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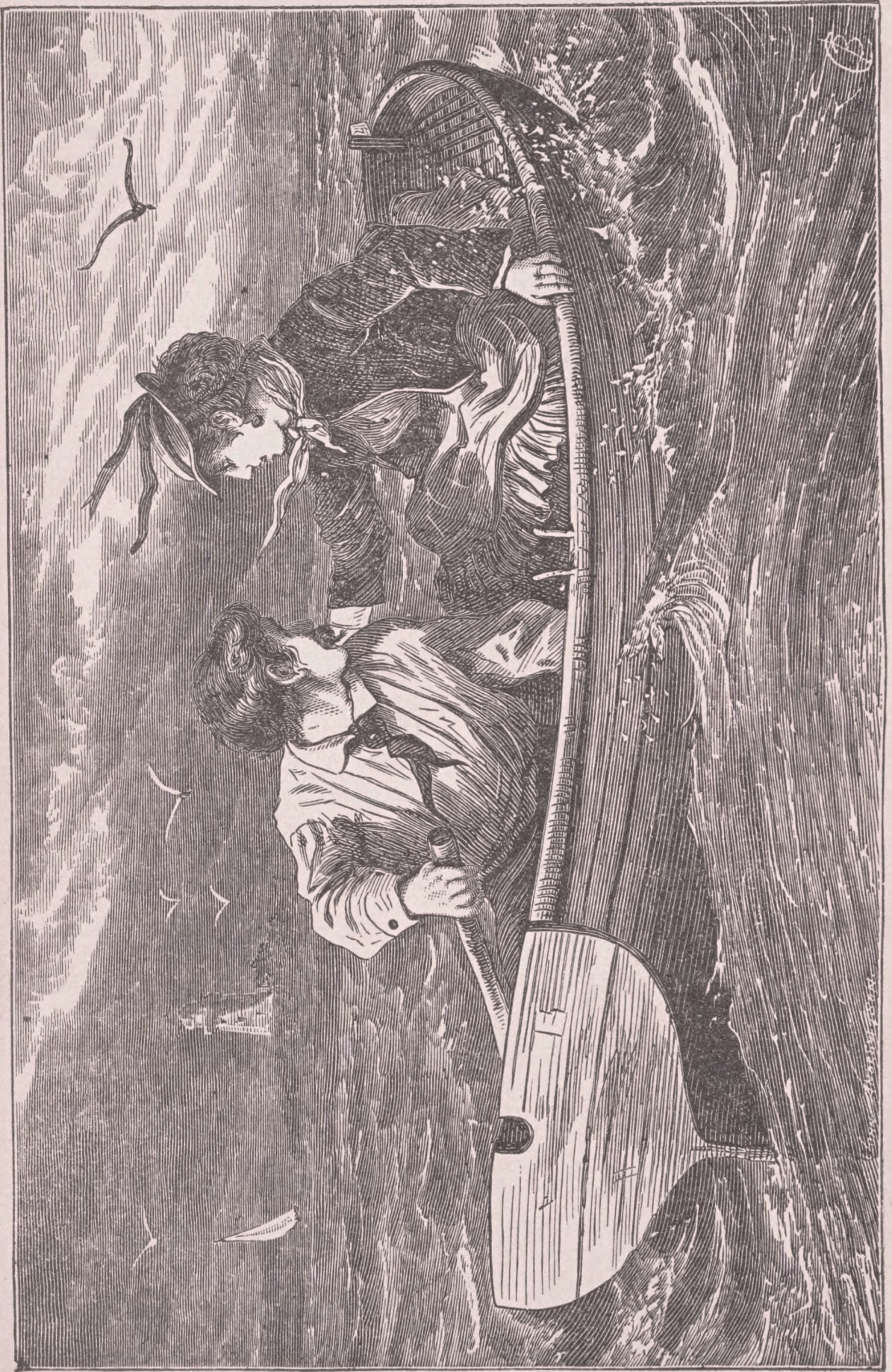
TO
HIRAM CLAPP, ESQ.,

This Book

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY HIS FRIEND,

WILLIAM T. ADAMS.



DRIFTING TO SEA.

THREE MILLIONS!

OR

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THE WAY OF THE WORLD

BY ✓

WILLIAM T. ADAMS

(OLIVER OPTIC)

AUTHOR OF "LIVING TOO FAST," "IN DOORS AND OUT," "TAKEN BY THE ENEMY,"
"WITHIN THE ENEMY'S LINES," "ON THE BLOCKADE," ETC.



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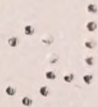
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THE WAY OF THE WORLD

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THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THREE MILLIONS.

THREE million dollars! In round numbers, three million dollars, after the legacies to individuals and the bequests to charitable institutions had been paid!

Three million dollars! Suggestive of mighty air-castles, of untold grandeur, of matchless liberality to the poor and needy! Suggestive, also, of long and weary years of patient seeking after worldly wealth, of painful struggles with adverse circumstances, and of parsimonious self-denial extending even to the very necessities of life.

There had been three great epochs in the life of John Hungerford, the Baltimore *millionnaire*, at each of which he had annexed a zero to the number indicating his worldly wealth; and it must also be said that he was continually adding zeros to the sum total of his moral and spiritual possessions. When he commenced his business career, he had three thousand dollars. Operating with care and prudence, it required twenty years to annex the first zero, and he was forty-one when the first financial cycle was completed. Another twenty years of care and toil annexed the second zero, and John Hungerford was more than threescore.

Then fortune, always constant, became lavish, and the very skies seemed to rain down wealth. His real estate doubled, tripled, and quadrupled, and ten years placed the third and last zero against the accumulations of his lifetime. Then, having passed his threescore years and ten, he retired from active business with fear and trembling for the stupendous fortune he had made. Only three years more of life were vouchsafed to him; but one with his simple habits could not spend a tithe of his income, and another half million was added, almost in spite of himself.

Wherefore had John Hungerford struggled so patiently with the tide of fortune? Wherefore had he neglected his body and his soul for fifty long years? Wherefore had he lived in a mean house, upon the coarsest fare, with never a horse, and hardly a servant to ease his toilsome but successful march up to the pinnacle of his worldly ambition? He had not a child to inherit his hard-earned gains. He had no friends but those who had been constant to him in business relations, and they never crossed the threshold of his homely dwelling. Nothing but the love of wealth could have sustained him in his fierce struggles for the mammon of the world.

Yet John Hungerford was not a bad man. He had cheated no one; had never wronged the widow and the fatherless. He had no friends, because he wanted none; his blood relations had long ago ceased to darken his doors, feeling that they were not welcome guests. They were few in number, including only the son and daughter of his only brother, for the Baltimore *millionnaire* could boast of no long line of ancestors, and the family tree, so far as his knowledge extended, had its root in the preceding generation.

John Hungerford, senior, had never known a father or a mother. He was, at his earliest recollection, an inmate of an English workhouse, and he had at a tender age been bound out to a farmer. From this humble beginning he had bettered his condition until he was able to save a few pounds,

when he married. Prosperity smiled upon him in a small way, and about the year 1790 he had emigrated to America, bringing with him his wife and his four children, the oldest of whom, John, junior, was nineteen years of age, while the youngest, James, was twelve.

The whole family went to work in good earnest, and for a year were prosperous and happy; but the angel of death swept through the contented household during the following year. A malignant fever carried off first the mother, then the two daughters, and finally the father, leaving only John and James to mourn the wreck which death had made in their home. The old man, who had learned industry and thrift in an English workhouse, left six thousand dollars.

John was now twenty-one years of age, and, besides receiving the portion that fell to him, he was appointed the guardian of his younger brother. Then he commenced the career of which we have given the result at the beginning of this chapter. James worked in a store till he was of age; and then, with his three thousand dollars, which John promptly paid to him, with interest, he went farther north, where he invested his little capital in a cotton-mill, and obtained the situation of overseer in the factory.

James Hungerford had none of the genius for money getting which distinguished his brother. He was content with his position in the cotton-mill, and hardly doubled his capital in twenty years. At the age of thirty-four he married a lady of twenty; but it was ten years later when his first child, Eugene, was born, who was followed, four years after, by a daughter, Julia.

When the patient, plodding father died at the age of fifty-four, he left only the small cottage in which he lived, and the three thousand dollars in mill stock, which had paid him dividends for over thirty years. Mrs. Hungerford was a prudent and skilful woman, and she contrived to live very comfortably with her little family on the income of the stock, still occupying the small cottage which her husband had left.

At this time John Hungerford had added the second zero to the number which indicated his wealth. For many years there had been no regular communication between the families of John and James. Mrs. Hungerford had written to her brother-in-law, whom she had never seen, the particulars of the death of her husband. A prompt reply had been returned, in which the man of money deplored the loss of the husband and father, and even intimated that, if any assistance were required, it would be rendered. The widow was too high-spirited and self-reliant to make any demands upon the wealthy brother, and she replied that her family was in comfortable circumstances, and had no occasion to trespass upon his liberality.

In the mean time John himself, at the age of fifty-three, had married a widow who was the mother of a boy four years of age. Mrs. Lynch, who became Mrs. Hungerford by this arrangement, was an ambitious woman, who knew something of the extent of her husband's possessions; but she found that John had an iron will. He would not even move from the mean dwelling he occupied to one better adapted to a man of his wealth. Few and slight were the changes adopted in the household; indeed, they were little more than the substitution of a wife for a housekeeper. The widow was disappointed and indignant; but John was growing old, and she temporized with the present that the future might yield a golden harvest.

The man of wealth, as before hinted, was not a bad nor a hard-hearted man, and though Tom Lynch, his wife's son, was not the most promising youth in the world, John Hungerford derived a solid pleasure from his company, and favors which the mother could not obtain were readily won by the son. Mrs. Hungerford was delighted with these indications, and hoped and expected that her boy would be the fortunate heir of the rich man. She kept the peace, and submitted to her disappointments in the most exemplary manner, believing that the day of her triumph was not far distant.

Tom Lynch, in due time, was sent to a Pennsylvania college by his indulgent stepfather, who had thus far obstinately refused to die, as his loving wife wished; and when John Hungerford had closed up his warehouses, and nominally retired from business, Tom had been graduated, and was studying a profession in Philadelphia.

When his wife's son had completed his collegiate course, a bright thought entered the brain of the *millionnaire*. As sending Tom to college had not ruined him, it occurred to him that he might make another venture of the same kind. Having more time on his hands than ever before, having, in fact, so closed up his business that he had little to do but collect and invest his income, he had bestowed a thought upon the family of his brother James. In six lines of a letter, penned with difficulty, he had informed the widow Hungerford that he was tolerably well, and wished to know something about her family. The answer assured him that all were well and happy; that the children were growing finely, and in due time would doubtless ripen into an excellent young man and an excellent young woman. Eugene, she wrote, had particularly distinguished himself as a scholar, and a minister of Poppleton had intimated that the young man ought to be sent to college; but, the widow added, her means were utterly insufficient to enable her to carry out such a magnificent project, though her son would be rejoiced to continue his studies. She declared that Eugene was a noble boy, and submitted without a murmur to his disappointment. In a few weeks he would go into a store.

Whether the statement was intended as a hint or not, the uncle promptly sent her a draft for two thousand dollars, which he thought would take the boy through college handsomely. The letter of thanks in which this gift was acknowledged was so warm and earnest, that the old man's heart was kindled to finer issues than he had ever before known. He wrote again, insisting that Mrs. Hungerford and her two children should visit him in Baltimore without

delay. He was too old and feeble to go to them, and they must come to him. Of course the widow could raise no objections to a project so reasonable, and she immediately announced her intention to accept the invitation. Though she was an independent and high-minded woman, who would not thrust herself or her children upon the notice of her wealthy brother-in-law, very likely she felt that it would be trifling with Providence to neglect this opportunity to improve the relations subsisting between them and the childless *millionnaire*.

John Hungerford told his wife what he had done, and announced the visit of his relatives. She turned pale, and trembled for the future of her son. She would have rebelled, if policy had not suggested a milder course, and she only declared that the house was in no condition to receive guests. The only practical result of the lady's protest was, a few hundred dollars were spent in "tidying" up the establishment.

Mrs. Hungerford and her children came. They were kindly welcomed by the old man, and prudentially welcomed by the old man's wife. It is true the visitors were astonished to find that the man of millions dwelt in a mean, poorly furnished house, without the slightest pretension to luxury or style; but they made no comments. Uncle John was kind and attentive to them; and this was all they could expect of him. Eugene was a fine, manly youth of seventeen, gentle and winning in all his ways; and the fond mother could hardly conceal her satisfaction, when, at the expiration of a week, she realized that her boy was a decided favorite of the old man. The boy was too artless to be mercenary; so he resorted to no tricks to win the regards of his uncle.

John Hungerford was too keenly schooled in human nature to be deceived by a false show of attention. He read his nephew's noble nature; he understood it perfectly; and day by day the old man's wife became more troubled and anxious about the prospects of her son. The visit was

terminated only when Eugene was obliged to return home to attend the examination for admission to Harvard College. The uncle expressed his desire that the visit should be repeated, and Mrs. Hungerford readily promised to come again.

Tom Lynch went home to spend his vacation a few months after the departure of the widow and her family. His mother imparted to him the appalling intelligence that he was in danger of being supplanted in the regards of her husband; but the young man was confident, and by every art and device which his ingenuity could suggest, he labored to make himself useful and agreeable to his stepfather. His mother still dreaded the impending evil. John Hungerford, so far as she knew, had made no will. As the case now stood, the children of James Hungerford were his sole heirs. Nothing but a wife's portion could come to her, and her son would be utterly excluded from the division. She did not dare to suggest the propriety of his making a will; but she commenced upon a series of hints, and a course of expedients, which were intended to effect her purpose. Thus months and years wore away, and Eugene Hungerford was graduated at Harvard; but the visit to Baltimore was not repeated.

Long and not very patiently had Mrs. Hungerford been waiting for the old man to die. He was aged and feeble, and he would be better off in heaven than upon the earth. It would be better for him to die, even though she obtained no more than her legal share of his estates. More must be obtained if possible, and while she was hinting and studying up expedients, which the superannuated *millionnaire* persistently refused to notice, she died herself: a violent attack of disease carried her off even before her son could arrive to close her eyes in death.

John Hungerford was alone in the world again. Perhaps his experience of wedded life had not been wholly satisfactory; at any rate, he bore his bereavement with much calm-

ness and resignation, and meekly submitted to the necessity of supplying the place of the departed one by employing a housekeeper. If this sudden death in his little family had no other influence upon him, it forcibly reminded him of the uncertainty of life. For two whole years he labored upon his will, elaborating whole pages of details, freely consulting his business friends, before he instructed the lawyer to embody his intentions in legal forms. Strange as it may seem, he did not send for his brother's family, as he had intimated he should, at least once a year. Mrs. Hungerford wrote to him occasionally, and with business-like promptness he answered her letters; but no invitation came for the family to repeat the visit. After the death of his wife, his sister-in-law had even proposed to move to Baltimore, and take care of him in his age and feebleness; but the old man, evading a direct reply, continued to study upon the details of his will, which document certainly promised to be the crowning work of his life. He wrote that he was so much occupied, the visit must be deferred; and he continued to postpone it, until one morning his housekeeper found him dead in his bed.

Three staid, dignified, elderly merchants had been John Hungerford's most intimate friends — friends only in the worldly and business sense. They had been his advisers, and during those two years of patient toil over his will — the master-work of his career — they had been occasional visitors in the little back parlor where the *millionnaire* now spent most of his time. They had furnished him with all his information of the outer world, and assisted him, so far as they could, in performing the task on which all his remaining energies were concentrated. For two weeks the best lawyer in the city had been closeted with John Hungerford during a portion of each day; and the great deed which finally disposed of the old man's immense property was completed only a few days before his death. Perhaps he felt that he had nothing more to live for; and permitting his energies to relax, this suspension of his wonted activity had hastened his death.

The housekeeper sent for John's trio of business friends as soon as she discovered that the vital spark had fled. One after the other they came, and when all had arrived, a solemn and dignified conference was held. There were no friends to be sent for but the Hungerfords of Poppleton, and Tom Lynch, who was attempting to establish himself as a physician in an interior town of Ohio, though reports came to Baltimore that he was too unsteady to achieve a success. Telegraph messages were immediately sent to Mrs. Hungerford and Tom Lynch. The former, with her family, arrived in season to attend the funeral, but the despatch did not promptly reach the young physician, and he did not appear.

John Hungerford went to his grave in greater state than he had ever moved in the flesh, for the three eminent merchants who managed the affair had a high regard for the proprieties of the solemn occasion. A long procession of carriages, occupied by men and women who were willing to join the brilliant funeral *cortége* for the gloomy excitement of the scene, though they had no interest in, and only a few had any acquaintance with, the deceased, followed the plumed hearse to the cemetery, and the tomb closed upon all that was mortal of the Baltimore *millionnaire*.

After the old man's dust had been solemnly disposed of, there was an intense curiosity to ascertain what disposition he had made of his princely fortune. This was really the most interesting question connected with the life or death of the departed. Few, if any, asked what he was; all, what he had. Hardly one wanted to know what pleasant memories he had left behind him; all, the sum total of his worldly possessions. None but fanatics asked where the old man had gone; but every one, where his fortune was to go.

What John Hungerford had been doing in the little back parlor for the last two years was to be made manifest. It had cost the old man fifty years of severe struggles to get his three and a half millions; it had cost him two years of diligent thought, and what struggles none could know, — it had

cost him two years of hard labor, more trying, perhaps, in his age and feebleness, than the half century of toil in the vigor of his healthy life, — to give it away. The will was read. There were present at the reading only the three eminent merchants, the Hungerford family from Poppleton, and the housekeeper.

Mrs. Hungerford was quiet and self-possessed. The neglect to send for her, as had been arranged with her brother-in-law, to pay the proposed annual visits, had prepared her to expect nothing more than a simple remembrance. Her son, Eugene, was calm and dignified, but there was something in the expression of his manly face which indicated his dislike of the proceedings. Like his mother, he was independent and self-reliant; and, very likely, he felt that the position of the family before the lawyer and the merchants was an exceedingly unpleasant one. They were to be regarded as expectants, if not supplicants, before the still closed coffers of the dead man; but Eugene repudiated the position. He asked nothing, expected nothing. He was deeply grateful to his uncle for the means of obtaining his education, and he was prepared to be entirely satisfied if this proved to be the total of his indebtedness to the deceased.

Julia Hungerford was nineteen, and she was so fair to look upon that even the dignified merchants stole frequent glances at her, as she sat annoyed and embarrassed, like her brother and her mother, by the awkwardness of the situation.

The lawyer read, and two mortal hours were consumed in the reading; and more of John Hungerford's life and thought was revealed than the world had ever known before. No one had ever suspected the *millionnaire* of any family ambition, or of any special affection for the name he bore; but this posthumous document convinced the listeners that the old man regarded the word "Hungerford" as the apple of his eye. The two years of hard reflection had been employed in devising schemes to prevent the name of

Hungerford from being forgotten. He had labored to honor it and to perpetuate it.

The great disappointment of John Hungerford's life, as the truth was educes from the will, was, that no son had blessed his lot — no son to be called John Hungerford, to live like a prince, and to keep the name alive. The testator, however, was not to be wholly balked. He was strenuous for the whole name of John Hungerford; and in spite of his disappointment, he determined to have a representative in the future who should be known and called as he had been known and called. It appeared that he had intended at one time to make Tom Lynch change his name, and become the fortunate owner of the appellation; but the young man had shown a disposition to follow after strange gods, and was not therefore a suitable person to support the honor and dignity of the Hungerford name, and the plan was discarded for the one which was now shadowed forth in the will. But even this might fail, and the old man, in this event, had finally resolved to satisfy himself by rendering immortal and glorious the single name of Hungerford, though his hopes and expectations still coupled it with the dearly beloved John.

To the end that his intentions might be clearly understood, the deceased had compelled the unwilling lawyer to preface the will with the matter from which the information we have given is derived; and it was estimated that the word "Whereas" occurred two hundred and some odd number of times in the folios devoted to this preliminary statement. But this story, in spite of the legal verbiage with which it was encumbered, proved to be of the deepest interest to all present, even including the eminent merchants, whose ideas were generally expressed by figures.

The reader turned the folios for an hour before he came to the pith and cream of the document, the masterpiece of John Hungerford's labors. "Imprimis" gave to John Lester, Edward Baker, and Loring Greene, the eminent mer-

chants, each the sum of fifty thousand dollars. These gentlemen were John's best friends, and he made them his executors and trustees for the disposal of his property as "hereinafter mentioned." To the widow of his late brother James he gave twenty thousand dollars. To Julia Hungerford and Thomas Lynch he gave a like sum. Then were mentioned twenty-eight literary, scientific, and charitable associations, to each of which the testator gave the sum of ten thousand dollars. John Hungerford must have been terribly puzzled to find all these names, and without the assistance of the eminent merchants he would certainly have neglected many of them. He was impartial in his bequests, for without regard to the objects or the magnitude of the enterprises to which he contributed, he gave to each the same sum.

These bequests, with an allowance of ten thousand dollars for present expenses of probate — there were no stamps then — used up only the half million, which was but a kind of flourish on the end of John Hungerford's fortune, and which had accumulated since he retired from active pursuits. The grand army of zeros, marshalled by its significant three, was yet in the field, and the three eminent merchants actually gasped with anxiety to hear the name of the residuary legatee. And now came John Hungerford's dying crotchet; now came the notable scheme by which John Hungerford, dead and in his grave, was to be represented in the coming generation by a John Hungerford, alive and glorious in the possession of a princely fortune; or, failing the "John," by which the name of Hungerford, simply, was to be honorably sent down to remote ages.

The whole three millions was to be placed in the hands of the eminent merchants, as trustees, who for their valuable services were to receive a fixed sum per annum, the whole income of which, after deducting the expenses, was to be paid to his "beloved nephew," Eugene Hungerford.

Eugene did not faint when he heard that he was to be the

recipient of one hundred and eighty thousand dollars a year, but his motner absolutely gasped for breath.

The lawyer proceeded. The eminent trustees were to retain possession of the three millions, all safely and profitably invested at the present time, until the before-mentioned beloved nephew, Eugene Hungerford, had attained the age of thirty years; at which time, if the said Eugene was legally married, and was the legal father of a legal son, then the said eminent trustees should pay over to the said beloved nephew, Eugene Hungerford, the said legal father of the said legal son, absolutely and irrevocably the said three millions, now invested as aforesaid: *provided* that the name of John Hungerford shall be unchangeably given by the said legal father to the said legal son.

Eugene twisted uneasily in his chair. Mrs. Hungerford looked very complacent, as though the conditions of the will, in her estimation, were not very difficult to be complied with. Julia wanted to laugh, but the eminent merchants, who continued to glance at her occasionally, were too solemn and dignified to permit her to indulge in any levity.

The reading was not finished. If the said beloved nephew was not married when he attained the said age of thirty; or, if married, and being the legal father of a legal daughter or daughters only, and not being the said legal father of a said legal son; or if the said son was called by any other than the said name of "John Hungerford,"—then the three millions was to be shattered and divided into six equal parts of half a million each; one part to be paid to the said beloved nephew, Eugene Hungerford; one part to the before-mentioned beloved niece, Julia Hungerford; one part to the son of his late wife, Thomas Lynch; one part to the Hungerford Orphan Asylum; one part to the Hungerford Institute for Aged Women; and one part to the Hungerford Home for Aged Men.

Every provision of the will was carefully set forth, and nicely protected from any possible misconstruction. John

made things strong. It was duly signed and sealed, and was witnessed by the twelve proprietors of the twelve nearest stores; for though the testator knew that three witnesses were enough, he insisted upon having an army of them, at least one half of whom should not be over thirty years of age; so that if any trouble came, some of them could be found, and not all of them would have died of old age.

The reading of the will was completed. The eminent merchants and the sharp lawyer congratulated Eugene, his mother, and especially his sister. They were astonishingly polite to the whole family. Eugene tried to be good natured, but, with his peculiar temperament, he found it even more difficult than if he had been cut off with a shilling. As Eugene is the hero of the story, we will not attempt to use him up in the first chapter, or even to indicate his views of the magnificent position to which he had suddenly been elevated.

Tom Lynch had not yet been heard from, and Eugene, after listening to all the trustees had to say, started for Poppleton with his mother and sister.

CHAPTER II.

MR. ELIOT BUCKSTONE.

THE view from Poppleton Point was very fine. A marine painter sat making a sketch where the spray from the sea which beat upon the rocks below spattered his patent leather boots. He was wholly absorbed in his work, and one with a taste for the grand and beautiful, engaged in such a task, might well be pardoned for knowing nothing else. The Point was the eastern boundary of the northern coast line of the estuary into which Bell River disembogued. At an average distance of half a mile from the shore lay two islands, which had been named from their shape The Great Bell and The Little Bell. Just above the latter, on the north side of the river, was Port Poppleton, a village of four thousand inhabitants, who were principally engaged in the coasting and fishing business.

Above its mouth Bell River made two turns, which gave it the form of the letter S. The country was hilly and rocky, and the stream had been forced into a tortuous way in its path to the sea. Two miles north of the Port was another village, within the corporate limits of the town, which went by the name of Poppleton Mills. The place was a live New England town, with some farming, some fishing, some coasting, some ship-building, a great deal of trade with Boston and Portland by land and by sea, but the principal interest was the cotton factories.

The mouth of Bell River was surrounded by rocks, and the region to the southward was rather noted for its fine

scenery. The gunning and fishing in the vicinity were first class. Not only were the finest cod, haddock, perch, and tautog caught in the sea off the Port, but the finest pickerel and pouts were taken in the river above the Mills, and the finest trout in the brooks which flowed into it. It was therefore a paradise for sportsmen and summer idlers, and two very comfortable hotels in the lower village were usually well filled with visitors for four months in the year. Port Poppleton was rapidly acquiring a reputation as a watering-place, on a small scale.

Mr. Eliot Buckstone, marine painter from the city of New York, sat on a rock at the extremity of Poppleton Point. He had taken a room at the Bell River House for a fortnight, and was just now at the height of earthly felicity in the enjoyment of the luxuries of the place, not the least of which, to his artistic soul, was the view from the Point. He watched the green waves, as they rolled up from the sea, and broke themselves in flaky spray upon the rocks of the Great Bell. This was the scene he was sketching. He had already outlined the rocks, with the curling billows shattering themselves upon them, and the dilapidated farm-house and barn which occupied the highest part of the island.

“Help! help!”

Eliot Buckstone dropped his sketch-book and pencil, and sprang to his feet, for the tones were those of a woman.

“Help! help!”

It was the voice of a woman, but the accents were not so deeply burdened with terror as the words would seem to indicate. Mr. Buckstone glanced in the direction from which the appeal came, and discovered a small boat, containing a female. She uttered no wild screams, she made no extravagant gestures; and as her tones, gentle and supplicatory as they were, had before informed him, she did not appear to be seriously alarmed. The strong tide was bearing the boat swiftly through the narrow strait between the Great Bell and the north shore.

Although the lady, standing up in the boat, did not seem to regard her situation as a perilous one, the artist took a very different view of it. The wind was blowing fresh from the south-west, and the frail craft, already tossed by the great waves that rolled up from beyond the Point, was going out to sea. The wind and the tide might force it miles from the shore, and the lady, if not drowned, would be subjected to a long absence and a great deal of suffering. She appealed to him for help, or, if not to him, to somebody, for it was doubtful whether she had yet seen him. If there was no danger, of course she would not ask for assistance. Mr. Eliot Buckstone was an artist, and his imagination was strong and vivid. To him the lady's situation at once became desperate. Without his prompt decision, and his strong arm, the interesting supplicant would be swallowed up by the remorseless billows, engulfed by the relentless tide, mangled upon the pitiless rocks.

Mr. Buckstone threw off his coat the very instant he discovered the helpless lady, for though all the matters we have mentioned were duly considered, the thoughts flashed through his mind as thoughts always should flash through the brain of a genius. Mr. Buckstone threw off his vest. He did not take off either of these garments, for he was an impetuous young man, and a lady was in mortal peril — he threw them off. Mr. Buckstone kicked off his boots, though they were of patent leather, and snugly encased a pair of well-formed feet; he did not pull them off by any of the slow and tedious expedients known to the wearers of artistic boots — he kicked them off.

“Help! help!” again appealed the lone voyager, this time with a little more emphasis, but hardly with more feeling or more terror.

Mr. Buckstone rushed down to the water, walked out upon a big flat rock, and launched himself upon the stormy tide. The boat was coming within a few rods of the Point, and having measured with his eye the base and perpendicular of

a triangle, the hypotenuse of which was the space between himself and the boat, he struck out on the base line, leaving the wayward craft to follow the perpendicular.

The artist swam well, and vigorously breasted the strong waves which beat against him. It is hardly more than once in a lifetime that a young man has an opportunity to become the hero of a romance, and Mr. Eliot Buckstone seemed to be determined to make a rich investment on the present occasion. It is hardly necessary to say that he intercepted the truant boat, as it was in the act of passing the Point, for to a young man in his frame of mind, with a helpless female before him rushing on to death and misery, failure was as impossible as success to a less determined person. He grasped the gunwale of the boat, and held on; he could do no more, for, short as was the distance he had accomplished, the obstinate waves and the pitch of excitement to which he had worked himself up, had completely exhausted him. He hung on at the gunwale, puffing like a porpoise torn from his native element.

The imperilled female, now apparently in less peril than her gallant deliverer, stood up in the stern of the boat, regarding with intense interest and anxiety the amphibious gentleman who had so boldly battled the waves in her behalf. While Mr. Eliot Buckstone recovers his breath, let us glance at her who had unwittingly caused the enthusiastic artist all this trouble and inconvenience.

She was rather tall; beautifully proportioned, and exceedingly graceful. Her complexion was naturally fair, but it had been somewhat browned by the summer sun. Her eye was large, soft, and blue; her nose Grecian; and her lips had just curl enough to indicate firmness of purpose. Her face and form would have attracted attention anywhere; but the more spiritual the nature, the more elevated the taste, the higher the intellectual cultivation, of the beholder, the more intense would have been his appreciation of the gentle maiden, whom the wind and the waves were wafting to sea. when the artist rushed to her assistance.

“I am very sorry to have caused you all this trouble, sir,” said the lady, in tones so sweet and soothing, and withal so musical, that the marine painter instantly lost all sense of fatigue, and felt whole volumes of fresh, pure air pour into his empty lungs.

Eliot Buckstone was not sorry when he saw that face, beheld that graceful form, and heard that musical voice. He was endowed with a highly sensitive organization, and he may be pardoned for the raptures which were kindled into being beneath his wet garments. I am inclined to think, knowing what he felt in this moment of enthusiasm, that he was a fatalist; that he believed fate or providence had at this time, and in this manner, brought him into the presence of the tall maiden; who gazed in pity and gentleness upon him.

“No trouble at all, madam,” he replied, as with a vigorous movement he climbed over the rail into the boat, to the imminent risk of swamping the frail craft.

“I did not see you, sir, when I called for help,” she added, apologetically.

“I am glad you did not, if seeing me would have prevented you from claiming my assistance,” answered Mr. Buckstone, as he shook the salt water from his curly locks.

“I would not have had you expose yourself in this manner on any consideration,” continued the lady, who had seated herself when the artist climbed into the boat.

“Do not complain of me for what I have done, for I assure you it has been a greater pleasure to me than to you.”

“You are very kind, sir, but I must regret that you adopted this method of assisting me.”

“What other method could I have adopted?” asked Mr. Buckstone, not a little puzzled by the protest of the rescued damsel.

He was a man of the world, and though he had been in the habit of hearing ladies pretend to object to the trouble they might have caused, he felt that they regarded any sacri-

fices of time or comfort as expressions of devotion, highly flattering and complimentary to them. He believed that the gentleman who incurred the greatest risk for a lady had the sincerest admiration for her. In the present instance, Mr. Buckstone realized that the lady actually regretted the annoyance and discomfort which she had caused him.

“Gentlemen do not usually put to sea like seals and porpoises,” replied the lady, with a soothing smile, the first he had seen, and which rendered his case even more desperate than before.

“How do they put to sea?”

“In boats.”

“But I had no boat.”

“Perhaps you might have found one at the salt works beyond the Point.”

“Perhaps I might — who knows!” replied Mr. Buckstone with a rather vacant expression on his handsome face, for the idea of resorting to a boat when a lady was in peril, looked absolutely preposterous to him, especially if the boat had to be searched for before it could be found.

“I beg you will not think I am ungrateful,” continued the lady, noticing the shade of discontent that appeared on the face of the artist.

“By no means, madam.”

“I am really very grateful to you; and I was only sorry to have caused you so much trouble and discomfort. I was not in great danger ——”

“Not in great danger?” interposed Mr. Buckstone, puzzled by the lady’s apparent intention to underrate his services.

“Did you think I was?”

“I certainly did.”

“Then I am all the more obliged to you for your kind exertions in my favor.”

“Don’t mention it; but you will excuse me if I say I think you are the dearest lady it was ever my good fortune to meet.”

“Indeed, you misunderstand me entirely,” protested she, a slight flush mantling her cheeks, while she looked exceedingly troubled and annoyed. “I am very, very grateful to you.”

“O, I do not doubt that.”

“You think that I am cool, but I assure you my heart is warm with thankfulness. I am just as much obliged to you as though I had been in peril of my life, and all the more so because you so regarded my situation.”

“I only meant that you were very cool in view of your danger. How a lady could be as composed as you were, when alone in a boat drifting out to sea, is more than I can comprehend. That was what I meant. I would not by any means accuse you of undervaluing my poor service.”

“I am relieved,” added she, her smile meaning even more than her words. “I do not think I am lessening the value of your efforts in my behalf when I say that I should not have been very much alarmed if I had been sure of going out to sea. It is now only the middle of the forenoon: I should have been picked up by some boat or vessel bound in or out of the river.”

“I must say you have more courage and self-possession than I ever happened to meet with in a lady before.”

“I am quite used to the water.”

“I see that you are,” laughed the artist, rising from his seat on the thwart, where all this time he had been resting from his labors, while the boat continued to drift out to sea.

“Have you any oars?” he asked, after he had glanced into the bottom of the boat.

“I have not, unfortunately. If I had I should not have been here.”

“Then I am very thankful that you had none;” whereat the maiden blushed, and looked troubled again.

“I lost the oars overboard,” she added, without noticing the pretty speech of the gallant young man.

“I am glad you did, Miss——,” and he looked up into the fair face of the lady.

“Miss Kingman; but I am very sorry I lost the oars, for you are as wet as a fish, and you may take cold.”

“I never take cold; I am above such infirmities.”

“I hope you will not, but a cold bath is not comfortable on a chilly day like this.”

“This is a beautiful day, and my heart is warm enough just now to generate sufficient caloric for my whole body.”

Miss Kingman did not, perhaps, precisely comprehend this bold speech. She glanced back at the Point, past which the boat had drifted, and was now tossing about like a chip on the great waves of the open bay.

“You think we had better get back to the land,” continued Mr. Buckstone, interpreting her glance at the shore to mean this.

“I am not at all frightened; my father is an old sailor, and I have always lived on the sea shore.”

“Upon my word, I am heartily rejoiced that you are not alarmed at your situation, for really I can't see that I have done anything more by my swim, than to give you a companion in your voyage out to sea,” replied the artist, as he glanced over the boat again in search of something that would serve as an oar.

The lady was silent; perhaps disliking to say what she may have believed — that a companion like the young artist was more dangerous than the wind and the waves.

Whether she thought so or not, it was true in this case, though by no fault on his part; and it would have been better for her to be buried in the depth of the ocean, with nothing but the wind and the waves to chant her requiem, than to have met Eliot Buckstone.

“What shall I do? I have no oars, and the thwarts are all fastened into the boat.”

“I don't know, really,” she replied, “what you can do. I wondered, when I saw you swimming out, what you intended.”

“I supposed you had oars,” answered Mr. Buckstone,

stung by the implied, but not intended, reproach for his thoughtless measures.

“If I had had oars, I should not have needed your assistance.”

“Then I am only an encumbrance to you. I suppose the boat would live longer in a sea with one person in it than with two. I have actually added to your peril, Miss Kingman, instead of removing you from it. What a blunderer I am!”

“You wrong yourself. Whatever the practical result, you intended to do me a great service, and I assure you I appreciate it as such.”

“I think it would be better for me now to leave you, and swim ashore.”

“Swim ashore!”

“And save you from my presence.”

“You wrong me now, sir.”

“I have come to the conclusion, that in your estimation, I have made a fool of myself.”

“Far from it, sir,” protested she, earnestly.

“That you owe me thanks only for my good intentions, which have stupidly increased your danger rather than diminished it.”

“I have no thought but gratitude.”

“For my good intentions, and contempt for my blundering work.”

“I hope I have not offended you. I did not mean to say anything unkind. I am sure I owe you ——”

“Nothing, Miss Kingman. We are not more than half a mile from the Point, and I will swim ashore.”

“Not on any account. I shall never forgive myself for my careless words.”

“But when I get ashore, I will procure a boat, and come — or send some one — to your relief.”

“You are vexed with me, sir. I did not mean to say a word which would wound you.”

“Neither have you.”

“And I do not undervalue your kind exertions in my behalf. Do not attempt to swim ashore in such a sea as this,” pleaded the lady, as she saw him look significantly over the side.

“I can easily do so.”

“You are nearly exhausted by your efforts in swimming off to the boat.”

“That was only because I was so much alarmed for your safety.”

“How noble and kind you were! And how cruel and unkind I have been to disparage your efforts; but I did not intend to disparage them,” protested she, with an earnestness which entirely removed the feeling of chagrin that lingered in the mind of the enthusiastic artist. “I hope you will forgive me, sir.”

“With all my heart;” and it was with all his heart, for he could not resist the eloquence of that soft eye, and those musical tones, albeit his vexation was caused wholly by the feeling that the fair stranger did not appreciate him, rather than his exertions in her behalf.

“I cannot express to you how grateful I am, and I would not have you think me unkind for all the world.”

Mr. Buckstone was satisfied. How could he be otherwise after such liberal concession on the part of the lady? He now occupied himself in an examination of the interior structure of the boat. One of the narrow ceiling boards was loose, and without asking to whom the craft belonged, he tore it from its place. With his pocket-knife he soon fashioned it into something that had a remote resemblance to an oar.

“Now, Miss Kingman, if you will permit me to sit in the stern of the boat, I will try to scull her ashore,” said he, as he moved aft for this purpose.

“I am sure you will do all you intended.” replied she, as she rose from her seat.

The artist took her hand to assist her to another seat. It was a delicate and prettily shaped hand, and Mr. Buckstone, in spite of the emergency of the moment, glanced at it with an artist's eye. He was sufficiently enraptured by the touch to press the hand, if he had dared to do so; but he prudently refrained, and placed himself in the stern with the oar he had improvised.

Mr. Buckstone, in the pursuit of his art, had accustomed himself to marine occupations. He succeeded in putting the boat's head up to the wind, but that was about all he succeeded in doing, for the pine board twisted and behaved itself in a most unseamanlike manner; or Mr. Buckstone did, for the fault lay somewhere between them; and as far as the boatman or the lady could discover, no progress was made. Then he essayed to row the stubborn craft; but she whirled around, and resolutely went to seaward with the wind and tide. Miss Kingman hoped he would not wear himself out in fruitless exertions; but Mr. Buckstone seemed to have "enlisted for the war," and to be determined to carry his point in spite of the obstinacy of the boat, the treachery of the oar, and the adverse influence of the wind and tide. Finally, after resorting to various expedients, he turned the craft towards the lighthouse on The Great Bell, so that her intended course was diagonal with the force of the breeze and the current, and pulled his oar on the seaward side. By this strategy, with the utmost exertion at the pine board, he realized that he was making a little progress through the water.

The labor was very great, and the headway very slight. It would be hours before he could reach the lighthouse at this rate, and he was soon discouraged by the prospect before him. But what added to his discomfort and discouragement was the fact that his beautiful companion sat behind him, and he could derive no inspiration in his arduous labors from the contemplation of her sweet face and graceful form. Mr. Buckstone was really in no haste to reach the shore, and nothing but a proper regard for appearances and the propri-

eties of the occasion induced him to struggle so hard to attain what he did not wish to attain. The marine painter was young, sentimental, and susceptible. Never before in flesh and blood had he so distinctly seen his ideal of a beautiful woman, as in the being who now sat behind him in the boat. In spite of his wet garments, and in spite of the terrors of the ocean upon which the boat was drifting, he found himself very pleasantly situated, and not the least in a hurry to escape from the perils which were as yet too far off to be dreaded. There was a greater peril nearer at hand, of which neither of them was conscious.

“There comes a boat out of the river!” exclaimed the lady, just as Mr. Buckstone had given up his useless labor, and turned round to gaze into the speaking eyes of his lovely companion.

“I am sorry for it,” said he, incautiously; “that is, I am sorry it did not come before.”

Miss Kingman was eighteen years old, and if she was deceived by the change in his words, she was undeceived when she felt the earnest gaze of admiration he bestowed upon her. The artist turned, and saw a sail boat dash out from behind the point of The Great Bell, on which the lighthouse was located.

“She makes good time, and you will soon be relieved of my presence, Miss Kingman,” said he, with a sigh.

She hoped so, but it would have been cruel to say it.

“It is Mr. Hungerford,” continued Miss Kingman, when the sail boat had come within hailing distance; and there was a smile of pleasure on her countenance which did not escape the keen observation of the artist.

