In India he would be filling a good position—associating with his equals, moving among people higher in the social scale than Mr. Osberton. He could take quite a different tone about the marriage. He would not then come forward as a struggling shilling doctor, who had wooed and won a rich man's daughter, but as one of the Dagleys of Dagley Park, who did not want anything from Mr. Osberton except his own wife. From India he could claim her without fear. He intended to suggest she should come out to him, and if her father objected—why, he could return to England and take her, unless Mr. Osberton consented to supply such an amount of money as might enable them to reside in London.

Life had not seemed so bright to him for many a day. He was glad Amabel had kept the fact of their marriage secret. Everything was working together for the best. If he had planned the course of events himself, he thought, they could scarcely have gone more smoothly; a compliment to events which was about the highest he could pay.

After the first shock, it is possible the separation



proved a relief to Amabel. She had been so troubled by constant entreaties to tell her father that not to have to tell at all came upon her like a blessing. Her spirits improved. She ate more. She slept better. She began to look a little more like her former self, until suddenly she awoke from this state of false security to a new terror—to a dread which stole appetite, sleep, health, peace from her, and wrought within a few weeks such a change in her appearance that Miss Loveland was filled with anxiety, while Baroness Questo told her husband she did not like the girl's looks at all, that she feared she would go off like her poor mother.

“It is a great pity women always select the time when men are most harassed to fall ill,” remarked the Baron, which was an unjust observation, because his wife had a splendid constitution, and never troubled him about nerves, or head, or anything.

“Is Mr. Osberton harassed, then?” she inquired. “I thought Edward Saughton had helped him over his difficulty.”

“So he did, and Osberton insisted on paying him back almost immediately. Now the other house needs assistance, and Osberton has had to send out cash to meet their acceptances. I don't like the way things seem to be going there. When a firm can't honor its own signature, the end seems to be a mere question of time. And, for Heaven's sake, don't go putting the idea of decline into Osberton's head—he has enough to worry about as it is.”

Meantime Miss Loveland was experiencing her own anxieties. Quite accidentally it came to her



knowledge that instead of remaining for three weeks at Mrs. Burt Craden's her niece had only spent one with that interesting family. The bazaar did not come off till the early part of January, and according to her own account, which she stuck to, Amabel had remained in Yorkshire for twenty-two days. Miss Loveland did not believe her, but she failed to obtain any other answer.

It was early summer when this terrible light broke in upon her, and the poor lady was at her wit's end to know what to do.

"Is there anything you would like to tell me, Amabel?" she asked one day, and Amabel answered: "To tell you, aunt; what should I wish to tell you?"

"Ah! my dear, that is just the thing I would give anything to know. Why will you not trust your poor aunt, who loves you, and whom you are making wretched?" But Amabel, according to her own account, had nothing to confide; and thus the weary days dragged on, and once more the season came to an end.

Mr. Osberton had let the Grange furnished, and although Miss Loveland and her niece went to Devonshire for a short time, he himself did not leave town. Things in South America were so "difficult" he had to remain at his post, and, indeed, his sister-in-law was glad enough to find herself back at Queen's Gate. Amabel had abandoned all effort to appear even tolerably cheerful. For months she passed from one depth of despondency to another. She had lost hope and heart and energy, for the ill-luck which dogged Dr. Dagley's steps in England



followed him to India. When he reached Rhejemur it was only to find a new doctor established there. "Just a month too late," he wrote to his young wife. "I am going further up country, so do not be uneasy if my letters are few and far between."

When he wrote again it was but to say his great expectations were still unrealized; then after another silence, she heard he had gone back again to Rhejemur, because Mr. Manford had been told of something likely to suit him. Soon after, news came to England, cholera had broken out at Rhejemur, and that every one who could get away from the place was fleeing from it for dear life. About this time Miss Loveland began to wonder why Amabel took such an interest in the daily papers—she who had never cared hitherto to look at a paper. One afternoon, after a more than unusually restless morning, she dispatched Serry for a *Globe*, and when she returned went to her own room that she might search the columns watched by no curious eye.

Ten minutes later Miss Loveland was startled by the sound of a heavy fall, and running upstairs found Amabel lying in a dead faint, the crumpled paper clutched in her hand.