“And pray, who is Mr. Hungerford?” he asked.

“Haven’t you heard of him? Eugene Hungerford, the heir of the Baltimore *millionnaire*?”

Mr. Buckstone had never heard of him; but he hailed the sail boat, and begged the loan of a pair of oars.

CHAPTER III.

THE HUNGERFORD FAMILY.

THE Hungerford family, after uncle John had been solemnly and ceremoniously committed to the tomb, returned to Poppleton. Everything had a kind of unsubstantial look to them, as though they had been suddenly lifted from the cares and trials of this sublunary sphere to a region of golden clouds which were very beautiful to look upon, but which would not bear the solid tramp of mortal feet. Whereas they had gone to Baltimore, ten days before, in very moderate and even humble circumstances, now they were rolling in wealth; at least the will of the late John Hungerford had so declared them to be, though they found it exceedingly difficult to realize the stupendous change which had come over them. They reached Poppleton with all these doubts unsolved, and with these cloudy sensations still hanging about them.

Mrs. Hungerford was the most practical person of the three. She was a well-educated, well-informed lady, who knew something of books, and a great deal of the world. She had brought up her little family on three hundred dollars a year, and she had necessarily been a very practical person; but as she journeyed home from Baltimore, she was troubled with a dread lest the golden clouds should suddenly roll away, the misty curtain be lifted, and the bright dream of ease, luxury, and happiness be dissipated even before she had tasted its sweetness. Twenty thousand dollars had been left to her, independently of all contingencies; and this to a

woman of high aims, who had been struggling all her life with the inconveniences of a small income, was a fortune in itself. By degrees, as the train thundered along towards her home, she reasoned herself into the belief that her own legacy and that of her daughter were as real as the solid earth beneath them. Of the golden clouds, the silver fountains, and the glittering mists from Pactolian streams, that enveloped her son Eugene, she had not the courage to think. Her own little fortune was large enough and suggestive enough to satisfy the highest flights of her imagination.

So far as thought and feeling were concerned, the Hungerford family were only one individual. I do not mean to say there was never any difference of opinion among its members, for that would be saying they were all dolts and fools, and that the cottage in which they dwelt was the dullest and most insipid place in the world; but there was a rich harmony of thought and feeling, even while thought and feeling ran in different channels. Simple-minded, Christian people, of intelligence and cultivation, always remarked what a beautiful family the Hungerfords were. The mother and her children were unselfish; they lived for each other, and there was not a joy or a sorrow for one that was not for all. It made no difference, therefore, what members of the family had been mentioned in the will of John Hungerford as the recipients of legacies, or which one as the residuary legatee; by the ties of nature, what belonged to one belonged to all; and if the *millionnaire* had known them better, he might have left his bounty to the whole, instead of mentioning individuals.

Eugene Hungerford appeared to take his altered circumstances with the utmost composure; but he only appeared to do so. While he was universally acknowledged to be a generous, noble, and high-minded young man, he had the reputation of being odd and strange. He never did things as other people did them; not apparently for the sake of being odd and strange, but because he had a will and a way of

his own. As the train bore him north, he did not seem to be elated: nor was he; for, like his mother and his sister, he was troubled with that feeling of insecurity and unsubstantialness—the fear that things would not work according to the programme laid down in John Hungerford's will. Perhaps the old man was crazy, and had made his magnificent will without the means of doing a tithe of what the labored document proposed to accomplish. He had heard of men making wills who had not a dollar to leave behind them.

But in spite of this want of confidence in the reality of the golden era which had dawned upon him, he could not help building castles in the air: certain brilliant projects flitted through his mind, some relating to personal comforts, luxuries, and enjoyments, and others to the reformation and improvement of the world at large, but more especially to the world of Poppleton society; though this, as being within the sphere of his knowledge and experience, was only the representative of a general idea. “No pent-up Utica” was to contract his powers, when he became the sole possessor of the three millions. When he did! Eugene regarded the terms of the will as contingent, rather than conditional. They were disagreeable to him. He did not relish them. To have the holiest and dearest relations of life even mentioned in connection with money was repulsive to him.

In a worldly point of view, he must marry as soon as practicable; otherwise the contingency which would give him the three millions, absolutely, could not occur. There was certainly a worldly inducement for him to make some lady Mrs. Eugene Hungerford. He did not like it. Why should he marry, if he did not wish to do so? Why should he be bribed to enter into the holy state of matrimony? He could not very clearly define to himself his feelings on this delicate point; but there was a certain sense of compulsion which fretted and annoyed him, and which tempted him to be obstinate even against his moral, social, and pecuniary interests. To be compelled to marry in order to obtain the three mil-

lions, went exactly across the grain of his sensitive and high-strung nature. If the question had been between the three millions and taking to his bosom one whom he did not love, one to whom he was indifferent, he would not have hesitated an instant in making a decision, even if poverty and single blessedness had been the alternative.

But Eugene Hungerford was doomed to be rich in spite of himself. No obstinacy or hardship could deprive him of his entire wealth — always supposing that John Hungerford's will was not a vision. He was to receive the income of the three millions for seven years; and then, if the conditions were not complied with, he was to have the sixth part of the whole sum. Let him be as obdurate as he pleased, he could hardly help being a *millionnaire*; let him be denied the blessed boon of a little John Hungerford in the future, and then even a fortune of which he had never been extravagant enough to dream, would still be coming to him. His position would not be a very hard one, though he should choose to be ugly and uncompromising.

With this view he came back to the original question, Why should he marry if he did not wish to marry? Why should he call his first born son John if it did not suit him so to call him? But in this connection there came up before him, unbidden, the image of a beautiful girl, upon whom he had long looked with admiration, and to whose virtues and gentleness his heart had yielded homage. She was all that he could ask for as the partner of his joys and his sorrows in the pilgrimage of life, though never before had he ventured to think of her as his wife. Though she was poor like himself, though her family relations were overshadowed by griefs and sorrows, she was so fair and so good, that crowds of suitors thronged her path. She could choose from a score, if not a hundred, and perhaps her choice was already made.

This beautiful girl was Mary Kingman, whom we left in the boat with Eliot Buckstone. Though only twenty, she had taught the grammar school at Poppleton Mills, and the

one at the Port. Her last service had been in the High School, and she had just resigned her situation there on account of family troubles. She had been a pupil in this school with Eugene Hungerford, where a strong friendship had grown up between them. It was not love -- they were too young. On his return from college, where, to save expense, he had taken to the study of the law in the office of Squire Perkins at the Port, he saw her only occasionally. The future had been too uncertain to permit him to think of marriage; and though he still cherished his early regard for her, he prudently refrained from committing himself or her to any expression of the feeling which both evidently entertained. All this was changed now; he could give her a home, a palace; he could crown her with golden wreaths, and make her the queen of the county; but above all, he could redeem her from the wasting bondage to which her domestic relations subjected her.

Thus thought Eugene Hungerford as he travelled homeward, and in spite of the vein of obstinacy in his nature, there was a fair prospect that the expectations of the deceased uncle would be realized. Mary Kingman was an angel of light in his future path, and he could not turn from the bright vision, even to become a martyr to his high sense of duty, and thus wrong himself out of the three millions.

In due time the family got out of the cars at Poppleton Mills, through which the railroad from Boston passed, and took the stage, that made two trips a day from the Port.

The marine village lay exactly two miles due south of the manufacturing village, across the space included in the lower half of the S formed by the winding of Bell River. The road was through a rocky, hilly region for the first mile, abounding in glens and steeps which were beautifully picturesque. One mile from the Port the great turnpike to the north-east, over which the mail between Boston and Portland had been carried before railroads were built, crossed the

Mills road, forming an acute angle with it. In this angle was the cottage of James Hungerford.

Twenty-four years ago, when the factory agent was about to build a cage for the bird he had caught, he purchased all the land lying in the northern acute angle formed by the two roads, extending to the river and a cross road from the turnpike to the Mills. James Hungerford believed that Poppleton, with its valuable water power, and its maritime advantages, would become a great city, though it was then only in an embryo state. The tract of land he had purchased appeared to be of no practical value, and he had given only twelve hundred dollars for it. About fifty acres of it on the turnpike was level enough for cultivation, though there were several eligible sites for building on the Mills road. On one of these, at the forks of the roads, he had built his house.

People of practical sense laughed at James when he bought this land; said that "a fool and his money were soon parted," and other sharp things, which the purchaser was too independent to heed. When Poppleton was a city, his harvest would come. He had leased it as a pasture for enough to pay his taxes and keep the fences in repair; but four and twenty years had failed to realize his hope. Poppleton had grown amazingly, but still his wild lands were not in demand.

Pine Hill, as this rough territory was called, was a favorite resort of Eugene; and when the vision of three millions dawned upon him, he could not help thinking what a paradise money would make of it. He could not have found a region in the whole state so admirably adapted to the improvements which his taste coveted. He knew just where the mansion should be located on the turnpike, just where the stable must be placed, just where certain roads should be built, and just where certain summer houses and "lazy places" were to be constructed, in order to bring into being the most splendid domain the world had ever seen. But

then there were the doubts in regard to the reality of his present situation, and he permitted Pine Hill to bloom for the present in its own wild grandeur.

“Home again, mother!” exclaimed he, as he assisted Mrs. Hungerford and Julia to alight from the stage.

“Yes, and I am glad to get home.”

“So am I,” added Julia. “I am tired out.”

The neighbor’s wife who lived opposite saw them come, and hastened over with the key of the cottage, for they had no servants to keep house for them during their absence. The good woman at once made a fire, and began to get tea for the weary travellers. Very likely she wished to know how much money the Baltimore *millionnaire* had left to his poor relations, for the newspapers had not yet blazoned to the world the provisions of the will; but she asked no questions till the family sat down to tea. Mrs. Hungerford then told her that she and Julia had each received a legacy of twenty thousand dollars, which was magnificent enough to absorb the kind neighbor’s whole attention; and she forgot to ask any more questions, being in haste to go out and circulate the astounding intelligence that the Hungerfords had got forty thousand dollars. Eugene, therefore, to his great satisfaction, escaped her congratulations and her wondering exclamations. After tea he walked over Pine Hill.

Everything went on as usual in the Hungerford family. Doubtless great plans were laid, and great expectations were indulged; but nothing was done, and people wondered that they did not dress in silks and satins, and buy a carriage. In the course of a week, the papers had the news. Then everybody looked upon Eugene Hungerford as a money prince, and treated him with the utmost deference. The officers of the Poppleton Bank bowed low to him, and both villages wondered what he would do with his money. Eugene kept as cool as he could, and tried to be indifferent to the excitement of which he was the cause and centre. The only extravagance in which he had been known to indulge was the

purchase of a beautiful sail boat, which he had long coveted. Eugene was a man of large lungs, and it required the whole atmosphere to inflate them. He was, therefore, devoted to out-door exercise, and his keenest enjoyment was derived from the ocean. This boat had been purchased partly with reference to the expected visit of an old college friend, one Dick Birch, who had promised to spend a week with him in July.

July came two months after the return of the family from Baltimore. Eugene had become in a measure accustomed to his situation, and had come to realize the full meaning of John Hungerford's will. Two or three times he had met Mary Kingman. He had blushed; she had blushed; but he was not quite ready to say what he had to say to her. He was not sure that some less prudent young man was not already wooing her. He could not ask if she was still free; he could not ask her, or any other person, such a question; and so he waited for the future to solve the problem, and open the way for him. But each time he saw her, added to the intensity of his desire to possess her.

The stage stopped before the cottage door, and out jumped Dick Birch. A small valise for clothes, and a large package of fishing rods, game bags, fish baskets, two guns, and other sporting gear, were placed on the ground before the arrival was discovered. Eugene, who was just returning from a tramp over Pine Hill, rushed to the spot.

"Well, Dick, old boy, how are you? I am glad to see you."

"Ah, Hungerford, I am rejoiced to meet you," replied Dick, as he grasped the extended hand of his friend. "But I was in some doubt about coming."

"In doubt?"

"Yes."

"Why so?"

"I have heard bad stories about you."

"Do you mean so?"

“Upon my word I do. I heard some old fellow down in Baltimore had died, and left you three millions, or something of that sort.”

“Such has been my misfortune, but not my fault. I didn’t die and leave all that money to a graceless scamp; so I am not to blame.”

“Then it’s true.”

“Conditionally, it is all true; but, in any event, I have had at least a million thrust upon me.”

“Poor fellow!” said Dick, with a mock sigh. “But how do you feel?”

“As I always did.”

“Is that so?”

“Undoubtedly.”

“A million is enough to spoil any fellow; three millions would ruin an angel. I had my doubts about coming.”

“Why?”

“Didn’t know that you would care to see me now.”

“Dick, you don’t speak the truth. You had no doubts.”

“Three million dollars is a great deal of money; so is one million.”

“Did you think it would make me forget my friends?”

“No, I did not think so; but hang me if one can tell what effect money will have on a man.”

“I can’t tell what effect it will have on me, but I do know that it will not cheat me out of my friends. Dick, I am delighted to see you. I have been anticipating your visit with the keenest satisfaction. I have something laid out for every day. I have just bought a boat for your sake.”

“Well, I reckon you are the same old fellow, after all,” laughed Dick.

“I know I am. I want to talk with you about the future, too; about this money, with which I am to be bored. You have a soul, Dick; and you can understand me, if any fellow can. I want your advice.”

“I don’t belong to the breed of Solemons, but I won’t

charge you anything for my advice, though I am a lawyer."

"Thank you, Dick. Now come into the house, and we will make you as comfortable as we can. We don't live like *millionnaires*, but a cheerful welcome makes a soft couch."

Engine led the way into the sitting-room, and the guest was introduced to Mrs. Hungerford, who gave him a kind and motherly greeting.

"Where is Julia, mother?" asked Eugene, when he saw that his sister was not present.

"Gone to the post office; she will return presently."

"Yes, where's Julia?" laughed Dick Birch. "I want to see her. In fact, I don't know that I should have come if it hadn't been for seeing her."

"Yes, you would, Dick; tell the truth."

"I wanted to see her, at any rate. Fellows don't often speak of their sisters, Mrs. Hungerford, as Eugene did when we were at college together."

"Well, I think she deserves all that he may have said of her," said the matron.

"Come, Dick, I will show you your room;" and loaded with valise, guns, fishing rods, and game bags, the young men went up stairs.

When they came down, Julia had returned, and she was formally introduced to the guest, of whom she had heard encomiums before, bordering upon the extravagant. Dick was not a handsome man, like Mr. Eliot Buckstone, whom we left in the boat with Miss Kingman; neither was he ugly or ill made. He had a sharp, bright eye, and his face was noble rather than handsome. He looked like a man of intellect, of high purposes, and grand ideas, rather than one of those masculine monstrosities whom some weak-minded females call "pretty." Bah! the idea is nauseating. To be pretty is the prerogative of young ladies, though Heaven defend them if this be all they have!

Julia was not very pretty, though none would have called her homely. Perhaps she was a little disposed to be "strong minded;" not in the offensive sense, and only enough so to have a certain contempt for things weak and effeminate. She was not afraid of spiders, or even of striped snakes. She had actually read Locke and Bacon, as well as Scott and Dickens.

She had heard a great deal about Dick Birch, and was prepared to see a miracle of all that is grand and noble in man. She blushed slightly when she met the full gaze of his sharp eye, and took his offered hand.

"This is the great moment of my life, Miss Hungerford," said the guest. "You have been set forth to me as a princess among sisters."

"And you to me as a prince among friends," she replied. "When you are a candidate for the presidency, I shall certainly vote for you if woman's rights are recognized by that time."

"Thank you. I shall certainly be elected then; though, perhaps, you would like to know my principles before you give me your suffrage."

"Probably you will have none by that time."

"I certainly shall, if, when I reach that bad eminence, I can make up my mind beforehand which is to be the winning side. Do you take me for a politician?"

"I hope you won't quarrel in the beginning," interposed Eugene.

"I hope not; but I forgot I had a letter for you. Eugene," said Julia, as she handed him a large envelope, post-marked Baltimore.

"Excuse me, Dick," said he, as he opened the package.

It contained, among other papers, a draft for fifty thousand dollars, forwarded by the eminent merchants, trustees under John Hungerford's will. It was the income which had accrued before and since the death of the *millionnaire*

There were two other drafts for the legacies due Mrs. Hungerford and Julia.

“Fifty thousand dollars! That is more money than I ever saw,” exclaimed Eugene.

“May Heaven be kind to you!” added Dick.

“After tea, you will tell me what to do with it, Dick.”

“I shrink from the task.”

Just before sunset the young men strolled over Pine Hill. Eugene pointed out the spot on which he purposed to build his mansion. Dick approved it, and an aquatic excursion for the next day was planned before they returned.

CHAPTER IV.

OFF THE GREAT BELL.

WE should delight to linger with our readers around the pleasant and happy home of the Hungerfords; but scenes more exciting than the quiet of domestic life lie before us, and we must hasten to them. After breakfast Eugene and Dick, on their way to the boat, stopped at the Poppleton Bank, in the Port, to leave the drafts, which were payable in Boston, for collection. Eugene did the President, who happened to be there, the honor to inform him that he should make the bank the place of deposit for his funds, and desired the fifty thousand dollars to be placed to his credit. This was his first actual transaction as a moneyed man, and what had before seemed to be a vision was now an undoubted reality.

His income was fifteen thousand dollars a month, or five hundred dollars a day, and he began to be conscious of the painful necessity of spending some of it before the Poppleton Bank should be overwhelmed by the surplus. At present he was going out in his boat, and could not afford the time to consider the matter in detail; but he hoped, before many weeks elapsed, to make his money fly with tolerable rapidity. He had schemes enough in his head, but only time and thought could reduce them to practice.

“Upon my soul, Hungerford, I am afraid of you,” said Dick, as they left the bank.

“What do you mean?”

“Why, all this money! My dear fellow, you are almost

as badly off as John Jacob Astor and Stephen Girard were!"

"Stop till we get into the boat before you begin. Let me tell you what I am going to do."

They reached the wharf at the foot of the main street, where the boat was moored. As we are not writing a nautical romance, we will not trouble the reader with a description of the boat, though she was a fine little craft. Both Eugene and Richard were somewhat "salt" in their tendencies, and were familiar with the science of boating. The breeze was fresh, and after running by the point of The Little Bell, the boat went "wing and wing" down the river.

"Now, Hungerford, what are you going to do?" asked Dick, as he settled himself back in a comfortable position on the cushioned seat in the standing-room.

"My ideas are rather crude, so far," replied Eugene.

"You are going to get married, in the first place, or you are sure to lose the three millions," added Dick, to whom all the provisions of John Hungerford's will had been detailed on the preceding evening.

"Perhaps not, Dick; I don't know yet;" and Eugene thought of Mary Kingman.

"You don't know!"

"I do not."

"Come, come, Hungerford; don't play off in that manner with me. Of course you intend to marry as soon as the thing can be decently done."

"I don't intend any such thing. I shall take my own time, and do exactly the same that I should have done if John Hungerford had died without making a will."

"Are you going to be mulish?"

"By no means. Marriage, in my estimation, is a very serious thing, and I will not be driven into it, or driven out of it, by any purely selfish considerations."

"Certainly not."

"Three million dollars will not induce me to trade my

self off, like a swine in the market, to any living woman and three millions shall not induce me to purchase even the most fascinating creature that ever daintily trod this footstool."

"I understand that; but you are giving your uncle's will a very narrow and bigoted interpretation. The terms are liberal; you have four or five years given you to become a Benedick; and you are not hampered by any conditions in regard to the lady. Don't attempt to make a martyr of yourself."

"I have no such thought."

"But you have a little vein of obstinacy in your nature, which prompts you to go against your own interest. I don't mean your pecuniary interest, but your moral, social, and domestic welfare. Hungerford, if an angel of light should suddenly appear before you, and declare that you might go to heaven by reading the fifth chapter of Matthew every morning during the rest of your lifetime, I think you would be content to stay out of heaven rather than comply with the conditions."

"I certainly should?"

"You should?"

"Certainly."

"Because you would deem it your duty to be on the off side."

"No; if an angel made such a declaration as that to me, I should set him down as a humbug, for I do not believe that heaven is to be purchased by compliance with a form; if it were, it would not be worth having. I believe in heaven, and I hope to reach it when I die. Your simile suits my argument better than it does your own. I shall endeavor to live a true and good life, not as the price which I am to pay for heaven, but because it is right that I should so live—because God requires such a life of me. My prayer shall not be the weary, toilsome, distasteful struggle of a doubting spirit, of which heaven is the guerdon, but my

heart-breathing to Him who made me, who loves me, and to whom I am always grateful for his mercies. When I read the fifth chapter of Matthew — which I shall often do, I hope — it will be because the Saviour speaks there to my soul, and I love to hear his words.”

“Upon my word, Hungerford, you will be a parson yet.”

“No; but with all the means which God has placed in my hands, I hope to be a minister of the gospel in my own way to the poor and needy ones of earth.”

“Then you intend to set up as a philanthropist,” laughed Dick.

“I certainly do not intend to ‘set up’ as such; but you have run away from the question. When I marry — if I do marry — it shall be as I go into heaven — if I do go there; not by purchase, not by barter, trade, or compromise. If it suits me to wed, I shall so do; if it does not suit me to do so, I shall not. I only mean to say that, in a matter so serious and solemn, I shall do precisely the same as though my uncle had sunk his three millions in the middle of Chesapeake Bay. Is that obstinacy?”

“I think it is.”

“You don’t mean it, Dick.”

“I do.”

Dick bent down in the bottom of the boat, and lighted a cigar. It was plain that he had something to say.

“Would you be bought into matrimony?” demanded Eugene, a little excited.

“Have a cigar, Hungerford?”

“No; thank you.”

“I would not be bought into matrimony. That is not the question. If your uncle had not left you a single sou, you would, in the ordinary course of events, have fallen in love, and would have married. Now, because two and a half millions depend primarily upon your doing so, you have set your teeth against it. I’m ashamed of you, Hungerford.”

“If you don’t argue a legal case better than you do a matrimonial one, you will never succeed as a lawyer. You are all wrong, Dick.”

“No, I’m not.”

“Yes, you are. I haven’t said I should not marry.”

“What you have said amounts about to that.”

“I have only said that I would not be dragooned into marriage.”

“But you mean to be obstinate; you mean to be on the off side.”

“I do not; I only mean not to be influenced in the slightest degree by this price which has been set upon my marriage. Things shall take their natural course.”

“Hungerford, if you see a pretty girl, with all wifely qualifications, you will think of what you call the ‘price,’ and give her the cold shoulder.”

“No; and I have already seen the one whom you describe,” said Eugene, glancing behind him at the wake of the boat, because he did not wish to have his looks scrutinized, as he made this important declaration.

“Is it possible?”

“It is a fact, told in confidence, of course.”

“To be sure; but I am afraid you will give her the cold shoulder.”

“No.”

“The thought of the ‘price’ will make you a slow wooer. You will be so fearful of selling yourself, as you call it, that you will be distant and reserved, and permit the bird to fly away from you in disgust. You will think she is going to smile upon you for your money, or you will take so much time in satisfying yourself it is not so, that she will grow cold towards you. The three millions will be like the turtle that swallowed its own head.”

“The matter must take its natural course.”

“You will not let it take its natural course. You cannot help being influenced by the ‘price.’ Be a little more

selfish, and you will be more just to yourself and to the lady. By the way, who is she?"

Eugene pointed to the old worn-out farm-house, on The Great Bell, and told him all he knew of Mary Kingman, which was more than the reader yet knows.

"Now, Hungerford, I must do you the justice to say that I was wrong in my estimate of your position," continued Dick Birch, when the story was told. "I think you don't mean to avoid marriage on account of that condition in your uncle's will."

"I do not."

"But I fear that you will be so cramped by it, that the fair lady of your castle on the isle may die an old maid for all you will do to save her. Mind, I don't say you will be so cramped and influenced; I only say, I fear it—fear it; that's all."

"I hope not."

"There is not a particle of danger that you will do anything from mercenary motives; but you must study to avoid the other extreme—that of cheating yourself out of a loving, beautiful, and accomplished wife, from the very fear of taking her at a price. But, Hungerford, you haven't told me what you are going to do with your money, though you have hinted that you intend to be a universal philanthropist."

"I distinctly said that I had no intention of 'setting up' as a philanthropist. Your knight errant of philanthropy is just as ridiculous to me as the veritable hero of Salamanca. There are as many Don Quixotes among the reformers of the age, as in any other class."

"Good!"

"By a most astounding turn of events, I find myself in possession of an enormous income. I shall be worth at least a million when I am thirty, and possibly three millions."

"Probably," laughed Dick.

"Well, probably, then; but it will only increase my responsibility. I don't want to prate about even what I sincerely

feel, but, in view of this immense wealth, I regard myself as the almoner of God's bounty. I say this to you in the privacy of our friendship, Dick; I shouldn't be willing to tell it, or to have it told, in town meeting, or even in the church. You understand me, Dick."

"I do, my dear fellow;" and the idea was so lofty and grand, that Dick could not help casting a glance of admiration at his friend.

"It is no affectation for me to say to you that I value this money only for the good it will do to me and to others."

"I know you well enough to believe it, Hungerford."

"But I am not bigoted, Dick. I don't intend to become a professional philanthropist. I am going to be selfish enough to look out for myself first. I am going to build as fine a house on Pine Hill as a man worth half a million ought to live in; one, say, that will cost twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars. Then I shall employ at least a hundred men for the next year upon the Pine Hill grounds, which I shall transform into a kind of Central Park. This will give employment to a small army of mechanics and laborers. This is my first scheme of philanthropy."

"It is a very sensible one."

"I shall lay out this work, and then, while it is in progress, go to Europe for six months or a year."

"And leave your affairs to take care of themselves?"

"No; I shall have a business man to act for me."

"I don't know where you will find one who could do your dreaming for you," laughed Dick.

"I know of only one man who can think and feel for me, Dick; and that is yourself."

"I!"

"There will be a great deal of legal business to be done, and I must have a lawyer. I will give you a salary of five thousand dollars—more if you say so."

"You are getting personal. There should be nothing mercenary between friends. The salary is double what I should make at my profession in the city."

“But it is only a little more than two and a half per cent on the money you will handle.”

“I accept the offer, because I think it is only a fair one.”

“I will give you ten thousand.”

“And sell me at your own price! No, I should not be your friend if I took advantage of your liberality.”

“I should have said ten in the first place, but I feared you would think I intended to patronize you, to make you a creature of my bounty, as the novels say, which would be an insult to you. You have a soul, Dick. Now let me talk to you as my business man.”

“Go on; I am all ears.”

The sea was quite rough outside The Great Bell, and for the purpose of making the conversation easy and free, Eugene had put the boat about, and she was now standing, close-hauled, up the river; otherwise Mary and the artist would have been seen before.

“At the Port and at the Mills there is a population of at least four thousand poor people,” continued Eugene.

“Now we come to the eleemosynary schemes,” laughed Dick.

“Don’t mistake me. I seek my own comfort and luxury first, for even these help the poor indirectly. I attend to my own salvation first; and have no opinion of those who neglect their own souls in running after the souls of others. Not a dollar of charity shall be wrung from me. I repeat that I shall not go prowling about the country on missions of benevolence. Your sickly sentimental philanthropist, with long hair parted in the middle, who lives on cold beans and warm water, is not my ideal of the man who reforms the world and carries blessings to the poor and needy. I propose to do something, but I don’t wish to make any noise about it. I had about as lief be pointed at as a thief as a professional philanthropist.”

“Do you mean clergymen, missionaries, agents of chari-

table associations, who collect money for the poor and the wronged?"

"By no means — God forbid! I refer to your bran-bread philosophers, who ride hobbies about the country; men who have theories, who believe in fantastic communities, free-love brothels, and other abominations; men who strain at a gnat and swallow a camel; in a word, men who can do nothing for the poor and needy until society is reformed — until our social and political institutions have been remodelled. Dick, I propose to go to work in my own sphere. I am not going to upset the world, and throw the machinery of society out of gear. Now, to our four thousand poor in Poppleton. They are not beggars. Most of them earn enough to live on. They work in the factories, go to sea, and job about the two villages. A large portion of them are vicious, immoral, and irreligious."

"And you propose to build a church and establish a Sunday school for them."

"I don't propose anything of the sort," replied Eugene, impatiently.

The boat had been put about again, and was now off The Little Bell.

"What kind of an institution do you propose?"

"No institution whatever. These people live in poor, mean houses, crowded together like sheep in a pen, surrounded by filth, and unvisited by the pure air of heaven. These causes alone are quite sufficient to make them vicious and immoral. I propose to strike at the root of the evil. In a word, my first work shall be with the homes of the poor. I shall quietly purchase one or two of these tumble-down old houses, clear them off, and build upon the sites suitable dwellings for the poor — such as can be afforded at a cheap rent."

"Model houses, you mean."

"I hate even the cant of calling them model houses. I don't intend to let them rent free, but to have the occupants

independent while they are comfortably lodged. When we return to the Port, I will show you where I mean to begin.'

"I am all interest, Hungerford, but I see some difficulties. For instance, who will collect these rents?"

"I should employ a man for that purpose."

These difficulties were discussed at length, till the sail boat passed the light on The Great Bell.

"Boat ahoy!" shouted Mr. Eliot Buckstone.

"There's a craft in distress," said Dick Birch. "There's a woman in it."

"I see there is," replied Eugene, as he put the helm down. "Give the jib-sheet a pull, Dick."

The sail boat was now headed towards the disabled craft. Eugene tried to make out the person who had appealed to him, but he was a stranger.

"Young and pretty," said Dick, as the sail boat rounded to alongside the other boat.

"It is Miss Kingman!" exclaimed Eugene, not a little puzzled to account for the circumstances under which she happened to be in a boat with a stranger at this distance from the shore.

"Who is Miss Kingman?"

"Her father lives in the house on The Great Bell."

"Ah, indeed!"

"Could you oblige me with the use of a pair of oars?" asked Mr. Buckstone, holding on to the sailing craft to keep the two boats together.

"Mary!" said Eugene to the lady. "You are making a long voyage for a small boat."

"It was an involuntary one," she replied, blushing and looking troubled when his gaze met her own. "I was crossing from the Port to the island, when I lost my oars overboard. I was drifting out to sea, and this kind gentleman swam off to my assistance."

"But was unable to render any," added Mr. Buckstone "Could you spare me a pair of oars, sir?"

“I can do better than that for you. I will land you at the Point, or wherever you please. Mary, let me help you on board.”

“Excuse me, sir, but I would much rather pull ashore,” interposed Mr. Buckstone. “I am wet and rather chilly, and I think the exercise would do me good.”

The marine painter had already imagined how very pleasant and exhilarating it would be to place the fair girl in the stern-sheets of the boat, while he occupied the fore thwart, and sit gazing into her sweet face as he leisurely pulled to the shore. He was not willing to abandon this delightful prospect.

“It will be a long, hard pull against wind and tide; besides, I have a couple of overcoats on board, which will make you quite comfortable.”

“I prefer the exercise; I think it would be better for me, if the lady does not object.”

“I am afraid my friends on shore will think something has happened to me, and I prefer to return as soon as possible,” added Mary, as she took Eugene’s hand, and stepped into the sail boat.

“You shall have the oars with pleasure, sir, if you insist upon it,” continued Eugene, as he handed Miss Kingman to a seat in the standing-room.

Mr. Buckstone did not insist any longer. He was evidently annoyed at the decision of his charmer; but there was no appeal from it, and he went on board of the sail boat. The rebellious craft, that would not go without sails or oars, was taken in tow, and the little schooner was headed towards the Point, for the artist expressed a desire to recover his coat, boots, and sketch-book. On the passage the conversation was confined to the incidents of the lady’s voyage, and her “rescue” by the marine painter, who had placed himself in such a position that he could see the face of the fair one.

Dick Birch, who had no idea of what the artist was thinking about, amused himself in watching the countenances of

Eugene and Mary, to detect, if he could, any silent indication of affection on the part of either. He was not rewarded by a single sign or token. Eugene was dignified and reserved, devoting his whole attention to the sailing of the boat. If Mary had any thoughts or feelings which concerned the helmsman, they were a sealed book to the observer.

Off the Point, Mr. Buckstone sculled the truant boat ashore, and procured his clothing and his sketches. Mary had already invited him to go to her father's house on The Great Bell, and dry himself. He was very nearly dry without the intervention of the good fire she promised him, but he accepted the invitation; and on his return, the boat stood up the channel towards the pier at the upper end of the island. It was but a short run, and on the way, Mr. Buckstone, now assured that he should not be ruthlessly torn from the beautiful girl, made himself wonderfully agreeable. He exhibited his sketches, especially commenting on the one which included the view of The Great Bell from the Point, and flattered Eugene by promising that his schooner should have a place in the painting. The boat landed her party at the pier in good order and condition.

"Will you go up to the house with us, Mr. Hungerford?" said Mary, as she stepped on the pier.

"I think not, Mary. I agreed to take my friend down to the Ledges."

"I should be happy to have you go," she added.

"I would like to take a stroll on this island, Hungerford," interposed Dick.

"Then you will go," continued Mary, with a look which was more eloquent than her words.

"Go," said Dick, in a low tone.

There was certainly no reason why he should not go, especially as his friend desired him to do so; and to the intense disgust of Mr. Eliot Buckstone, he complied. Eugene placed himself by the side of Mary as they walked up the hill, and the poor artist was obliged to follow with Dick Birch.

Eugene tried to be tender and gentle, tried to let his actions convey the first impressions of what was going on in his heart; but in spite of himself, though he was not conscious of it, he was rather stiff and reserved. He wished to go just far enough to assure Mary that he was tenderly inclined, and then, with the slightest encouragement, he would take another step; but he was so fearful of going too far, that he altogether failed to produce the least impression. To Dick he looked cold and reserved. To Mary he seemed not at all like the free and generous boy he had been in the days when they glanced at each other across the school-room.

“We don’t live in a palace,” said Mary, turning round to the two strangers behind her, as they approached the dilapidated mansion of her father.

There was a blush on her cheek, and her lip quivered as she spoke, for there was more to mortify her pride within the house than without.

“I am fond of old houses. I take an especial delight in them. I shall paint this house, with the sea for a background,” replied Mr. Buckstone, as he followed Mary into the dwelling.

CHAPTER V.

THE KINGMAN FAMILY.

MARY KINGMAN led the way into the house. As she had remarked, it certainly was not a palace. It was a very old house, but it would have been a very good one, if it had been kept in repair. The party were ushered into a large, square room, which in spite of the general dilapidation of the building, was a comfortable apartment. The floor was covered with a cheap carpet, and the furniture looked as though it had been redeemed by patient care and labor from the wrecks of better times, though here and there it was pieced out by sundry inexpensive articles rendered necessary by the progress of the age.

Whatever the house, and whatever the other occupants thereof, Mary Kingman was a lady. She moved with ease and grace, she spoke with fluency, and her manners would have adorned a Fifth Avenue palace. It was evident that she had risen above her social sphere. She was plainly dressed, yet there was that in her personal appearance which indicated a fine taste.

It was necessary that Mr. Buckstone should be introduced to the kitchen, where the great wood fire, employed in getting dinner, would extract the remaining moisture from his garments. An odor of fried fish pervaded the house, which the artist declared was exceedingly grateful; indeed, his prejudices, if he had any, against the humble abode and its humble surroundings, seemed to be completely merged in his admiration of Mary. If he was a stylish gentleman, as

he doubtless claimed to be, he was remarkably condescending; for he made himself quite at home, and did not seem to notice the disagreeable things which could not be concealed from the eye and the nostrils of the denizen of the city.

Mary introduced him to her mother, a plain, good-natured woman, without any pretensions to polish. She was frying the fish over a wood fire in a great, old-fashioned fireplace. She gave the artist a homely but hearty welcome, placed him before the fire, and heaped on the wood till the fire blazed up like a volcano, and the fish in the pan exhibited a tendency to leap out of the hot fat in which it was immersed.

“Where is father?” asked Mary, in a low tone.

“He hain’t come home yit,” replied Mrs. Kingman, in the same low tone. “Are you go’n’ to have all these folks to dinner? cause, if you be, I must fry some more fish. I hain’t got nigh on to enough.”

“I don’t know; I will see.”

“I shall evaporate very soon at this rate,” said Mr. Buckstone, who was turning himself round before the fire like a piece of meat on the spit.

“I hope you are more comfortable, sir,” replied Mary. “Will you excuse me for a few moments?”

“Certainly,” answered the artist, though he would have preferred not to do so, for he realized that the gentlemen in the “best parlor” were to have the benefit of her society during those few moments.

As Mary passed along the entry, she saw Mr. Birch through the open, front door, on a little eminence before the house, apparently enjoying the view of the ocean and the surrounding scenery. I have no doubt he was enjoying it, for he had a keen relish for the beauties of nature; but at the same time, I cannot help thinking that his presence on the knoll at that moment was a piece of strategy — a commonplace contrivance to enable Eugene to see the lady alone for a brief period.

Mary went into the parlor, where she had left the two gentlemen. Eugene sat in the rocking-chair, as cool, dignified, and self-possessed as though he had not been under the same roof with the lady whom he professed to love well enough to make her Mrs. Hungerford. A slight flush mantled her cheek as she realized that she was alone with him.

“Has your friend so soon tired of our palace on the island?” said she.

“O, no; I was telling him what a fine view was to be obtained from that knoll, and he could not postpone the enjoyment of it.”

“Of course you will stay to dinner with us, though we can give you only fisherman’s fare.”

“No, I think not. We have our dinner on board the boat, and we shall partake of it on the Ledge. We had no intention of trespassing upon your hospitality to that extent. As Mr. Birch wished to see the island, I thought we might as well walk up while we were at the landing.”

That was all—was it? He had not walked up to the house for the sake of being in her presence a few moments longer. He did not look at her; he did not smile like one whose heart yearned towards her. There was little, if any, of the tenderness in his manner which the impressible artist exhibited even after an acquaintance of a few hours. Mary was sad at heart, and her smile was a struggle with her disappointment.

Yet Eugene did smile upon her; his heart did yearn towards her, and gladly would he have told her his thought, and revealed to her his soul; but Dick Birch’s prophecy was having a literal fulfilment. The three millions rested upon his heart like an incubus, not closing, but turning aside the channels of his affection; not drying up, but rolling back the current of his love. Eugene did try to be tender towards her, but it was an awkward and clumsy effort; it was a signal failure. He judged himself by his intention rather than by his acts, and though no sign was given, he fully believed

he had taken his first step. He was waiting now for a token of encouragement: of course none could be given. Had he boldly looked his love, — had he taken her by the hand, and glanced wistfully into her face, — it would have been well with him, well with her. He knew not certainly that she loved him; to manifest his own love, decidedly and unmistakably, would be to tempt her with the three millions. He could not buy her with a price; he could not sell himself at a price.

Mary went out to inform her mother that only Mr. Buckstone would dine with them. Dick Birch still enjoyed the view, and she returned to the parlor.

“Is your friend dry, Mary?” asked Eugene, when she came back.

“He is not my friend,” she replied, hastening to repudiate the implication. “I never saw him till he came off to the boat.”

“Still he served you well enough to be your friend.”

“I am very grateful to him for his kind intentions, though it would have been better for him, and better for me, if he had confined his attention to his sketch of *The Great Bell*.”

“He is evidently a man of genius; and what is more, perhaps, to a lady, he is an exceedingly handsome man.”

“He is certainly handsome, but that is saying very little for him.”

“Not many ladies would grant as much.”

“We have been friends for a long time, Mr. Hungerford,” — she generally called him Eugene, — “and you know me well enough to believe what I say.”

“I know you set but a small value upon mere beauty; but Mr. Buckstone is more than handsome. He is an artist; he has an excellent reputation as a marine painter in the city.”

Why did he persist in talking about Mr. Buckstone?

“I suppose you will not remain in Poppleton now, Mr. Hungerford,” she continued, boldly changing the topic.

“Why should I not?”

“All the world knows that you are a *millionnaire* now,” she added, with a languid smile, as though that were the knell of any hopes she might have cherished.

“Would that change me?”

“I think it has changed you,” she answered, with some spirit.

“In what respect?”

“You seem more distant and dignified than you used to be.”

“Do I?”

“You know we used to be excellent friends when we went to school together, and even while you were in college, and since your return.”

“Are we not now?” he asked, with a look more earnest than any he had yet bestowed upon her, and beneath which a slight flush came to her cheeks.

“I don’t think you are so cordial as you used to be.”

“I am sure my friendship has suffered no diminution: on the contrary, I regard you with more — more respect than ever before.”

Respect! what a word to use at such a time and in such a presence! He meant to say something warmer than this when he began, but the ghost of the three millions suddenly obtruded itself between him and her, and he made a botch of it.

“Without being very sentimental, Mr. Hungerford, I cannot help setting a high value on these early friendships.”

“So do I; and, Mary, I am sure we shall always be *friends*,” said he, cheerfully, and even earnestly; but he placed a mysterious emphasis upon the word “*friends*,” which seemed to imply that they could never be anything more than friends.

“It would not be strange, Mr. Hungerford,” — she still persisted in calling him so, notwithstanding the example he set her in this respect, — “if you should forget some

of the friends of your early years, in your altered circumstances.”

“Mary, it would be very strange if I should forget such a friend as you have been to me.”

This was at least progressive.

“I could not complain of you if you did. I certainly have no claim upon your friendly regard.”

“Indeed you have, Mary. I may forget many associates, but I shall never cease to remember you as one for whom I have always felt a strong — esteem.”

Was that all? Mary felt that it was. Her heart was yearning for his love — not for his three millions. What she felt now, she had felt before John Hungerford died, when Eugene was a humble law student in the office of Squire Perkins. These carefully guarded expressions seemed to shut the door against her, and to pile up a mountain between them. Yet he thought he had said a great deal. He believed that she understood him. He was tempted to take her hand as they stood by the window looking out at Dick Birch on the knoll, and give it a gentle pressure — just enough to assure her that he meant all he said; but this would be committing himself just a trifle too far; it would be offering her a bounty of three millions for her love. He must have some slight expression on her part; he must have some assurance that she loved him independently of his fortune.

“I have no doubt of your present esteem, but the excitements of your new position will drive many old thoughts from your mind,” she continued, perhaps wondering whether he had ever thought of her with any more feeling than that of cold friendship.

“It may; but, Mary, you will never be driven from my thoughts; that is to say, I shall always think of you as the kindest and best of friends.”

The first clause was too warm, the second too cold; and Eugene began to struggle for the happy medium.

“Mary, I don’t know that any definite expressions of affection ever passed between us,” he continued; “still there was a certain sympathy of thought and feeling when — when — we went to school together, which made us unusually good friends. While I was at the head on the boys’ side, you were at the head on the girls’ side. All this has gone by; but friendship between boys and girls has a tendency to be a progressive sentiment which has ripened or will ripen into something” — up came the three millions again — “will ripen into the friendship of the man and the woman.”

“I hope so,” replied Mary; but it was with a sigh which she turned away to conceal.

“Mary, I am going to Europe in a month or two — as soon as I can make my arrangements. As I wander among the ruins of Greece and Rome, and sun myself under pure Italian skies, about which we used to have something to say at school, I shall think of —” — the three millions! — “I shall think of — of my friends at home.”

All of them, of course! Eugene had a large heart, and it could include within its embrace all Poppleton, not excepting the four thousand of the perishing classes, who were to be blessed by his bounty. Mary was hardly satisfied with the cold, studied, embarrassed termination of Eugene’s rapturous speech. One moment he made her heart glow, and the next he chilled it. It is impossible to say what point he might have reached, if Mr. Buckstone, now thoroughly dried and comfortable, had not entered the room and disturbed the unsatisfactory conference.

Mary could hardly be said to be in love, though the phase she had reached is usually interpreted as being in love. She was enduring the miseries of that incipient affection from which the slightest token of love on the part of Eugene would have plunged her into irretrievable depths. That token had not been given; it had been studiously withheld. His words were carefully guarded, apparently with the intention of preventing her from misunderstanding his purpose. He spoke as a friend, not as a lover; he labored to make it plain to her that

he was only a friend. He insisted upon friendship; he had half a dozen times elaborately repudiated the very idea of love. The spark that was wanting to kindle in the heart the flame of genuine affection was not communicated to the waiting altar.

Mary Kingman was not lacking in decision. The little curl of her under lip did not speak falsely of her character. Gladly, joyously, triumphantly, as she would have thrown herself into the arms of Eugene Hungerford, and permitted her heart to grow into and intertwine itself upon him, he was a mountain of ice to her. She felt that he had closed his heart against her. He could be a good and true friend, but nothing more. With a desponding spirit she turned from him, and the firmness of her character enabled her to banish, once and for all, the pleasing illusion from her mind. Not all, not many, could have done so; Mary did, and Mr. Eliot Buckstone, with his new-born, but enthusiastic admiration, became tolerable to her.

“I hope I don’t intrude,” said the artist, significantly, as he entered the room.

“Not in the least, Mr. Buckstone,” replied Eugene, lightly, as though the great event of his lifetime had not been pending during the interview; and the very cheerfulness of his tones was full confirmation to Mary that no thought deeper than friendship had crossed his mind.

“How do you feel after your bath?”

“Very nicely, thank you.”

“Well, Mary, my friend must have exhausted the island by this time, and we will continue our voyage,” added Eugene, taking his hat, and moving towards the door.

“Dinner’s all ready, Mr. Hungerford,” interposed Mrs. Kingman, coming out of the kitchen on the other side of the entry. “We hain’t got much, but you’re welcome to ’t, such as ’tis.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Kingman; I think we will not remain
We engaged to dine on the Ledge.”

At this moment the door at the rear end of the entry was opened, and an elderly man, considerably intoxicated, reeled towards the party. It was Captain Kingman, the proprietor of the island and of the dilapidated buildings; and the ruinous aspect of everything about the place was sufficiently explained by his present condition.

Mary Kingman turned pale and turned red. She looked as though she would sink through the floor, and hide the shame of being the daughter of a drunkard. She had hoped he would not come home while her guests were present, and the exposure of the family grief would be avoided.

“How d’ do, Mis’r Hung’ford,” said Captain Kingman, in very loud and bluff tones, as he staggered up to Eugene, and extended his hand.

“Very well; how do you do, Captain Kingman?”

“Only to’rable; I git a little touch of rheumatiz now’n then; but I’m to’rable. ’S dinner ready, mother?”

“Yes, and waitin.”

“Come, Mis’r Hung’ford, set down, and take a bite with us.”

“I thank you, captain; I have a friend with me, and we intend to dine on the Ledge.”

“Where’s the man? Tell him ’t come ’n take a bite with us.”

“You must excuse me, Captain Kingman; but we shall be too late for the tide if we remain any longer.”

“See here, Mis’r Hung’ford,” reeling up to Eugene, and steadying himself in a position directly before him, “they say you’re rich now. Your uncle’s dead and gone, ’n left you all ’s money. But look here, Mis’r Hung’ford; you mus’n’t come down here, put’n on airs. I knew your father, Mis’r Hung’ford; he was a smarter man ’n any of ’s chil’n. Will you take sum’n to drink, Mis’r Hung’ford?”

“Nothing at present; I’m obliged to you. I must go now.”

“Mr. Hung’ford, you go to ——.”

For some reason or other the inebriated man was determined to be angry. Eugene saw what was coming, for Captain Kingman, in his cups, was well known to be a quarrelsome man, and he beat a retreat. Dick Birch, who had stood like the statue of one of the martyrs on the knoll all this time, joined him, and they hastened down to the boat, which was soon standing down the river again.

“Who’s this man?” demanded Captain Kingman, glancing at Mr. Buckstone.

“Your most obedient servant,” replied the artist, with abundant good nature. “Captain Kingman, I’m happy to make your acquaintance;” and he stepped forward, with extended hand, which the drunken man grasped, with a tipsy grin on his face. “My name is Eliot Buckstone.”

“Mis’r Bucks’on, I’m glad to see you. Won’t you take sum-thin?”

“Thank you; I don’t care if I do,” replied the polite wooer.

“You’re the man for me, Mis’r Bucks’on. Won’t you take a bite with us?”

“Thank you; I had already accepted Mrs. Kingman’s invitation to dine.”

“Well, come; the dinner ’ll be cold,” suggested the lady of the house, nervously.

At the table Mr. Buckstone was introduced to another member of the family — Ross Kingman, the only son of the captain. There were four girls, all younger than Mary. The inebriate brought out a black bottle from his chamber, adjoining the kitchen, and the artist, though evidently for the sole purpose of keeping the peace, partook very sparingly with his host. Captain Kingman drank, and the effect of this additional dram was soon apparent in his manners. He was belligerent to a degree which made peace almost impossible; and poor Mary and her mother endured tortures too keen for description during the dinner hour.

“Mary,” said her father, sharply and sternly, as the family rose from the table.

She looked at him, but she made no reply.

“Mary, that Hung’ford is a fool,” he continued, spicing the remarks, as he did most of his conversation, with many oaths. “He’s a bad man. Don’t you speak to him again. Mary, d’ ye hear me?”

“I hear, sir,” she replied, as she conducted Mr. Buckstone to the parlor, hoping to escape her father’s presence.

The artist had behaved in the most conciliatory manner, and by his tact had several times appeased the anger of the inebriate; but it was plain to him that home to Mary Kingman was little better than a hell upon earth. He pitied the poor girl, and with admiration, love, and pity, his interest in her was hourly increasing. Captain Kingman followed them into the parlor. He was even more stormy and violent than at dinner, and Mr. Buckstone, in spite of the peace policy he pursued, found it utterly impossible to prevent the drunkard from pouring out the vials of his causeless wrath upon him.

“You pop’jays from the city think a sight of yourselves,” he added, after he had broken with the artist because he declined to drink a second time. “You ain’t no better ’n the law ’lows. You’ve been here long ’nough.”

“I’m going presently, Captain Kingman.”

“Want you to go now,” roared the inebriate. “And if you ain’t gone ’fore I get my bitters, I’ll help you out.”

He left the room, and Mary wept like an infant. It was the artist’s duty to comfort her, and he did so in the most tender and respectful manner. While he was thus engaged, a scream from the kitchen startled both of them. It was twice repeated, and Mary rushed out of the room, followed by Mr. Buckstone. It appeared that Mrs. Kingman, fearful of the consequences of further drains upon the bottle while there was company in the house, had taken the liquor from the chamber and concealed it. She had attempted to do this before, and her husband, promptly comprehending the trick,

flew at the poor woman with a ferocity which threatened her life.

Mr. Buckstone promptly interposed, and saved the wife from further peril, but only to draw down upon himself the vengeance of the demon. He defended himself with skill and decision, using no more violence than was necessary to save himself from the wrath of his opponent. He was soon joined by Ross Kingman, the son; and the old man, now overcome by the liquor and the excitement, was borne to his bed.

Mary was weeping bitterly when the artist joined her; but for years had she suffered as she was suffering now. Mr. Buckstone was all sympathy and tenderness. He consoled her, and soothed her mortified pride, by telling her that he had witnessed the same scenes in the house of his own father, and he knew what it was. She felt his kindness, and later in the day, when he took her hand, she did not resist. She was so wounded by disappointment, so broken down by domestic sorrow, that it was sweet to have a friend near her in such an hour.

Twenty years before, Captain Kingman had been what was called a "smart man," though even then, he was occasionally the worse for liquor. The island was his farm, and at that time he had been the owner of a good coasting schooner, which he sailed himself. But his bad habits increased upon him. In coming into port, after he had drunk too much, he ran his schooner upon the Ledge, in a sharp blow, and she became a total wreck. This event opened his eyes, and he was a comparatively steady man for several years, and sailed in the employ of other owners.

Just before the wreck, he had lost his first wife, the mother of Mary and Ross, an excellent, well-bred, refined woman, who sorrowed herself to death as the wife of a drunkard. He married another, his present wife, an easy, good-natured woman, of no force of character, though with a capacity for suffering which was now tried to its

utmost. Captain Kingman soon relapsed into even a lower depth of vice. No one would trust him now with the command of a vessel, for he had lost another schooner when there was no excuse for him. He was poor, for he spent what little money he made in drink. Without Ross and Mary, the family could not have been kept together.

Mary had for several years received a salary as a teacher. Her position in the High School had been a good one; but several times her father had come to the school in a state of beastly intoxication, and abused her shamefully. Her sensitive nature could not endure what she was unable to prevent, and she had resigned her situation, with the intention of obtaining another place, at a distance from home. She was waiting for such a position at the present time.

Ross Kingman was a good-hearted young man. He worked on the farm, at the ship-yards on the other side of the river, and occasionally made a fishing or a coasting voyage. All he earned was contributed to the support of the family. The farm was mortgaged up to its full value; and guilty as his father was, the pride of Ross would not permit the family to be broken up, for that would send his parents to the almshouse. Mary was his own sister, and to her he was wholly devoted. He had often advised her to seek a home elsewhere; but thus far she had assisted in the support of the family, and had borne her cross with what fortitude she could command.

Mr. Buckstone heard the substance of this story from the lips of Mary herself. In her grief she was glad of a friend. She listened to his kind words with gratitude; and now that Eugene Hungerford, as she fully believed, could be no more to her, she hardly shrank from the attentions of the artist.

He went back to his hotel in the evening. He came the next day, and the next, and the next, — every day, — till he returned to the city. Captain Kingman, sober, remembered his interference in the quarrel, and savagely drove him from the house; but Mary met him in other places.

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE STORY.

EUGENE and his friend dined on the Ledge, and discussed plans and projects for the future. No doubt they enjoyed the dinner, the sea air having given them sharp appetites, and the conversation was very interesting, for they were in full sympathy with each other. Dick desired to know whether his friend had made any progress in his love affair, and Eugene, fully believing that he had said enough to make an impression upon the mind and heart of Mary, assured him that he had taken his first step, and had accomplished all that could be expected in one brief interview.

They returned to the cottage, and the evening was devoted to the contemplated European tour, in which Eugene was to be accompanied by his mother and sister. It was arranged that the family should depart about the first of September. The next day, the young men tried the trout in the brooks, and continued for a week to divide their time between the sea and the land — riding and walking, fishing, gunning, and sailing. Although it was vacation to the lawyer, and the hours were given up to amusement, the future, with its stupendous projects, could not be avoided; and when the week was ended, the details of the enterprise before them had been so well elaborated that it only remained to do what had been agreed upon.

During this period of relaxation, Eugene had twice been to The Great Bell; but on both occasions he found Mr. Eliot Buckstone there, walking on the beach with Mary. Now,

Eugene, without any positive prejudice against the artist, had but a very indifferent opinion of him. He did not think Mr. Buckstone was a person who could be agreeable to Mary; and so far from being disturbed by the intimacy which had grown up between them, he rather pitied the fair girl because she was compelled to endure so much of the painter's society. He concluded that the fellow, as he contemptuously called him, was taking advantage of the service he had rendered to Mary, and was making the most of it, while she, poor girl, was actually undergoing his persecution rather than subject herself to the charge of ingratitude by declining to see him.

This week had been a stormy one in the dilapidated mansion on The Great Bell. Though the artist had kept away from the house, he could not conceal himself from the vengeance of Captain Kingman, who was drinking even more deeply than usual. He saw that his daughter was meeting her new-found friend every day in some part of the island, and the wretched girl was consequently subjected to the severest and most brutal treatment. He had even struck her; and human nature could endure no more. On the day after the first visit of Mr. Buckstone at the house, her brother Ross had sailed upon a fishing voyage, and she had no one to stand between her and the wrath of her drunken father.

Captain Kingman was so incensed against her, that all his thoughts seemed to be centred in wreaking his vengeance. He was maddened by the demon of the cup, and there was no limit to his fury. On the night which completed Dick Birch's week of vacation with his friend, Mary had retired at her usual hour. Her father was not in the house at the time; he was carousing in a low grogery at the Port. It appeared that some one, who had seen Mary with the artist on the beach that afternoon, informed him of the fact. He was heard to swear that he would kill her as soon as he got home; but those present at these drunken orgies regarded the words only as a threat.

At midnight, Captain Kingman reached his miserable home. Whether he intended to execute his threat or not, he went up stairs to the chamber of his daughter. The door was fastened; but he broke it open, and seizing the poor girl by the hair, he dragged her from the bed, and with horrid imprecations repeated his threat. Mary was fearfully alarmed; she screamed in mortal terror, and Mrs. Kingman came to her assistance. His wife, by drawing the vengeance of the brute upon herself, enabled Mary to escape. He pursued her, but in his present condition, it was not difficult to avoid him. As soon as he had given up the chase, she returned to her room, and dressed herself. She suffered agonies which cannot be described. Her power of endurance had reached its utmost limit.

Kneeling down by her bed, she prayed for strength and guidance. There was no friend but God upon whom she could throw herself in her sorrow and fear. She could no longer remain in the house, for her life was in peril. Her father had threatened to kill her in his insane passion. It would be tempting him and exposing herself to stay another hour; it would be cruel to both of them. Packing up her scanty wardrobe in a bundle, and taking the few valuables she possessed, including a small sum of money, she crept softly down the stairs. She had decided to leave her wretched home, never more to return while her father lived.

In the entry below she met Mrs. Kingman, who was hardly less terrified than the daughter. The poor woman was suffering almost as much as Mary — not as much, for her nature was less gentle and sensitive. Without a word which might be overheard by the drunken father, they left the house, and walked towards the landing-place.

“Where are you going to, Mary?” sobbed Mrs. Kingman, glancing uneasily at the house in the gloom of the night.

“I hardly know, mother; I cannot spend another night in that house.”

“I don’t blame you, child; it ain’t in natur to stand sich treatment. If it wan’t for the children, I’d go too.”

“I wish Ross were at home, mother; he could tell me what to do,” moaned poor Mary, gazing vacantly at the stars, which looked so bright and happy, while she was so sad and miserable.

“I wish he was. I don’t think I can stand it much longer; but the Lord knows, what can I do?”

“I will tell you, mother. You must have him taken care of. It is terrible, I know, and I have always struggled against the thought.”

“What do you mean, Mary?”

“You must have him arrested.”

“Arrested! My gracious! It would be as much as my life is worth. I should no more dare to do it than I should to cut my head off.”

“I’m sorry to leave you, mother; and I wouldn’t do so, if I didn’t think it was best for you as well as for me. He is terribly incensed against me.”

“I know he is, child. Perhaps he will behave better if you go off for a while.”

“I hope he will. I am willing to suffer if it will do any good; but my presence here only makes him worse. I must go.”

“But where are you goin, child?”

“I don’t know, mother. I suppose I shall find a place.”

“Can’t you find some place to stop over to the Port?”

“Perhaps I can.”

“Well, God bless you, child. You’ve allus been a good gal, and deserve to be well used.”

Mrs. Kingman, still weeping, returned to the house to pass the rest of the night in terror and misery, as she had passed many a night before.

Mary walked to the landing-place, and sat down upon a rock by the shore. The present and future were full of darkness, and she knew not whither to turn. She was a

lone wanderer in the desert, and there was no friendly oasis to welcome her. By turns she wept and prayed, but there seemed to be no healing balm in her tears or her prayers. She knew not where to go. She had friends, as the world calls them, — many friends, perhaps, — but none to whom she felt like appealing in her present desperate condition. Her pride revolted at the thought of becoming a supplicant before those with whom she had walked as an equal, though there were hundreds in yonder slumbering villages, who would gladly have taken her to their hearts, and poured out of their plenty into her lap. There were hundreds who would joyfully have given her a home, and protection from her wrathful parent, beneath their roofs. Mary was too proud to ask favors of this kind. She was capable and self-reliant, and loathed the thought of dependence.

The gloomy hours wore slowly away, and the daylight gleamed in the east. She had determined to take the morning train for a large town, a few miles distant from Poppleton, where she hoped to procure a situation as a teacher, or at least as an employee in one of the factories.

As soon as it was light enough, she got into the boat, to row across the channel to the village. She intended to carry her bundle to the house of a poor woman, whom she had served in the past, and having purchased a travelling-bag, pack her things in readiness for the journey. She could then take the stage, and depart respectably, without exciting idle remarks among her acquaintances, if she met any of them. Her pride was not conquered even by her intense anguish.

She had not rowed half way across the channel which divides The Great Bell from the main land, before she heard the voice of Mr. Buckstone. He was an early riser during his vacation, if at no other time, and had taken a boat for his morning exercise. Mary trembled when she recognized him. Many times had she thought of him during her lonely vigil on the shore. He had been a kind and tender friend,

and he knew more of what happened at her father's house than any other person outside of the family. He had not spoken to her so gently and so lovingly without producing in her heart an impression — just the impression he intended to produce. But, in spite of the interest, and even affection, with which she regarded the artist, she would have preferred to leave Poppleton without his knowledge.

He had spoken of love to her; he had uttered the vows and protestations of an enthusiastic admirer. He had pleaded with her, as a lover pleads, for her heart and hand; but she had made him no definite answer. Though she was not insensible to his love, though she was even deeply moved by his earnest devotion, she did not feel that she yet loved him well enough to be his wife. Eugene Hungerford, all hopeless and distant as he now was to her, could not be wholly forgotten, though she had ceased to think of him as she had thought before he so prudently proclaimed himself to be only her "friend."

Mary was in that state of terror, doubt, and agony which rendered a near and dear friend almost a necessity to her. Her sorrows were too weighty to be borne alone. Under the smile of prosperity, with no boding clouds threatening her, she might never have favored the suit of Eliot Buckstone. As it was, she was disposed to do so; and now, as she was fleeing in grief and misery from the home of her childhood, and from the wrath of him who should have been her strongest friend, he stepped into her path. Not thus, borne down by the shadow of all earth's calamities, would she have met him; not here and now would she have listened to his impassioned eloquence, for her heart was weak with suffering, her strength was exhausted by the pressure of misery; not thus would she have heard and decided the question upon which hung all the issues of the unseen future. She was weak in body, but weaker in spirit under the accumulated trials and terrors that beset her.

"You are an early bird, Mary, as well as myself," said Mr. Buckstone, as he threw his skiff alongside her boat.

She made no reply, for her sorrows choked her utterance. Without ceremony, he leaped into the boat, securing the skiff astern.

“Are you going to the Port, Mary?” he asked, as he gently took the oars from her grasp, and assisted her to a seat farther aft.

“Yes.”

“You are up very early.”

She could not speak.

“What is the matter, Mary? You can tell me, you know, for I am familiar with affairs over at the house,” he continued. “Something has happened, Mary.”

His gentleness, his tenderness were more than she could bear, and she bent down her head, and wept like a child.

“Won’t you tell me what it is, Mary?”

“I cannot, Mr. Buckstone,” she sobbed. “Don’t go to the village now. I cannot be seen as I am.”

He turned the boat’s head towards the Point, and waited till the torrent of her grief had spent itself.

“O, Mr. Buckstone!” exclaimed she, suddenly raising her head, and gazing earnestly at him.

“What has happened, Mary? Won’t you tell me?”

“I cannot stay at home any longer. I shall not dare to enter my father’s house again.”

“I feared it would come to this. Where are you going?”

“To Newington.”

“Have you friends there?”

“I shall find friends,” she answered, evasively.

Then she told him what had occurred during the night; and for an hour, until the sun had risen far above the heaving waters, they talked of the past and the present. There was a future which was still nearer to the thoughts of Eliot Buckstone. What he had spoken before, he spoke again. Once more he told his story of love, and begged her, in her present extremity, to give him the legal right to become her

friend and protector. Now he spoke to more willing ears than ever before. Without saying that she loved him with her whole heart and soul, she accepted his proffered love; and when she had done so, the great black clouds seemed to be rolled back, and she smiled upon him.

“Mine, mine, forever!” said the rapturous artist, as he seated himself by her side in the boat, and passing his arm around her waist, he imprinted upon her lips the first kiss.

“Will you always love me thus?” she replied, feeling that, if he did, he would soon become to her more than all the world beside, if he was not now.

“Always, Mary, always! There shall be no change, or suspicion of change, in me—never, Mary! I have loved you with all my heart from the first moment I saw you. When I looked into the boat, still struggling for breath, I was almost petrified by the vision of loveliness which greeted me. Mary, I had seen you thousands of times before.”

“Seen me before?”

“In my dreams of paradise! In my visions of the glorious and the beautiful of earth! I have seen you on my canvas ere the pencil had traced a line, and I would have given my life for the power to transfer my bright ideal upon its waiting surface. But even fairer than the thought is the loving, breathing being I press to my heart;” and he suited the action to the word.

“I am afraid this is too poetic to be real,” replied she, her confidence in the man she had accepted not increased by the glowing strains in which he spoke.

“It is all real. I see you; I touch you. Mary, you know not what I have felt, what I have hoped and feared, how I have trembled for myself, since I first saw you. Mary, let me live for you. I ask nothing better of this world; and if I have you in the next, I can dream of no purer happiness.”

“But I am a wanderer and an outcast now,” she said, looking sad again.

“Not a wanderer, and you can never be an outcast from my heart, Mary.”

“I have no place to lay my head. Let us go to the village now. I would have gone without your knowledge, but Providence has thrown you into my path. Let us return now, Mr. ——”

“Eliot,” he interposed.

“Eliot! I will go on my way rejoicing now. When I reach Newington, I will write to you, and then ——”

“No, Mary, you shall not go to Newington, or anywhere else, without me,” protested Mr. Buckstone, earnestly. “I should be a villain if I permitted you, in our present relations, to expose yourself to the perils and privations which would surround you in a strange place, where you had none to care for you.”

“But what shall I do? I cannot go home. My father would kill me if he knew what has just transpired,” added she, as she glanced inquiringly into his face.

“Neither go home, nor go to Newington alone,” he continued; and it was evident from his look and his manner, that he had a proposition to make, though there was some embarrassment about mentioning it.

“I must do something.”

“Of course you must, Mary.”

“What shall I do?”

“You shall be my wife before the sun goes down to-night, Mary!” exclaimed he, rapturously.

She shrank from him, apparently offended, while her cheeks were redder than the sun when he rose from his watery bed.

“Don’t shrink from me, Mary. I meant no harm.”

It was some time before he could restore her to her former self-possession.

“Mary, I love you with all my soul. I could die for you this moment, even without possessing you for a single instant.

You don't think I would propose anything which I did not believe was best for you?"

"No, Eliot, I do not."

"If you had even the humblest home, I could wait without a murmur whole years. But you are alone in the world, without a roof to cover you, without a friend to comfort you. You are mine; but what can I do for you? I cannot even give you a shelter. I cannot even conduct you to a place of safety, without subjecting you to the breath of slander."

It was kind of him, harsh and abrupt as the proposition had seemed. He meant well, she thought, and she did not reproach him when he again brought up the subject. Mr. Buckstone argued the question like a lawyer, and in the end he overcame all her maidenly scruples. Her situation was a desperate one, and if she was to be the wife of this man, it might as well be to-day, as a year hence. She consented, unwillingly, shrinkingly, almost revoltingly, but she consented.

"We shall reach Boston by half past two, and Providence by six. I have friends there, and you shall be a bride before the sun goes down," he added, exultingly, pressing her to his bosom. "We have no time to spare;" and he took up the oars, and pulled up the river again.

Landing, he carried her bundle to the hotel. A valise was purchased for her use, and she was soon employed in packing it with her clothing. Her breakfast was sent to her room. A private vehicle was procured, and they hastened to the railroad station at Poppleton Mills. But they were seen together; seen to depart together, with the valise and other baggage; seen together at the hotel. If the whole truth was not known to the busybodies of Poppleton, it was fully surmised.

And on this morning, as Eliot Buckstone and his intended bride were speeding on their way to Providence, Eugene and his friend commenced the work which they had planned during the week of vacation. All the laborers that could be

procured at the Port and at the Mills were employed upon the projected roads through Pine Hill. A practical man had been engaged to superintend the operations.

Eugene was not content with this beginning: he and Dick were hastening down to the Port, intent upon purchasing a ruined mansion, in which swarmed a dozen Irish families. There was no great difficulty in the way, and the estate was at once secured. Half of one night during the preceding week had been spent in perfecting a plan for the model house, and our practical philanthropist was impatient to have the building in progress. The parties next went to the office of Squire Perkins to have the deeds drawn.

"There is a strange story circulating through the place this morning, Mr. Hungerford," said the squire, after he had satisfactorily ridiculed the fancy of his former student for purchasing Irish shanties.

"There are always strange stories circulating," replied Eugene, indifferently, for he was too intent upon the business before him to be moved by the reports of the village gossips.

"They say that Mr. Buckstone, the artist, left town rather suddenly this forenoon," continued the squire.

"Indeed? Where has he gone?"

"Nobody knows. They say Captain Kingman's oldest daughter has gone with him."

"Mary?" gasped Eugene, starting back with horror.

"So they say."

"So they say! Who says so?" demanded Eugene, fiercely.

"Well, perhaps twenty people saw them go. Why, what's the matter, Mr. Hungerford?"

"Nothing, nothing," replied he, struggling to recover his self-possession. "Is that a fact?"

"I didn't see them go; but that's what they all say, and I suppose there can be no doubt of it."

Eugene felt giddy and sick. The story was too terrible and revolting for him to believe, and while he struggled with

the tumultuous emotions that rolled up from his heart, he refused to credit it.

“They say this Buckstone isn’t any better than he ought to be,” proceeded the matter-of-fact squire, opening the old deed by which he was to draw the new one. “There was a gentleman from New York up here last week who said he was a notorious rascal. I think he said Buckstone ran away with another man’s wife, and there was ——”

“My God!” groaned Eugene, rushing madly out of the office, followed by Dick Birch.

“What’s the matter with him?” demanded the honest squire, with no little perturbation, as he jumped out of his chair; and he had not a suspicion that he was rending the very soul of Eugene by his words.

“He seemed to be struck up all in a heap,” replied the late owner of the Milesian hovel.

“Bless me! now I think of it, Hungerford was rather fond of that Kingman girl. I’m sorry,” continued the squire, rubbing his bald head vigorously. “She was a nice girl, and it’s a pity any harm should come to her;” and sadly worried by the shock he had given the young man, he turned again to the deed.

CHAPTER VII.

POOR MARY!

“DON’T be disturbed, Hungerford; it is nothing but an idle story,” said Dick Birch, taking the arm of his friend as he joined him in the street.

“Dick, I shall go mad!” exclaimed Eugene; and a cold shudder ran through his frame.

“Never mind the story; it is only gossip.”

“Let us get out of sight, Dick,” continued Eugene, as he convulsively clutched the arm of his friend, and dragged him down the street towards the river. “I must go down to the island and learn the truth at once.”

“Keep cool, Hungerford.”

“How can I keep cool in the face of such a wretched rumor?”

“This is not like you.”

“I shall go mad, Dick!”

“No, you won’t do anything of the sort. What are you going mad for?” said Dick, rather impatiently.

“Don’t mock me.”

“Then don’t make a fool of yourself. You are attracting attention now by your furious pace. Slow down a little, and be reasonable.”

“You can’t understand it Dick,” groaned Eugene.

“Yes, I can understand it better than you do.”

“Let us get out of sight.”

“You won’t make much by getting out of sight, if you

insist upon showing yourself off to the people in the streets beforehand."

Eugene reduced his pace, and labored to be calm; but it was utterly impossible for him to control his emotions. It required all of Dick's strategy to prevent him from exposing his weakness to the people in the streets. When they reached the river, the sail boat seemed to be the only available resort, and Eugene threw himself on the cushions in the standing-room, the very picture of despair and desolation. The conduct of Mary Kingman was as mysterious as it was painful.

Dick hoisted the sails, and took charge of the boat, leaving his companion to vent his sorrows by himself. The wind was very light, and the boat slowly receded from the shore. Eugene did not speak, and his common-sense friend watched the sails in silence, deeming it best to let the first transports of grief spend themselves. At last the disappointed lover looked up into the face of Dick, but the anguish of his heart was still visible in his countenance.

"What shall I do, Dick?" he asked.

"Do nothing," replied Dick, rather sternly.

"You don't understand it."

"I do, perfectly. I don't want to say anything to hurt your feelings, Hungerford, but I congratulate you upon this thing."

"You are making sport of me."

"On my soul, I am not! I mean what I say. It is fortunate for you that this thing happened when it did, and as it did."

"No, Dick!"

"I mean so."

"You cannot be so barbarous."

"Barbarous? We haven't got the facts yet, but if this girl has run away with a dissolute person, you are a lucky fellow to escape from further contact with her."

"You don't know her, Dick."

“I don’t want to know her if she is what she appears to be.”

“I will not believe *she* meditates anything wrong, Dick. Mary Kingman was an angel!”

“All girls are, under certain circumstances.”

“No, no, Dick; you will not understand me.”

“Hungerford, I know you feel bad, and I am sorry for you; but I must speak my mind, if I speak at all, whether you like it or not. It appears now that the girl has run away with a man whose character is not above par.”

“Don’t, Dick!”

“Don’t what? I only state the fact.”

“You state it as offensively as possible.”

“I state it just as it is. Now, to take the mildest view of it: Miss Kingman did not love you, or she would not have run away with another man. Is that good logic?”

“I always thought she loved me.”

“You were mistaken.”

“I can’t think I was.”

“Confound it, Hungerford, what do you mean?” said Dick, impatiently. “Don’t you see the thing has proved itself? If you thought chalk was cheese, wouldn’t the taste convince you? The girl has gone off with another man, either to be his wife, or —.”

“No, Dick!” shouted Eugene, springing to his feet. “Don’t say that, or you will make me your enemy.”

“Hungerford, I don’t buy my friends, any more than you buy your wife. I deem it my duty, as your friend, to open your eyes. I don’t wonder that you feel bad, if you loved the girl.”

“If I loved her!” gasped Eugene.

“Well, I had my doubts whether or not you did. I must say you were the coolest, most unimpassioned lover I ever saw in my life.”

“Do you think so?”

“I do. Why, man, you hardly looked at her! You were alone with her for half an hour, the other day, and I’ll bet you talked politics with her, or discussed the height of the mountains in the moon.”

“You are amusing yourself at my expense, Dick.”

“I was never more serious in my life, Hungerford. In my opinion you have done the very thing I was afraid you would do, and warned you not to do.”

Dick prided himself on being a prophet.

“What was that?”

“I was afraid you would permit your fear of buying the lady to make you seem cold, indifferent, reserved, and distant. When you came out of the house the day we went there, I studied her expression very carefully. You had been alone with her for half an hour; I expected to find a little glow upon her face, to find some indication of pleasure in her eye, which would assuredly have been visible, if you had given her reason even to suspect that you loved her. Hungerford, she looked sad, disappointed, hopeless.”

“Do you mean to say that you could tell by her looks what her feelings were?”

“No; but a lady of her age, and of her sensitive nature, could not conceal the exultation of her first love, any more than she could conceal any other joy that warmed her heart. I was looking for such a manifestation. I could not find it. On the contrary, she looked sad and depressed.”

“Poor girl! she had enough, as you saw, that day, to make her sad and depressed. It was just before her drunken father made his appearance.”

“It was not that. You did not take her by the hand, when we left; you did not smile upon her. Your adieu to her was not different from that to her mother. I watched her as you walked away. Her eye followed you, and it seemed to me I could hear her reason speaking to her heart, and saying that you did not love her, and that her

heart must cease to beat for you. I think now that she gave you up then. Very likely she thought that, as you were now a *millionnaire*, she had no right to cherish the affection she had fostered when you were both poor."

"Perhaps she did," said Eugene, musing; "but I did love her, and I intended to assure her that I regarded her with deep interest."

"Pray, what did you say to her?" demanded Dick, bluntly.

Eugene recalled the embarrassment under which he had labored on that occasion; the difficulty he had experienced in attempting to say enough without saying too much; and the fear which had haunted him lest he should make her the wife of the three millions instead of himself. He had firmly resolved not to permit himself to be influenced by the contingent fortune, and this resolution had warped his judgment over to the opposite extreme. He began to realize it now, under the sharp tuition of his common-sense friend.

"I told her that we should always be friends," he replied, in answer to Dick's blunt question.

"Did you, indeed?" And something like a sneer accompanied the words.

"I meant so."

"It is quite possible you did. Are you sure you didn't tell her you could never be anything more than friends?"

"Of course, I did not. I didn't mean that."

"Miss Kingman would have been smarter than any lady I know of, if she hadn't believed that was what you meant. Did you tell her you were going abroad?"

"I did."

"Did you promise to write to her, or ask her to write you?"

"Not in so many words?"

"What did you say about it?"

“ Well, I told her — I told her I should think of all my friends at home.”

“ Excellent ! ”

“ Of course I meant her.”

“ And she, being gifted with the power to read your soul, even while you were studiously attempting to hide it from her, readily understood that all your friends at home meant herself ! No, Hungerford, there was no hole in that millstone. You cheated yourself, which is of no great consequence ; you cheated her, which, as the result shows, is a matter of very great consequence both to you and to her.”

“ Let us go to the island, and find out the facts,” said Eugene, uneasily ; for, as thousands of others have done when it was too late, he regretted his excessive distrust, his overstrained prudence.

They went to the island ; they saw Mrs. Kingman : her husband was still sleeping off the effects of his midnight debauch. She told Eugene that Mary had gone — where she knew not. The “ strange story ” that was circulating at the Port had not yet reached the island. With tearful eyes she narrated to him the events which had transpired in the house when Captain Kingman came home in the middle of the night ; that Mary had been driven from her home by the fear of her father’s violence ; that even her life was in peril if she remained longer in the house.

Eugene was filled with anguish by the story of wrong and violence ; and it was some time before he could muster the courage to repeat to her the rumor which was passing through the village. Mrs. Kingman listened patiently to his slow and struggling utterance of the truth so terrible to him.

“ I shouldn’t wonder, a mite,” said the woman.

“ Then you think it is true that she has gone off with this man ? ” asked Eugene.

“ I shouldn’t be the least surprised. Mr. Buckstone was down here e’en a’most all the time arter that day you were all here.”

“Was he?”

“That’s what made her father so desp’ate mad with her. He found ’em down on the beach two or three times; and arter that it seemed to me the man was possessed with the sperit of the evil one, and he pestered the poor gal all the time.”

“What did you think of Mr. Buckstone yourself?” said Eugene, pierced to the soul by every word the woman spoke.

“Well, he was a perlite body. He always looked like a nice sort o’ man to me; but there’s no tellin what a body is by the looks. Cap’n Kingman stuck to’t the man was a raskil; he told me that he had hearn some one said so that knew him in New York.”

“Poor Mary!” sighed Eugene.

He had already passed from the selfish view of his own loss to an unselfish consideration of the poor girl’s fate. The story was all told. What he had been too blind to see, others had known for a week — that Mary had encouraged the attentions of the artist. With a heart sadder than he had ever known before, he walked down to the boat, where his friend had remained while he went up to the house to make the inquiries. He repeated to Dick all that he had learned.

“Poor girl! I pity her, if the fellow is the villain he is represented to me,” said Dick, who, though sometimes sharp in his words and quick in his conclusions, had a heart as warm and tender as that of a woman.

Eugene buried his face with his hands, and groaned in bitterness of spirit. To his own grief at the loss of her who seemed to be more to him now than ever before, was added the revolting fact that Mary Kingman had unwittingly thrown herself into the arms of a reckless villain. To have known that she had become the bride of an honest man, would have been tolerable; to feel that she had thrown herself away upon an unprincipled wretch, was insupportable.

“What shall I do, Dick?” he exclaimed, unable longer to conceal the tears that flowed down his haggard face.

“You can do nothing but bear it. I pity you, Hungerford, as I pity her.”

“Can’t we follow her, and bring her back?”

“She would not come, if what you say be true. She loves this Buckstone.”

“Can you believe it?”

“We have no right to think she does not. When we saw them last on the beach, I could not help thinking that she was favorably inclined towards him. He is a splendid looking fellow. He is an artist, and probably as romantic as a knight errant.”

“But Mary was not romantic,” protested Eugene.

“Perhaps not. Poor girl! I have ceased to blame her for what she has done.”

“Wasn’t it wrong for her to go off so suddenly with this man!”

“Undoubtedly he has promised to make her his wife at once. Here she was, driven from her home in the dead of the night, with the fear of death by the hand of her father if she returned; and, with too much pride to burden her friends, whither could she turn?”

“Where, indeed!” groaned the disconsolate lover.

“Then this Buckstone, who has been pouring the tale of his love into her ears all the time for a week, steps into her presence. He knows something about her family relations, and she tells him what has happened. What more natural than that she should listen to him? What more natural than his offer to be her best and truest friend? Doubtless he proposed to make her his wife without delay, and she, poor girl, not having a resting-place or a near friend on earth, after weakly resisting the appeal for a time, yields the point.”

“Will he make her his wife?” whispered Eugene.

“Let us hope that he will. They may be man and wife before this time.”

“But they say he’s a villain.”

“They say so; but he may be an honest man, after all, though I confess that I have my doubts.”

“He may deceive her.”

“He may.”

“Dick, I cannot endure this agony!” cried Eugene, springing to his feet, as he had often done in his excitement. “I must do something to save her; at least I must try to do something.”

“Nothing can be done.”

“Dick, I feel guilty. If I had spoken what was in my heart, this could not have been.”

“We don’t know.”

“I know! If I had told her how I loved her; if I had whispered only a tithe of what I felt then, and feel now, this could not have been.”

“It might.”

“No, Dick.”

“Don’t distress yourself. You meant right.”

“If Mary comes to harm, it will be my fault. If she is lost, I have destroyed her,” cried Eugene, in his agony.

“Nothing of the kind, Hungerford.”

“If I had told her what I felt, she would not have countenanced this Buckstone. When we found them in the boat, I saw that his presence was distasteful, if not disagreeable, to her. I think she had begun to love me. As you said before, Dick, my coldness robbed her of all hope, and she has thrown herself away upon this wretch.”

“Don’t blame yourself, Hungerford. You did what you believed was right.”

“I am guilty, Dick! I must at least try to save her.”

“It is too late.”

“It is not too late to try; I must do that. If I can find her, I will tell her of my love now.”

“After she has been off with this fellow?”

“Dick, she is as pure as the angels of heaven. It is honorable marriage with her, or it is nothing. She may be deceived; this is all I fear. Come with me, Dick. Be my friend now, as you have always been.”

“Though I think it will be a bootless journey, I will go with you where you will; or I will follow her without you.”

“No; I will go. If the villain has wronged and deceived her, I will tear him in pieces. If I cannot be her husband, I will be her avenger, if any wrong has been done to her.”