Within two minutes Serry was flying for the nearest doctor; within fifteen minutes Miss Loveland knew her worst fears were correct, that the dread she had tried to cast from her was but too well founded.

"I shall never be able to keep it from her father," said the poor distracted lady to Mrs. Graham, when a few miserable hours had passed.



“Indeed, ma’am, I would not try,” answered the housekeeper, with wonderful common-sense.

“But I must. It would break his heart. Amabel! Amabel! if you had only told me I might have kept your disgrace quiet. Oh! you unfortunate child—you poor dear soul—what a purgatory you must have passed through! If I had only some one to advise me!—and I daren’t send for the Baroness, even if she were in town. I know what I will do, though,—telegraph to Mr. Saughton!”

“Do you think so, ma’am?” very doubtfully, as was indeed natural.

“Yes, for I can trust him. He is the only person I could trust,” and accordingly two telegrams were speedily sent off, one to Temple Bower, the other to Mr. Saughton’s club, where, as it chanced, this message reached him:

“Am in the deepest distress. Can you come to me at once?”

He went straight away, fancying what he was to hear referred to a piece of news which was being shouted over the whole of London, and appeared in the evening papers as “Great Failure” printed in big capitals.

As soon as he read the explanatory paragraph which followed he had hastened to Mr. Osberton’s office, only to find that gentleman gone for the day. Thinking it possible he might be looking for him, Mr. Saughton repaired to his club, and while actually writing a note to his old friend received Miss Loveland’s telegram.

“I was on my way here,” he explained, as she



tearfully thanked him for his promptitude. "I feared you would be greatly troubled."

"But how did you know?" she asked greatly amazed.

"It is in all the papers. Lads were crying the news as I came here."

"Impossible!" said Miss Loveland. "What are you talking about?"

"The failure of the South American house," he answered, in a state of perfect mystification—"I made sure that was why you wanted to see me. What is the matter, Miss Loveland?" he added in surprise, seeing she sat rocking herself to and fro and staring at him with wide-open eyes full of an indescribable trouble.

How she found words to tell her story she never afterward knew, but in some way she contrived to make him understand the misery and disgrace which had fallen upon them, and that the one thing she most earnestly desired was to shield her poor child—her sister's only child, who had gone so far astray.

"Morgan, of course, must never know," she finished, weeping such tears as only middle age can shed; "but what course must I adopt about those who do know? If she had only told me, I could—I would have managed to save her; but now—now there is not a creature in the household, I suppose, but is aware of what has happened."

He did not answer for a moment, probably feeling a little stunned himself, but then he said:

"Has it never occurred to you that your niece may be married?"



“Ah! there is no such good news in store for us.”

“I made a promise in the spring,” he said, deliberately, though with a little hesitation, “in which I did wrong, and I have kept it ever since, which I had no right to do, because there is sometimes less sin in breaking a promise than in keeping one.”

Mr. Saughton waited for a moment, as though expecting her to speak; then, finding she uttered no word, went on:

“The promise I made was to your niece, in utter ignorance of what she had to tell.”

“Which was——?” gasped Miss Loveland.

“My dear friend, she said she was married.”

“The unfortunate child! And you believed her?”

“I felt sure she believed she was, at any rate.”

“And you have kept this to yourself during all these months!”

It was ungenerous, but then, who expects generosity or even justice from a woman when she is in trouble? Mr. Saughton certainly did not, and answered deprecatingly:

“I am sorry to say I have, but what was I to do?”

“You ought to have come to me.”

“With all respect, Miss Loveland, that is just the thing I ought not to have done. Amabel’s father was the person I should have gone to, but I thought she had the best right to tell him, which, indeed, I received, her assurance she would do.”

“First and last, what a tissue of falsehoods!” ejaculated Miss Loveland. “If she had been married why should she have hesitated to let her father know?”



"Simply, I take it, because there is something against the man."

"Who is he?"