They landed. The intention to do something, in some measure, satisfied the impetuous nature of Eugene, and he was tolerably calm, as they walked up to Squire Perkins's office. The deeds were signed and sealed, and the tenants of the Irish house were warned to vacate the premises on the next rent day, though with the assurance that better apartments at the same price would soon be in readiness for them. While Eugene was thus occupied, Dick Birch obtained, at the hotel where he lodged, all the current information in regard to Mr. Buckstone. As Eugene's friend was obliged to go to Boston on the following day, in order to close up his business affairs, he had arranged to go with him, and consult an architect in the city in regard to the plan for his new residence. They now purposed to take the noon train, and there was not much time to spare.

At the railroad station they learned that Mr. Buckstone had taken tickets for Boston, as they had before supposed. Our travellers reached that city late in the afternoon. Dick immediately procured the services of a skilful detective, who promptly traced the fugitives to the Providence depot. The hackman who had driven them there had followed Mr. Buckstone into the station-house to carry the baggage, and had heard him call for a ticket for Providence. The last train for that city had gone; but Eugene, not to be balked or delayed, chartered a special train, and at half past eight in the evening they were thundering on their way in quest of the runaways.

The detective went with them, and other assistance was obtained when they reached Providence, at ten o'clock; but the hackmen, upon whom they mainly relied for information, were scattered at this hour, though at midnight the fact was clearly established that the fugitives had taken the steamboat train for Stonington and New York at seven in the evening. The lady and gentleman were in Providence about an hour; but whether they were married or not during that time, it was impossible to ascertain that night. They had proceeded, on their arrival, to the house of an artist in Westminster Street. Whether a marriage ceremony had been performed there or not, the occupants positively refused to say; the parties had gone to New York, and must answer for themselves.

The fugitives could be followed no farther that night, if indeed it was necessary to continue the search. The next morning Eugene and Dick called at the house of the artist, which had been visited by Mr. Buckstone and Mary. Eugene assured him he came as the friend of the lady, and had no desire to injure her; all he wanted was information of the facts.

"I haven't a word to say, sir," replied the artist. "Buckstone's affairs are not mine. I don't know what the effect might be of telling you that a marriage has or has not taken place in my house; therefore I shall make no sign."

"If Mr. Buckstone is married, I have nothing to say."

"I don't know, sir, anything about that. You are a stranger to me. How do I know but you mean to attach the lady's property, if she has any, for Buckstone's debts, if they are married? How do I know but you mean to prevent the marriage if they are not married? You perceive, sir, that I can say nothing at all about the matter."

Eugene was suspicious; so was Dick; but it was impossible to induce the obstinate artist to unseal his lips. The secret was safe with him. During the day all the clergymen in the city were visited, but none of them had per-

formed the ceremony. It might have been done by some other authorized person; but no such individual could be discovered who had married the parties. Some inquiries into the character of the artist in Westminster Street were not favorable to that gentleman, and it was possible that he had been a party to one of those miserable deceptions by which young females have been deluded into the belief that they were legally married; but there was no evidence on this point, and the pursuers continued on their way to New York.

It was two days before the present abode of Mr. Buckstone could be discovered. At this house it appeared that he had taken rooms for himself and *wife*.

“Is she his wife?” demanded Eugene, imperatively, of the landlady.

“Bless you! I suppose she is! If she isn’t, I don’t want them in my house. But they got a telegraph message yesterday, and started immediately for Philadelphia. Mr. Buckstone said they should return in a few days.”

It was useless to pursue the fugitives any farther. It was more than probable that the telegraph message had come from Providence, and Mr. Buckstone was now fleeing from them. Eugene and Dick instituted a thorough inquiry into the antecedents and character of Mr. Buckstone. The result was not so unfavorable as it might have been, though it appeared that the painter had been implicated in a disreputable affair, affecting the honor of a married lady, as it had been reported in Poppleton; but opinions varied in regard to his guilt. Some declared that he was innocent of the charge, and was as honorable a man as any in the city, while others were entirely satisfied of his guilt in the particular case, and did not regard him as even a respectable man.

Mr. Buckstone could not be tried on the accusation, or on his general character. Whether he was actually married or not, it was impossible to ascertain. Be this as it might,

Eugene was confident that Mary believed she was legally the wife of the artist. This was all the result that could be reached, and sadly and reluctantly he left the city, to forget, if he could, the painful circumstances. Bitterly he reproached himself for concealing his feelings from Mary. He felt guilty, even though his motives had been pure and lofty. Mary could be no more to him, and he felt that there was not another woman in the world who could take her place in his affections.

Dick Birch was a true comforter, a true friend; but Eugene's was a sorrow which could not be healed by human sympathy — hardly soothed by it. Even the plans for the elegant mansion, the work on Pine Hill, and model houses, seemed to have lost half their interest. The business in Boston was completed, and Eugene returned to Poppleton. Dick soon followed him, and they immediately plunged deep into the operations which had already been commenced.

CHAPTER VIII.

TO EUROPE AND BACK.

THE city architect in due time completed his plans for the mansion at Pine Hill, and the building was commenced. The improvements upon the grounds were continued with unabated vigor. One model house at the Port and two at the Mills were in process of erection. Eugene Hungerford's extensive operations kept business good in the place; his enterprise was appreciated, and he was regarded with a respect bordering upon reverence.

Meanwhile, the preparations for the European tour were completed. Mrs. Hungerford had always been "a home body," and at her time of life was not much inclined to go abroad. She dreaded the ocean voyage, but as Julia desired to go, she preferred to join the party. It would be home wherever her children were, and as she was still hale and healthy, she thought she could enjoy life better with them, even at sea, than alone in the cottage at Poppleton. Besides, she was greatly troubled by the melancholy which had brooded over Eugene, since the flight of Mary Kingman. It worried her to see him, with every worldly prospect so bright, become so moody and depressed. She and Julia, as well as Dick Birch, did everything that could be done to restore his former cheerfulness.

With these loved ones at home, Eugene talked freely of his sorrows; it was all the solace he had. He could not banish from his mind the feeling that he had indirectly been the cause of Mary's misfortune, if, indeed, it was a misfortune,

which had not yet been demonstrated. Many were the tricks and expedients to which his kind and loving friends resorted to overcome his melancholy. Picnics and parties, visitings and merrymakings, were liberally encouraged. Eugene, to please his mother and sister, attended them all; yet the gloom still hung over him. Independent of his princely fortune, he was a favorite with the ladies of Poppleton. He was a man of noble mien and bearing, and the fairest would have been flattered by his attentions. And now, the wealthiest man of all the region round, he was not only the object of a vast amount of solicitude on the part of managing mothers, but the fair ones, who would willingly have taken him without a "bonus," fluttered when he smiled, and blushed when he glanced at them. In vain they fluttered, and in vain they blushed. Eugene treated them with the utmost respect and deference, but his heart was away with Mary.

Even Mrs. Hungerford and Julia, with the kindest intentions, did not scruple to bring him frequently into the presence of ladies whom they deemed worthy of him, with the hope that he might be fascinated by some one of them; but it was only to steal him away from the corroding care upon which he fed, and win him from the dead thought to which he was still hopelessly wedded. He was calm, and even cheerful most of the time; but the worm still kept on gnawing. It was hoped by all at home that the tour in Europe would produce a salutary effect upon him.

Just before Eugene's departure, Ross Kingman returned from his fishing cruise, and a letter for him, which had lain in the post office, was opened. Carefully as the lover and his friends had striven to conceal his disappointment, the village gossips made all the capital they could of it. The postmaster had shown this letter to Eugene, who at once recognized Mary's handwriting, and he had impatiently awaited the brother's return, in order to learn what tidings it contained of the absent one. On the day of his arrival, Eugene

went to the island, and had a long interview with Ross, and the letter was shown to him. It was written a month after her arrival at her new home. She spoke of Eliot Buckstone as her husband, and simply assured her brother that she was pleasantly situated; but Eugene, who was permitted to read the letter, saw, or thought he saw, indications that she was not happy. She alluded to her husband in the kindest terms, but she did not speak of him as one of her gentle, loving nature would have spoken, if he had fully realized her hopes and expectations.

The letter did not improve Eugene's mental condition. He could not help feeling that she was disappointed and unhappy, and he continued to charge himself with the misfortunes which had fallen upon her. He frankly told her brother his feelings in regard to her.

"Well, I always thought, Mr. Hungerford, that she was fond of you. She always used to speak of you to me just as though it was a settled thing with her, and, up to the time you got this money, I supposed you understood each other perfectly," said Ross.

"Nothing particular ever passed between us, Ross," replied Eugene.

"I didn't suppose there had; but anybody can see through a millstone when there is a hole in it. I hadn't much doubt as to how the thing would turn out. I suppose everybody in the place had the same idea."

"I was not aware of it."

"In such matters, other folks sometimes know better what is going to happen than you do yourself."

"I seldom met her."

"That didn't seem to make much difference. When you went to school together, the story was started. But you saw her once in a while, and I know she used to be thinking of you all the time. Well, she didn't say so, but I was just as well satisfied as though she had told me with her own

mouth that she liked you. I hadn't any doubts till the money came."

"Did you think that would make any difference with me?" asked Eugene, anxiously.

"Perhaps I didn't exactly think so, but I was afraid it might make some difference with you. I knew Mary liked you, and for her sake I couldn't help wishing things had got a little further along. I knew the money wouldn't break anything off with you, but I was afraid it would keep them from going on. Besides, folks in the village had a good deal to say about it."

"What did they say?"

"They didn't talk of anything but you and your money for a week after the news came. I didn't ask any questions; I generally pay attention to my own business; but it was said, that, according to your uncle's will, you would have to get married right off."

"They did not know me, and they did not understand the provision of the will," added Eugene, petulantly.

"They said you wouldn't marry Mary now; that you would find some lady in the city! and such things as that. I didn't pay much attention to what they said. Mary did not talk about you to me, after that, as much as she used to before. As near as I could make it out, she thought the money would come between you and her."

"Why should she have thought so?"

"It wasn't very strange, I think. I talked with her the day I went away about things in general. I asked her if you and she were good friends still; she said you were, but she didn't think you were quite as cordial — that's the word she used — as you were formerly."

Eugene stamped his foot impatiently upon the ground. The analysis of his conduct which Dick Birch had given him had assured him of this fact, and it was now confirmed from Mary's own mouth. He did not curse himself, for he had meant well; but he severely blamed his own blindness,

and wondered that he had not been permitted to see what had been so plain to others.

“I am sorry I did not understand her better.”

“I know that Mary was sorry any money had come to you. I'm sure she liked you for yourself, Mr. Hungerford, and not for what you had.”

“Would that I had known it before !”

“I should think you might have known it. Mary did not keep things to herself much.”

“I was wrong.”

“When I saw that she felt bad, and was disappointed, I could not help feeling hard towards you, myself,” added Ross. “Still, as I looked at it more, I concluded that it was hardly fair to expect a man with your money would marry a poor girl like her, and with things in the family as they have been with us.”

“That would have made no difference with me.”

“Well, I suppose it is of no use to cry for spilt milk. It's done now, and can't be helped. I only hope the man she has married is the right sort of person, though I didn't think much of him the day I saw him here.”

Ross, though a quiet and well-behaved young man in the main, was belligerent, like his father, upon provocation. Eugene did not dare to hint even a suspicion that Mary had been deceived ; that Mr. Buckstone was capable of deluding an innocent maiden with the mockery of a fictitious marriage ; but he could not banish the idea from his own mind. At his instigation, Dick had been engaged for a month past, through a legal friend in Providence, in an investigation of the circumstances attending Mr. Buckstone's visit to that city with Mary. It had been ascertained that a marriage, real or pretended, had taken place at the house of the artist ; but the legal gentleman having the matter in charge had been unable to find the person who had performed the ceremony. The artist was reserved and taciturn ; the lawyer had coaxed and threatened him without effect. No record

of the marriage had been made, and the obstinacy of the artist, who naturally dreaded a criminal prosecution, if anything was wrong, was a suspicious circumstance. Eugene feared the worst.

“Ross, what are you going to do this fall and winter?” asked Eugene, as they walked down to the landing-place.

“I don’t know yet; very likely I shall go a fishing once more.”

“I will give you a thousand dollars a year to work for me.”

“A thousand dollars!” exclaimed Ross; for the sum was twice as much as he had ever earned before. “Of course I will take it.”

“Then the year shall commence to-day.”

“What am I to do?”

“I am going to build a yacht of a hundred tons. I have the model and draughts all made. You shall superintend the work, and Mr. Birch will employ you part of the time in taking charge of my houses at the Port and at the Mills. While I am gone, he will keep you busy.”

“Thank you, sir; I am very much obliged to you.”

“When the yacht is done, you will have charge of her.”

Nothing could have suited Ross better, and he was Eugene’s friend for life. Dick wanted such a person to assist him, and it had been decided, weeks before, that Mary’s brother should be employed as soon as he returned.

“Ross,” said Eugene, as he stepped into his boat, “if you hear anything from Mary, I want you to write me.”

“I will.”

“Give your letter to Mr. Birch, and he will forward it to me.”

“Yes, sir; I will. I hope she will do well. If her husband don’t do the right thing by her,” — he paused, and looked what he meant, — “it will be all the worse for him.”

“I hope he will be a good husband to her.”

“I hope so; but I wish she hadn’t gone off with him,”

added Ross. "I suppose I may as well go over and see Mr Birch, and go to work to-day."

"You need not commence till you are ready. You have just returned, and you may wish to stay at home a few days."

"There is nothing there I care for now," he replied, sadly.

"How is your father now?"

"About the same; he don't improve any. He is very hard on Mary, and if she came home, I shouldn't dare to have her go near him."

Ross went up to the Port with Eugene, and reported to Dick Birch for duty. He was a ship carpenter by trade, and worked at the business when there was anything doing at the Port; and his natural tact and ingenuity, as well as the miscellaneous occupations in which he had been engaged, rendered him an exceedingly useful person to Eugene's agent. He made the contract with the builders for the yacht, and the keel was immediately laid down.

In the mean time, the eminent trustees in Baltimore continued to forward the income of the three millions to Eugene, and there was no want of money to carry on the operations which had been commenced. A general power of attorney was given to Dick by his principal, to transact all business in his absence. The agent moved from the cottage to the hotel, and the Hungerford family started for Boston to embark for Europe on the first Wednesday in September. It was observed that Dick Birch was a little shaken when he took leave of Julia; that though he kept up a running fire of sharp words all the time, he could hardly conceal a disposition to mope and to relapse into moodiness.

"Good by, Dick; do for me as you would do for yourself, but remember that only half a million, instead of three millions, is to come to me at the end of the seven years," said Eugene.

"That matter cannot be decided at present," replied Dick
"You may bring a wife home with you."

“No!”

“Good by, Mr. Birch,” said Julia, taking his hand.

“Good by, Miss Hungerford. Don’t forget me while you are gone.”

“Forget you!” laughed she. “Of course I shall not forget you.”

“Thank you.”

“How strange you are!”

A new phase in Dick’s character seemed now to present itself, and she blushed slightly in spite of herself. His words were strange; his look was stranger. Perhaps before she had gone many miles, the look and the words were more intelligible.

The train bore the family away from Poppleton, and it was nine months before they saw it again. We do not purpose to follow the party across the ocean, and in their wanderings through Europe. They went the grand rounds, and beneath Italy’s sunny skies Eugene did think of all his friends at home, and especially of Mary, though not as he had intended when his unwitting coldness banished hope from her heart.

Every steamer bore a letter to him from Dick Birch, and one which reached him in May, just before he sailed for home, enclosed another from Ross Kingman. Eugene, with trembling eagerness, tore open the envelope of the latter, for he knew to whom it alluded, and he had impatiently longed for some intelligence of Mary for months; not that it could give him even a ray of hope, but it might assure him that she was happy, and had not come to harm. Ross Kingman’s letter contained a brief note from Mary to himself, with a few lines which he had evidently penned in great haste, and under the most intense excitement.

Mary’s letter, brief as it was, filled Eugene with grief and indignation. It gave him a shock more terrible than any he had yet received, and only confirmed the fears which had so long haunted him. Mary’s note was as follows:—

NEW YORK, April 20, 1856

DEAR BROTHER: Three days ago I became a mother, but my poor baby died yesterday, and to-day they bore it from me. I have not seen my husband for four weeks. I fear he has deserted me. He has neglected me for some months. I reproached him for it; he was very angry, — he had been drinking too much, — and told me that *I was not his wife*. O Ross, I could have borne everything but that! He has left me no money, and the people where I board look very coldly upon me. Could you come to me, Ross?

Your affectionate sister,

MARY K. BUCKSTONE.

Ross Kingman's letter breathed nothing but vengeance, dire and terrible, upon the man who had wronged his sister. He was about to take the train for New York. Eugene was paralyzed by the intelligence contained in these letters. Poor Mary! How terribly was she suffering for his indecision! He could take no other view, and his anguish was pitiable. He gave the letters to his mother, but even she had no power to console him.

Poor Mary! The miserable villain had even declared to her that she was not his wife. The curse of the cup, from which she had escaped when she fled from her home, had followed her, and stung her again. She had been a mother, but not a wife! She had been deceived by the wretch; she had not swerved a hair's breadth from the law of purity and innocence in her heart, but her good name was blasted. She was cast down and destroyed, with no fault of her own, unless her hasty departure with the villain, when all earth seemed to conspire against her, was a fault; her reputation was ruined; the finger of scorn and contempt would point at her. It was THE WAY OF THE WORLD.

"Poor Mary!" groaned Eugene, as in the silence of his chamber he thought of the hard lot to which she had been reduced. It was not enough that she had been wronged and

deceived, cheated of her honorable name as a wife; but to these were added poverty and neglect. The people in the house looked coldly upon her. They regarded her as a despised creature, and repudiated her with scorn and loathing.

“O God! that she should come to this! She whom I loved with all my soul, whom I would have made my wife,” he moaned, as he paced his chamber. “God pity her, and take her up, when others have cast her off!”

Ross Kingman, with the true instincts of a noble brother, had hastened to her assistance. He did not despise her; he did not look coldly upon her; the way of the world was not his way. Eugene was comforted by the reflection that she had a friend in Ross, but he hoped the passionate young man, justly roused to the highest pitch of indignation by his sister's wrongs, would not encounter Eliot Buckstone. There would be blood shed if he did.

Long and weary to Eugene Hungerford were the days and the hours which intervened between the receipt of the intelligence and the sailing of the steamer in which he had engaged passage. Westminster Abbey and Windsor Castle had lost their attractions to him; he was anxious to be where he could assure himself that poor Mary was not still suffering. Just as the tug-boat was leaving the landing stage in Liverpool, to convey her passengers to the steamer, lying in the Mersey, the porter of the Washington Hotel, where he had stopped, brought him a package of letters, which had been forwarded by his banker from London. Eagerly he tore them open, to obtain fresh tidings of her who was now always in his thoughts. There was none from Ross Kingman, but Dick Birch wrote that Mary was still in New York; that her brother was with her, and would remain there until she could gain strength to bear the journey to Poppleton. “If I had known what was in that letter of Kingman's, which I enclosed for you, I would not have sent it,” wrote Dick. “You must be miserable if you have re-

received it. Buckstone is a villain, but everything we can do for poor Mary shall be done."

Dick wrote page upon page about the new residence at Pine Hill, the grounds around it, the model houses in the villages, and the receipts from the trustees; but Eugene read them without interest. The agent had completed the mansion, furnished it, employed a housekeeper, stocked the conservatory, partially filled up the book shelves in the library; indeed, he had put the place in complete readiness for occupancy. His description was glowing and eloquent, and Eugene would not have believed, a year ago, that he could look so coldly upon the realization of his dreams of splendor and comfort. If Mary could have been at his side to enter the new house with him, it would have been a fairy palace.

The steamer sped on her way over the ocean, and safely landed her passengers in Boston. Eugene telegraphed his arrival to Dick Birch, and took the first train for home. When the family reached the station at Poppleton Mills, Dick was there.

"How are you, old fellow?" exclaimed the enthusiastic agent, as he seized the hand of Eugene. "How pale you are!"

"I am very well, Dick. How are you?"

"Never better, Ah, Miss Hungerford, I welcome you home," he added, grasping the hand of Julia.

For some reason or other both of them blushed a little. Mrs. Hungerford was greeted in her turn, which was after Julia.

"What's the news in Poppleton, Dick?" asked Eugene.

"Nothing special; there was a man drowned to-day, off The Great Bell."

"Who was he?" asked the returned wanderer, fearing that this might be the preface to a story informing him that some friend had been lost.

"His name was Goodwin; he was a stranger — came down here gunning."

“What a shock you gave me!” added Eugene, greatly relieved.

“This way, Hungerford,” continued Dick, leading the way to an elegant carriage which stood by the platform, with the driver holding the open door.

“Whose is this, Dick?” asked Eugene.

“Yours, of course. I purchased it for the use of the ladies.”

Avoiding as much as possible the greetings of friends and neighbors, who had heard of his coming, and had collected at the station to welcome him, Eugene got into the carriage with his mother and sister.

“Home,” said Dick to the driver, as he joined the party inside.

“Now, Dick, what news is there?” demanded Eugene. “You know what I mean.”

“I hoped you would not say anything about that at present, for the news is not pleasant.”

“My God!” groaned Eugene,

“No, no, Hungerford; it is not as bad as it might be. She is not dead.”

“That would be good news, — I had almost said. Where is she?”

“At home.”

“At her father’s?”

“Yes.”

“Have you seen her?”

“No; she is too ill; but she is improving.”

“What does her father say? Is he reconciled?”

“No; but he can’t help himself; he has been confined to his bed, for a couple of months, with rheumatism.”

“Where is Ross?”

“At home. Your yacht lies in the river.”

“Never mind the yacht.”

“I have made Ross stay at home, and attend to the affairs of the family.”

“I am glad you did. What does Mary say?”

“She suffers severely — not physically, perhaps.”

“I see. Do you know anything about Buckstone?”

“He is in New York, I suppose. Mary had a letter from him the other day: what it was I don't know.”

“Send for Ross. I must see him to-night.”

“Keep cool, Hungerford; the matter might be worse.”

“I don't think so,” replied Eugene, as he settled back in the carriage.

From the window might be seen the improvements of Pine Hill. He did not look at them. The carriage stopped in front of his elegant mansion. He hardly glanced at it. They were nothing to him: Mary was all in all.

CHAPTER IX.

HEALING THE WOUNDS.

‘ I SEE that what I have done does not suit you, Hungerford,” said Dick Birch, as the party entered the house.

“ You never made a greater mistake in your life, Dick ; I am delighted with it,” replied Eugene.

“ Upon my word, you look delighted !” exclaimed Dick. “ You took it all so coolly that I expected to be condemned for everything.”

“ I could not have done so well myself, if I had been here, Dick. You do me injustice. I entirely approve of all your arrangements.”

Mrs. Hungerford was pleased with the house, and she expressed her satisfaction in her own matronly way. Julia was in ecstasies ; and as they walked through the various apartments, she did not attempt to conceal her enthusiasm. Eugene’s thoughts were too busy with the affairs of Mary to permit him to be very deeply interested in the comforts, the luxuries, and the splendors of his new home ; but a proper regard for the feelings of his friend, who had labored so diligently and faithfully in fitting up and furnishing the house, induced him to manifest an interest which he hardly felt. His taste in books, furniture, flowers, and pictures had been carefully regarded, and he was pleased with the devotion of Dick, if not greatly so with the work itself.

“ I spent a fortnight in the bookstores of Boston and New York, and I have put all your favorite authors on the shelves. But I have only used up half the space, and you can com-

plete the collection yourself," said Dick, when the ladies had gone to their apartments.

"I see you have, Dick, and I am very grateful to you. Is Mary able to leave her room?"

"Yes; I believe she walks out. What do you think of those pictures, Hungerford?"

"They are entirely to my taste. You haven't seen Mary you said?"

"No; she is almost a stranger to me, and I could hardly thrust myself into her presence under the circumstances."

"Quite right, Dick."

"Do the carpets suit you?"

"Entirely; they are beautiful styles. You said Mary had received a letter from Buckstone?"

"Yes; but I have no idea of its contents. I was in doubt whether to have those chairs in the drawing-room in plush or damask."

"You did quite right, Dick. Your taste is unexceptionable. What does Ross say about Mary?"

"Very little to me. I have left room in the conservatory for the ladies to please themselves, you perceive."

"You were very thoughtful, Dick, and I am sure they will appreciate your kindness as I do. How long has Mary been at her father's, did you say?"

"About two weeks. I have three horses in the stable, besides the span for the carriage. Of course you can increase the number, if you wish."

"Three, I think, will be quite sufficient for the present, Dick. I hope the family down on The Great Bell don't want for money."

"O, no! Ross has drawn all his salary for the year."

"He might have drawn more."

"I offered him all the money he wanted. He has repaired the old house, and made quite a change down there. By the way, Hungerford, here is a little business-office adjoining the library, which I haven't shown you."

"That shall be for your own use. Do you think Mary would see me, Dick?"

"I don't know; but I don't think it would be advisable for you to see her."

"Why not?"

"I think it would not improve your present morbid state of mind."

"Morbid?"

"Yes, morbid. You can think of nothing but her. When I speak, you answer me with never a word but 'Mary.' I have assured myself that everything was done that could be done for her comfort. If I haven't accomplished enough, you can do more."

"I am entirely satisfied, Dick."

"Then why don't you let her rest? The mischief has been done, and it cannot be helped. Of course she can be nothing more to you now."

"No," replied Eugene, vacantly.

"Then why do you keep dwelling upon her?"

"Dick, I feel that I am the cause of all her misfortunes."

"Nonsense! What a stupid idea that is!" exclaimed Dick, impatiently, almost angrily.

"Don't scold at me, Dick; I am as weak as a child."

"Well, I won't scold at you; but did ever mortal entertain such a ridiculous notion as that you just now expressed? Doubtless there are a dozen girls in the village who have been unfortunate. If you had proposed to them they might have been saved."

"But I loved Mary."

"That does not alter the case."

And she loved me."

"It is all the same."

"Dick, you told me yourself that I had been tardy; that I did not speak when I ought to have spoken."

"Does that make you responsible for her misfortune? You meant right."

“I do not accuse myself of any moral wrong in the matter; but if I had been less cautious she might have been saved.”

“It was your duty to be cautious. With two and a half millions of dollars depending upon your marriage, you would have been guilty, if you had not been cautious, Hungerford. Be a man; don't reproach yourself, for you are no more responsible for what has happened than I am.”

“But it is terrible to think that I might have saved her, if I had spoken even a word.”

“No, it isn't terrible. My dear fellow, this is all bosh. Dismiss the whole subject from your mind.”

“That is not so easily done.”

“But you are in duty bound to do it. You are making your mother and your sister miserable by your vain repinings. You have everything to make you happy, and you are resolved to luxuriate in your fancied woes.”

“What can I do, Dick?”

“Drive the whole subject out of your mind. She has been unfortunate in her husband, if he is her husband——”

“My God!” groaned Eugene, refusing to be comforted.

“Come, Hungerford, you are absurd. Listen to me, and I will heal your wounds and hers at the same time.”

“You cannot.”

“Yes, I can. What under the canopy do you wish to do? Do you intend to marry the girl yourself, after what has happened?”

Eugene only looked at him, and his expression was so sad and painful that Dick abandoned the “heroic” method of treatment which he had pursued, and became as gentle as a woman.

“Of course you cannot undo what has been done. Now, Hungerford, if you saw Mary happily situated, would that satisfy you?”

“Happily situated!” repeated Eugene. “How can she

oe happily situated, after she has been so cruelly mocked and deceived?"

"No matter for that; if you could see her so situated, would you be satisfied?"

"I would; but ——"

"No buts about it, my dear fellow. Nay, hear me. All her misery grows out of the fact that she has not been legally married."

"It is horrible to think of," said Eugene, with a shudder "Such a gentle, sensitive, angelic nature as Mary's could endure everything rather than this."

"Then we will correct it."

"You are treating this as a matter of business, Dick; just as you bargain for my house and my horses."

"No, Hungerford; I simply apply common sense to the case. I have a remedy."

"There is no remedy."

"Yes, there is. You will not hear me."

"Go on," replied the stricken lover, impatiently and hopelessly.

"If Mary is not married, she shall be married. We will have the ceremony performed by your own minister. This Buckstone shall face the music — nay, Hungerford, don't interrupt me. That will heal the worst wound, and that will satisfy her. Now, as you have plenty of money, you can insure her against want to the last day of her life. Settle twenty thousand dollars upon her. Invest it in stocks; make Ross trustee, and let him pay over to her the income. Let it go to her children at her decease. This plan ought to make you perfectly easy; at least it ought to atone for your fault, if you are guilty of any."

"O, Dick! To think of healing her wounds with money!" said Eugene, reproachfully.

"Nothing of the kind; we heal the wound with marriage, which is the only balm for her sorrow."

"Will Buckstone marry her?"

“He will; he shall have the alternative of marrying her, or standing a criminal prosecution.”

“This is revolting, Dick. A villain to marry her in order to avoid a criminal prosecution.”

“It will save her good name; it will make her a wife. When he has done justice to her, he may go, if he pleases.”

“And leave her in her misery?”

“He will not go, Hungerford. He may be a very good fellow yet. Nothing has been proved against him, except that he drinks too much.”

“For shame, Dick! Is it nothing that he tells her she is not his wife?”

“He was tipsy then,” replied Dick, rather tamely, for he could not conceal from himself the fact that he was arguing the case as a lawyer rather than as a just man. “Very likely the remark he made that she was not his wife was only a petulant reply to a sharp question.”

“Mary used no sharp words.”

“But she reproached him for his neglect. As I understand it, Buckstone is one of those periodical drunkards, who have a spree once or twice a year.”

“Do you believe that Buckstone married her, Dick, in Providence?”

“To be honest, I do not believe he intended to do so; but the marriage may be legal, if we can prove it. We will supply the omission.”

“Omission!” groaned Eugene. “You speak of it as though it were a trifling offence, instead of the most monstrous crime of which a man could be guilty.”

“I condemn the crime as strongly as you do. We will redeem him and her as far as we can. Now, Buckstone has written to her; this proves that he has not abandoned her. Probably he has got over his spree, and desires to have her return to him. If so, he shall come to Poppleton, and marry her in the church, so as to remove every doubt. Then you will put her in the way of receiving an income of twelve

hundred a year, and the happy couple may go on their way rejoicing."

"He will still be a drunkard; and he may still abuse and neglect her."

"But she has the power in her own hands. With the twelve hundred a year in her own right, she will be independent of him. If he leaves her for a month or two, she will not suffer in his absence."

"What a fate, to be joined to such a man!"

"That is her misfortune. She chose him, and she must abide her choice; there is no help for that. You cannot make a bed of roses for her. She accepted the man, and if she does not choose to live with him, she can leave him."

Eugene walked up and down the library, considering this plan. Though, in his estimation, it offered Mary no immunity from the miseries of her unfortunate union with Buckstone, it would partially mitigate them. He doubted whether she would accept his bounty; but Dick was certain that he could manage this part of the business through her brother. On the whole, therefore, he was disposed to adopt this as the only method by which he could do anything to smooth the rough path of the poor girl whom he had so fondly loved, whose sweet face and gentle nature still haunted his thoughts.

The more he considered the plan the stronger became his approval, though he still regarded it only as a compromise. This method of healing the wounds of poor Mary, unsatisfactory as it was, had an immediate effect upon the spirits of Eugene. As soon as he had decided to adopt it, he had something to think of—something to turn his thoughts away from the morbid fancies that beset him.

"I like your plan very well, Dick; but only because it is the best that can be done," said he, seating himself in the luxurious arm-chair before his friend.

"Hungerford, it is not only the best that can be done, but

it is very good in itself. It is noble and generous on your part, and Mary ought to be happy."

"She cannot be."

"You prejudge the case. She has no claim upon you, but you are treating her like a princess. She will go to New York with her husband, and though she will have her trials, as all must, she will be better off than half the wives in the world. But after all, Hungerford, I propose this method for your sake rather than hers. It will heal your wounds, as well as hers."

"I'm afraid not."

"You are determined to be obstinate; to make your mother and sister unhappy by moping over this thing."

"No, Dick; for their sake, I will be cheerful and happy, if I can."

"You can; you are not a weak-minded man; you can banish the whole thing from your mind if you will."

"I shall try."

"Then you will succeed. There are other women in the world besides Mary — girls as beautiful, as gentle, and as loving."

"They are not Mary."

"No; they are Ellen, and Carrie, and Alice, and Emma. A rose by any other name will smell as sweet. You will find one who will make you a loving and accomplished wife."

"Don't speak of marriage to me, Dick. I am disgusted," said Eugene, petulantly.

"Just now you are, my dear fellow; but you will get over it, and within the five years now left to accomplish your destiny, you will marry, and at the age of thirty the three millions will drop into your coffers."

"No, Dick; though I may possibly marry, I shall not do it so as to comply with the conditions of my uncle's will. I have even made up my mind that it would be wrong for me to do so."

“What do you mean, Hungerford? Are you crazy? Has this thing turned your head?” demanded Dick, who, however, had long ago learned not to be surprised at anything his friend should do.

“I am sane and reasonable, Dick. Look at it a moment. If I comply with the conditions of the will, so far as I can do so, and if Providence should bless me with a son, so that the three millions would be legally mine, what would be the result?”

“The three millions would be the result, of course,” laughed Dick.

“What else?”

“Anything else you please; it will depend upon how you use your money.”

“By the conditions of the will, the three millions are to be divided into six equal parts, if I have no son. One part would be mine, which is all-sufficient for me. I ask for no more. I confess, if I was to be left a poor man by it, I should not be so likely to entertain my present views.”

“But the three millions were intended for you upon certain conditions, and you ought to have the money.”

“If I have the three millions, I shall cheat my sister out of half a million.”

“By no means: you can give her the half million if you choose.”

For some reason or other Dick seemed to be embarrassed when he had said this, as though a selfish consideration was intruding itself upon him.

“But she is satisfied; and I hope you will not do it.”

“Beyond this, I should deprive the other contingent legatees of their share.”

“Dr. — What is his name?”

“Tom Lynch.”

“Dr. Lynch; pray what possible claim can he have upon you, or upon your uncle's estate? By the way, there are some letters from the trustees in the office. I did not deem

them of importance enough to send to you; but in one of them Mr. Lester says this Dr. Lynch is a miserable reprobate, and has about run through the legacy your uncle left him."

"That is not my affair. I do not wish to deprive him of what my uncle was disposed to give him on a certain condition. Then, by the will, a million and a half is to go to three great charitable enterprises. If I could rob the individuals, I could not take from the poor of Baltimore this great boon."

"Your uncle did not leave them a single cent of what you mention. It was not his wish that these institutions should be founded; if it had been, he would have left the money unconditionally. It was his last and most earnest desire that the three millions should be inherited by your son, under the name of John Hungerford. This was his meaning; this was his wish, his hope; and you have no right to set aside his intentions. If you take any of his money, you are bound by every consideration of respect, affection, and gratitude, to carry out his design, even if you think it absurd to do so. What right have you to set yourself up as a judge of your uncle's purposes? The three millions belonged to him, and he had the undoubted right to dispose of it as he pleased. If you decline to do what he wished you to do, you have no moral right to take any of his money."

"Perhaps you are right, Dick."

"I know I am. I am very clear that it is your duty to get married, and carry out the intentions of your uncle by doing so."

"I certainly shall not marry to obtain the three millions."

"You certainly should not avoid matrimony in order to defeat your uncle's last wishes."

"I will not. Let things take their course just as though no three millions were pending."

"If you will only do that, I will be satisfied. Be your-

self; that is all I ask of you. But tea is ready. Let me escort you to the dining-room."

Eugene joined his mother and sister at the table. He was more composed and reasonable than when he first entered the house; and he began, in some slight degree, to enjoy the comforts and luxuries of his new home. The charge which Dick had made against him, of conspiring against the peace and happiness of the other members of the family, had produced a deep impression upon his mind, and he labored to be cheerful. But the plan to mitigate the sorrows of poor Mary afforded him some comfort, and his cheerfulness was not all a pretence.

A man had been sent for Ross Kingman, and before tea was over, the skipper of the yacht arrived. Dick, after charging Eugene not to mention to her brother the scheme for healing Mary's wounds, went out with Mrs. Hungerford and Julia to walk in the grounds around the house. He preferred to manage this business himself, fearful that Eugene, in his excited state of mind, might make some mistake, and thus defeat his own kind intentions.

"I am glad to see you, Ross," said Eugene.

"Thank you, Mr. Hungerford; it does me good to see your face once more," replied Ross, grasping the offered hand of Eugene. "The yacht is finished, sir, and if you will take my word for it, she is a beauty."

"I have no doubt of it."

"I have been out in her several times. She has made twelve knots with the wind free, and nine close hauled. She works as handy as a skiff, and behaves like a lady, in a sea."

"I dare say," added Eugene, rather coldly.

"Mr. Birch attended to fitting up the cabins; and they are as handsome as your parlor."

"I have no doubt she is everything I could wish."

"There was one thing you forgot, and that was, a name for her."

“We will attend to that at another time. Ross, how is Mary?”

“Well, she is improving. She walked out to-day, but she feels very bad.”

“Poor girl!” sighed Eugene.

“I have cried more within a month than I ever did in the same time when I was a baby. You have no idea, Mr. Hungerford, how she took on when I first saw her. I was afraid she would go crazy.”

“Poor Mary!” was all Eugene could say.

“I brought her home as soon as I could, and I have staid with her most of the time since. She is my own sister, you know, and she sets a great deal by me, and I do by her. She don’t like to have me away from her.”

“I will not keep you long, Ross.”

“O! she don’t mind a few hours at a time.”

“What does she say about Mr. Buckstone?”

“Nothing; not a word. Mary is a Christian, if there is one in the world, and she won’t even let me abuse him.”

Ross clinched his fists and grated his teeth. He indulged in a few expletives, which seemed to relieve his mind; but it was evident that it would not be safe to let the outraged brother see the artist.

“Where is Mr. Buckstone, now?”

“I don’t know; it is lucky for him I do not,” replied Ross, fiercely.

“Don’t do anything rash, if you should meet him, Ross,” continued Eugene, impressed by the savage tones and the mischievous looks of the young man.

“Mr. Hungerford, it’s no use to talk to me about this matter; if I should see the villain, I would tear him in pieces! I would pull out his heart, if I had to be hanged for it the next minute!”

“Don’t you touch him, Ross.”

“If I saw him, I couldn’t help it. Why, the scoundrel did not even marry her! He cheated her!”

“ You are not sure of that.”

“ I am sure of it.”

“ What is your evidence?”

“ He told her so himself.”

“ He was intoxicated and angry then.”

“ Why did he desert her, just as she was about to become a mother?”

“ She has had a letter from him since she came to Poppleton, I learn.”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ What did he say?”

“ He pretends to be sorry for what he has done, promises never to drink any more, and wants her to return.”

“ Does he say anything about the marriage in the letter?”

“ Not a word; but he says he shall come and see her soon. He had better not,” added Ross, with compressed lips and gleaming eyes.

“ Don't harm him, Ross; perhaps the matter may be settled.”

“ Settled!” exclaimed Ross, jumping out of his chair. “ He can't settle this matter, but I can, if I get my hand upon him!”

“ If you should assault him, or anything of that kind, you might injure your sister more than you injured him.”

“ I hope he will keep out of my way, Mr. Hungerford; but if I see him, his doom is sealed.”

“ We are going to do something for Mary, Ross; we are going to restore her good name, at least. Now, you must not defeat our intentions by any rashness on your part. Keep cool, Ross.”

“ How can I keep cool, Mr. Hungerford, when my poor sister has been ruined by a villain?”

Ross wept like a child, and Eugene felt that his own grief was not to be compared with his. When they parted, he counselled him repeatedly not to resort to any violence, if Mr. Buckstone should visit The Great Bell.

CHAPTER X.

ROSS KINGMAN.

ROSS KINGMAN left Pine Hill at nine o'clock in the evening. Since Mary's return to Poppleton he had been almost constantly with her. When he was sent for by Eugene Hungerford, she made no objection to his going. She sat in her chamber as usual that evening. Though all her life since she came to years of discretion had been full of cares and trials, though she had endured much of the shame and mortification brought upon the family by the conduct of her father, the past, in contrast with the present, seemed full of joys and hopes. Only a few brief months before, her lot had been happy, compared with her present condition.

She had been deceived, and she felt that henceforth she was to be an outcast. Those who had been her friends would shun her now. The scorn of the cold world would be heaped upon her, whatever the degree of her guilt. Those terrible hours of the gloomy night when she had been driven from her father's house came to her mind; her meeting with Eliot Buckstone in the morning, when, upon condition that she should become his wife before the sun went down, she had consented to flee with him to find the comforts of a home, if not the joys of a wife.

Her sun had set. Henceforth she must be content to be shunned and despised. Her husband had deserted her, leaving her not even an honest name before the world. She had been indiscreet, but she had not been guilty, and God would

forgive her, if man would not. Then, as many a time before since sorrow darkened densely upon her, she would have welcomed the angel of death as her best and truest friend. The night shadows gathered over the face of nature, while she gazed from the window, as they gathered over her troubled heart. The clock struck nine, but Ross did not return. She wished to see him before she retired, for she was anxious to know what Eugene said of her; whether he condemned and scorned her, as she was assured all the rest of the world condemned and scorned her.

It was a very mild and soft night for May on the sea shore, and she still sat at her open window. She shrank not from the night air, which might be laden with disease and death, for life was no longer sweet to her, and she dreaded not the grim messenger who must sooner or later summon her from the misery to which she seemed to be doomed. She heard footsteps in the path which led from the landing-place round to the front of the house. She listened and looked, believing it was Ross; but the person, whose form she could now indistinctly see in the darkness, did not move like her brother. He came beneath her window, and stopped there.

“Mary.”

She was startled by the voice. It was not that of Ross, but the tones were familiar.

“Mary,” repeated the speaker.

“Who is there?” she asked, quivering with emotion in every fibre of her frame.

“It is I, Mary. May I see you?”

It was Eliot Buckstone.

She had many doubts whether to see him or not, but her first thought was, that he who had called himself her husband, who was the father of her dead child, was in mortal peril.

“Come up stairs,” said she, intent only upon warning him from the spot.

He entered at the front door, and was familiar enough with the house to find his way up stairs. Mary conducted him from the entry to her room without speaking a word, though her heart was almost bursting with agitation.

“Can you forgive me, Mary?” said he, as he closed the door behind him.

“Can you forgive yourself?” asked she, in tremulous tones.

“No, Mary, I cannot! I have sinned against Heaven and you, and I am no more worthy of you,” continued Eliot, with apparent or real emotion.

“How could you desert me at such a time?”

“I did not mean to desert you. I knew not what I did; but how bitterly have I repented!”

“Have you repented?”

“O, Mary! If you knew what I have suffered! If you could have seen my tears! If you could have felt the throbs of my breaking heart!”

“You told me I was not your wife, Eliot. That was the most cruel of all,” sobbed she.

“I was mad, Mary. I had been drinking; but I have sworn never to put the cup to my lips again, and God help me, I never will!”

“Did you mean what you said when you told me I was not your wife?”

“I did not. Mary, I meant to make you my wife — God knows that I did!”

“Am I not your wife?”

“I do not know.”

“You do not know!” she gasped, for his words sounded like an equivocation; and indeed all his promises and protestations had been much too violent to seem real to her.

Now she had discovered that he was a drunkard, she had no confidence in him. He had deceived her — he did not know whether or not she was his wife!

“I do not know, Mary,” he repeated.

“You are not sincere now, Eliot.”

“God knows that I am sincere — that I love you with all my soul!”

“Were we married that evening in Providence, Eliot?” she demanded, sternly.

“I do not know, Mary. If I intended to deceive you, I would not answer you thus,” replied he, with much meekness in his tones and manner.

“How dare you tell me you do not know?” continued Mary, with energy.

“I do not know; but whether you are or are not my wife, Mary, you shall be.”

“You mock me, Eliot.”

“Hear me, Mary, and you shall know the truth, just as it is. As God is my judge, I would not deceive you for all the world.”

“You have done it already, if you do not know whether we were married or not.”

“I intended to make you my wife. When we reached Providence, we went to the house of my friend, Mr. Dorning.”

“The artist, you mean?”

“Yes; I acknowledge that he is not the best man in the world.”

“Then why did you take me there?”

“Because I had no other friend in Providence.”

“If he is a bad man, why is he your friend?”

“We studied art together. I was acquainted with him — perhaps he was not my friend, in the truest sense of the word. We went to his house, and I told him as much of our story as I could relate in five minutes. He laughed —”

“Why should he laugh?” demanded Mary, indignantly.

“Probably he took a wrong view of the matter, and did not suppose I wished to be really married. He was mistaken; I intended to make you my wife — God knows that I did!”

Mary wept bitterly. Eliot should have smote the man to the earth when he laughed, for the laugh was an insult; it was trifling over the innocence and purity of her he pretended to love. She lost hope, as he went on with his story; her worst fears were gradually confirmed. His frequent use of the sacred name of God to fortify his statements did not inspire her with confidence. To her it was not the simple tale of truth.

“Go on, Eliot,” said Mary, in despair.

“In ten minutes Mr. Dorning appeared with the gentleman who married us: whether he was a clergyman or not, I do not know to this day.”

“He pretended to be one?”

“And he may be, for aught I know.”

“What reason have you to suppose that he was not a clergyman, as he assumed to be?”

“A remark which Dorning made to me, as we were leaving his house.”

“What was it?”

“It was to the effect that I was married or not, just as I chose to regard it.

“O, Eliot! You knew it then, and you did not tell me.”

“I did not fully understand the meaning of the remark.”

“Why did you not make the marriage legal as soon as we reached New York?”

“In my heart I meant right, Mary. I intended to see Dorning, and find out his meaning. If we were not legally united, I intended that we should be.”

“But you were swift to tell me I was not your wife, when you were angry with me.”

“I was mad then; I had drank too much wine.”

“I have lost confidence in you, Eliot.”

“Do not say that, Mary,” pleaded Buckstone.

“Have you seen Dorning since?”

“I have not. He telegraphed to me, you remember, that

two gentlemen were inquiring into the affair, and we went to Philadelphia."

"Why, Eliot? If you meant right, why should you have run away?"

"To avoid a scene. I supposed then that it was your father who had made the inquiries. I thought it best not to meet him. You were of the same opinion."

"But it was not my father."

"No; it was Mr. Hungerford. It was none of his business. Why should he meddle with it?"

"Perhaps he suspected the truth."

"What truth?"

"That you were deceiving me."

"I was not deceiving you, Mary. If you were deceived, so was I."

"Mr. Hungerford was my friend. It seems that he suspected, what never occurred to me, that I had been cruelly duped."

"Mary, you wrong me. I have come here to make you my wife, if you are not so already. Your own clergyman shall marry us; and after I have done justice to you, I will leave it with you to live with me or not."

"Then you believe I am not your wife?" groaned Mary, to whom the fact that she had been a mother without being a wife was the sum of all miseries, outweighing all other sorrows combined.

"To be candid, Mary, I do not believe we were legally married."

"Why have you not seen Mr. Dorning, and satisfied yourself? Is this a matter of so little consequence that you can pass it by like a rejected picture? O, Eliot, you have deceived me! You have robbed me of myself! Why have you not seen Mr. Dorning?"

"I was afraid to see him; I preferred to be in doubt rather than to know that I had done you this great wrong."

"What will become of me?" sighed she.

“Let us bury the past, dear Mary; and in the future I will be the fondest and truest of husbands,” pleaded Eliot. “We will be married to-morrow — to-night, if you will.”

“I will consult my brother.”

“No, Mary; do not tell him I am here, till we are married.”

“He is my only friend. He will tell me what I should do. But, Eliot, he is terribly incensed, and you must not meet him. You must go; it is time for him to return now.”

“Where is Ross?”

“He has gone over to see Mr. Hungerford, who returned from Europe to-day. Go now, Eliot; I will tell you to-morrow what I will do.”

“Tell me now, Mary. Let my conscience be at rest.”

“Go at once; if Ross should see you, I tremble to think what the consequences might be.”

“I am not afraid of him.”

“But I am afraid. Don’t remain another moment.”

“Go with me, Mary. Let your minister marry us to-night.”

“No, no, Eliot. You must go now,” she continued, taking him by the arm, and leading him to the door.

“Good night, Mary,” said he, taking her by the hand. “You will see me to-morrow.”

“Do not come here. If Ross should see you ——”

“I will come when he is away.”

“I will meet you on the beach.”

“When Ross leaves the island, hang your red shawl out this window, and I will go to the beach at once.”

“I will. Now go as quick as you can.”

He left her, and Mary threw herself into a chair, and wept till she was startled by the footstep of Ross in the entry. When her brother entered the room, with a light in his hand, he could not help perceiving by her agitated manner, and her tear-stained face, that something had occurred to disturb the calm in which he had left her a few hours

before. He was her friend and confidant; and after he had promised not to be angry, she told him that Eliot Buckstone had been there.

Ross sprang to his feet, and looked like a madman. He forgot his promise. He had not expected this, and his nature was not proof against the shock it gave him. But Mary, with her tears and her pleading, calmed him down a little, and then he wrung from her a portion of what had passed between herself and Buckstone.

“Are you his wife, Mary? Did he say anything about that?” demanded Ross, struggling to keep down the stormy passions that labored in his breast for expression.

“I am not his wife, Ross, but ——”

“Not his wife! He told you so again!” exclaimed he; and he rushed from the room without waiting to hear any more.

“Ross! Ross!” she cried, following him.

But Ross heeded her not. He burst from the house wild with rage. She went to the outside door, but he was gone; and overcome by her emotions and her fears, she sank fainting upon the floor. She was weak and exhausted, and this new demand upon her strength was more than she could endure. Mrs. Kingman heard her scream, and heard her fall. With the assistance of her oldest daughter, Mary was borne to her room; but it was long before she opened her eyes and remembered what had transpired, — so long that The Great Bell sounded with a note of horror before she knew that still she lived.

Eliot Buckstone left the house. Though he had no strong fears of Ross Kingman, he did not care to meet him. He walked down the path to the landing-place for a short distance, and then turned off towards the beach, where he had been in the habit of meeting Mary in brighter days. He reached the shelving rocks, below which the sandy shore extended.

“Well, Buckstone,” said a young man, seated on a rock there, “what did you make out?”

On the beach below a boat was hauled partially out of the water, and it was evident that the stranger had come over from the main shore with Buckstone, and was waiting his return from the house.

“Everything works well,” replied Buckstone.

“Has Hungerford been here yet?”

“No ; of course not. He did not get home till five o'clock.”

“He is fool enough to come even before he went into his own house.”

“He has not been here.”

“What does she say?”

“She will give me an answer to-morrow. I have no doubt what her answer will be.”

“If she is not a bigger fool than Hungerford, of course she will let you marry her.”

“She is crazy if she does not.”

“Do you really think, Buckstone, that she is not your wife?” demanded the stranger.

“I told her I had my doubts,” laughed the artist, who certainly appeared now to have none of the penitential thoughts which he had expressed in the presence of poor Mary.

“You are not talking to her just now.”

“Well, then, I am perfectly satisfied that I was not married to her.”

“Did you *intend* to marry her? for your intention makes all the difference in the world,” added the stranger, who was evidently acquainted with the law on this subject, if, indeed, he was not a lawyer.

“I did, and I did not,” replied Buckstone, jocosely.

“Not both?”

“Yes, both. I'll tell you how it was. When I went to Dorning's house, I intended to marry her. I told him what

I wanted, and he laughed. That laugh was clear enough to me. He understood me to mean that I wished to cheat the girl --- Dorning and I had been together a great deal, and understood each other very well. Just then I thought it would be foolish and stupid for me to throw myself away on one woman. I laughed then. Nothing was said, but the affair was just as well arranged as though we had talked half a day about it."

"Then you did not intend to marry her when the ceremony took place."

"No; I did not. I thought it was best not to put my head into a trap from which I could not withdraw it, if I so desired."

"Who performed the ceremony?"

"I don't know; and I have kept out of Dorning's way because I don't want to know."

"Precisely so; then you must marry her at once."

"For a consideration, I consent," replied the heartless villain.

"The consideration shall be forthcoming," said the stranger.

"I don't exactly understand your position," continued Buckstone.

"Never mind my position."

"If you prevent Hungerford from marrying Mary, you cannot prevent him from marrying some other lady."

"I attend to only one thing at a time."

"I don't see why you should care whether he marries or not."

"It is not for you to know," replied the stranger, impatiently.

"As you please. When I do anything, I like to know something about it. If I don't understand it, somebody else might."

"After your confession to me about the marriage, it

would not be prudent for you to say much," added the principal, significantly.

"Perhaps parties on the other side would be more confiding."

"Very likely they would. In due time, if you are patient, you shall understand the whole matter."

"I prefer to understand it now."

"Very well, I will tell you now, if you insist, though it is not best for you to know, at the present stage of the proceedings. After the marriage, I intended to tell you the whole story. But as ——"

"Hark!" interposed Buckstone. "Some one is coming. It is that fiery Ross Kingman."

"So much the better. Why not see him now, and tell him what you mean to do?" whispered the stranger.

"He is as savage as an untamed tiger."

"You are afraid of him?"

"No."

"Then see him; it would help the matter along."

"He is ugly."

"Never mind, if you are afraid of him."

"I'm not afraid of him. To prove that I am not, I will see him," replied Buckstone, who could not bear the imputation of cowardice.

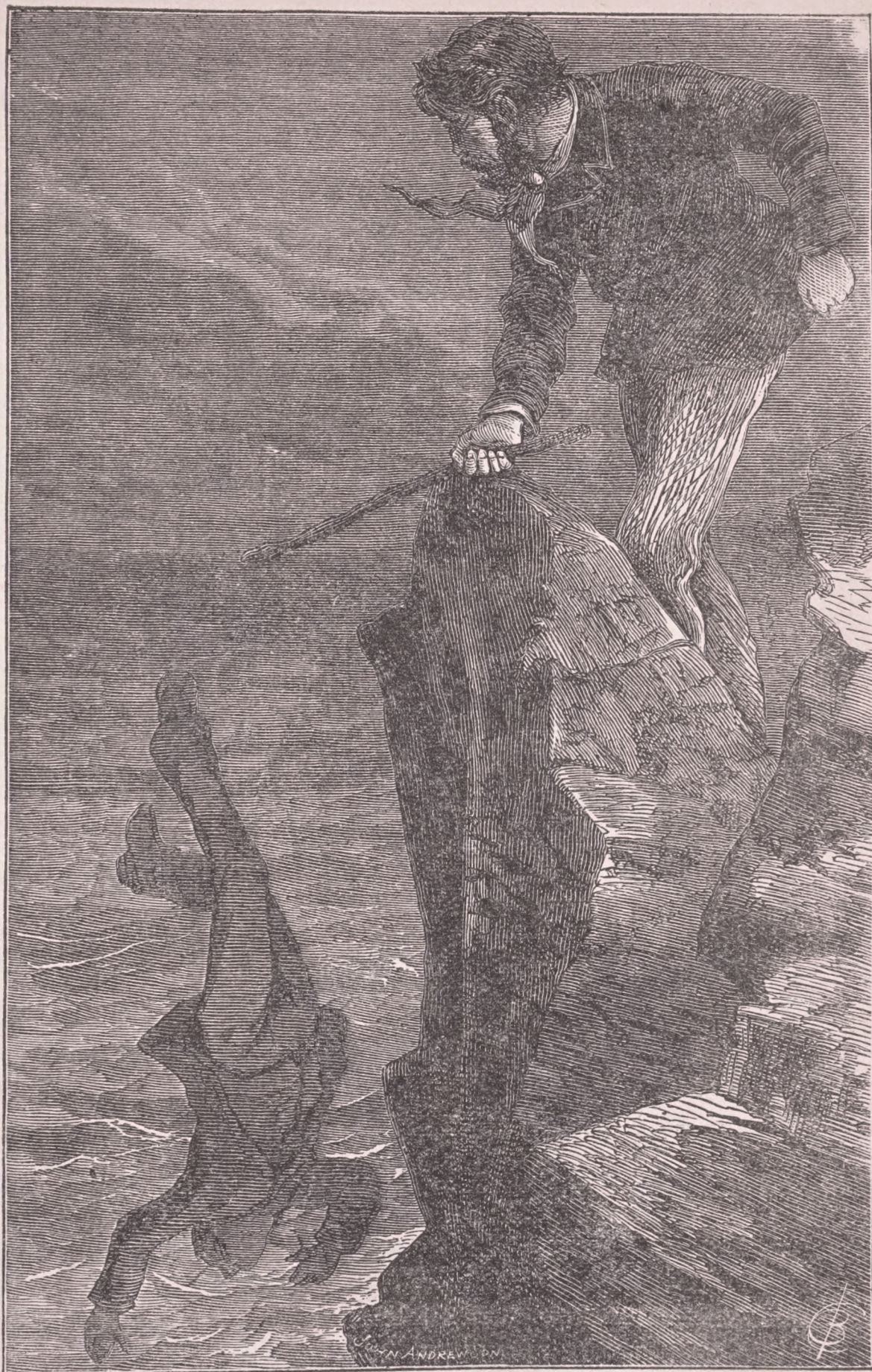
"Very well; I will go down upon the beach, for I am afraid the boat will float off."

Ross Kingman, roused to the highest pitch of excitement and anger, was approaching the spot where Buckstone stood. There was but one purpose in his mind, and that was vengeance upon the man who had wronged his sister. He knew nothing of prudence; he had no regard for consequences.

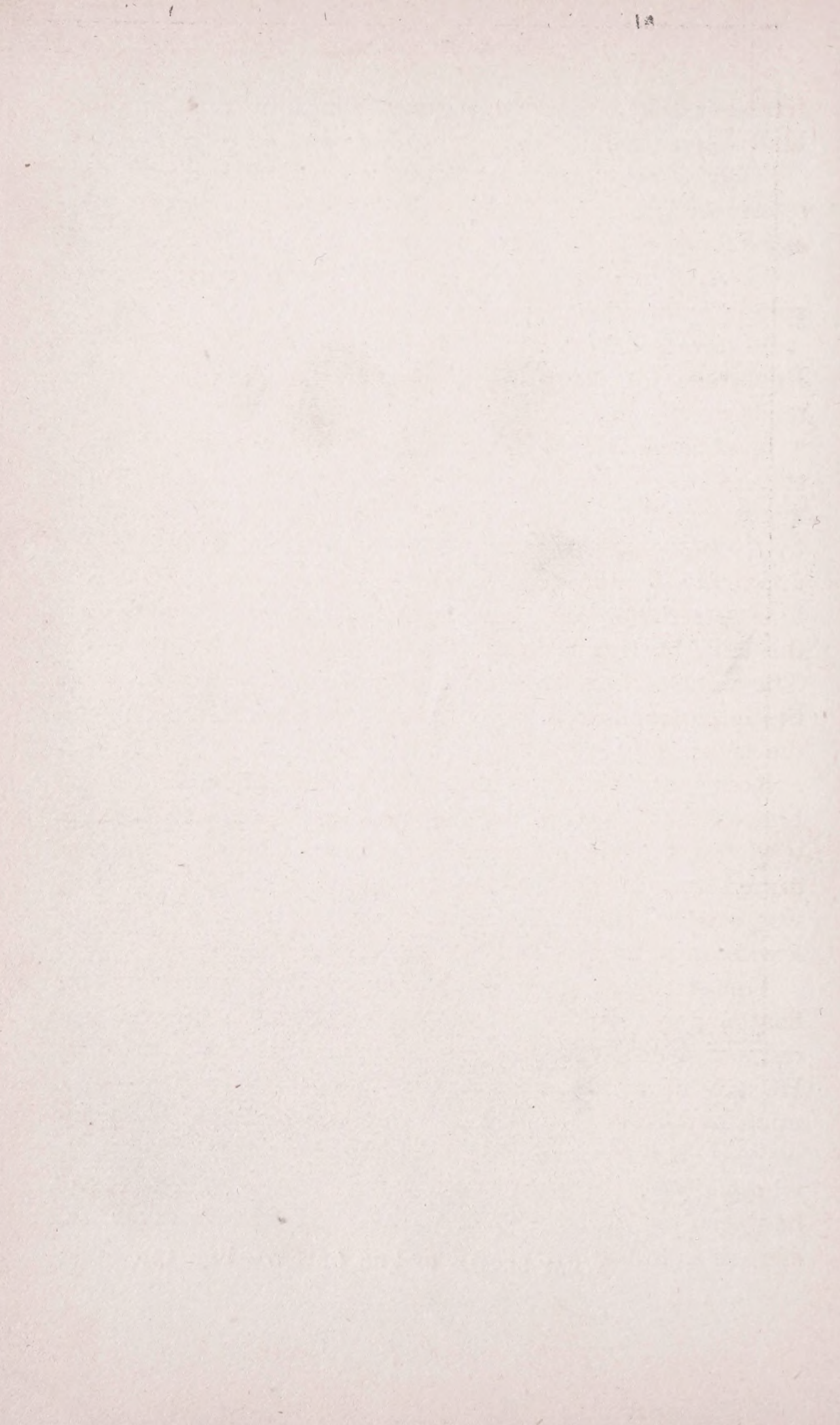
"Is that you, Ross," said Buckstone.

"Villain!" cried the enraged brother, as he rushed forward upon the artist.

Buckstone had discretion enough to run away, and he



WHAT BECAME OF THE ARTIST. — Page 133.



retreated before his relentless enemy until he came to a high bluff, beneath which the sea beat against the rocks.

"Stop a minute, Ross; I am going to make it all right to-morrow," gasped Buckstone, out of breath with running, as he found that his pursuer was rapidly gaining upon him.

"I shall make it right to-night," shouted Ross, as he sprang upon the hated enemy.

"I am going to marry her to-morrow, Ross," pleaded Buckstone, as the gripe of the infuriate brother was fastened upon him.

Ross had a club in his hand, with which he struck Buckstone a heavy blow on the head. The artist did not speak again; he sank down upon the ground, stunned, if not killed, by the blow. Ross, unappeased by what he had done, and apparently unmoved by the sight of the prostrate form before him, seized the body with both hands, and, dragging it to the cliff, hurled it down into the rolling waters beneath. There was a heavy splash, and then nothing was heard but the monotonous roll of the waves, as they surged against the rocks.

Ross gazed down the steep for a moment, as if to satisfy himself that his work was done. He panted like a chafed wild beast. He muttered something to himself, and then turned from the spot, walking towards the house. If Mary was a wife before, she was a widow now. If she was not a wife, most terribly had her wrongs been avenged.

The stranger, when Buckstone left him, pushed off the boat, and got into it. Rowing leisurely down the shore, he came to the high rocks. His boat struck against something. He got up to see what it was. Part of the object rested upon a rock, and it was swaying up and down with the waves. It was a dead body! It was the corpse of the man who had been drowned that day, for which unavailing search had been made. It was a ghastly sight, for there was light enough from the stars to enable him to see it. But he did

not tremble ; did not flee in terror from the spot. He was accustomed to such sights.

At this moment a heavy splash in the water, a few rods from the boat, attracted his attention. He had heard the angry words spoken on the cliff above, and he comprehended at once that a deed of violence had been done. He was startled now, for his companion had been the victim ; the bargain he had made with him could not be consummated. He pulled towards the spot where the splash had been heard. He discovered the inanimate form of Buckstone, and dragged it into the boat. He pulled back to the beach, and there examined the body.

“Dead!” exclaimed he, with more of disappointment than of horror in his tones. “He will not marry her now.”

That was evident enough ; but still the stranger, as if unwilling to abandon the hope which had brought him to the island, continued to work over the body.

CHAPTER XI.

DOCTOR BILKS.

ROSS KINGMAN walked back to the house. Not yet did he regret the deed he had done. He felt that he had been the minister of God's justice, as well as of his own vengeance. He was calm, now that the excitement of the assault was over, and he had no fears of the future. He did not tremble as he thought of an arrest, a trial, and a penalty; he was ready to meet them. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," saith the Lord; but this reflection did not occur to him. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," saith the Law; and this reflection did not occur to him.

He entered the house. Mary was recovering from her swoon. When she remembered what had happened before she fell upon the floor, she asked for Ross. He went to her. She saw that the storm had passed away from her brother's soul; but she could not see that the lightning of his wrath had spent itself upon her betrayer.

"Where have you been, Ross?" she asked, distrusting the stern calmness of his looks.

"Down to the shore, Mary."

"Did you see him?"

"I did."

"What passed between you, Ross?"

"Let us not speak of that to-night, Mary. You don't feel very well, and it won't make you feel any better."

"O, Ross! What have you done?"

"I will tell you all about it in the morning, Mary," he

replied, evading the answer for her sake rather than his own.

“Tell me now! Let me know the worst.”

“I was very angry.”

“Tell me at once, Ross, or I will go down to the beach myself.”

“Be quiet, Mary. Don't make yourself sick.”

“I know by your looks that you have done something, Ross. Don't speak of me at such a time, but tell me what happened.”

“I struck him,” replied he, rather doggedly. “I gave him the blow he deserved.”

“Why did you, Ross?” said she, reproachfully, as she rose from the bed. “You have struck me, as well as him.”

“Struck you, Mary? Don't you hate the villain?”

“I do not hate him, Ross. I could forgive him. Have you told me all?”

He made no reply.

“You have struck him down, Ross, and he lies upon the beach now. He will die there!” exclaimed she, springing from the bed.

“Be calm, Mary.”

“I will go to him.”

“No; you must not.”

“You have struck me harder than you struck him.”

“Do not say that, Mary. He is a villain. Think what he has done! He cast you off like an unclean thing!”

“He lies on the beach, and he will die there,” continued she, rising and taking a shawl. “I must go to him. I must undo what you have done, if I can.”

“It is too late.”

“Ross! Ross!” cried she, in horror and anguish.

“I could not help it. It was for your sake I did it.”

“Where is he now?”

“What does it matter to you where he is, Mary? Be quiet now.”

“I must go and find him.”

“You cannot find him.”

“Ross, what have you done with him?”

“I struck him down; and then I heaved his vile carcass over the cliff into the river! Now you know it all. I have avenged your wrongs, Mary.”

The poor girl sank back upon the bed with a groan, and her senses left her again. She was too weak and feeble to endure the terrible blow. To her other miseries was now added the revolting fact that her brother was a murderer. Ross called Mrs. Kingman, and together they struggled to reclaim the life which seemed to have fled. She opened her eyes at last, but by two o'clock in the morning, her condition was such, that the watchers by her side were greatly alarmed, and Ross started for the Port to procure the physician.

As he walked rapidly down to the landing, he began to fear that he had done wrong; that his vengeance had fallen heavier upon his innocent sister than upon the villain who had wronged her. He might have thought of this before he struck the fatal blow, but he did not. The reflection impressed itself more strongly upon his mind till he bitterly reproached himself for the crime.

With vigorous stroke he pulled across the channel, and hastened up to the office of the doctor. To his great satisfaction he saw a light in the window, and he gave the door bell a violent pull. Doctor Bilks came to the door himself. He was a young man, of twenty-six. During the preceding autumn, while Eugene Hungerford was in Europe, he had visited the place ostensibly for gunning and fishing purposes, but the wise ones afterwards came to the conclusion that it was in search of a good location to build up a practice for himself. He hailed from Ohio.

Dr. Hobhed, the principal physician at the Port, had been growing unpopular for several years. He was running after strange gods, and some believed that he was crazy. He had been experimenting for years in connection with a hobby

which he called "The Chemical Theory," which seemed to afford him more satisfaction than the practice of his profession, though he was regarded as a very skilful physician. As no man can serve two masters, Dr. Hobhed's practice began to scatter. People sent to the Mills for the doctor there for a time; but now two or three young practitioners had set up at the Port, and the old doctor was permitted to pursue his studies without much interruption.

Dr. Bilks was a free and easy man. He had an abundance of tact—more tact than professional knowledge. He knew human nature better than pathology and therapeutics; consequently he was more successful in obtaining patients than in healing them, though his knowledge and skill were fully up to the average standard. He was a popular man in the Port. He knew how to make acquaintances. If there was anything going on in the place, he was always present in the heat of the excitement. He had a fast horse attached to a new sulky, and every forenoon he was seen driving at a furious pace through the principal streets, as though the life of a patient depended wholly upon the speed of his horse. He commenced this strategy before he had been three days in the place, and had kept it up ever since. It looked like business.

When Dr. Bilks went into company, he talked a great deal about his profession. He was inclined to gape, even in the very teeth of decency and good manners; but this gape was always the prelude to a narrative of the hardships and privations of the physician's life. He had been up all night, attending to a desperate case, miles away, where the people were not known. Dr. Bilks was an ill-used man in his own estimation, and patients seemed to break their legs and arms, derange their stomachs, and disorder their livers, solely to punish him. But the new doctor was a growing man.

Dr. Bilks had been seven months at the Port, and had made the acquaintance of every man of consequence in the town. Dick Birch and the smart physician were on the

most intimate terms. The doctor was no quack or charlatan; he was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, regularly matriculated, and regularly graduated at the Jefferson Medical College in the city of Philadelphia. There were so few persons of liberal culture in the place, that Dick was glad to know him, and afforded all needful encouragement to the acquaintance. Dr. Bilks had been a frequent visitor at Pine Hill before the return of its owner, and, of course, Eugene did not suffer at all in the descriptions which Dick gave of him. That the lord of Pine Hill, on his return, should be a fast friend of the smart doctor, was already a settled fact.

When Mary was brought home by her brother, sick and suffering, Dick had advised Ross to call in Dr. Bilks, and he was attending her professionally at the time of Eugene's return, though his visits were now made only two or three times a week. It was quite proper that Mary's physician should know all her story, and Dick had unreservedly confided in him, though the narrative included the relations of Eugene, as well as those of Eliot Buckstone. It is more than probable that the anxious friend depended much upon the doctor for assistance in healing Hungerford's wounds, as well as Mary's.

"Ah, Ross, is that you?" said the doctor, familiarly, as he recognized the caller.

"Yes, sir; I want you to go over to the island with me right off. Mary is very bad," replied Ross, hurriedly.

"What's the matter with her?"

"She's nervous; she got frightened. Be as quick as you can, if you please, doctor."

"Well, this is rather hard on me. I have just come in from a bad case over beyond the Point. I've hardly slept a wink for three nights. But of course I will go, Ross."

"That's right; but be as quick as you can."

Dr. Bilks put on his overcoat, and took the small trunk in which he carried his medicines and instruments. Lock-

ing the door of the office, he joined Ross, who had already gone into the street.

“I'll carry your trunk, doctor.”

“Thank you, Ross. You said your sister was frightened — had a shock,” said Dr. Bilks, as he drew on his gloves.

“What frightened her?”

“I may as well tell you all about it, doctor,” replied Ross, quickening his pace. “You will find it out to-morrow.”

“Has anything happened on the island?”

“Yes, sir; something has happened there; and I suppose no one knows any more about it than I do. That Buckstone has been down there.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, sir; you know whom I mean — the man who pretended to be Mary's husband; who wronged and deceived her.”

“Yes. I understand. I have heard the whole story. You say he has been down there.”

“He has; but he never will go away from there!”

“What do you mean, Ross?” demanded Dr. Bilks, stopping short in the street.

“Don't you understand me? But come along. We must be in a hurry.”

“You don't mean to say you have — you have put him out of the way?”

“That is just what I mean to say.”

“Killed him?” gasped the doctor.

“I struck him on the head with a club, and then threw him overboard,” answered Ross, in excited tones. “I gave the villain what he deserved.”

They walked along in silence for a moment, for the doctor seemed to be paralyzed by the murderer's confession. And yet there was something so commonplace and formal in his expressions of horror and regret, that even Ross was surprised at the coolness with which he received the intelligence.

"This is bad business, Ross," continued the doctor. "Why did you tell me of it? I am your friend, and I would not injure you for all the world."

"I did what was right."

"Do you think it is right to kill a man?"

"I think it was right to kill him."

"But you have made a world of trouble for your friends."

"I can't help it. I don't care what any one thinks but Mary. She feels bad about it. I wouldn't have done it if I had thought it would make her feel so."

"But you will be arrested, Ross."

"I can't help it," added Ross, doggedly. "If any jury will hang me for that, I am willing to be hanged."

"You will hang yourself! Why did you tell me?"

"I thought you had better know what ailed Mary."

"You musn't speak of it again. Who knows it now?"

"Only you and Mary."

"Don't speak of it to any one else," said Dr. Bilks, earnestly, as they stepped into the boat.

"I shall not be likely to talk much about it."

"Perhaps the body will not be found. If it is not, you may never be suspected."

"I don't care much what becomes of me."

"For Mary's sake you must keep still. I am afraid you have wronged her, more than any one else, Ross."

"How can that be?"

"I have no doubt that Buckstone was really her husband."

"He told her he was not; and those words sealed his doom. When she told me that, I didn't wait to hear any more. I was so mad, I could not keep still."

"There is some mistake, Ross."

"No; there isn't."

"If either Buckstone or Mary *intended* to be married, even if the man who performed the ceremony was neither a clergyman nor a justice of the peace, the marriage is

legal. That is the law of the state," replied Dr. Bilks, who had evidently been reading the law books on this subject.

"He didn't intend to marry her," replied Ross, with an oath.

"Perhaps it may be proved that he did; if so, the marriage was legal."

The boat had now reached the landing, and Ross and the doctor walked up to the house. Mary was a little better; but Dr. Bilks prescribed for her. Nothing was said about the murder, for the poor girl was trying to forget her own woe in seeking the safety of her brother. The doctor was equally prudent, and did not betray his knowledge of the terrible affair. He remained an hour, and then Ross returned to the Port with him.

"You must be very cautious, Ross," said Dr. Bilks, as they entered the boat. "It might go hard with you, if this thing is found out."

"It will be found out; it will be all over town by to-morrow morning," replied the murderer, indifferently.

"Not unless you tell of it. I will keep still, and I am sure Mary will. She did not speak to me about it."

"It cannot be covered up; I don't care whether it is or not. If I have done wrong, I am willing to suffer for it."

"But think of Mary."

"That is all that troubles me. If it wasn't for her, I would go to the deputy sheriff and give myself up. But it will all come out."

"It need not. Only you and I know anything about it — except Mary."

"Yes; there is another man who must know all about it."

"Another!"

"There was somebody with Buckstone on the beach."

"That's bad; you didn't tell me of this before."

"I didn't even think of it."

"Who was the person?"

“I don’t know,” replied Ross, who seemed to feel no interest in this part of this business. “I heard them talking.”

“Did you hear what they said?” demanded the doctor, sharply.

“I did hear something that was said, but not much. I didn’t expect the villain was on the island then. I was going over to the Port to find him. I got into my boat, and pulled out a little way; then I saw a boat on the beach, and went back. I took the path over to the bluff, walking on the grass, so as not to make a noise. When I got to the rocks above the beach, I heard them talking.”

“What did they say?” asked the doctor, eagerly.

“I heard Buckstone say he intended to marry her, at first, and then he did not. I didn’t want to hear any more. I went after a club then; I found one; and when I came back, they were talking about a consideration for marrying my sister. My God! how my blood boiled! I moved forward then; Buckstone ran, and I followed him. I finished him, and pitched him over into the channel.”

“But who was this other man?” asked the doctor, nervously.

“I don’t know.”

“Did you see him?”

“Yes; but it was dark.”

“Couldn’t you tell anything about him?”

“No; he was a man about your size.”

Dr. Bilks was startled.

“What did he wear?”

“He wore an overcoat; it was too dark to see anything.”

“What did he do?”

“Nothing. I saw him go down to the boat. I don’t know where he went.”

“Ross, did you let this man go without finding out who or what he was?” demanded Dr. Bilks, impressively.

“I did not care anything about him.”

“Where did he go?”

“ I don't know ; after I had done my work, I went back to the house, and didn't even think of the other man.”

“ You say this man was hiring Buckstone to marry your sister.”

“ I didn't say so.”

“ Yes, you did ; you spoke of a consideration.”

“ I don't know who offered it, or what it meant. It was all Greek to me.”

“ Perhaps it was Mr. Hungerford,” suggested Dr. Bilks.

“ No, it was not ! ” replied Ross, decidedly.

“ How do you know ? ”

“ Do you think he would bribe Buckstone to marry my sister ? ”

“ He has plenty of money.”

“ He wouldn't do that.”

“ Perhaps he would. In my opinion, Ross, Mr. Hungerford was the man.”

“ It was not ! He is taller than this man.”

“ It might have been Mr. Birch, acting for Hungerford.”

“ It might have been ; but I don't believe it was.”

“ I am satisfied that it was Mr. Birch. In fact, he told me that, as soon as Mr. Hungerford came home, he should compel Buckstone to make your sister an honest woman.”

“ He told you so ? ”

“ Yes ; he acts from the best of motives, Ross. His only object was to save your sister from disgrace.”

The boat had touched at the Port, and the conversation was interrupted. Dr. Bilks seemed to be entirely satisfied that he had given a correct solution of the problem in regard to the stranger on the island. Ross was still sceptical. As the doctor walked up the street towards his office, the boatman pulled back to the island.

Dr. Bilks entered his office. The bad case beyond the Port, which had kept him up till two, as he had told Ross, and the case at the island, which had then kept him up till four, had consumed nearly all the hours of the night, and

he must have been a very weary man. We must do him the justice to say that he was tired on this occasion; that he even looked haggard and pale. His bed was in the room in the rear of his office; but exhausted as he was, he did not retire like a reasonable man. Throwing himself into an arm-chair, he was soon buried in deep thought. But a murder was an exciting event, and if his thoughts related to this startling affair, it was worth his attention.

About sunrise he threw himself on the bed, but he did not sleep; though, as it is certain he did not commit the murder on The Great Bell, it was not the ghost of the dead man which haunted the chambers of his soul. At eight o'clock his horse was brought to the door, as usual, and the doctor started to visit his patients. He drove down to the post office first, to receive his letters.

"Good morning, doctor," said the postmaster. "Anything new this morning?"

"I heard a startling rumor just now," replied Dr. Bilks.

"Indeed! What was it?"

"They say a man was murdered over on The Great Bell last night. Whether there is any truth in it or not, I don't know."

"A man murdered!"

"So they say. I don't know anything about it."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know."

"Who killed him?"

"I didn't hear any particulars. Hadn't you heard of it?"

Of course he had not; neither had Dr. Bilks heard of it. This was the manner in which he kept silence, and endeavored to save Ross Kingman from the consequences of his crime.

The doctor went from house to house, where he had patients, and repeated the startling rumor. In a couple of hours there was not a man, woman, or child at the Port who

had not heard that a man had been murdered on The Great Bell. The deputy sheriff, the constables, the coroner, the selectmen heard of it; but the rumor was so confused now, that no one could tell whence it originated.

The sheriff and the coroner went down to the island. They could find no murdered man. But they went to the house of Captain Kingman. They saw Ross, and asked him what he knew about the horrid affair. He knew all about it, and believing the stranger on the beach — probably Mr. Birch — had charged him with the crime, he was not willing to add even a single falsehood to his guilt. Ross Kingman was too manly to lie, though he could slay the betrayer of his suffering sister. He told the whole truth, and conducted the sheriff and the coroner to the place where the deed had been done. Ross was arrested, and conveyed to the county jail.

Mary was almost stunned by this blow, though Ross had already taught her to expect it. He told her that brothers and fathers, all over the county, would applaud rather than condemn the deed, and that she need have no fears for him. No jury would convict him. But the arrest had come sooner than even Ross expected, and she was not prepared to have him borne from her bedside so soon.

All the rest of that day men were dragging the channel, and searching on the shores of the river, for the dead body of Eliot Buckstone. Nothing was talked of in Poppleton but the murder. It was known that Mary had been deserted by her husband as soon as she came home. Then it was whispered that she had never been a wife. Evil-minded persons laughed, but most of the people pitied Mary, and condemned the wretch who had deceived her. They were prepared, therefore, for the final act of the tragedy, and the voice that condemned Buckstone applauded Ross Kingman. Many stout-hearted men declared that they would have done the same in defence of a daughter's or a sister's honor, and

that they would level the jail to the ground rather than permit Ross to suffer for what he had done.

But they were law-abiding men, deeply as their feelings were stirred by the wrongs of Mary; and after all, the people, in the persons of the twelve jurymen, were to decide whether Ross was "guilty or not guilty."

CHAPTER XII.

DICK BIRCH.

IF Ross Kingman was not the calmest man in Poppleton on the morning following the murder of Eliot Buckstone, it was only because Mary was a sufferer by his act of retribution. She seemed to be better as the morning advanced. She nerved herself to bear everything, though it was terrible to have her brother borne from her presence on such a grave charge, to spend weeks or months in a cell of the common jail. She suffered, but she endeavored to endure all her woes with patience and resignation; and when Ross left her, she had become the comforter, and spoke words of consolation and hope to him. For his sake she was calm and gentle.

Though from the first Ross had not intended to conceal what he had done, yet in Mary's feeble condition, he did not mean to proclaim his guilt. But in the morning, when she was able to come down stairs, he was better prepared for the arrest, than if she had lain helpless on her bed.

He asked the sheriff who had given the information of the murder of Buckstone. The officer did not know; it had passed from mouth to mouth, and the author of the story could not be identified. Ross did not suspect Dr. Bilks, but concluded that the person who had been with the deceased had started the rumor. It did not yet appear who this person was; but the fact that Buckstone had a companion at the time of the murder was soon added to the sum total of the information concerning the event, and circulated

through the Port. Ross freely told all he knew of the circumstances.

Eugene Hungerford rose early that morning, and walked through the Pine Hill grounds. The improvements had all been made in accordance with the plans, and though he ought to have been delighted with the appearance of the place, he was as devoid of enthusiasm in the presence of his realized ideal as though he had no part or lot in it. He was still thinking of Mary, and considering the plan by which her wounds were to be healed. After breakfast he was closeted in the office with Dick, who insisted that he should examine his papers and accounts. Eugene glanced at the balance in the Poppleton Bank, and at the total of his agent's expenditures during his absence. He manifested no interest in the model houses, and as soon as possible changed the topic to the one which had occupied his thoughts all the morning. At eleven o'clock, when Dr. Bilks drove up to the door, they were still engaged in discussing this interesting question.

Dr. Bilks was admitted at once, and duly introduced to Eugene, who had already been informed of the doctor's kindness and care for poor Mary during her illness. There was no better passport to the favor of the disappointed lover than acts of this description.

"And how is your patient now, Dr. Bilks?" asked Eugene, after he had cordially greeted the physician.

"She was not so well when I visited her this morning," replied the doctor, in a subdued and rather embarrassed tone, as though he was not willing to tell the whole truth at once.

"Is she worse?" demanded Eugene.

"Not absolutely worse; but she was in a state of high nervous excitement," added Dr. Bilks, looking with apparent interest and sympathy at Eugene. "Of course you must have heard what happened on The Great Bell last night."