"I do not know. I asked her, but she refused to tell me. I shall ascertain to-morrow, however. Meantime, Miss Loveland, I think it only fair to tell you I intend to be no party to any concealment in the future. If I made a mistake once, that is no reason why I should repeat it. Mr. Osberton is the proper, and, indeed, only person to deal with a matter involving his daughter's honor and happiness, and I shall not leave this house till I have told him all I know."

"It will kill him," she said.

"Sooner or later he must know," answered Mr. Saughton, firmly. "Better he should hear such tidings from the lips of a friend than from the mouth of a stranger. Be assured I shall break my news as carefully as possible. After all, whoever the man is, something surely may be made of and done with him; I wish we had some clew to his identity to-night."

"That newspaper—" suggested Miss Loveland.

"True. You do not think it was the news of that failure in South America——?"

"Oh! dear, no. I am sure not. Amabel knows nothing about business. Such a paragraph would scarcely convey the slightest meaning to her. It is only those who have felt the pinch of poverty that——"

Miss Loveland paused. That part of her past, when she knew the pinch, was ever present with her



—but even to Edward Saughton she did not care to talk about it.

“If I could see the newspaper——” he said, intent on the one question of interest.

“It is here,” answered Miss Loveland, “all crumpled up, just as we took it from the poor darling’s hand.”

Mr. Saughton searched that paper over; he looked at the marriages, he glanced at the police report, he read the sensational paragraphs, he scanned the advertisements, always returning to the part of the sheet which seemed to have been clutched in some convulsive agony, without finding any sentence to reward his search.

At last, feeling certain there must have been something, somewhere, to cause that deathlike faint, and determined not to be baffled, he spread the print on the table and carefully smoothed out the creases from a short paragraph set up in small type, which had seemed to him as if inserted only to fill a gap.

With difficulty he read: “The death from cholera of Dr. Claud Dagley, at Rhejemur, is announced, after a few hours’ illness. He was the only son of Colonel Claud Dagley, and had been unremitting in his attention to the sick in the military hospital.—*Dalziel.*”

Mr. Saughton re-read these few lines, then he said, with a gulp like one who had just swallowed something very bitter:

“The only reference I can find in this paper to any one you possibly ever heard of is that Dr. Claud Dagley is dead at Rhejemur of cholera. I wonder if



that can be the same man who practised at North Kensington?"

Miss Loveland lifted her anxious face and looked at him.

Then they both understood.



## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### DARKNESS AND A NEW DAY.

THROUGH the darkness of an autumn evening, unaware of the sorrow awaiting him, Mr. Osberton walked home a sorely troubled man. The blow which had fallen that day meant commercial ruin, not because he was insolvent, but because he could think of no way to avert insolvency. The downfall of that great house with which he had been so intimately connected proved such a shock to the nerves of business London that Mr. Osberton knew asking for advances in the then state of the South American money market would be as vain as to bid the dead arise.

He had never thought to find himself in such a strait! As he paced slowly along the Victoria Embankment he paused so frequently and so long, watching the Thames flowing on ever and ever to the far-off sea, that the river's mysterious music seemed, even when he got into Hyde Park, to be filling his ears with the sound of some weird, solemn dirge concerning the mutability of all earthly possessions, the vanity of all human desires.

It was not that he lacked money's worth in abundance. Given time to realize, he could have paid all he owed himself, all he stood to lose over his



correspondents, twice—aye, five times—over; but he knew, in the face of what had occurred that day, it would be necessary for him to be prepared at once with a large amount of ready cash, and he did not know where to obtain it.

Baron Questo was in Paris, but even had he been at hand, Mr. Osbertson was aware he would have quite enough to do to take care of himself.

The merchant had gone to his bank, the unlikely refuge to which most people turn in such an emergency, but, being fully secured, the powers which kept that bank afloat only gave plenty of sympathy and an even larger amount of aggravating advice.

From the bank, where he had kept an account during the whole of his business life, Mr. Osberton went to a firm of solicitors, who had looked not merely after his legal interests for more years than he could count, but after his father's and grandfather's law affairs before he was thought of.

There also he met with sympathy, and received likewise a great deal of unpalatable counsel.

“Call a meeting of your creditors at once,” said the shrewdest partner. “You'll never have a better opportunity; don't let it slip.”