"No; what was it?" asked Eugene, in breathless anxiety.

It may seem strange that, at this hour, he had not heard

what had happened on The Great Bell; but, as Pine Hill was a mile from the Port, and neither Dick Birch nor himself had been off the place, the news had not reached those who were most interested.

“Mr. Buckstone visited Mary last evening,” continued the doctor, cautiously feeling his way, before he imparted the news.

“Buckstone!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Was it that which made Mary worse?”

“Not that alone. Her brother unfortunately saw him.”

“I feared it,” said Eugene, nervously. “I hope nothing serious occurred.”

“Nothing more serious could have occurred.”

“Good Heaven! You don’t mean ——”

Eugene paused and trembled.

“Ross is a terrible fellow in his anger,” added Dr. Bilks.

“What did he do?” demanded Eugene.

“He found Buckstone over by the cliff, and struck him a blow which felled him to the ground.”

“Did it kill him?” asked Eugene, shuddering.

“Perhaps not; but Ross then threw him over the cliff into the river.”

“O Heaven! This is terrible! I ought not to have permitted Ross to leave me after what he said.”

“Don’t reproach yourself, Hungerford. Of course you had no reason to suppose Buckstone was within two hundred miles of Poppleton,” interposed Dick Birch.

“Certainly there is no occasion to attach any blame to yourself, Mr. Hungerford,” added Dr. Bilks.

“Poor Mary!” sighed Eugene. “This is another heavy weight added to her burden. But how is she, doctor? How does she bear it?”

“Much better than I expected she would. Ross came for me about two o’clock this morning. He told me what he had done, on the way to the island.”

Dr. Bilks then narrated with great minuteness all the particulars of his visit to Mary, and all that Ross had told him about the circumstances attending the murder.

“I did not intend to say a word of the matter, but this morning I found that the story was flying through the Port.”

“But who told it, if you did not?” demanded Dick Birch.

“I don’t know. The sheriff has arrested Ross, and taken him to the county jail.”

“You say there was a man with Buckstone on the island?”

“So Ross told me.”

“Who was he?”

“That is what I would like to know,” replied the doctor. “Ross told me that this person offered Buckstone a ‘consideration’ for marrying Mary. Of course he was an interested party. I at once concluded that this person was Mr. Birch.”

“Dick!” exclaimed Eugene.

“You remember the plan you mentioned to me, Mr. Birch, for making everything all right with the poor girl?”

“I did speak to you about it; and I have spoken to Mr. Hungerford about it since his return; but I never proposed to offer Buckstone a consideration for marrying her. I would have hung him to the nearest tree, before I would have given him a dollar,” replied Dick, indignantly.

“Then you were not the person with Buckstone?” said Dr. Bilks.

“I was not! Most decidedly, I was not!” answered Dick, emphatically, and rather disgusted with the doctor for entertaining such a thought, even for an instant.

“I might have known that a gentleman of your lofty principles and high sense of honor would not have done even this good deed surreptitiously,” added Dr. Bilks, apologeti-

cally. "When I supposed you were the person, I attributed to you none but the best of motives."

"You do me no more than justice, doctor," said Dick. "But who was this person?"

"That's a mystery to me. I know of no one, except Mary's own friends, who are interested in having justice done to her."

"Poor Mary!" sighed Eugene. "She is a widow now."

"If she was a wife, she is a widow," added the doctor. "It appears that Buckstone told her that he did not himself know whether they were married or not. You are a lawyer, Mr. Birch; perhaps you can decide the question."

"Without evidence, I cannot. As at present informed, I do not think it was a legal marriage."

"I am no lawyer, but I differ from you," said the doctor, with a smile.

"We will not discuss this question now," interposed Eugene. "Let us do what we can for Ross. Dick, you must get the best lawyer in the state to defend him. Mary must be suffering terribly."

"Yes; I shall visit her at once," said the doctor.

Dick proposed that Dr. Bilks should be presented to the ladies, and they went to the sitting-room for this purpose. The story of the murder had to be told again; and Mrs. Hungerford and Julia were shocked at the tale. They wept for poor Mary, tortured anew by this agonizing event, and both of them anxiously studied the face of Eugene to discover the effect upon him. He was calm, but he was paler than usual.

"But I must bid you good morning, ladies," said Dr. Bilks. "My next visit will be to Mary."

"Mother, don't you think I might do something for Mary? I suppose she is alone," added Julia.

"You might comfort her, Julia. It would be kind of you," exclaimed Eugene, before Mrs. Hungerford had time to answer the question.

"I think you would be of more service to her than I could," continued Dr. Bilks.

"We will both go, Julia," said her mother.

"Her sickness is of the heart rather than the body, and kind friends are better for her than medicines," added Dr. Bilks. "But I think one would be better than two."

"I will go alone, mother. Mary and I were always good friends."

"Very well, if Dr. Bilks thinks best."

The doctor did think best, and gave his reasons for the opinion, which were quite satisfactory to Mrs. Hungerford. The carriage was ordered for Julia, and it was arranged that Dr. Bilks should join her at the wharf, where they would take a boat for the island. While they were considering the matter, the morning mail was brought in, and Eugene glanced at his letters. He opened one of them.

"Mr. Lester is coming to Poppleton to spend a week with us," said he. "I wrote to him from London that I should expect him."

"We'll give the old fellow a jolly time," added Dick, lightly.

"Whom did you say?" asked Dr. Bilks.

"Mr. Lester; he is one of the trustees of my uncle's will."

"John Lester?"

"Yes. Do you know him?"

"Not personally; I think he had a son in college with me. When does he come?"

"Next week. He is an excellent man, doctor, and you must know him. You must help us entertain him."

"This is very unlucky for me," replied Dr. Bilks, evidently much troubled. "I must be absent from town next week."

"O, no; you must be here when the old gentleman comes," said Dick. "We shall give him some big dinners."

“Nothing would afford me more pleasure; but I have an imperative engagement in New York. I am very sorry.”

Dr. Bilks was uneasy, and seemed to be thinking of some way by which he could postpone his engagement, and have the pleasure of meeting the eminent merchant from Baltimore. It was very unfortunate, but it could not be helped; this was the conclusion he had reached, as the carriage for Julia drew up at the front door. The doctor drove to the Port, and joined Julia on the wharf. A boatman rowed them across the channel, and they walked up to the house. Dr. Bilks was a gentleman of good taste, and of course he could not fail to appreciate the beauty and grace of his charming companion. He made himself very agreeable.

They found Mary in the parlor below, and alone there. She was calm, though the evidences of her suffering were apparent in every line of her countenance.

“I have brought you a new physician,” said the doctor, as they entered the room.

“This is very kind of you, Julia,” replied Mary, taking the offered hand of the visitor.

“I am very glad to see you. I hope you are better;” and Julia talked and acted like a true friend.

The doctor gave his professional advice, and though he lingered much longer than was necessary, paying more attention to the visitor than to the patient, he departed at last, and left Julia to attempt the cure which he was powerless to accomplish.

“I cannot help thinking how kind it is of you to come to me at such a time, Julia,” said Mary, wiping away the tears called forth by the sympathy of her early friend.

“I could not help coming, when I heard how much you were suffering.”

“None of my friends have been to see me before.”

“Indeed!”

“But I cannot blame them. What am I now?”

“You are the same good girl you always were!” replied Julia, with generous earnestness.

“I am afraid not.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No; I am an outcast now, scorned and despised. Julia, glad as I am to see you, I am sorry you have come.”

“Why should you be sorry?”

“I’m afraid it will injure you. You know why my friends desert me.”

“But I will not desert you. You have been wronged; but you are true and good, as you always were. It was not your fault.”

“I’m afraid it was — partly, at least.”

“It would have been better if you had never met Mr. Buckstone, it is true; but you are not to blame.”

“I wish I could feel that I had not done wrong.”

“You may have made a mistake, but you have done no wrong; and you shall not be cast down for your misfortunes.”

“It is the way of the world, Julia; and I can never be to others what I was before.”

“But you shall be, Mary. If all the rest of the world desert you, our family will still adhere to you.”

“I am afraid you don’t understand it, Julia. Though I may not be guilty, I shall be shunned as one contaminated; those whom I have known in brighter days will no longer associate with me.”

“We shall see, Mary,” said Julia, proudly. “You shall come to our house. You shall be our guest; and if other people dare to insult you by word or look, they are not our friends!”

Julia, in her generous thoughts, regarded the position which wealth gave her family in society as a blessing then. If the Hungerfords countenanced the poor, betrayed girl, who should dare to cast her out? Julia was high-spirited

and magnanimous, but she knew not to what a trial her generosity was to be subjected.

“I will not permit you to injure yourself for me, Julia. I am resigned to my fate. You see how calm I am;” and she smiled faintly.

“It would not injure me.”

“And I am the sister of—of a murderer!” she added, with a perceptible shudder.

“That is not your fault.”

“But it will add to my disgrace. No, Julia, you shall not wrong yourself by associating with me. As soon as I am able, I will go away from Poppleton, and hide myself from the world.”

“Indeed, you shall not! You shall have the best and truest friends here. When Ross is acquitted, as all say he will be, you shall be happy again.”

“Never in this world, Julia. I have become what I dreaded more than all other miseries combined.”

“You have not, Mary; you were married.”

“No, I was not; he told me so not an hour before he fell by Ross’s hand. I shall not call myself Mary Buckstone again. Now you despise me.”

“I do not, Mary; you wrong me,” replied Julia; but it must be acknowledged that she was struggling to overcome a certain sensation of dread and horror which she could hardly define.

“Now you know what I am, you may leave me; and I will think kindly of you, as one who wished to be my friend.”

“And I shall be your friend, whatever you are,” added Julia, resolutely; “and I am sure my mother and my brother will be. Eugene has been—he has been very sorry for you.”

She was not quite certain that she ought to say anything about Eugene, and she suppressed the sentence she was about to utter, substituting another.

Mary was moody and thoughtful when Eugene’s name

was mentioned, and it did not require much skill on the part of Julia to discover the nature of her reflections. But what had been could no longer be, and her brother had ceased to think of the poor girl, except as a sympathizing friend. The afternoon was passed away in these conversations, and Mary was much consoled by the words, but perhaps more by the presence and the generous indorsement, of Julia.

Just before sunset, Eugene's small schooner touched at the landing-place on The Great Bell. It contained three persons; and after Dick Birch had gone up to the house for Julia, Dr. Bilks and Eugene walked over to the spot where the murder had been committed. The island had been visited by hundreds of curious persons during the afternoon, who desired to examine the locality of the terrible affair. The deputy sheriff was there when they arrived, making another visit to the spot for the purpose of obtaining further information in regard to the circumstances. The sheriff was in possession of all the facts imparted by Ross Kingman, and he was now examining the beach, where the stranger was last seen by the prisoner.

"It's a plain case," said the official to Eugene, after they had shaken hands, and spoken of the event in general terms. "Ross don't cover up anything, but he thinks it is not murder to kill such a man."

"He was very much exasperated by the conduct of Buckstone. Has any new discovery been made?"

"We have got a clew to the man who was with Buckstone," replied the sheriff.

"Ah! Have you?" said Dr. Bilks, nervously.

"We have found the boat in which Buckstone and the other man came over to the island."

"Where did you find it?"

"Over by the Point."

"How do you know it was the boat in which they came over?"

“It was hauled up on the sand; there,” said he, pointing to the marks of the boat, “you can see the prints of the lap streaks. That deep mark was made by a ledge on the boat, nailed on to keep the bottom from chafing. I brought the boat over here, and measured the distance between the keel and this ledge, and it exactly corresponded with these prints.”

“What does this prove in regard to the man with Buckstone?”

“It proves that he landed there by the Point, for one thing. A handkerchief and a cigar were found in the boat. Here they are,” he added, producing the articles. “Do you know them?”

The handkerchief had the letters R. B. upon it.

“By Heaven! this is Dick Birch’s handkerchief!” exclaimed Eugene.

“Impossible!” ejaculated Dr. Bilks. “He declared that he was not the person, you remember.”

“But he was the person,” added the sheriff, decidedly.

“Why do you say he was?” demanded Eugene, who would as readily have believed Dick Birch guilty of the murder as of the duplicity and falsehood.

“Ross Kingman thought it was Mr. Birch.”

“Did he say so?”

“He did.”

“Did he say positively it was Mr. Birch?”

“Not positively.”

“Let me see the cigar. Dick smokes a peculiar brand,” continued Eugene, excitedly.

The sheriff handed him the cigar, and it was carefully examined by Eugene and the doctor.

“That’s Dick’s brand, without a doubt,” replied Eugene, bewildered by the conclusion thus forced upon him.

“Here he comes; he will speak for himself,” added the doctor, as Dick and Julia descended the rocks to the beach.

Julia had expressed a desire to see the spot where the murder was committed, and Dick had taken her to the cliff

for this purpose. Seeing Eugene and Dr. Bilks on the beach, they joined them there.

"Where did you leave this handkerchief, Dick?" asked Eugene, as his friend approached the spot.

"I'm sure I don't know," he answered, taking the handkerchief. "Where did you find it?"

"Did you lose it, Dick?"

"I suppose I did, if you found it, though I hadn't missed it. Did you find it here?"

"No; it was not found here," replied the sheriff.

"Is this one of your cigars, Dick?"

"Yes; you can't find such cigars as that at any shop this side of Boston; and I don't think you can find them there now. That's one of my brand. Did you find it with the handkerchief?"

"It was found with the handkerchief," said Eugene, averting his sad face.

"What does all this mean? What ails you, Hungerford?" demanded Dick, astonished at the singular conduct of his friend.

"I suppose he doesn't want to say much about it," interposed the sheriff; "and I will do the talking."

"Will you? You will oblige me by doing it as speedily as possible," replied Dick, whose flushed and indignant face sufficiently explained his feelings.

"You are believed to be the person who was with Mr. Buckstone at the time he was murdered, or just before the event."

"Who believes me to be the person?" asked Dick, who seemed to grow an inch taller, as his head was involuntarily thrown back by the impulse of his natural pride.

"I do, for one," answered the deputy sheriff.

"What reason have you for thinking so?"

"Because your handkerchief, and one of your cigars, which can only be obtained in Boston, were found in the

boat that made those marks on the beach," answered the official, pointing to the prints.

"They were found in that boat — were they?" said Dick, apparently as much astonished as Eugene.

"They were; more than this, Ross Kingman, who thinks as much of you as of any other man in the world, — unless it be Mr. Hungerford, — believes that you were the man he saw with Mr. Buckstone."

"I have nothing to say," replied Dick.

"Speak, Dick! Tell me it is not so, and I will believe you before all the rest of the world!" exclaimed Eugene.

"Not a word, Hungerford, to-night," answered Dick, proudly. "I am not prepared to speak yet."

"Don't be angry with me, Dick."

"Certainly not, Hungerford. There is my hand," said Dick. "Appearances are against me. When I have cleared myself of the charge of falsehood, I will come into your presence again, but not till then."

"Come, Dick," added Eugene, taking his hand; "this shall not part us even for an hour."

"It must; I told you and Dr. Bilks this morning that I was not the person. You despise a liar; so do I. Good night, Hungerford;" and springing up the rocks, he disappeared beyond the bluff, heeding not the calls of his friend.

Before the party could reach the landing-place, he was seen in a boat crossing the channel towards the Port.

CHAPTER XIII.

DICK UNDER A SHADOW.

“WHAT does all this mean, Eugene?” asked Julia, perplexed and troubled by the singular conduct of Dick Birch, as well as by the facts which had been developed by the deputy sheriff.

“I don’t know, Julia; it is all as new to me as it is to you,” replied Eugene.

“With what is he charged?”

“With nothing, Miss Hungerford,” interposed the sheriff, wishing to remove any wrong impression from her mind. “If Mr. Birch was with Mr. Buckstone at the time of the murder, or just before, we should like to use him as a witness.”

“Mr. Birch says he was not with him.”

“I see no reason why he should deny the fact, if it is a fact,” said Eugene. “If he met Buckstone, he did so with the best of motives.”

“I have no doubt of it,” added Dr. Bilks, who had all this time been watching the effect upon Julia. “Mr. Birch is one of the truest and noblest men it was ever my good fortune to meet.”

“But the evidence goes to show that he was with Buckstone; that he was the person whom Ross Kingman saw with him,” continued the sheriff. “I shall be obliged to follow up Mr. Birch till he can give me a satisfactory account of himself at the time of the murder.”

“Ross left me at nine o'clock last evening,” continued Eugene, recalling the circumstances.

“Did you see Mr. Birch after that time?” asked the sheriff.

“I did.”

“Dick was with mother and me till we heard Ross leave the house,” said Julia. “Then he went into the library, where you were; and we were so tired that we went to bed immediately.”

“Mr. Birch joined me in the library just after Ross left me. I told him what had passed between us, and that I feared, if Ross saw Buckstone, he would do some rash deed; but he seemed to have no fears.”

“Did he say anything about Mr. Buckstone's being in town?” asked the sheriff.

“Not a word.”

“Did you have any conversation with him about Buckstone, after your return yesterday?”

“I did; he proposed to send for Buckstone, and remove all doubts in regard to Mary's marriage, by having it performed over again.”

“Precisely so; then he had business with Buckstone,” said the sheriff. “What time did you leave Mr. Birch?”

“He went into the office about half past nine; and being exhausted by my journey, and the want of sleep on my voyage, I retired.”

“You left him in the office?”

“I did.”

“Did any of your servants see him after this time?”

“I don't know.”

“I should like to question them before I see Mr. Birch again,” added the officer, who seemed to be satisfied that he was making out a case.

“I will give you all the assistance in my power, but I am perfectly satisfied that Mr. Birch will conceal nothing,” replied Eugene, confidently.

“I do not know that he has any reason to conceal anything.”

“It is possible that he intended to settle up this unpleasant affair of Buckstone’s marriage — in which, for Mary’s sake, I have taken some interest — without troubling me.”

“But he said distinctly that he was not with Buckstone,” interposed Dr. Bilks; “and when Mr. Birch says a thing, he means it. In my opinion, he was not with him. I will take his word for it against all the circumstances that can combine against him.”

This was confiding, generous, and even magnanimous on the part of Dr. Bilks, and Julia bestowed a smile of grateful acknowledgment upon him.

“I agree with you entirely, doctor; but it will be doing Dick a favor to inquire into the matter.”

The sheriff had no further business on the island, and he accepted Eugene’s invitation to accompany him to Pine Hill. Dr. Bilks was very attentive to Julia, and while the other two gentlemen talked about the murder, he made himself as agreeable as possible to her. He assured her that Dick was incapable of deceit; if the handkerchief and cigar had been found in the boat, some one else had placed them there. It was not possible that even the suspicion of duplicity should rest upon him, and it would all be satisfactorily cleared up within a few days, if not hours. The carriage was waiting on the wharf when the boat arrived, and the whole party started for Pine Hill. When they reached the mansion, the sheriff was conducted to the library, and all the servants were sent for; but none of them had seen Mr. Birch after Eugene retired for the night.

The man servant thought he heard him go out at the front door about half past nine, but was not very sure. It was this man’s business to see that the front door was locked, the windows fastened, and all the fires and lights extinguished before he went to bed; and he had attended to this duty, as usual, about ten o’clock.

“Was the front door locked?” asked the sheriff.

“No, sir.”

“Did you lock it?”

“No, sir.”

“Why not?”

“Because I thought Mr. Birch might be out.”

“Did you know he was out?”

“No; I only thought so, because I had heard the door open, as I said.”

“Are you sure you heard the door opened?”

“I’m not certain. There is a night lock on the door, so that it was fastened.”

“What time does Mr. Birch usually retire?”

“About ten or eleven.”

“Why didn’t you go to his room, and see whether he was in or not?” asked the sheriff.

“Because I didn’t want to disturb him, if he had gone to bed.”

“Then you went to bed leaving the door unlocked?”

“It was fastened by the night lock.”

“How did you find it this morning?”

“Just as I left it last night.”

“Did you go to Mr. Birch’s room this morning?”

“I never go to his room; it isn’t my business.”

“Who makes the bed?”

“The chambermaid, of course.”

The chambermaid was called. Mr. Birch’s bed had been occupied. No one knew that he had gone out, after half past nine; no one knew that he had not. Parkinson, the man servant in the house, was a sharp, intelligent mulatto, imported from the city. He was strongly attached to Dick, and did not understand what the sheriff wished to make out of him. He did not know whether it would serve Dick best to show that he had gone out, or that he had not gone out, at the time specified; and he was one of those pliant witnesses who can be bent to serve a friend. It is quite possible

that, if he had comprehended the case, he would not have "thought" that he heard the door opened at half past nine. He was not certain of anything which was important in the matter.

Though no evidence was obtained to show that Dick was not in the house at the time when he was alleged to have been with Buckstone, the absence of proof to establish the fact that he was there, was vexatious to his devoted friends. Eugene desired to see Ross Kingman, and to hear his testimony on this interesting point; and when the sheriff departed, it was with the promise to accompany him to the jail for this purpose.

Dr. Bilks was invited to tea. His attentions to poor Mary had already made Eugene his friend, while his devotion to the ladies had rendered him a welcome guest, particularly to Julia, to whom his vigorous defence of Dick was even more than satisfactory. It was quite true that no expressions of love had passed between Julia and Dick Birch, but it was just as patent to the rest of the family that they were interested in each other. So the doctor made himself popular by espousing the cause of the absent friend.

After tea Eugene and the doctor went to the library to smoke. Though the acquaintance between them had commenced in the forenoon of that day, Dr. Bilks knew enough of his host's relations with the Kingman family to make himself a confidant, so far as these relations were concerned; and Eugene did not scruple to speak unreservedly to him. Indeed, now that Dick was under the shadow of a suspicion, and had withdrawn himself from the house for a time, he congratulated himself upon having a person at hand to whom he could speak. Eugene was not content to let Dick bear his burden alone; and when the sheriff left, he had sent Parkinson with a note to The Bell River House, where he concluded his friend had gone, entreating him to come to Pine Hill. The servant had not yet returned.

"Before I can get rid of one trouble, another is cast upon me," said Eugene, as he lighted his cigar.

"That is often the way in this world," replied the doctor.

"Perhaps you think I have no right to trouble myself about this murder; but I assure you I regard it almost as a family affair. When Mary Kingman went off with Buckstone, I was robbed of more than half I had to live for in this world. I haven't been myself since."

"Perhaps I had no right to know anything of a matter so private as this ought to be; but as the lady's physician, Mr. Birch gave me full information in regard to your relations with the poor girl. I sympathize with you. But perhaps good may come out of all these evils."

"What good can come out of them?"

"Pardon me, if I am blunt; do you still love the lady?"

"With all my soul!" replied Eugene, fervently.

"I had hoped your foreign travel would remove the impression from your mind."

"It was more than an impression, Dr. Bilks. I did not know how much I loved her till I had lost her. In spite of all that has happened, she is the same to me now that she was a year ago, before Buckstone came into the place."

"That is unfortunate."

"Why unfortunate?" demanded Eugene, earnestly.

"Well, the circumstances have changed."

"What circumstances?"

"Whatever the truth may be, it is generally understood that she has been a mother without being a wife."

"True."

"As the world goes, her reputation is blasted, and she can no longer be received in good society."

"She shall be received in good society!" exclaimed Eugene, leaping out of his chair, and pacing the room with violent strides.

"I say nothing of the merits of this case. I speak only of the way of the world," added Dr. Bilks, mildly apologizing

for repeating what he would not advance as his own individual thought.

“I understand you, doctor. You may as well know now what all the world shall know one of these days. Mary is still mine!” said Eugene, with energy, as he paused before the doctor’s chair. “All earth shall not rob me of her again!”

“I can understand your feelings,” interposed Dr. Bilks, soothingly.

“I am no hypocrite; and I could hardly conceal the joy I felt when I heard of this murder.”

“For God’s sake, Mr. Hungerford, don’t say that,” protested the doctor.

“I feel it; why should I not say it?”

“It would not be prudent. If you expressed such a thought, people would suspect you of instigating Ross Kingman to the commission of the crime,” said Dr. Bilks, whose solicitude for the good name of his new friend was fully expressed in his face.

“I do not mean joy at the murder.”

“Of course not.”

“I only rejoiced that Mary was free again. I would not have injured Buckstone. I made Ross promise not to harm him, if he met him, though I had no suspicion that he was in Poppleton.”

“Certainly; I understand you. But you would not think of marrying Mary now?”

“I will think of it now, and do it as soon as the circumstances will permit. Of course I say this to you in confidence.”

“Of course; that is fully understood.”

“I will do it if she will consent.”

“She will, without doubt.”

“She married this Buckstone under the pressure of terrible circumstances. It was all my fault that she did so; and I will atone for my error in the only way open to me.”

“I am afraid the public voice will condemn you.”

“Let it condemn me.”

“What do your mother and sister say?”

“I have not spoken to them. They may regret, but they will not oppose my decision. I believe that Mary loves me now, as I love her. To me she is as pure as she was the day she was born. My friends will object, but I cannot help it. She shall be my wife, if she will; and if she cannot be respected and honored as such here, I will go with her to the farthest verge of the country in search of a home. I do not ask whether she is a widow or a castaway. She is to me now what she has been for years. What I say to you to-day, I shall say to her to-morrow. Let the world condemn me, if it will. I shall live for my own heart, not for the applause of the multitude.”

“A man with three millions can afford to be independent in such a matter.”

“I have no three millions; I may never have.”

“Your present decision points in that direction, as I have understood your uncle’s will.”

“Thus far the three millions have been a curse to me. Mary would have been mine before now, if the three millions had not made me fearful of doing a mean thing. I act independently of this prospective fortune. I am beginning to be disgusted with it.”

“Why so?”

“Because it seems to have caused all my troubles, to have cheated Mary out of a true love, and made her brother a murderer,” replied Eugene, with startling emphasis. “I will make Mary my wife, though, come what may. Doctor, you do not say that I am wrong.”

“I do not think so. You have a soul; you were born for noble deeds. I would do just what you intend to do. If I loved her as you do, she should be my wife in a week.”

“I shall not use any unseemly haste.”

“The three millions may yet be yours.”

“Bah!”

“If the three millions are not yours, to whom will they go?”

“Half a million will be mine; the same amount will go to my sister, to a Dr. Lynch, and to each of three charitable associations yet to be founded.”

“Half a million to your sister!” exclaimed Dr. Bilks.

“Yes; is there anything strange in that?” demanded Eugene.

“No; O, no! I was thinking of something; but I will not mention it. The thought was a disagreeable one.”

“You need not fear to mention it.”

“Excuse me, I will not,” replied the doctor, blandly. “It was an unpleasant suspicion, which does great injustice to a mutual friend. I will not mention it, for I am sure it is utterly groundless.”

“What do you mean, doctor?”

“I am sorry I hinted it; but it flashed across my mind, and I spoke before I thought of its meaning. I prefer to be silent.”

“You say it concerns a mutual friend — of course you mean Mr. Birch.”

“Really, Mr. Hungerford, you must pardon me. Mr. Birch is above suspicion. If I did, for an instant, think what might be, I drove the idea from my mind the next instant.”

“I have sent for Dick Birch, doctor. I hope he will come. You know that his position is slightly in doubt just now. If you can say a word that will help me to explain it, you will confer a favor upon me,” persisted Eugene.

“If you will answer me a few questions, Mr. Hungerford, perhaps the thought which came to me may come to you, for I will not be guilty of causing you to suspect so true a friend as Mr. Birch.”

“Two hours ago, I would have knocked the man down who dared to say as much as that to me,” replied Eugene.

"Then I had better be silent," said Dr. Bilks, with a significant smile. "He is my friend as well as yours. I am grateful to him for what he has been to me, and what he has done for me; I would cut my tongue out rather than utter a word to his disparagement."

"Ask your questions, Dr. Bilks," continued Eugene, impatiently. "If Dick were not your friend, I would not hear you."

"He is my friend, and I love and respect him. I would rather injure myself than injure him. If the thought which came to me does not come to you, I shall rejoice to feel that I was mistaken. Indeed, I feel so now."

"Go on, doctor. If I am blind, open my eyes."

"According to Ross Kingman's story, the man who was with Buckstone offered a consideration to him if he would marry Mary, and thus remove all legal doubts in regard to the union."

"Ross told the sheriff the same story."

"Do you know of any man in the world who has anything to gain by that marriage?"

"I do not. If Dick Birch hired Buckstone to marry her, it was in order to make her an honest woman. He proposed such a plan to me last night, and I assented to it. For her sake I desired it. I loved her, and I would have done anything to save her from even a day of misery."

"Suppose, on further examination, the marriage had proved to be illegal and void, and that Buckstone had wholly deserted and abandoned her. What would you have done?" asked the doctor, looking sharply into the eye of Eugene.

"I don't know."

"Would you have married her?"

"She would not have consented while Buckstone was alive."

"Would you, if she consented?"

"I would."

“So I supposed.”

“Why should you suppose so?”

“Before you returned, I had a conversation with Mr. Birch. We both agreed that you would marry her, in spite of her position before the world.”

“I confess that such a thought occurred to me, even before I sailed from Liverpool.”

“I did not know you personally, Mr. Hungerford; but from your friend’s eloquent description of your noble, but — you will pardon me — slightly eccentric character, I had no doubt that Mary would become Mrs. Hungerford, if she could lawfully be your wife. Mr. Birch was equally, or rather more, confident, from his better knowledge of you.”

“What was Dick’s opinion of such a marriage?”

“He condemned it with all his might, while I favored it. We discussed the matter for hours together in this room.”

“Why did he condemn it?”

“Because it would lower you in the estimation of the world; because you would be pointed at as the *millionnaire* who had married a — never mind what he called her.”

“Did he dare ——”

“No, no, Mr. Hungerford; it was nothing very bad; a castaway — that was all.”

“But, after all, Dick was only thinking of my good name and reputation; it was kind of him, even if he was mistaken.”

“Certainly it was; I honored him for his manly course, though I differed from him.”

“Is this the thought which I was expected to divine?”

“No, by no means. Did you ever observe that Mr. Birch was attentive to your sister?”

“Well, rather so; I think they are inclined to be fond of each other. I have noticed it more since we returned than before,” replied Eugene, still struggling to grasp the mysterious thought which had darkened the mind of his companion.

“ Mr. Birch was opposed to your marrying Mary ; and he feared that you would marry her.”

“ Just so.”

“ Naturally enough, he would prevent it.”

“ Very likely ; he openly proposed to me to compel Buckstone to marry her, on penalty of a criminal prosecution. If he was the person with Buckstone last night, there was nothing dishonorable or unfriendly in his conduct, for his action was consistent with the course upon which we had agreed.”

“ Did you authorize him to purchase Buckstone’s compliance ? ”

“ No, I did not ; but that does not materially affect the question.”

“ It does not : I only wish to establish the point that Mr. Birch desired to bring about the marriage of Mary with Buckstone.”

“ We grant that.”

“ Why did he desire it ? ”

“ For Mary’s sake ; for mine, too, if you please. Both considerations were honorable and friendly towards me.”

“ Entirely so, Mr. Hungerford,” said the doctor, warmly. “ One more question, if you please. Did you ever say anything to Mr. Birch about marrying, when Mary was utterly lost to you ? or could he, from his thorough knowledge of your disposition and character, have formed a correct idea as to whether you would or would not marry another ? ”

Dr. Bilks looked interested and anxious when he proposed the question.

“ I told him in so many words, before I went to Europe, that I should not marry at all, as Mary could not be mine ; and he knew me well enough to believe what I said. The last thing I said to him was to the effect that the three millions could never be mine.”

“ Exactly so ; he told me, if you did not marry Mary, you

would never marry. If at the age of thirty you have no son, what becomes of the three millions, did you say?"

"Half a million goes to me, half a million to my sister ——"

"Did you intimate that you thought Mr. Birch and your sister were disposed to be fond of each other?" interposed Dr. Bilks, in a kind of careless, indifferent manner.

Eugene sprang to his feet. His face was deadly pale, and his lip quivered. He had grasped the doctor's mysterious thought. Dick Birch wished to prevent the possibility of his marriage with Mary, that, with Julia, he might obtain the fortune of half a million! It was a disgusting, revolting suspicion, and he was sick at heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE LIBRARY.

“MR. HUNGERFORD, I beg you will not give this suggestion the slightest thought or attention. I am entirely satisfied that there cannot be the least ground for suspecting our friend Mr. Birch of unworthy motives,” interposed Dr. Bilks, when he observed Eugene’s distress. “I am sure he has been a true friend, and far above any selfish considerations.”

Eugene paced the room in violent agitation. He could not, he did not, believe that Dick Birch was capable of double-dealing with any body, and especially not with him.

“You have compelled me to lead your mind in the direction which my own travelled for an instant; you dragged my thought out of me; now I must insist that you banish the idea from your mind, as I did from mine,” continued the doctor, apparently much moved by the mischief he had been forced to do.

“Can I have been deceived in Dick Birch!” mused Eugene, as he walked the library.

“You have not been; he is the same true and tried friend he has always been.”

“This money has cursed the whole of us!” exclaimed he.

“Not at all, Mr. Hungerford. You wrong him; you wrong yourself. Mr. Birch is as true as steel.”

“Dick was poor, and in debt for his education, besides having a mother and three sisters partially dependent upon him,” continued Eugene, who appeared to be talking to

himself rather than to the doctor. "It was a great temptation."

"Whatever the temptation, I am sure Mr. Birch has not yielded, and has never cherished a selfish thought towards you or yours."

"Dr. Bilks, do you believe that Mr. Birch was the person who was with Buckstone last night?" demanded Eugene, stopping before the doctor's chair.

"I am hardly prepared to say, Mr. Hungerford."

"You have heard all the evidence for and against him."

"The evidence is very strong; but in the face of it all, Mr. Birch declares that he was not the person. I am disposed to believe him, in spite of all the testimony against him."

"I thank you for those words; they are very comforting to me. If Dick's word produces so strong an impression upon you, who have known him but for a few months, what effect should it produce upon me, who have been his intimate friend for years!"

"Mr. Hungerford, without fear or favor, without regard to the friendships of months or years, we wish to know the truth," said the doctor, with a Brutus-like integrity.

"Yes; you are right! If Dick has deceived me in the smallest particular, even for my own good, I will cast him off; I will renounce the friendship which I valued more than all the money in the world."

"Let not your own integrity blind you on the one hand, or your friendship on the other," added the doctor, solemnly. "Be just."

"I will, if possible. What were you about to suggest?" asked Eugene, whose intuitive knowledge of the character of his companion assured him that this flourish was only the preliminary to another suggestion.

"I confess that I feel a painful interest in this matter," continued the doctor; "and while nothing would afford me so much pleasure as to see our friend Birch completely vin-

licated, I feel compelled to say that appearances are very strong against him. I am exceedingly sorry to say that his conduct on the beach to-night was not entirely satisfactory to me."

"Why not?" demanded Eugene, abruptly.

"He did not deny the sheriff's position. Three of his warmest friends, including yourself, Mr. Hungerford, were present. He knew how painful to us that attitude of suspicion must be. Why did he not explain to us, if not to the sheriff, the facts alleged against him? Why did he hold up his head, and walk away, when a word would have satisfied us? Why is he not here this evening, to give us the assurance which we have the right to demand of him?"

"You don't know Dick," said Eugene, impatiently.

"I certainly know nothing ill of him; but I cannot help thinking how much better it would have been, if he had squarely faced this charge, instead of leaving us to grope about among all these painful doubts."

"Dick is a proud, high-spirited fellow. He believes that his friend has no right even to suspect him of anything wrong, much less to believe him capable of doing a wilful wrong. His view of friendship is too lofty to permit him to defend himself from any charge or suspicion. He would rather suffer in his honesty, than stoop to the littleness of buying his friend with an argument."

"I can hardly comprehend such a position."

"If Dick's friend suspects him, he is no friend. He believes in perfect confidence. If that confidence is lost or impaired, it is not for him to restore it, or to heal the breach. He will not tolerate a partial friendship."

"It is rather a sentimental idea."

"But it is the true one."

"If my friend places himself in a suspicious position, I think he is bound to explain."

"In his estimation, a friend cannot place himself in a suspicious position. Whatever attitude he may assume, his

friend has no right to doubt his integrity; no more than a wife has to suspect her husband, or a husband his wife."

"Are friends always perfect? are husbands and wives?" asked Dr. Bilks, incredulously.

"No; never in action, but always in purpose. They may err in judgment constantly, but never in intention. If your friend suspects you, he is not your friend. If your wife does not trust in you, you are married, but not mated. This is Dick's view, and it is mine. If I have been mistaken in him, he is no longer my friend. I would not injure him, but he is no more to me than a neighbor and a brother man. No man is my friend in whom I cannot perfectly confide. If, with good intentions towards me, he wronged me out of all my money, and made me a knave before the world, I should still cherish him, even while I lost all respect for his judgment and discretion."

"Then you certainly have no fault to find with Mr Birch."

"None, if he has only erred in judgment. If he has deceived me, if he has endeavored to make Mary the wife of Buckstone to prevent me from marrying her, for his own ends, he is a knave!" said Eugene, emphatically.

"But it is not so, Mr. Hungerford. Mr. Birch, I am sure, had no selfish motives."

"Dick and I proposed to do the very thing which the person on the beach was doing with Buckstone."

"If it was not Mr. Birch, who was it? Who else could it have been?" asked the doctor.

"I have no idea. There is not another man in the world who could by any possibility have had the slightest interest in Mary's marriage."

"I think there is some mistake. We probably misunderstood Mr. Birch this morning. He did not mean to say he was not the person. I am entirely satisfied that he will say he was the man who accompanied Buckstone to the island. He is honest and upright, and he will not deny it."

“Mr. Birch,” said Parkinson, opening the door of the library.

“Mr. Birch!” exclaimed Dr. Bilks.

Eugene rushed to the entry, grasped the hand of his friend, and returned to the library with him. Dick was rather cold, stiff, and formal in his manner.

“I have called up to see you on business, Hungerford,” said he.

“I am glad to see you on any terms,” replied Eugene, warmly.

“If Dr. Bilks will excuse you for a few moments, we will go into the office. Or perhaps the doctor will join the ladies in the drawing-room for half an hour,” added Dick; and there was a certain bitterness in his tones which did not escape the keen ear of Dr. Bilks.

“Certainly, Mr. Birch; do not let me interrupt you for a moment. I must go to my office,” replied the doctor.

“Dick, we have been talking about you and these affairs since tea. Dr. Bilks knows all about the business.”

“If you desire his presence, it will not disturb me,” added Dick, indifferently. “If I have been the subject of your conversation, it may be as well that he remain.”

“Dick, don’t be so stiff.”

“I am under the shadow just now,” he replied. “I came to deliver the books and papers to you.”

“No, no, Dick! Don’t begin in that strain.”

“I came on business only.”

Dick went to the office, opened the iron safe there, and took out the books and papers, which he brought into the library.

“Here are the day-book and ledger, the latter posted to May,” he continued. “I have kept them with the utmost care, and you will find them plain and intelligible. They need no explanation. Here is your letter-book; it contains a copy of every business letter I have sent; while every one I have received is on file. Here is your check-book

Here is a record-book, containing a full history of all I have done since I managed your affairs."

"Dick, I will hear no more of this!" exclaimed Eugene. "Burn the books and papers; and I am still satisfied with what you have done."

"There was a time when you would have been—not three hours ago," replied Dick, as he carried the books and papers back to the office, restored them to the safe, and, locking it, brought the key to Eugene. "Here is the key, Hungerford. You will find everything straight and correct. To-morrow, when you have had time to examine my personal account, I shall trouble you to give me a check for the balance of my salary."

Dick Birch, though his hand trembled, and his lip quivered, buttoned his coat, and took up his hat, which lay on the library table.

"Dick, have you joined the conspiracy against me?" demanded Eugene.

"No."

"You know how all this vexes me; how it wounds and crushes me."

"I will leave you, then."

He moved towards the door.

"Stop, Dick; you cannot mean to give me the cold shoulder now?"

"Hungerford, I am the sufferer, not you. You have nothing to lose; I, everything. You banish me, and I go."

"What do you mean by that? Sit down, Dick, and let us talk over this matter."

"No, Hungerford. I will not talk about it, even. If you believe me capable of deceiving you, I have not a word to say."

"Dick, will you answer me one question?" demanded Eugene, earnestly.

"I will."

"Did you see Buckstone last night?"

“No.”

Eugene was staggered by this reply — a single, plain, unadorned negative.

“How is it possible?” continued he, “that ——”

“I will answer no more questions,” interposed Dick, firmly. “You would not believe me if I did; and my self-respect does not permit me to speak when my truthfulness is suspected. To the sheriff, to the court, I can do this; to you I cannot. If others do not believe me, I will not complain; they have no reason to trust me.”

“I will believe you — I do believe you,” protested Eugene.

“You will try to do so, doubtless. Your conversation since tea, you told me just now, related to me.”

“How could it relate to any other person or thing, after what occurred on the beach to-night?”

“With the sheriff, you tried to prove that I left the house last night, after you retired — so Parkinson tells me,” added Dick, bitterly.

“On the contrary, we tried to prove that you had *not* left the house.”

Perhaps the sheriff was trying to prove one thing while Eugene tried to prove the opposite.

“It would be better to say we were trying to ascertain the truth,” added Dr. Bilks.

Dick looked at the doctor, as though a word from him was out of place; but he said nothing.