All in vain Mr. Osberton tried to make him understand he did not want to pay a composition; all he desired was time to pay in full, and still keep a good business going. He might as well have talked to the wind. The astute partner had a theory, and, as Fullom said, “There is nothing so destructive of human progress as a theory.” Theories, as well as facts, were bidding fair to sadly change his position,



Mr. Osberton reflected while walking home through the darkness, his thoughts as gloomy as the night.

Two years ago how prosperous his life had seemed! The head of a splendid business, his name on check or bill equal in its way to that of the dear old lady in Threadneedle Street; his daughter looking forward to her presentation with all a woman's pride and more than a girl's pleasure; Edward Saughton almost his son; and now—and now—where were the leaves of that season's roses, where the fair blossoms which promised such abundance of fruit?

It had been a bad harvest, and he was gathering it as he pursued his way by the loneliest and quietest route home. Why had the harvest not been better? he asked himself. Why had his daughter not merely refused to marry Edward Saughton, but failed to marry any one else? Would she not now, if he put it to her, ask her heart whether the love she had twice refused were not the only man she really cared for?

In Edward Saughton there lay temporal salvation for Mr. Osberton, but the latter felt that not even to save himself from bankruptcy could he seek help where he knew he should find it, unless his daughter told him she would afterward look kindly on her father's true friend.

In her folly Amabel, dear child, had twice said "No," but if other influences were brought to bear, if she were told of the ruin her acquiescence would avert, of how generously the rejected suitor once before had stepped into the breach, might she not look at the matter with different eyes and make two men very happy?



The experiment was worth trying, and her father decided to speak that night. Then the gloom seemed to lighten a little, and Mr. Osberton turned down Queen's Gate more cheerful than he had felt for hours.

Berriss received him with cold dignity, dropping no hint of what had occurred.

"It was not my place," he said afterward to Mrs. Graham, "and at any rate, I never found harm come of holding my tongue."

In answer to inquiries he said the ladies were upstairs. Mr. Osberton had never asked him such a question before, and Berriss considered his doing so then remarkable.

"He's a-gone to dress," the butler continued. "I wonder what he'll say when he comes down and finds nobody but hisself."

"There'll be Mr. Saughton," observed Mrs. Graham, who was sitting with her elbows on the table, weeping copiously. "I will go up in a few minutes and tell him Mr. Osberton's back."

"And then we'll have Meg's Diversion," which prophecy proved true much sooner than the speaker expected, for it chanced that as Mr. Osberton was passing his daughter's apartment he heard a strange sound, which caused him to pause.

At that moment the door, which stood slightly ajar, was quietly opened, and a woman in the act of coming out started at sight of Mr. Osberton.

"Oh, sir," she said, speaking low, "you must not come in; the poor lady has just fallen off to sleep."

"Has my daughter been ill, then?" he asked in the same low tone, greatly astonished and shocked.



"She has had a very bad time, sir, but is now going on beautifully," answered the nurse, who had not been warned there was any mystery afloat.

"What has been the matter?"

"The matter, sir? only the finest boy I ever did see, though he came into the world before his time."

Mr. Osberton recoiled as if he had received a blow; just then the infant cried again, the woman stole back into the room, and the wretched father went groping his way downstairs like one stricken with blindness, as mad for the time being as any inmate of Bedlam.

Berriss was still below with Mrs. Graham, delivering himself of various sage observations; the hall was quite deserted, and no one saw Mr. Osberton enter the library and stagger to a chair.

What was all that had gone before compared with this—what was insolvency, bankruptcy, beggary, when weighed in the scales against a daughter's dishonor? Hitherto he never suspected anything wrong; but even in the minute or two which had elapsed since the full tide of knowledge broke in upon his understanding, he joined into a complete chain many a disjointed link, many a hitherto inexplicable circumstance.

This was why his only child had refused Edward Saughton, why her spirits seemed changeable as the weather, why she had not cared for society, why she grew spiritless and pale, came down in the morning leaden-eyed when she came down at all, why she had ceased running to greet him; and then the steady flow of the Thames in his ears grew into a mighty



roar, for he was in the ocean of sorrow and the waves were engulfing him!

He opened one of the table drawers, and after a moment found what he sought.

It was a revolver, bought on the occasion of his last visit to South America. (Ah! how the world had changed for him since then!) But a mere toy to look at, yet it killed at sixty yards; a mere toy but deadly—he was glad to remember that. There were five chambers in the revolver, and he loaded them all; then he laid it on the table for a moment while he reclosed the drawer and wrote a few lines, which he placed in an envelope, which while he was fastening Mr. Saughton opened the door and walked in.

In a moment Mr. Osberton jumped up, and seizing the revolver attempted to leave the room, but the younger man, though taken by surprise, was too quick for him.

“Where are you going, Mr. Osberton,” he asked, “and why are you carrying that weapon?”

“I am going,” said the other, standing at bay, “first to shoot my daughter and then myself. I knew I was a ruined man when I came home to-night, but I did not know I was dishonored.”

“You are not dishonored and you are not ruined,” was the rejoinder, uttered rather quickly, for Mr. Osberton was pressing close upon him and striving hard to open the door.

“My daughter has been playing the——”

“*She has not!*” cried Mr. Saughton. “Ah!” and in a second he had sprung across the library and caught Mr. Osberton, who was just disappearing



through a second door which led into the dining-room; and then there was no time for further speech. The men were struggling together, Mr. Saughton getting a little the worst of the fray, when Berriss, in due discharge of his ordinary duties, entered, and grasping the position at once, by a clever flank movement knocked the revolver out of his master's hand and plunged it instantly into a glass jug, full of water, which stood on the sideboard.

"That means a ten-pound note, anyhow," thought the astute butler while he stood at ease looking with calm tolerance at Mr. Osberton, who, completely unnerved, his fit of frenzy exhausted, was now supporting himself on the arm of his late antagonist.

"Come in here and let us talk the trouble over," said Mr. Saughton, gently—"though there is no real trouble," and he guided his friend into the library; Berriss, equal to all occasions, intimating to the cook, through Serry, she had better keep back dinner.

What passed between the two men it would be but vain repetition to tell at length. Edward Saughton summarized it in a sentence.

"My dear friend," he said, "what happened to-day has sprung upon you as a surprise, but is no news to me. Last Easter your daughter confided to me the fact of her being already married, to me who wanted to marry her. To-night I fear she is a widow! As for your being commercially ruined—never, while I have a sovereign."

The strain had been too intense, the relief was too great. Mr. Osberton, weak and shaken, could not speak, could not ask any questions, could only accept



what he heard, while, his face covered by his hands, he wept like a child.

“Now we had better have some dinner, which I am sure we both want,” remarked Mr. Saughton after a time; which practical observation at once carried both what had happened and what had nearly happened beyond the bounds of tragedy into the accustomed round of every-day life.

Berriss waited upon them as though there had never been any trouble or the shadow of crime in the house, but of his own accord he opened the finest brand of champagne Mr. Osberton's cellar held, which that gentleman drank as though it had been water. Berriss, looking on, understood, and when alone subsequently kindly partook of some himself.

In case of accidents, Mr. Saughton remained at Queen's Gate that night, sitting in the drawing-room, and Berriss also kept vigil on the next floor, in case, as he put it, his “master wanted anything”; no one, however, did require assistance. A deep silence dropped over the house about midnight. The rush and hurry of that sorrowful day was ended, and utter quiet succeeded.

Early next morning Mr. Saughton went off to the Strand, where after a brief interview with his bankers he repaired to Somerset House.

In consequence of the latter visit two announcements appeared in most of that evening's papers—one:

“At Queen's Gate, the widow of Dr. Claud Dagley, of a son (prematurely)”; the other:

“At Rhejemur, India, of cholera, Claud Dagley,



M.D., son of the late Colonel Dagley, aged 29.—By telegraph.”

These announcements, which strangers read with deep pity, were received by those acquaintances whom the change in Amabel had previously mystified with expressions that varied according to the speaker.

“Well, I could *not* have believed it,” said Baroness Questo.

“Ai—Ai—Ai—this accounts for the milk in the cocoanut,” thought the Baron when he heard what had happened.

“By Jove!” exclaimed the Honorable Burt Craden, after his wife had read out the paragraph which related to Amabel.