“Of what else do you suspect me, Hungerford?”

“I suspect you of nothing, Dick. It is cruel for you to put yourself in such an attitude.”

“I am under suspicion: can you deny this, Hungerford?”

Eugene bit his lip. He could not equivocate. He was perplexed with many doubts. It seemed impossible that any other person than Dick should have been the man with Buckstone on the beach, and it was just as impossible that his friend should utter a deliberate falsehood. The evidence of

the handkerchief and cigar, and the opinion of Ross Kingman, were hardly needed, though everything was against Dick.

“You do not answer.”

“I cannot deny that I have believed you were the person, Dick.”

“That is quite enough, Hungerford. My relations with you and yours are too delicate, too important, to be trifled with for an instant. If you can believe, if you can suspect, that I was in treaty with Buckstone, as represented, it follows that I was doing so from personal and selfish motives.”

“Not at all, Dick; there may have been a dozen reasons why you should have conducted such a negotiation privately. I had no doubt of your motives.”

“You must have doubted them; but I do not blame you, Hungerford. Dr. Bilks had probably told you my views in regard to Mary. I was afraid you would marry her.”

“We have been entirely free in this matter,” said Dr. Bilks, in silky, apologetic tones.

“I do not complain. I must say one thing more, in confidence,” added Dick, glancing at the door; and his face flushed as he spoke. “Though I have never confessed it to you, much less to her, I love your sister Julia. I thank God, she knows nothing of it!”

“I think she does, Dick. A man’s looks and actions cannot be wholly meaningless. I knew it; so did others.”

“So much the worse for me — and for her!” exclaimed Dick, sadly and bitterly. “What is patent to us will be so to others. All the world will believe that I was hiring Buckstone to marry Mary, at the time he was killed — doing it in the dark — and for what? To prevent Eugene Hungerford from marrying her! I confess this was half my thought, for I loved you too well, Hungerford, to see you throw yourself away upon one who, in the eyes of the world, was defiled. It was for your sake, as well as for hers, I made the

proposition last night, to which you assented. But what will the world say?"

"Never mind what the world says."

"I must be above suspicion. What follows?"

"Never mind what follows, Dick. I understand you. Your motives were pure and friendly. You meant to serve me. You were right; I would have made Mary my wife, if the marriage with Buckstone had been illegal."

"It was legal enough, if it could be proved; but there is no certificate, no record, nothing even to prove that any ceremony was performed. Though the man who married them were an impostor, the legality of the union is not thereby affected; but we cannot prove that either of the parties consented, or even that a mock ceremony was performed. If there was any marriage, it was legal; but we can prove nothing, and Buckstone repudiated it—deserted and abandoned the girl. For these reasons it was necessary that Mary should be married again. I thought so, and felt so, and, with your knowledge and consent, intended to have her married again, but not without."

"It is all clear enough, Dick."

"No, it is not. One thing follows another, until it appears that I am laboring to prevent you from carrying out the provisions of your uncle's will. Hungerford, I know this has never occurred to you."

Eugene was silent. Dr. Bilks opened a book.

"Such a thought never darkened your mind, Hungerford," continued Dick; "but others will say, if I should ever be seen with your sister again, that I"—he struggled with the thought—"that I keep you a bachelor in order to marry half a million with Julia."

"Why should they think so?"

"Because it is natural that low-minded and selfish men should suspect the motives of others. Such a thought never occurred to you, Hungerford, but it has made my brain whirl

with agony, since we parted on the beach. In what a damnable position am I placed!"

Eugene was still silent, and Dr. Bilks did not seem to approve all Dick's statements and conclusions, for he occasionally turned and twisted in his chair.

"If Julia thinks kindly of me now, she would spurn me as an unclean reptile, if the thought came to her mind."

"Dick, I must be candid: this thought has occurred to me, but only to be rejected and cast out as a suggestion of the devil."

Dr. Bilks winced.

"I need not wonder at it, though I did not think it. Now you understand me. I must go."

"No, Dick, you shall not go," protested Eugene.

"I did not intend to speak of anything but business when I came. I will not stand in a false position. I will not be suspected of marrying for money."

"Now you have stepped upon my ground, Dick," said Eugene, with a smile. "I would not marry for three millions — only for love."

"I know not that Julia would have consented — perhaps it was wrong for me to mention her name. It is all past now."

"Not at all. Nothing would have pleased me so well as such a marriage."

"It cannot be now — at least not till you are married, and John Hungerford is born."

"You are cheating yourself, Dick."

"I will not take a step where my motives can be suspected. I am not free from suspicion, even in your partial eyes."

"You are."

"No — you have suspected me. I have not intended to utter a word to remove your suspicion. We part, Hungerford."

"No, Dick."

“It must be so. I do not blame you. I am still your friend.”

“This is cruel.”

“More cruel to me than to any one else.”

“It is unnecessary.”

“Can I stand by you in these intimate relations while I am accused of base and unworthy practices? No, Hungerford. If it be the will of God that I shall be purged of this stain, we shall meet as friends again; if not, never.” I will speak a word to Julia as I go. Good night, Hungerford.”

“I shall see you to-morrow.”

“I am summoned as a witness at the examination of Ross to-morrow. We may meet then.”

Dick Birch left the library, and entered the room where the ladies were. He briefly stated that circumstances had occurred which rendered it necessary for him to absent himself from the house. He shook hands with Mrs. Hungerford and with Julia, neither of whom dared to ask him any questions. He betrayed some emotion as he parted with Julia, and she could with difficulty repress the tears that struggled in her eyes. Dick went forth from the mansion he had reared and beautified, like the wanderers from Eden, sad and disturbed.

“What do you think now, Dr. Bilks?” demanded Eugene in the library, as the door closed behind the parting friend.

“I hardly know what to think,” replied the doctor.

“The thought which you suggested to me, you perceive, has already occurred to him.”

“That was the worst feature in the interview. I was not entirely satisfied with his appearance or his explanation.”

“You were not?” said Eugene, with much surprise.

“I am afraid he has had the thought about the half million too long in his mind. It was the first thing, evidently, that came to him when the little cloud of trouble appeared. I was pained to hear him mention his danger, for it proved that he had been thinking of it.”

“You wrong him. A person of his noble nature is always sensitive.”

“If he had no thought of wrong, it would hardly have occurred to him when the plan miscarried.”

“You have already condemned him.”

“No, far from it; I hope Mr. Birch will be able to make it apparent that he had no selfish motives.”

Dr. Bilks spoke as a man disturbed by doubts and fears, but who was sincerely anxious that those doubts and fears should be removed. He staid till quite a late hour, and suggested various plans by which Dick could be extricated from his unfortunate position; but Eugene had too much faith in simple integrity to believe in any plans. When the doctor took his leave, Julia came into the library with her mother. She was sad and gloomy, and her looks sufficiently indicated her interest in Dick. Eugene told them enough of what had transpired to explain the rupture with Dick, and assured them it would soon be healed.

“I know he never had a thought of anything wrong,” said Julia.

“I do not think he had.”

“There is no reason why he should conceal his meeting with Mr. Buckstone from you, if he did meet him.”

“None that we know of; but Dick says he was anxious to make Mary the legal wife of Buckstone, to prevent me from marrying her.”

“To prevent you from marrying her!” exclaimed Mrs. Hungerford.

“Of course Eugene never had such a thought,” added Julia to her mother.

“I had no such thought before I came home,” said Eugene, who considered this a good opportunity to inform his mother and sister of his purpose.

“Have you now?” demanded Mrs. Hungerford, full of motherly anxiety

“ I have, mother ; I intend to make her my wife as soon as possible.”

“ Eugene ! ”

“ You cannot mean so ! ” ejaculated Julia.

“ I am entirely in earnest.”

“ Marry Mary Kingman ! ” exclaimed his mother.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Why not ? Sure enough, why not ! ” said Mrs. Hungerford, more excited, if not more indignant, than she was wont to be.

“ Why not ? ” Eugene asked, quietly.

“ How can you ask such a question ? ”

“ Isn't Mary a good girl ? ”

“ Well, she was a good girl.”

“ Isn't she now ? ”

“ I do not wish to say anything to hurt your feelings, Eugene ; but you know yourself that what has happened makes her notorious ; and this terrible murder will not improve her reputation. She has been town talk for months ; now she will be the talk of the whole state.”

“ Is that her fault ? ”

“ Perhaps not. We don't even know that she was married to the man she called her husband. Why, it's shameful, Eugene ! It would be a disgrace to the whole family. We never should get over it.”

Eugene explained for two hours, but he failed to remove their objections.

“ Promise me, Eugene, that you will not marry her,” pleaded Julia.

“ I cannot.”

“ I will do anything for her as she is. I will go and see her every week. I will go into society with her ; but don't make her your wife.”

“ I am the indirect cause of her wrongs, Julia ; and I shall do what I can to atone for them.”

“Anything, but do not marry her. I cannot explain why, but do not.”

“Julia, I must marry her, for your sake as well as my own and hers.”

“For my sake!” exclaimed she. “Why?”

“I cannot explain why; but I must.”

“Eugene, I hope you will think better of it. This is a rash resolve,” interposed his mother.

“I will think of it, mother, as I ought; but I love her, and she must be mine.”

And a new grief was added to the lot of Julia and her mother.

CHAPTER XV.

DR. BILKS ON THE STAND.

TO Dick Birch had been assigned the duty of providing counsel for the defence of Ross Kingman, and he had immediately secured the services of Mr. Darling, an eminent legal gentleman, residing in Summerville, the county town, where the examination was to take place. It had also been his purpose to add his own strength to that of the distinguished lawyer's; but after the complications which the evening of the first day had produced, he was disposed to abandon this idea. On his way from Pine Hill to the hotel, while he was considering what had transpired in the library, he determined to follow his original intention.

Early on the following morning he went to Summerville, and had an interview with Mr. Darling, to whom he fully and unreservedly explained his own position. He then went to the jail, where, as counsel for the prisoner, he was readily admitted.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Birch," said Ross, as he entered. "This is not a pleasant place to live, but I suppose I must put up with it for some months yet."

"I'm afraid you must, Ross," replied Dick, with more sympathy than a lawyer might be supposed to feel, though Dick was more than a lawyer in the present cause.

"I shall bear it as well as I can. How is Mary?"

"She was as well as usual when I heard from her last evening. She bears it better than any one could have expected."

“That is a great relief to me.”

“But, Ross, I came to talk with you about your defence.”

“Thank you, sir. I am afraid you have got a hard row to hoe,” added the prisoner, with a smile.

“No, I think not; though I am rather sorry that you used your tongue so freely.”

“I like to tell the truth. I had no more idea of denying what I had done, than I had of disowning my own name. But I want you to understand that I am not guilty of murder. I don't feel any more like a murderer than you do, Mr. Birch. I have said the same thing to Mary, to Dr. Bilks, and to the sheriff.”

“But it is a pity you acknowledged it in so many words.”

“I killed Buckstone, and I meant to do so,” said Ross, with dignified firmness. “I am willing to say that to the jury; and then I want them to say whether I am guilty of murder.”

“But you musn't do anything of the sort. You must leave the whole matter in the hands of your counsel, and be guided by their directions.”

“I will do so.”

The lawyer then proceeded to draw out of the prisoner all the facts relating to the murder, and made memoranda of them.

“Ross, you say there was a man with Buckstone when you first saw him on the rocks?” continued Dick Birch.

“Yes, I do; of course you know that better than I do,” replied Ross, with a smile.

“Why should I know it?”

“Because you were the person.”

“Could you swear that I was the person, Ross?” asked Dick, with as much indifference as he could assume.

“I could not. It was too dark to see plainly who it was; and I was busy with another affair. I didn't care who it was.”

“Now, Ross, I wish you to think of this matter. You cannot swear that I was the person?”

“No, I cannot. Does it do you any harm to have it known that you were the person with Buckstone?”

“Never mind that, just now, Ross. All we want here is the truth. When you first saw the man with Buckstone, did you think who it was?”

“No, sir; I did not.”

“After you had done the deed, did you think who it was?”

“No.”

“Now, Ross, according to your statement, Buckstone and this man were talking together, and you listened to them.”

“Yes, sir; I did.”

“Then you heard the stranger’s voice.”

“Certainly I did.”

“Could you tell by the voice whether it was any one you had heard speak before?”

“Well, he didn’t say much. I heard him ask Buckstone if he intended to marry Mary. Then, pretty soon, Buckstone told a long story about how it was—that he did intend to marry her at first, and then he didn’t. This made me so mad I didn’t want to hear any more, and I went off after a club. When I came back, they were talking about a consideration for marrying my sister, which didn’t make me feel any better. I heard what Buckstone said, and I didn’t care a straw what the other man talked about; besides, he didn’t speak very loud.”

“Then you could not tell from his voice who he was?”

“No, sir; I could not. I didn’t mind much about it; but I have thought since, from the way he spoke about the marriage, that he was a lawyer.”

“Did you think, at the time, that he was a lawyer?”

“I didn’t think anything about it.”

“What did he say that made you think he was a lawyer?”

“He asked Buckstone if he intended to marry Mary, and said the intention made all the difference in the world.”

“Just so; now, Ross, you did not think, at the time, who this stranger was, — are you quite sure on this point?”

“Of course I am. When I had thrown Buckstone over the cliff, I began to think of Mary, and I am sure I never thought a word of what took place before the deed. I didn't even think that any person was with Buckstone. In fact, my mind was all in confusion. I wasn't used to doing such a job, and I felt all the time, before and afterwards, just as if I was living in some other world. It didn't seem as though there were any other persons in existence but Mary and myself.”

“I can understand your feelings, Ross. When did it first occur to you that I was the person with Buckstone on the rocks?”

“Not till I went over after Dr. Bilks for Mary.”

“Did you think of it while you were going after him, or while you were returning?”

“Not till I saw Dr. Bilks. I told him all about what I had done to Buckstone, before he saw Mary, so that he might understand what ailed her. I went back with him to row him over the channel. Then I told him there was a man with Buckstone — I didn't even think of it till then.”

“What did Dr. Bilks say about it?” asked Dick, with an eagerness which he could not wholly conceal.

“He said the stranger must be Mr. Hungerford.”

“Mr. Hungerford!” exclaimed the lawyer.

“Yes, sir; but I told him it was not; Mr. Hungerford was a good deal taller than this man.”

“What then?” continued Dick, nervously.

“Then he asked if it wasn't Mr. Birch. I told him it might be; but I didn't believe it was.”

“What did he say then?”

“He said he was satisfied the man was Mr. Birch. He told me you had said something to him about making Buckstone marry Mary. He said you did it from the best of

motives; and I know you did, and I was very much obliged to you."

"This satisfied you that I was the person on the rocks with Buckstone?"

"Well, yes; that was enough to satisfy me — wasn't it?" said Ross, not a little puzzled by the troubled expression on the lawyer's face. "I'm sure I feel very grateful to you for all you have done. Of course, if I had known you were the man with Buckstone, I shouldn't have done what I did. You were acting all the time for Mary's good."

"Did it seem reasonable to you that I should meet Buckstone in the dark, and bribe him to marry your sister?" asked Dick, as quietly as he could.

"It didn't seem exactly like you, I own; but, then, Buckstone is a slippery character, and I didn't understand your plans. I knew you wouldn't do anything that wasn't right."

"Where did you find Dr. Bilks, when you went after him that night, Ross?"

"In his office."

"Was he abed?"

"No; he had just come in from making a visit."

"Do you know where he had been?"

"He told me he had been over beyond the Point, where he had a bad case. He said it was rather hard on him to have to go out again, for he had hardly slept a wink for three nights, or something of that sort."

After some further conference, Dick told the prisoner to keep his courage up, and left him. He had another interview with Mr. Darling, and at ten o'clock in the forenoon, all the parties met in the court-house, where the examination was to take place. Eugene Hungerford, Dr. Bilks, and Mary were there as witnesses. Eugene had attempted to see Ross; but Mr. Darling, at Dick's suggestion, had requested the sheriff to exclude all visitors.

The examination was conducted in the usual form, its object being simply to establish the fact that a murder had

been committed, and that there was sufficient evidence to presume the guilt of the prisoner. It was not an easy matter to prove that a murder had been committed, though no one doubted the fact. The prosecution expected to establish it from the confession of the prisoner to Dr. Bilks, and by Richard Birch, who was generally believed to be the person who had accompanied the murdered man to The Great Bell.

The body of Buckstone had not been found. It might yet appear when the chemical changes attending decomposition caused it to rise to the surface. Neither had the body of Goodwin, the sportsman, who had been drowned on the forenoon of the same day, been recovered. There was a kind of tradition prevalent at Port Poppleton that the bodies of people drowned in Bell River, between the islands and the main land, were seldom, if ever, found. There was alleged to be something in the tidal current which carried the corpses down, and so entangled them upon the jagged rocks of The Great Bell, that they never rose to the surface. The water was ten fathoms deep, even close up to the cliff. Old men at the Port told of this man and that man who had been drowned many years before, whose bodies had never been found. It was doubtful, therefore, in the light of the popular superstition, whether Buckstone's body would ever be discovered.

The examination commenced. Ross Kingman was firm, dignified, and even noble, in his demeanor. Mary wept and trembled when he was brought in; but Dr. Bilks, who had charged himself with the care of her, spoke some consoling words, and she became calm. For the first time since her departure from Poppleton with Buckstone, Eugene saw her. He took her by the hand, and assured her all would be well. This was all he said to her in the court-house, though he watched her with tender interest all day long.

Mary was called to the stand first, and, supported by Dr. Bilks, she took her place. She had recovered her firmness,

and related, in a tone loud enough to be heard by all in the court-room, what had occurred between Buckstone and herself before the murder. She was truthful, and did not attempt to conceal the fact, so damaging, apparently, to her brother's cause, that he had acknowledged to her the killing of Buckstone.

"Your name?" was the first question put to her.

"Mary Kingman," she replied, to the astonishment of all who heard her.

"Is that your name?"

"It is."

"Is it the name by which you have called yourself, and by which you were known in New York?"

"It is not."

"By what name were you known?"

"Mary K. Buckstone."

"Were you the wife of Mr. Buckstone?"

"I was not."

"Were you not married to him?"

"I do not know that I was, or was not."

"Was a ceremony performed?"

"There was; but Mr. Buckstone assured me I was not his wife."

"You intended to marry him at the time the ceremony was performed?"

"I did."

"And he intended to marry you?"

"I suppose he did not, as he repudiated the marriage, and declared that I was not his wife."

"It is important to know whether the man who was murdered was your husband or not. The court will instruct you that you were legally the wife of Buckstone, if any ceremony was performed, and you believed that it was real; that the fictitious character of the marriage does not affect its legality."

“Was the marriage otherwise legal?” asked the magistrate.

“I don’t know,” replied Mary.

“Have you any certificate — was there any record made of the marriage?”

“None, sir.”

“Is there any evidence that the marriage ceremony was performed?”

“I know of none.”

The magistrate did not presume to decide upon the validity or invalidity of the marriage; it was sufficient for the present purpose that the witness did not regard herself as the wife of the deceased.

Mary then gave her testimony, as already indicated. It is probable that she was aware how much might depend upon her marriage; that Ross’s very life might hang on this question, for it was one thing to kill his sister’s husband, and quite another to kill her betrayer and seducer. The issue with the jury at the trial must lie between these two points. She was a well-informed person; had always read the newspapers; and understood the merits of the case as well as any man who would sit upon the jury. Ross had told her that, while he acknowledged the fact of the killing, it was not murder; the deed was a justifiable one, and no jury would convict him. Her testimony, so far as it could be without distorting the simple truth, was based upon this view. Hence she called herself Mary Kingman, honestly believing that she was not legally a wife; and hence she did not attempt to conceal or mitigate the facts contained in her brother’s confession to her.

Dr. Bilks was called. He had been summoned to attend Mary Kingman — as she chose to call herself — though he was still of the opinion that she was Mrs. Buckstone — a legal venture which produced a smile on the almost impassible face of the magistrate. Going to and returning from the residence of his patient, he had been accompanied by the

prisoner, who had told him what he had done, substantially as related by the last witness; but with the additional fact that Buckstone was not alone just before the murder.

“Who was the person with him?” asked the government attorney.

“I do not know who he was,” replied the doctor.

“Did the prisoner tell you who he was, or give you any description of him?”

“A meagre description—simply that he wore an over coat, and was about my size;” and the doctor smiled as he mentioned the last item.

“Did he say it was you?”

“Of course not.”

“Well, did he say who he was?”

“He did not; that is, he didn’t say in so many words who the person was.”

“Go on, Dr. Bilks.”

“I think I mentioned the names of several persons.”

“Whose names did you mention?” demanded the attorney, impatiently.

“I mentioned Mr. Hungerford’s first.”

“Well?”

Dr. Bilks was a slow witness. It was evident that he did not like to implicate any person in the business of making a contract with Buckstone, which must soon be apparent.

“The prisoner was positive that Mr. Hungerford was not the person,” added the doctor.

“What other name did you mention?”

“I mentioned Mr. Birch’s;” and the doctor gave a very elaborate explanation of the reasons which had led him to use Dick’s name in this connection, which, of course, included the whole matter of the plan by which Buckstone was to be induced to marry Mary in Poppleton. “For the reason that Mr. Birch intended to do what the stranger on the island appeared to be doing, I concluded the person must be Mr. Birch.”

“What did the person on the island appear to be doing?”

Dr. Bilks related what Ross had reported to him about the “intentions” of Buckstone, and the “consideration” which the stranger offered.

It looked like a plain case, and everybody was fully satisfied that Dick Birch was the mysterious personage who had gone to The Great Bell with the murdered man.

“What did the prisoner say when you mentioned the name of Mr. Birch?” continued the attorney.

“He was satisfied that Mr. Birch was the person;” which was quite true.

Other evidence of less importance was elicited from Dr. Bilks, and when the “direct” was finished, he was turned over to the prisoner’s counsel for cross-examination. The doctor had certainly behaved like an honest witness. He had exhibited a great deal of delicacy and sensitiveness when compelled to use the names of those who were understood to be his friends, and the impression produced by him thus far was decidedly favorable. To the surprise of many, and of none more than Dr. Bilks himself, Mr. Birch was intrusted with the task of cross-examining him. Dick was courteous, and the doctor was steady, so that the questions and answers flowed very smoothly for some time, without disclosing anything new or startling.

“You were at home, Dr. Bilks, when the prisoner came for you to attend his sister?” said Dick.

“I was.”

“What time was it?”

“About two o’clock in the morning, or a little later.”

“You were in bed then?”

“No, sir.”

“Were you up at that hour in the morning?”

“I was.”

“Do you usually sit up all night?” asked Dick, facetiously.

“Not usually.”

“Did you on this occasion?”

“I did — until about five o’clock.”

Dr. Bilks barely answered the questions proposed to him. He was a prudent witness — careful not to prove too much.

“Why did you sit up on this particular night, if it is not your usual custom?”

“Professional duties required it,” replied the doctor, crisply; and though the examination seemed to be of no possible moment, a close observer might have detected a slight pallor in the face of the witness.

“Ah, you had been out professionally, when the prisoner called for you?”

“I had.”

“Where had you been?”

“Over beyond the Point.”

“Will you be a little more definite, if you please?” said Dick, in the blandest of tones, and with the softest of smiles.

“I do not know that I can describe the locality; I believe it is within the corporate limits of Poppleton,” replied Dr. Bilks, with a smile apologetic for his ignorance of mere roads and boundaries.

“Who was sick?”

“It was an obstetric case.”

“By whom were you called?”

“By a man — I don’t know who he was. He was an Irishman.”

“Did he tell you where to go?”

“He did.”

“How did he describe the locality?”

“What has all this to do with the murder on the island?” demanded the attorney for the government.

Mr. Birch, without precisely stating his object, made it appear that the matter was proper — that it was not new matter, and that it was relevant.

“I do not remember what his description was,” replied the doctor, when the question had been repeated.

“But you went to the place indicated — did you?”

“I did.”

“What was the name of the lady whom you attended?”

“I do not remember; I have forgotten the name. Possibly I have it in my book;” and he examined his pockets, and produced his case-book; but the name of the sick lady did not appear.

“Didn’t you put the name down?”

“I supposed I put the name down, but it appears that I did not,” replied Dr. Bilks, who had now become quite pale.

“Are you not usually spoken to some weeks or months in advance, in such cases?”

“Usually, but not in this instance.”

“Did you visit this patient yesterday, or this morning?”

“I did not.”

“Do you leave them with only one visit, in such cases?”

“Never!”

“Why have you not called upon this patient then?”

“I did not consider it as regularly a case of mine. The family were evidently in very indigent circumstances; and I concluded, if there was any further need of my attendance, I should be called.”

“Is this your custom with poor people?”

“It is not,” said the doctor, sweating like a day laborer under the cross-examination, for it was evident to all in the court-room, that there was something wrong, somewhere, though what or where it was, they could not tell.

“Can you describe the house to which you went, Dr. Bilks?”

“I could not.”

“Did you find it readily when you went that night?”

“I did not, very readily.”

“Did you inquire?”

“I did not; the man who came for me gave me such directions as enabled me to find the house.”

“Could you go to it again?”

“I doubt if I could.”

“Have you any intention of calling upon this patient again?”

“Not unless I am sent for.”

“How will you collect your bill?”

“I shall make no charge; I never do, when people appear to be as poor as they were.”

The doctor looked magnanimous, and glanced languidly at the spectators, as if for their approval of his professional generosity.

“What time did you start, Dr. Bilks?”

“About eleven, I think.”

“Where did you spend the early part of the evening?”

“I visited a patient at eight o’clock — shall I give you the name, and describe the house?” asked the doctor.

“It is hardly necessary in this instance,” replied Dick, not at all moved by the witty charge. “You visited a patient at eight o’clock: go on, if you please.”

“I returned to my office at nine, and read till eleven. The book was ‘The Lancet’ — a medical periodical published monthly, in New York, at two dollars a year. The article in which I was particularly interested was a ——”

“Never mind the article, doctor,” interrupted the lawyer.

“I beg your pardon; I thought you wanted all the particulars.”

“I do in regard to the patient you visited beyond the Point. That is the only case of yours in which the court is at all interested. You read ‘The Lancet’?”

“I did; and was about to retire at eleven, when the man came for me. I went to the hotel stable for my horse, and started immediately.”

“What road did you take?”

“The road to the Point.”

“Describe your route till you reached the house where you found your patient.”

“I drove down the Point Road, by the salt works.”

“Go on, if you please.”

“I came to the house, and went in.”

“Where was the house?”

“I cannot describe its locality,” replied Dr. Bilks, the cold sweat standing visibly on his forehead.

“Did you go beyond the road leading from the Point Road to the Mills?”

“I think I did.”

“Did you pass any houses before you came to the one you wished to find?”

“Possibly I did; I don't remember.”

“You stopped — did you?”

“Of course I did.”

“What induced you to stop?”

“The expectation of finding the patient to whom I had been called.”

“Did you get the right house the first time trying?”

“I did.”

“That was fortunate! What was the condition of the woman when you saw her?”

Dr. Bilks described her condition.

“Was she an old woman or a young one?”

“About thirty, I should say.”

“At what time was the child born?”

“About half past one o'clock.”

“You were there two hours at least?”

“About two hours.”

“Was there a nurse?”

“There were a couple of women there.”

“Was the child a boy or a girl?”

“A girl.”

“I pray your honor's judgment,” said the government attorney. “Mr. Birch evidently intends to treat us to a complete view of obstetrical science.”

“I have done with the witness, may it please your honor,” interposed Dick.

Dr. Bilks stepped down from the stand so weak and exhausted, that his condition excited the attention of the audience, especially of Eugene, though none could imagine what it all meant.

CHAPTER XVI.

DR. BILKS'S BABY.

NO one suspected Dr. Bilks of anything; and if his memory had not been so utterly treacherous respecting his obstetric patient "beyond the Point," his testimony would have been faultless. It would have added to his credit as a man and as a physician; for while he spoke the whole truth, he was tender of his friends, and he appeared to be unbiassed, just, and reasonable. No one had said a word against the doctor; no one had whispered a breath of suspicion upon his character. All the evidences against him were his bad memory, and his condition as he came down from the stand.

Eugene Hungerford was called next. He confirmed all that Dr. Bilks had said about the plan to procure the re-marriage of Mary, and explained Ross Kingman's state of mind just before the murder. His testimony simply showed that, with others, he did not believe she was the wife of Buckstone.

Dick Birch was called after the deputy sheriff had been examined; and when he took the stand there was a decided sensation in the court-room. The audience whispered one to another, and there was a general expectation that Dr. Bilks's agency in the affair would be exposed; that the reason for the severe cross-examination of the popular physician would be made apparent. The government attorney had wondered, as much as others, why the junior counsel for the defence had pressed the doctor so sharply on an apparently

unimportant point, and he hoped that the mystery would be probed.

“Mr. Birch, you were intimate with the prisoner, and with all the parties connected with the murder?” said the prosecuting attorney, when the usual preliminary questions had been disposed of.

“I was; the prisoner, with myself, was in the employ of Mr. Hungerford,” replied Dick.

“When did you see him last before the murder?”

“At the house of Mr. Hungerford, about nine o'clock on the evening of the murder.”

“How did he appear?”

“As usual; I saw him but a moment, as he was leaving the house.”

“Did you see him after the murder?”

“Not till I saw him in the jail this morning, as one of his counsel.”

“You wished to procure the re-marriage of the prisoner's sister?”

“I did.”

“You had made an arrangement for this purpose?”

“With Mr. Hungerford — I had.”

“Did you speak to the prisoner about it?”

“I did not.”

“Why did you wish to procure the re-marriage of the murdered man with the prisoner's sister?”

“For two reasons.”

Dr. Bilks had by this time recovered his self-possession and his bodily strength. His seat in the court-room was near that of the government attorney, and he was observed to be working his chair nearer and nearer to the questioner. The doctor was nervous and uneasy. He realized the awkwardness of his situation — to use the mildest term applicable to it, and those who observed the movements he made concluded that he had some suggestions to offer. When the attorney for the government put the last question, Dr. Bilks,

who was leaning over the table with a pen in his hand, wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper. After the disagreeable impression he had produced by his evident prevarication on the stand, it would be quite natural for him to attempt to do something to redeem himself. It was supposed that he was now engaged in this work.

The government attorney was in a confused state of mind, and was now feeling his way. There was something covered up — something he could not understand; and when he saw Dr. Bilks working towards him, he expected some hint or suggestion which would enable him to find the truth.

“For two reasons, Mr. Birch. Name them, if you please.”

“I desired the marriage, first, for the lady's sake. Her position was at least a doubtful one; I desired to heal her wounds.”

“Very praiseworthy, no doubt, Mr. Birch. What was the other reason?”

“I was afraid Mr. Hungerford would marry her himself,” replied Dick, desperately, for it required no little effort for him to say this in open court.

“Then Mr. Hungerford had been attached to this lady before her supposed marriage with the deceased?”

“He had been.”

“Why did you suppose he would marry her, after her connection with Buckstone?”

“Because his interest in her remains undiminished.”

“Did Mr. Hungerford ever mention such an intention in his letters to you from Europe, or in conversation?”

“He did not.”

“Did you think you had good reasons for believing Mr. Hungerford would take such a step?”

“I felt satisfied that he would, from my knowledge of the man, and of his state of feeling, if the lady's marriage with Buckstone was illegal, or if the union could not be legally established.”

“Did you tell him so?”

“I did not.”

“You were his confidential friend and adviser — were you not?”

“I was.”

“And you did not speak to him of a matter so important?”

“I did not; I intended to do so at a proper time. He reached home from Europe only a few hours before the murder.”

“But you deemed it your duty to prevent the marriage of Mr. Hungerford with the prisoner’s sister, if such a marriage should prove to be possible?”

“I did; I proposed the plan to Mr. Hungerford at once.”

“Did you state to him both of your reasons for doing so?”

“I did not. I did not deem it advisable to do so at that time.”

“Mr. Hungerford assented to your plan?”

“He did.”

“Would he, in your opinion, have assented, if your fears that he would marry the lady himself were well grounded?”

“I do not believe the thought of marrying her himself had yet occurred to him.”

“May it please the court, Mr. Hungerford is not on trial,” interposed Mr. Darling, “and the examination seems to be taking a very wide range.”

“What do you expect to prove by this witness, Mr. Lowe?” asked the magistrate.

“Mr. Birch will presently testify that he was on the island with Mr. Buckstone, just before the murder; and I wish to show the purpose for which he was there,” replied Mr. Lowe.

Dick’s face was slightly flushed at this reply; but he did not interrupt the proceedings.

“This examination is simply to ascertain whether there is sufficient evidence to justify the holding of the prisoner in

custody on the charge of murder," continued the magistrate. "It seems to me this point has already been reached."

"May it please the court, there is no evidence, except the partial acknowledgments of the prisoner, which must be taken with great caution, that a murder has been committed. As this witness was on the island at the time of the murder, it is possible that he may have seen the deed done, or at least seen the body of the deceased after it was done. This witness has thus far been exceedingly reticent. It does not appear, though he knew what took place on the island, that he gave information of the murder that night, or even in the morning. I wish, therefore, to show his object in going upon The Great Bell with Buckstone. I wish the court to understand what the deceased was doing at the time he was killed. It can only be shown by this witness."

"Go on, Mr. Lowe."

While the government attorney was making this explanation, Dr. Bilks, unnoticed, had placed the paper he had written on the table before him, and on the top of his notes, so that he could not fail to see it. Mr. Lowe, as he resumed his seat, and glanced at his notes to discover where he had left off, saw the paper Dr. Bilks had placed there. He read it, and appeared to comprehend its meaning without explanation.

"Mr. Birch, you do not believe Mr. Hungerford had yet thought of marrying the prisoner's sister?"

"I do not believe he had — of course I do not know."

"Mr. Birch, what are your relations in the Hungerford family?"

Dick explained them.

"Of course you are acquainted with Miss Julia Hungerford?"

"I am;" but Dick blushed, as well he might, when Julia was dragged into the court.

"What were your relations with her?"

“I had no relations with her, except those of ordinary courtesy and friendship,” answered Dick, indignantly.

“Did you correspond with her while she was in Europe?”

“I did.”

Mr. Darling objected very earnestly; but Mr. Lowe was able to show to the satisfaction of the thick-headed magistrate that his course of examination was absolutely essential to the prosecution.

“Mr. Birch, has Miss Julia Hungerford any fortune?”

“She has — twenty thousand dollars left her by her uncle.”

“Has she any expectations, real or contingent?”

“If her brother, at the age of thirty, has no son, named John, she will come into possession of half a million.”

Dick knew what was coming, and he braced himself for the issue.

“Mr. Birch, have you intended, expected, or desired to marry Miss Hungerford?”

“I object, your honor,” protested Mr. Darling, with as much violence as respect for the bullet-headed magistrate would permit.

Again Mr. Lowe explained that this evidence was essential to establish the fact of, and the provocation for, the murder; and again the blockhead on the bench permitted him to proceed. He repeated his question.

“I neither intended nor expected — I desired.”

“Have you not acknowledged that you were attached to her?”

“In the confidence of friendship, I did,” he replied, glancing at Dr. Bilks, who was now having his revenge for the severe cross-examination to which he had been subjected, and under which he had been so terribly exercised.

“Was there anything to prevent your marriage with Miss Hungerford — are you aware of any impediment?”

“I am not.”

“Would her mother or her brother have objected?”

“I think not.”

“The marriage, then, was possible, and even probable?”

“It was possible.”

“Was it not probable?”

“I am not capable of judging.”

“You were attached to the lady, and you are aware of no impediment. Did you not, therefore, expect to marry her?”

“I hoped to do so — I hardly expected it.”

“You intended to marry her — did you not, Mr. Birch?”

“I could not intend to do what it was not possible for me to do alone,” replied Dick, with entire self-possession.

“On your own part, then, you intended to marry her, and you knew of no impediment? Was this your position?”

“It was then, but it is not now?”

“Why not now?”

“These events have made it impossible.”

Even the magistrate, who sat, wood upon wood, on the bench, did not think “this line” was competent, and Mr. Lowe began to draw nearer to the real question; but in the course of his explanation to the court, he artfully reviewed the point he had apparently established — that the witness wished to prevent Hungerford’s marriage with the prisoner’s sister, in order that the contingent half million of dollars might come into her (Julia’s) possession, and thence into his own hands, when she became his wife; thus showing the strong motives which Dick had for meeting Buckstone privately.

“Mr. Birch, were you with the deceased on The Great Bell, just before the murder?”

“I was not.”

“You were not?” demanded Mr. Lowe, apparently confounded by the answer.

“I was not.”

“When did you last see Buckstone?”

“On The Great Bell, nearly a year ago.”

“Haven’t you seen him recently?”

“I have not.”

“On your oath, do you say you were not with him on the night of the murder?”

“On my oath, I do say so.”

“Where were you at that time?”

“In Mr. Hungerford’s house, at Pine Hill.”

“What time did you retire that night?”

“At about ten o’clock.”

“Did you go out of the house that night?”

“As I was going up stairs, I opened the front door, and stepped out to see what the weather was.”

“Did you put on your hat?”

“I did not.”

“Did you go out again?”

“I did not.”

The handkerchief and cigar were handed to him, and he identified them as his own.

“You heard the testimony of the deputy sheriff. These articles were found in the boat, which must have been the one in which Buckstone and the other person went over to the island. You say they are yours.”

“I do — they are mine.”

“How came they in the boat?”

“I don’t know.”

“Can’t you explain this singular circumstance, Mr. Birch?”

“I cannot; perhaps Dr. Bilks, who went down upon the Point that night, can.”

The doctor looked like an injured man, and there was a suppressed chuckle all over the court-room at his expense.

“I am afraid these articles, in their assumed relations, are as unsubstantial as Dr. Bilks’s baby,” said Mr. Darling.

The doctor had the good sense to appreciate this palpable joke, though his smile was rather ghastly and unreal.

Mr. Lowe pressed the witness to the utmost; but he steadily and firmly denied that he had visited the island with Buckstone, or that he had seen him since his assumed mar-

riage. He tried him on every tack his ingenuity could suggest; but Dick did not vary the breadth of a hair in his statements, and the attorney was compelled to give up in despair. "Truth is mighty, and must prevail." Truth was Dick's god, and his devotion was so sincere, that it impressed itself upon all who heard him. It is doubtful if there was a single person in the court-room who did not believe every word he said. There is that in the truth which conquers interest and prejudice; and he who adheres to it cannot help manifesting himself to all who hear him.

Dick Birch was not on the island that night. He had not seen Buckstone for nearly a year. Eugene Hungerford scorned himself for the doubts which had grieved his friend; but they were only momentary doubts. This was Eugene's triumph. He rejoiced in it, even while he was annoyed and disgusted by the heartless exhibition of his family relations.

Other witnesses were examined, and Ross Kingman was fully committed to await the action of the grand jury. No one expected any other result; indeed, Mr. Darling intended to waive the examination, and would have done so, if Dick had not protested so strongly against such a course; for he desired the privilege of cross-examining Dr. Bilks. Of course he had a theory, but it had not appeared at the examination.

Ross Kingman was borne away to the jail again, and the curious crowd followed the officers out of the court-room. Eugene remained, anxious to take Dick by the hand, and have every dark shadow removed from his path. Dr. Bilks took charge of Mary Kingman, and conducted her to his chaise.

"Dick," said Eugene, as soon as the lawyer was disengaged.

"Ah, Hungerford!"

"You have made me ashamed of myself."

"Don't mention it. I don't blame you."

"If I had a doubt, it was only for a moment. I never

had a real, substantial doubt — certainly not a suspicion — of you, Dick.”

“But I am more under the shadow than ever before.”

“Not with me — not with anybody. My dear fellow, will you forgive me?”

“With all my heart — there is nothing to forgive.”

“Dick, you are all — you are more to me than ever before. I believe every word you have said. Come, go home with me, and ——”

“I cannot do that, Hungerford.”

“Why not?”

“You heard what was dragged out of me.”

“What of that?”

“I have acknowledged the two reasons which induced me to propose the plan for Mary’s marriage to Buckstone. One was for her sake; the other still leaves me open to the charge of acting from interested motives.”

“Dick, you never had a selfish thought in your relations with me. I believe in you as I would in my own mother.”

“Enough, Hungerford!” exclaimed Dick, grasping his hand. “If there has been any breach, it is healed.”

“Good! that sounds like you, old fellow!”

“I have never wronged you or yours, Hungerford, in word or thought.”

“I know it,” said Eugene, warmly.

“If you had turned me out of your house, I would still have served you, and thought kindly of you.”

“I have never thought unkindly of you for a moment, Dick. We are the same now as ever; so come home with me, and we will talk this matter over.”

“No, Hungerford, I cannot do that.”

“Why not?”

“I should not dare to look Julia in the face after this exposure of my thoughts. I cannot go, Hungerford, and I will not.”

“This is obstinacy.”

"I can't help it. She must not even think that I have mercenary motives; and she can't help thinking it now. I will not go, Hungerford; I will not even see her."

"But you punish her more than yourself."

"I think not."

"Why should you punish her, or yourself?"

"It cannot be helped. My self-respect will not permit me to go into her presence with such an infernal suspicion attached to me."

This was entirely a matter of feeling with Dick, and he could not be moved from his position. Eugene unwillingly assented to his view for the present.

"Now, where is Mary?" asked Dick.

"She has gone back to Poppleton, with Dr. Bilks."