“The sly creature!” remarked Mrs. Craden.

“Nasty little thing!” cried Maud with conviction.

“Poor soul!” sympathized Tom Bayford.

The society papers for a time literally teemed with passages relating to Dr. Claud Dagley’s life, his romantic love marriage, his untimely death, the ill-fortune that had pursued him to the last, the courage with which he faced contagion, as well as his proved skill in curing disease.

When he could hear no sound of the world’s applause, when his heart could never more find pleasure in the praises of men, Claud Dagley’s desire was gratified. His name was on every one’s tongue—this story of his disappointed existence exalted into a nine days’ wonder.

But Mr. Saughton neither praised nor blamed; in utter silence he permitted the stream of idle talk to



flow on, bearing with it the memory of the man Amabel still loved.

One day, however, there came from India a letter the postmark on which bore a date, that of the day preceding Dr. Dagley's death. Then ensued much discussion in Queen's Gate as to whether that letter should be given to the "dear child," "the poor girl," "the heart-broken creature," as she was variously called in a household where the old story of one who "arose and went to his father" had been again enacted, with as much tenderness as in the original version; and Mr. Saughton was once more called into counsel.

"When she is quite strong again, let her read her husband's last words. It is her right," he said, in a harder tone than usual; a tone which only proved the struggle which Justice had won over Jealousy; and as advised father and aunt acted.

The result did not prove quite what they had anticipated. Amabel, after reading, tore the letter across and flung the pieces from her in a very excess of passion.

"May I not see?" asked her aunt, timidly.

"It does not matter who sees," was the answer; then with a weak revulsion of self pity she added:

"And that was the man I loved, for whose sake I suffered tortures, such agony as no one can ever imagine!"

Poor Claud Dagley, he had written that evil letter all unknowing it was the last he should ever indite, ignorant that the cold hand of death was even then



upon him. He said he could endure the persistent pursuit of misfortune no longer—that although he had been the means, at Rhejemur, of saving scores of lives, valueless except to their possessors, the man for whose existence he fought and spent himself was dead.

“Rich, well-born, possessed of enormous influence, beloved by high and low, he took a fancy to me and would have assured my success, and now he is gone, and with him my last chance in this hateful country. Ever since you and I met,” he went on, “fortune has proved consistently cruel. I married on the strength of your assurance that you would at once tell your father. How that promise was fulfilled you know,” and so on at great length in the true Dagleyan strain. *Never* had the unfortunate man “let himself go” so completely, but the ending, which probably he did not intend should read exactly as Amabel took it, was the worst of all. “I know now, alas!” he wrote, “that we made a fatal mistake, and one which has brought misery to both of us. So far as in me lies I propose to redeem that mistake. I shall go to Australia, Africa, or America, and never trouble you again. I promise that solemnly, whatever you may choose to do, I shall not interfere. With this letter the past is buried so far as I am concerned, and you need not fear that the time of prosperity which is, I trust, before you will ever be darkened by—

“CLAUD DAGLEY.”

“The scoundrel,” said Mr. Saughton, when Miss Loveland subsequently insisted on his reading this precious effusion, “the infer— Oh! I beg your



pardon, Miss Loveland, I ought not to have used such an expression, and the man dead, too."

"You ought," was the answer. "I would say much worse myself if I only could. After ruining the dear child's life, too! One comfort—that letter has quite cured her infatuation, for it was nothing less."

Miss Loveland only said the truth. From that day Amabel never mentioned Claud Dagley's name, but grew more and more like the Amabel of old, a fair, gentle woman, with a shy humility of manner, which seemed infinitely touching to Edward Saughton.

Nearly two years passed, however, before he again asked her to be his wife; when he did, she said, timidly:

"You ought to be afraid to marry any one who has proved herself so deceitful and selfish as I."

Perhaps she hoped he would contradict her, but this he could not do. He only answered simply: "I have always loved you, and 'Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.'"

THE END.



# A RICH MAN'S DAUGHTER.

BY

MRS. J. H. RIDDELL,

*Author of "George Geith of Fen Court," etc.*

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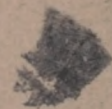
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