"With Dr. Bilks!" exclaimed the lawyer, with something like contempt in his words and looks. "But I must leave you now, Hungerford. You can see Ross if you like."

"Where are you going?"

"To Poppleton."

"We will go together."

"I do not go direct," replied Dick. "I shall return by the way of the Point."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to look for Dr. Bilks's baby. I am determined that this baby shall be named after the doctor."

"Dick, what does all this mean?" demanded Eugene.

"I can't stop to explain now, Hungerford. I must find that baby before Dr. Bilks has time to do so."

"I will go with you."

"Very well."

There was a great deal of laughing and sly joking about Dr. Bilks's baby, in the vicinity of the court-house, and the expression was destined to become a by-word throughout the county, though as yet no one knew what it meant. Hungerford had ridden over to Summerville in his buggy.

and while Dick went for the team, Eugene paid a brief visit to Ross in his cell. He spoke words of comfort and consolation to him, and promised to provide the best lawyer in the state for his defence when the trial took place. Ross was cheerful, and had no fears, except in relation to Mary; but Eugene told him that Julia had spent the afternoon of the previous day with her, and assured him she should not want for friends.

Dick came with the team, and Hungerford took leave of the prisoner, promising to see him frequently. The relations between our "Damon and Pythias" were now fully and completely restored. If possible, the sympathy and confidence of each were increased, though Dick was still firm in his purpose not to visit Pine Hill, or see Julia for the present.

"Now, Dick, what induced you to grind Dr. Bilks so unmercifully when he was on the stand?" asked Hungerford, as he drove away from the jail.

"Before I answer the question, what was your impression of him?"

"If it had been any other man, I should have said he was lying."

"But, as it was Dr. Bilks, you think he was not lying."

"On the contrary, I think he was, though I should not care to say so of him in so many words."

"I think that was the general impression," replied Dick, quietly.

"In a word, you meant to make it appear that the baby was a myth?"

"Precisely so. He was not called from his office at eleven o'clock; he was not in his office at eleven o'clock; he did not go to any house beyond the Point; and no baby was born under his charge that night."

"You are very positive."

"No, I am not; in fact, I know nothing at all about the business, except that which I derived from what the doctor

d.d say, and what he didn't say. In a word, I know no more of where he was, or what he was about, at the time mentioned, than you do."

"But you certainly had some reason for driving him to the wall as you did; of twisting him down till the cold sweat ran out of him."

"I did have a reason. When I went into your library last night, and found you there with Dr. Bilks, I knew, before you told me, of what you had been speaking. He suggested things to you of which you would never have thought without help. I didn't like the looks of Dr. Bilks last night. He seemed to be stepping between you and me. He had a hang-dog look that was suspicious."

"I didn't notice it."

"I saw him wince once or twice, when certain things were said. This forenoon I went to see Ross. It was Dr. Bilks who gave him the idea that I was the person on the island with Buckstone."

"But after what you had said to him, it was not strange that he should think so."

"It was strange to me."

"But he mentioned my name to Ross first."

"Perhaps I wrong him; but I did suspect that all was not right. I can hardly tell what it was that first made me suspicious. It was his general appearance, rather than any particular thing. The handkerchief and the cigar expanded my vision a little. Dr. Bilks smokes my cigars, and I have spent hours in his office. I may have dropped my handkerchief there. At any rate, my theory was, that the doctor put the handkerchief and cigar into the boat."

"Why should he do so?"

"I don't know; I intend to find out. I have been his friend. I know of no reason why he should turn this thing upon me."

"But, Dick, who was the person on the island with Buckstone?"

“Who was he,” repeated Dick, removing his cigar, and glancing at Hungerford.

“Yes, who was he? That hasn’t come out yet.”

“I don’t think you are as sharp as usual. Who was it?”

“I certainly have no idea.”

“It was Dr. Bilks.”

“Impossible!”

“Who else was it?”

“I don’t know; but what possible motive could Dr. Bilks have had in hiring Buckstone to renew his marriage obligations?”

“I don’t know; I can’t imagine.”

This point was discussed, not very satisfactorily, till they reached what was called the “Settlement,” the alleged birthplace of Dr. Bilks’s baby.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SETTLEMENT.

THE Settlement was a knot of small, poor houses, occupied by thriftless farmers, luckless fishermen, and laborers in the salt works. It was hardly half a mile from the sea shore, and the land was very sandy and barren.

The locality looked like a suitable field for the operations of Mr. Eugene Hungerford, when he should commence, in earnest, his philanthropic endeavors to improve the material condition of the race, and thus reach and stimulate the moral and spiritual nature. But with the exception of the laborers in the salt works, who lived here for convenience, the people were most unpromising subjects for the missionary of human progress. There was work enough in the villages if they chose to do it; but they were mostly idlers and vagabonds, who took their subsistence by stealth from the sea and the air; who followed no steady occupation, and had no definite aims, any more than they had any definite principles. If the lobster-pots of a Port fisherman were meddled with; if an orchard on the turnpike was robbed; if timber, iron, or cordage mysteriously disappeared from the ship yards, or from a vessel, — the mischief was promptly charged upon some of the vagabonds of the Settlement, and, nine times out of ten, justly so charged.

Eugene Hungerford was not bent upon an expedition philanthropic on the present occasion. Nothing sublunary agitated him, when, as he turned his horse from the Mills Road, and actually penetrated the bounds of the Settle-

ment, he discovered a chaise approaching them. The vehicle contained a lady and gentleman, and was drawn by a high-spirited black horse, familiar to Dick Birch, if not to Hungerford.

"We are too late!" exclaimed Dick, with ever so much disgust and dissatisfaction evident in his tones.

"Why so?"

"There's Dr. Bilks. He has got here before me. I didn't think he would take Mary with him to visit a patient. I am sorry I waited a moment in Summerville."

"What difference can that make? The doctor will point out to you the house in which his patient lives," laughed Eugene.

"I dare say he can by this time. I suppose Dr. Bilks has declared war upon me now, if he did not before."

"I should not suppose he would love you, after the scorching you gave him on the stand."

By this time the chaise was within a few rods of the buggy, and Eugene turned out of the road to let it pass; but Dr. Bilks drew up his horse, and came to a dead halt within talking distance of the two gentlemen.

"How are you again?" said the doctor, in his usual easy, good-natured tones, and apparently not at all disturbed by the events which had transpired in the court-room. "If you are not in a hurry, I want to tell you a story," continued Dr. Bilks, chuckling, as though he had something "rich" to relate; and, without waiting to learn whether the gentlemen were in a hurry or not, he proceeded: "A rather miserly man, out in Columbus, Ohio, where I came from, who was worth his hundred thousand, at least, was seen, one day, searching very diligently on the plank sidewalk, in one of the streets. The search was continued so long that the attention of the people was attracted, and some one asked him what he was looking for. After some hesitation he replied that he was looking for a cent he had lost. Of course the bystanders laughed heartily at the idea of a man worth

a hundred thousand dollars searching half an hour or more for a single miserable copper. 'O! it isn't so much the cent I want,' added the man, stung by the laugh, 'but I wanted to know where the derved thing had gone to.'

Eugene was polite enough to laugh at the story, but he was impatient for the application.

"Mr. Birch," continued the doctor, blandly, "you rather had me on the hip this morning. Now, it isn't so much the baby that I care for; but I wanted to know where the 'derved' thing was. In a word, Mr. Birch, I came down here to find that baby."

"As you seem to be remarkably good-natured about it, I suppose you found it," replied Dick, rather coldly.

"On the contrary, I did not. It seems the poor baby died, and the mother has gone away."

"Gone away?" exclaimed Dick. "Why, the child was born only night before last!"

"Bless me, I have known a woman to do her washing the day after," laughed the doctor. "Out in Columbus, Ohio, where I came from, I knew an Irish woman who started for Cincinnati about two hours afterwards, and carried her baby with her. That isn't the rule with our people, though it happens so sometimes."

Mary, who sat by the doctor's side, did not relish this conversation, and she turned away her head.

"Of course you found the house, doctor," added Dick.

"I did, though I inquired half a dozen times. When I found it, the direction of the man who called me came up to my mind. The fact is, Mr. Birch, I have so many of these directions in my head, that I ought not to be expected to remember them. More than this, I did ask the parties for the name; but as the matter wasn't all right with them, my question was evaded by suddenly turning my attention to the patient. It is the last house on the left-hand side of the road Good morning, gentlemen;" and the doctor gave the reins to his spirited horse, and away he went.

“We are too late, Hungerford,” said Dick, impatiently. “He has fixed the matter to suit his own purposes; told them what to say, and paid them for saying it.”

“But if there is anything out of the way, we will probe it. I will send for one of those detectives, skilled in working up affairs of this sort.”

“We will go to the house, and see what we can make of it,” said Dick.

Eugene drove to the last house on the left, and both of the gentlemen went in. The dwelling, which was one of the meanest in the Settlement, was occupied by one Sandy McGuire, an Irishman, who had married an American woman at least ten years his senior. The character of both was “below par;” or, rather, they had nothing that could pass for character among decent people. Sandy lived by his wits—that is, by stealing and depredating upon exposed property. His wife had been a nurse before her ill-assorted marriage; but then and now she drank more liquor than a woman or a man should drink, and had fallen into disrepute before she became Mrs. McGuire, and had continued in disrepute since.

Hungerford knew something about the couple, and gave what information he possessed to Dick, who observed that Dr. Bilks had well chosen his subjects. They went in, and found Mr. and Mrs. McGuire on better terms with each other than they usually were, according to the speech of people.

“Take a sate, gintlemin,” said Sandy, with the utmost suavity in his tone and manner. “The likes of me don’t often say sich fine gintlemin in me own house.”

“We come on business,” added Dick.

“What bishness could the likes o’ you have wid the likes o’ me? Isn’t Mистер Hungerford the richest man in the world?”

“Was there a child born in this house night before last?” demanded Dick, impatiently.

“Troth there was, thin! And the poor babby died just afther the dochter go’n,” replied Sandy, promptly.

“Was it your child?”

“Ish’t me! ’Pon me life it wasn’t thin.”

“Whose was it?”

“Faix, yous may well ax that; but it’s a better man nor me that can answer yous.”

“Who was the mother?”

“Sorra one bit o’ me can tell yous, thin. It’s Mistress McGuire that can tell yous all about it. I’m a poor man, your honor, and whin I gits a shance to make an honest pinny, it isn’t the likes o’ me that can turn me back upon it.”

“Did you know the mother of the child?” demanded Dick, turning to Mrs. McGuire, who, out of respect to her liege lord, had been silent thus far.

“Well, no, sir, I can’t say I did know her. Accordin to my notion, she didn’t mean nobody should know her.”

“How came she in your house?”

“I’ll tell you all about it if you want me to; though I didn’t think there was go’n to be any fuss about it.”

“No fuss at all, Mrs. McGuire. If the woman was a stranger to you, how came she in your house?”

“I’ll tell you. I used to be a nuss over to Newington, and some folks there know I keep house over here. Well, about a week ago a man come over here to know if I would take in a woman that was goin to be sick, and not say anything about it, for a pooty good price. Well, we are poor folks, and don’t make much, nohow; so I wan’t much behindhand makin a bargain. The woman come with another woman, and both on ’em staid here till this forenoon. The child was born night afore last. We didn’t cal’late to have no doctor, but the woman was awful sick, and I sent my husband over to the Port arter Dr. Bilks. He got here about half arter ’leven, and staid till nigh on to two o’clock in the mornin.”

“Where is the child now?”

“The child died before mornin, and I reckon the mother

wan't very sorry ; for she spunked up right off, and gct smart enough to go off this forenoon."

"The child died — did it?"

"Why, yes ; that's what I said."

"Was it a boy or a girl?"

"A boy," replied Mrs. McGuire, with some hesitation.

"You are sure it was a boy?" asked Dick, quietly.

"Well, I don't just know whether it was a boy or not. I wan't round much. I was seein to things in the kitchen."

"You think it was a boy — do you?"

"I shouldn't want to say I do think so : it may 'a been a gal ; I ain't sure it wan't a gal. The fact on't is, the child wan't much account. Of course I know'd all the time that things wan't right."

"The child died, you say," continued Dick.

"Yes ; I cal'late the child was dead afore Dr. Bilks got back to the Port."

"Very likely. What did you do with the body?"

"That's where the shoe pinches," said the woman, with a sickly smile.

Dick Birch was of the opinion that the shoe might pinch here, if anywhere.

"Can't you tell?"

"I can, but I don't want to."

"Why not?"

"You've come here to git us into trouble."

"I have not, Mrs. McGuire."

"If we say anything you will git us into a scrape."

"Don't say the firsht woord about it, Mistress McGuire," interposed her husband, solemnly.

"I don't see that I can say anything," added the wife.

"Of course the body was buried."

"Av coorse," replied Sandy, who seemed to be disposed to manage the difficult part of the case himself.

"And you buried it?"

"Ish't me? Sorra one woord I'll say about it."

“How much did you get for this business?” asked Dick, finding that the man would be obstinate.

“A hundr’d dollars,” replied the woman.

“Have you the money?”

“To be sure I have,” said Sandy.

“How much did Dr. Bilks give you for telling this story?” demanded Dick, sharply.

“Dr. Bilks!” repeated Mrs. McGuire. “Not a cent.”

“Are you willing to go into court and swear to all you have stated?”

“Ivery word of it!” exclaimed Sandy, emphatically; and, whether true or false, there was no doubt he would do so.

Eugene proposed, in a whisper, that the man should be arrested for not reporting the birth and death of the child; but Dick assured him that a householder was not liable under six months for the penalty, which was only five dollars. As Dr. Bilks was the real manager of the case, it was best to fight the enemy with his own weapons.

“McGuire,” said Hungerford, “I will give you five hundred dollars if you will show me where you buried the child.”

The man was indignant, and positively refused. Eugene then offered him the same sum if he would tell the whole truth. He was tempted, shaken, but finally refused, evidently from fear of consequences.

“I will leave the offer open to you, McGuire. Dr. Bilks has probably given you one hundred dollars to tell this story. No woman has been here, no child has been born; it is all humbug.”

“D’ yous mane to say I lied to yous?” said McGuire, indignantly.

“That is what I mean; but you were paid for it,” replied Eugene. “We care nothing about the child or the woman. If you wish to make five hundred dollars, you have only to tell the truth.”

“That’s just what I’ve been doin’, your honor.”

"If you change your mind, let me know."

It was not probable that he would change his mind till he had seen Dr. Bilks, who would give him the five hundred dollars rather than have his scheme exposed. McGuire was shaken and tempted by the large offer; and Dick saw it.

"McGuire, I will give you a thousand dollars for the truth," continued Eugene, at Dick's suggestion.

"A thousand dollars!" exclaimed the wretch, who had never seen so much money.

"Yes; five thousand," added the *millionnaire*, without any prompting this time.

Dick laughed. Dick enjoyed a joke.

"O modther o' Mary!" ejaculated the bewildered miscreant.

"Five thousand!" repeated Eugene, laughing heartily, as he glanced at his friend.

"Sure, you don't mane so! You're makin shport uv a poor man."

"I'm in earnest. I will make my offer in writing," added Eugene; and he took from his pocket a piece of paper on which he wrote in pencil, "*I agree to give Sandy McGuire five thousand dollars for the whole truth in regard to the child alleged to have been born at his house on Monday night last.*" He dated and signed it.

"Let me witness it," said Dick, laughing.

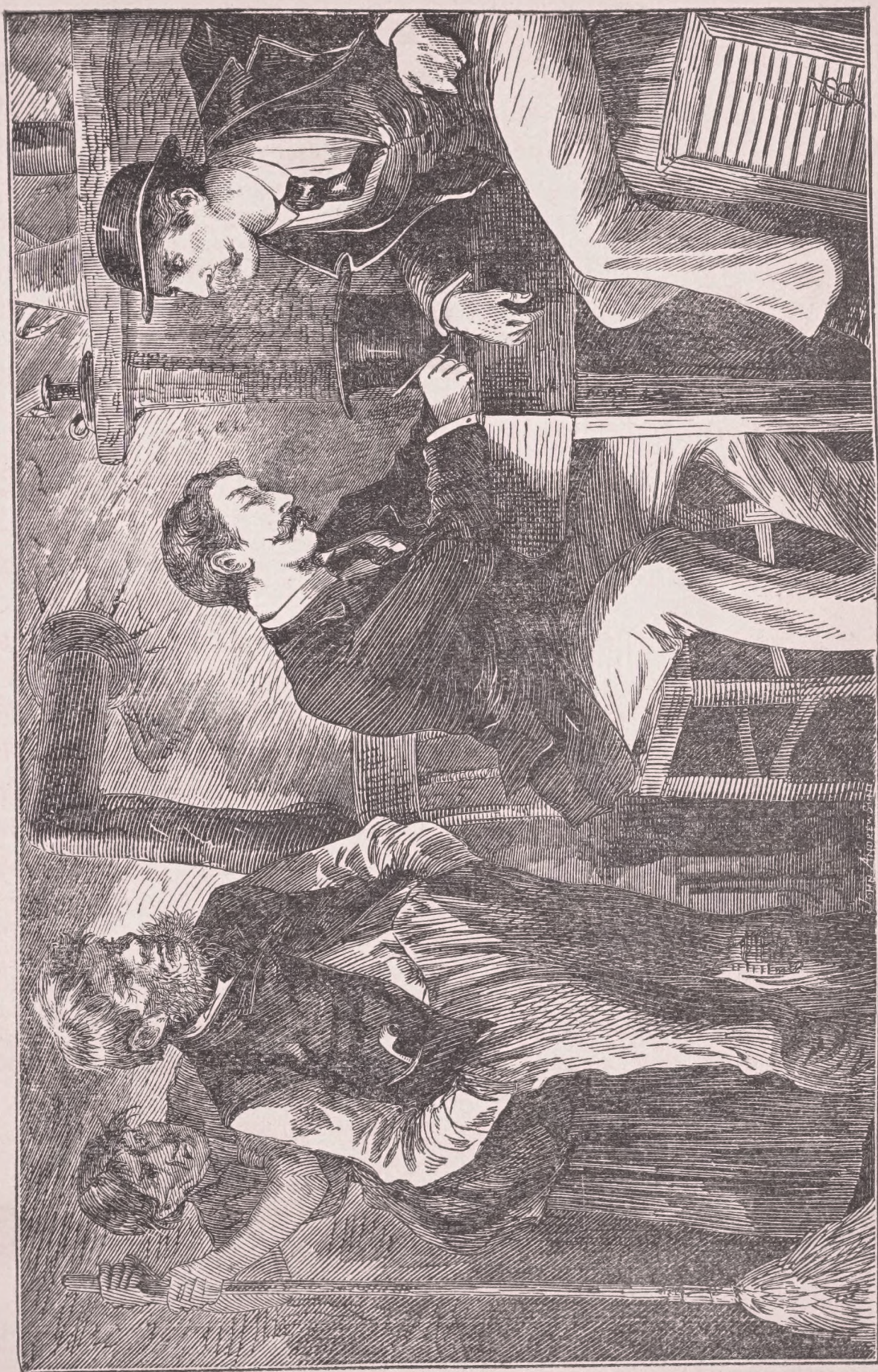
It was duly witnessed, though, being written in pencil and without a seal, it was hardly a legal document, yet the two gentlemen had no doubt it would prove to be a valuable instrument in the hands of its possessor.

"I'll see your honor to-morrow," said Sandy.

"After you have consulted Dr. Bilks," laughed Dick.

"What would I want wid Dr. Bilks?" replied he, a gleam of caution evidently streaming through his mind. "I only want to think what the truth is."

"It is that for which you can get the most money," said Dick, facetiously, as he walked out of the house.



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Eugene was intensely amused as he got into the buggy. Five thousand dollars was a large sum of money; but he seemed to be delighted with the idea of parting with it, if he had such an idea.

“I’m rather sorry you didn’t make it ten thousand,” chuckled Dick, as he joined Hungerford.

“Well, I will go in and change the paper.”

“Never mind; it will do just as well as it is. I don’t think Dr. Bilks can afford to pay out more than five thousand.”

“Has he much money?”

“He seems to be pretty well supplied with the article. He has several thousand dollars in the Poppleton Bank.”

“Good! We can find out at the bank whether he pays Sandy his price. I am rather sorry I did not make it ten thousand. If Dr. Bilks wants to dance, he ought to pay the fiddler,” laughed Eugene.

“It may turn out that you will be called upon to pay it yourself.”

“There is no possibility of such a contingency. His reputation is now in the hands of Sandy McGuire, and the rascal will have no more mercy upon him than upon the eel he skins for his dinner.”

“I hope he will skin him close. If I had reached the Settlement half an hour before the doctor, I should have headed him off.”

“Then you fully believe that he bargained with McGuire and his wife to tell this story?”

“I have no doubt of it. He was the person with Buckstone that night; and I shall not leave a stone unturned till I prove it.”

“But, Dick, you have no case. You are lame in the first and most essential point; you cannot prove his motive in being there.”

“If we prove the fact, the motive may be apparent.”

"There is no earthly reason why Dr. Bilks should have had anything to do with Buckstone."

"There is a reason, though you may not see it."

"Do you see it?"

"I have a theory."

"What is it, Dick?"

"I say, as I have said before, that I know nothing about it, any more than yourself. The anxiety of Dr. Bilks to make it appear that I was the stranger assured me he had a motive for doing so. The doctor and myself have been quite intimate for the last six months. Of course, my very occupation, as your agent, led us to talk a great deal about you, and I think by this time he knows you very well. Still, I never told him anything about your affair with Mary until I was in a manner forced to do so, after Ross brought her home from New York. Of course, I spoke to him in confidence, though what I told him was little more than was known by everybody in town. I did tell him that you were still deeply interested in Mary's welfare, and that I intended to do something to heal her wounds. I made him my confidant in this matter, because, as her physician, he could help me in the execution of my plan."

"There was no harm in this, Dick."

"There was not then."

"Nor is there now."

"Let us see. I told Dr. Bilks what I should propose to you in regard to Mary, and remarked that you would give her ten, twenty, fifty thousand dollars, if it would make her happy and contented."

"That was true, Dick; and if you had said a hundred thousand, it would have been just as true," added Eugene. "If she could not be my wife, I would not weigh money against her happiness as the wife of somebody else, for I still believe that I am the author of her misfortunes."

"I told him so."

"What did he say?"

“He added that you were a remarkable man. He was sure that Buckstone would marry her, for the money, if for nothing else. If the twenty thousand dollars which I named were in Mary’s hands, he could still have the benefit of it.”

“But you don’t show any motive, on the part of the doctor, for meeting Buckstone.”

“It is a mere surmise; but, as I view it now, Dr. Bilks sent for Buckstone himself.”

“Why should he do so, if he did?”

“I may as well out with it first as last. I think he and Buckstone together intended to pluck you,” replied Dick, desperately.

“But the money for Mary’s benefit was to be placed in the hands of Ross, as trustee.”

“I did not tell the doctor of that. It was an afterthought of mine.”

“It may possibly be,” said Eugene, musing.

“Let us look at it. Bilks writes to Buckstone, who comes to Poppleton privately, as he is directed to do. Bilks says, ‘If you marry Mary, you shall have twenty thousand dollars, but half of it shall be mine.’ Bilks makes it appear that it is through his agency that the money is to be obtained, and that without him it cannot be obtained. I don’t mean to say I am satisfied with this theory, Hungerford; but it is the only explanation of his conduct I can offer.”

“I think we must search farther for a solution.”

“It is evident the doctor intends to prove that I was the stranger on the island. I know I was not the person. Who put my handkerchief and my cigar into the boat on the Point?” demanded Dick.

“There is no evidence that it was Dr. Bilks.”

“He is the only man who knows anything about my cigars. Any one else would have used a common cigar. I tell you he was the man, whether we can prove it or not.”

“I am willing to believe it myself; but I think we had better not say much about it.”

“Not a word shall be said till the proof comes. In the mean time, we will treat him as usual, and watch him closely. He is a man of tricks and subterfuges.”

“You have already declared war against him.”

“He will not so regard it. He hasn't soul enough to be indignant, and he will be your best friend, you may depend.”

“I cannot treat such a man as a friend.”

“You need only tolerate him. If you or any of the family are sick, send for him. I think he is a good doctor.”

“I will be as tolerant as possible; but, after all, it may turn out that he is an honest and true man.”

“It may, but it will not,” laughed Dick. “I shall have plenty to do in searching into this matter.”

“I hope you will get at the truth. Dick, I want to go over to the island. I have not seen Mary, except in the court-room, since my return. Perhaps she may know what the doctor did at the Settlement.”

“Don't mention the matter to her. Have you any particular business there?” asked Dick.

“I have; very important business.”

“Hungerford, I remember what you said last night.”

“What?”

“That you would marry Mary if she were not the legal wife of Buckstone.”

“I did say so; I meant so. As the author of her miseries and misfortunes, it is my duty, as well as my desire, to give her back the good name of which the way of the world would deprive her.”

“If she was ever a wife, she is a widow now,” said Dick, suggestively.

“Speak out, Dick, if you have anything to say.”

“Hungerford, do you mean to marry her?”

“I do.”

Dick shook his head.

“I love her, and to me she is the same she always was. I believe she married Buckstone, without true love, in a frenzy of despair, when she was driven from her father’s house.”

“But think what she is.”

“You know what she is, Dick. She has violated no law of God or man. She has not sinned; she has been sinned against. There is no contamination of impurity about her; if there were, I should spurn her.”

“Without any sin, with nothing worse, at most, than indiscretion, she has become notorious in connection with these disgusting events.”

“Dick, I would have counted myself happy if I could have married her at the sacrifice of every dollar of my fortune, real and prospective, *before* these events. This was not to be. I have spent months of misery under the blow. I cannot have her as she was; I will take her as she is: and a thousand times better to me *as* she as she is than any other could be as she was.”

“Hungerford, I have much to say to you about this matter. Don’t be rash or hasty.”

“I will not.”

“I will ask only one favor of you to-day: do not commit yourself if you see her.”

“Dick, I have already told my mother and sister what I intended to do.”

“What did they say?”

“They are of your opinion.”

“Then, for their sake, do not be hasty.”

“Dr. Bilks knows my intention.”

“What did he say?”

“He was of my opinion.”

“Of course!”

“Dick, one thing more. When I am married, your position will be changed.”

“My position?”

“You certainly could not be suspected ——”

“Bah!” exclaimed Dick, turning red. “I should not be suspected if you had a wife. Hungerford, I am unalterably opposed to your marriage with Mary, whatever may be the result to me. My hopes were exposed to-day in the court-room, which shows that what did not occur to me till last night filled the thoughts of everybody else. My duty to Julia requires me to keep away from her. I shall do so. Never mind me, Hungerford. Don’t commit yourself to-day.”

“I will remember your wish ; but I will not promise.”

They parted at the pier, and Eugene, sending his horse up to the stable by Dick, pulled over to The Great Bell.

CHAPTER XVIII.

EVIDENCE WANTED.

MR. RICHARD BIRCH was not a philosopher in the wordly sense of the term. He was too sensitive and high-spirited to be a philosopher. Undoubtedly he would have been more comfortable and contented if he had been. The suspicions of Eugene Hungerford had annoyed him almost beyond endurance; and although common sense assured him that his friend was still a friend, and that there was abundant cause for doubt, he was not willing to accept the alternative; he was not willing that any one should think it possible for him to have selfish motives, and to be acting an underhanded part.

Mr. Birch, therefore, was not satisfied. Though Eugene had been convicted of his error, though he had banished every suspicion that haunted his mind, Mr. Birch felt that he had not yet made the triumphant vindication of the integrity of his purpose which his sensitiveness demanded. Not only in the partial eyes of his friend, but in those of all the world, must he be spotless and unsuspected. If Mr. Richard Birch had been a philosopher, he might have been content to believe himself that he was without reproach, and leave to time and circumstances the work of removing the stain which rested upon his good name.

He drove Eugene's horse up to the hotel stable, and left him there. He was thinking what evidence he could procure to establish the two facts that he was not the person with Buckstone just before the murder, and that Dr. Bilks

was the person. These two points were as clear in his own mind as though all the solid men of the county had sworn to them in open court. It would be very tedious to follow Mr. Birch in his patient and laborious search after facts during the remainder of that day, and all of that evening, because he spoke with more than a hundred persons, and examined every foot of the shore from the Port to the Point.

If Mr. Richard Birch was not a philosopher, he was sometimes a logician, and he had a prejudice in favor of beginning at the root of a matter. It was evident to his discerning and logical mind, that Mr. Buckstone must have come into Poppleton before he was murdered within its territorial limits; and if he did come into the town, somebody saw him, or ought to have seen him there. Thus far no such individual had been seen or heard from. Ross Kingman and Mary appeared to be the only persons—besides the stranger—to whom the murdered man had manifested himself. The diligent and interested inquirer into the truth was not willing to accept this conclusion, which is another proof that he was not a philosopher.

Buckstone had boarded at the Bell River House during his former visit to Poppleton. He would be likely to go there on the present occasion. The landlord, the clerk, the chambermaids, the hall girls, the porter, the hostlers—all knew Mr. Buckstone; but not one of them had seen him on the day of the murder. Those who had the means of knowing were very sure he had not entered the hotel. It was probable that the murdered man had arrived at the Mills by the afternoon train—the same in which the Hungerford family had come; but no one had seen him. The station agent knew him, but he was no wiser than others.

Mr. Buckstone and the stranger had gone over to The Great Bell in a boat—it was not possible to go in any other way, for, though some of the enthusiasts, who believed Poppleton would, at some indefinite future time, rival New York in commercial grandeur, when every foot of land would be

wanted, islands included, thought that a bridge over the channel was practicable, the structure had not yet even been proposed; therefore Mr. Buckstone and the stranger must have gone over to The Great Bell in a boat. This was a logical conclusion, and Mr. Birch believed in it with all his might. Then, as it was one of the customs of society that boats should be owned by somebody, it followed, by a course of reasoning equally accurate and logical, that the boat in which Buckstone and the stranger had crossed to the island, belonged to somebody.

Fortunately the problem of the ownership of this boat had already been solved, and it only remained for Mr. Birch to see the owner. He did see him; but the proprietor of the small craft was as lamentably ignorant as the rest of the world. He kept his boat on the beach about half way between the Point and the Port. He had not even missed it, for he seldom used it, until the sheriff had spoken to him about the matter. The boat contained two fifty-six pound weights, used as ballast, one of which was missing; and the painter, a piece of whale line, sixty feet in length, had been cut from the stem, and taken away; but he had not seen Mr. Buckstone, and did not even know him by sight.

"When did you use your boat last?" asked Mr. Birch, who had made a memorandum of the missing fifty-six and the sixty feet of whale line.

"I used it looking after the body of Goodwin the afternoon before the murder," replied the owner.

"What time did you go home?"

"I hauled up the boat just before dark."

"Did you leave the sail in the boat?"

"No; I always carry that up to the house."

"Where do you keep the oars?"

"They are not worth much; I always leave them in the boat."

"Don't you suppose the fifty-six was stolen by some loafer from the Settlement?"

“ I don't know but it was ; but it seems to me, if any one stole it, the thief would have taken the other one. He might as well be hung for an old sheep as a lamb.”

Though the sheriff had been informed of the loss of the rope and the weight, nothing could be made of the fact, and no significance was attached to it. Mr. Birch felt that he had gained something, though he knew not what. He left the owner of the boat, and examined the shore. There might be some person who had been on the beach between nine and ten on the night of the murder ; some one who had been a fishing that day, and returned late ; some one whose boat needed attention, or some uneasy individual whose wife did not allow him to smoke in the house. There was a current rumor in the Port that somebody had seen two persons get into a boat, and push off about nine o'clock in the evening ; but Mr. Birch did not find this person till nine o'clock. It was a man who caught fish for the hotels, and often came in late at night. His name was Josiah Hubbard, and the patient inquirer was quite sure this man would give him a clew to the mysterious stranger.

“ Hubbard, they say you were on the beach here the night of the murder,” began the lawyer.

“ Yes, sir ; that's so. I was there, and I told Dr. Bilks I was there,” replied the man, who apparently did not mean to have it appear that he had attempted to conceal his knowledge.

“ Did you, indeed !” exclaimed Birch, disgusted with this acknowledgment.

“ I did ; and I was ready to go on the stand and tell 'em all I knowed about it. 'Twan't much ; but I don't want to keep nothin' back. I did see them men, and I jest as I ef tell you on't as the next man.”

“ What time was it ?”

“ Well, it was hard on to nine o'clock, I should say.”

“ Did you know either of the men ?”

“ I cal'late I did.”

“Was either of them Mr. Buckstone? Did you know Mr. Buckstone?”

“I cal’late I did; he went down a fishing with me times enough for me to know him.”

“Was either of them Mr. Buckstone?” asked Birch, with no little eagerness.

“I cal’late one on ’em was Mr. Buckstone.”

“Could you swear to it?”

“I cal’late I shouldn’t want to swear to it, exactly; but I hain’t much more doubt on’t than I had o’ t’other man — Mr. Birch. I don’t reckon you’ll want me to swear to’t.”

“Why not?”

“Well, Mr. Birch, you ’n’ I hes allers been good friends. When you boarded to the Bell River, you did me one or two good turns, and I ain’t the man to forgit a favor. I kind o’ kept out of the way, and didn’t say much about what I’d seen, ’cause I thought ’twouldn’t do you no good.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, I cal’late you know what I mean, Mr. Birch,” said Hubbard, with an expressive grin.

“Who was the man with Buckstone?” asked Birch, as a matter of form, for he knew what the answer would be, and was satisfied that Dr. Bilks had already tampered with the man.

“I cal’late ’twas you, Mr. Birch.”

“You saw me?”

The man “cal’lated” that he did see him; that he knew him; was perfectly satisfied, at the time, that Mr. Birch was the person with Buckstone. It was not an afterthought; it was not something which Dr. Bilks had put into his head; he “knowed it all along.”

“Hubbard, has Dr. Bilks given you any money?”

“Not the first cent!”

“If he has, I am willing to give you twice as much more.”

“Do you think I would lie for money, Mr. Birch?” demanded the fisherman, indignantly.

“ I don't believe you would, Hubbard. I want the truth. If you know anything which you haven't told, you ought to let it out. If any one has paid you to keep back the truth, or any part of it —— ”

“ No one has paid me a red cent, Mr. Birch, ” protested Hubbard, who doubtless intended to tell the truth.

Mr. Richard Birch believed in the truth ; but he was willing to neutralize the cupidity of base men by paying more for the truth than his enemies would for lies. So far he was content to “ fight the devil with his own weapons ” — no farther. He knew that testimony thus obtained was worth nothing in a court of justice ; but he hoped thereby to obtain a clew which would enable him to unravel the tangled skein, and obtain reliable evidence.

He questioned Hubbard with the utmost minuteness in regard to his interview with Dr. Bilks ; but the fisherman still persisted that he knew the stranger was Mr. Birch before the doctor said a word to him. It was possible. They were both of the same height. Both wore light spring overcoats in the evening and on cool days. Hubbard might be perfectly honest, but it was more than probable that his opinion had been fortified by Dr. Bilks's carefully-made suggestions.

Mr. Birch left the fisherman, almost prepared to believe that he was himself the “ stranger ; ” that he had been with Buckstone just before the murder. The man was very positive, but he hoped Mr. Birch would not be injured by the truth. He didn't want any man's money when he did not earn it. If Mr. Birch had got into any “ scrape, ” he was sorry for it, and was willing to do anything he could to help him out, but he wouldn't lie on the stand.

Hubbard was a hard customer, in popular parlance. What he believed, he believed with all his might. He would do anything in reason to help a friend out of trouble ; but his “ nateral ” conscience would not let him go on the stand and tell what was not true. Dick Birch left him with a

higher respect for his integrity than he had ever entertained before, though it was none the less evident that the fisherman was mistaken. He was not willing to swear that the stranger was Mr. Birch, but to the best of his knowledge and belief such was the fact.

As the lawyer walked through the principal street of the Port, he saw a light in the office of Dr. Bilks. He had done all he could do that night on the beach, and round the streets, and he was disposed to look into the eye of the doctor, and to hear what he had to say. He entered without the preliminary of ringing or knocking. Dr. Bilks sat in his easy chair reading, not *The Lancet*, but the last new novel. He jumped out of his chair when Mr. Birch entered, and walked towards him with extended hand.

"I am glad to see you, Birch," exclaimed he, heartily. "I was afraid I shouldn't see you again."

"Why were you afraid of that?" demanded Dick, coldly enough, but as warmly as he could speak to such a man.

"Because, for some inexplicable reason, you seem to have raised your back against me," replied the doctor, with an injured air. "But I am glad to see you. Have a cigar? they are not your favorite brand, but they are the best I have."

"I was not aware that I had raised my back against you in any manner to which you could take exception," answered Dick, as he lighted the cigar.

"But what an infernal scorching you gave me in the court this morning!" exclaimed the doctor, laughing.

"That was merely professional. The blue pill you gave me a month ago was not pleasant to take, but I didn't blame you."

"But the point on which you drove me to the wall was of no importance. I never felt so bad before in my life. I had forgotten all about this affair at the Settlement, and to save my life, I couldn't call up a single circumstance, except what was strictly professional. You placed me in an

awkward position; and I came very near fainting away under it."

"I am sorry you suffered so much, doctor."

"I did suffer a great deal. When a man means to tell the whole truth, and is trying to do it, it is hard to be driven up on points of no consequence."

"I did not regard the point as of no consequence."

"Birch, you and I have been the best of friends since I came to Poppleton. Your influence gave me a position at once, and I am very grateful to you for all you did. But, Birch, you placed me in the ugliest situation I ever was in, to-day. I don't think it was the least matter to you or to the court who or what my patient was. I feel aggrieved by what you did. You made me appear ridiculous, if not untruthful."

Dr. Bilks looked hurt and indignant. He acted like a man who had been injured by his best friend.

"Doctor, I have only one face. We will not quarrel," said Dick.

"We will not; but I think it is no more than just that you should explain your extraordinary conduct. Let us be frank and candid, as between friend and friend."

"I will, with all my heart," said Birch, who found it practically impossible to conceal himself, even from the man he regarded as his enemy.

"I assure you that no amount of candor would offend me. Keep nothing back, Birch!"

"I shall not, Dr. Bilks; you have taken a great deal of pains to make it appear that I am the person who was with Blackstone on the night he was murdered."

"I deny it; I have taken no pains to do so."

"You mentioned my name to Ross."

"I did."

"And to Hubbard."

"I did not. He was sure you were the person."

"Was he sure without any suggestion from you?"

“He was; his first remark to me was to the effect that the person with Buckstone looked like Mr. Birch.”

“Did you do anything to lead him away from this conclusion?”

“I did not. I will be as candid as I wish you to be. I could not do anything to lead him away from such a conclusion, Birch. I believe you were the person.”

“You do!”

“Just as firmly and conscientiously as I believe that Ross killed Buckstone.”

“Do you wish to believe it?”

“No; I have tried with all my might to believe you were not the person. The evidence is too strong for my mind. Ross and Hubbard are confident; and your reasons for being there are sufficiently apparent. There was not a man in Poppleton who had any business with Buckstone, except Mr. Hungerford and yourself,” said the doctor, earnestly.

“But I have sworn that I was not the person.”

“That is where you made the greatest mistake of your life.”

“Then you believe me guilty of perjury,” added Dick, calmly.

“I have nothing to say about that. My belief is not a matter of choice. I believe that Bell River runs down hill; and I believe it because I can't help it.”

“In your eye I am perjured?”

“Don't worry me with hard names; don't ask me to condemn you. I will not. I cannot see why you should be so anxious to conceal your interview with Buckstone.”

“Do you think I helped murder him?”

“God forbid! Of course I do not.”

“Can you conceive of any motive I should have for concealing the fact, if it were a fact, that I was with Buckstone?”

“I cannot.”

“If you believe I was the person now popularly known

as the 'stranger,' you must think I have some strong motive for denying what you believe."

"There must be some motive: it is not apparent yet. I believe in the truth; and I am confident that the truth will come out. It will be proved that you were with Buckstone, and your motive for denying it will also be proved. I am satisfied on this point. Now, Mr. Birch, I claim to be your friend. You will do me the justice to say that I have not been forward in bringing out anything to your disadvantage."

"Did you suggest to Hungerford that I might be trying to get half a million with Julia by preventing his marriage?"

"Such a thought occurred to me; and you virtually owned up on the stand this forenoon."

"I think not," replied Dick, indignantly.

"Be that as it may, you will readily perceive that the thought which came to my mind was a general opinion in the community; otherwise, it would not have occurred to Mr. Lowe."

Dick Birch had no suspicion of what had been written on the paper passed to Mr. Lowe during the examination. Dr. Bilks had reclaimed the paper, and suggested to the attorney that his position might be compromised by this honest endeavor on his part to have the whole naked truth presented to the court. Mr. Lowe saw the point, and promised to be silent.

"Never mind that, doctor," said Birch. "What would you, as a friend, advise me to do?"

"Tell the truth, by all means."

"Acknowledge that I was on the island, whether I was or was not."

"I think there can be no doubt that you were there."

"I still deny the fact; but grant that I was there, as you say you believe."

"I trust you do not believe me capable of any insincerity. I do believe you were there."

“Never mind that — pass the minor points. You advise me to acknowledge that I was with Buckstone.”

“Certainly.”

“What then?”

“You are a lawyer; you know best. My impression was, and still is, that you were on The Great Bell that night for a good purpose. As you did not give information to the authorities of the murder, as you did not seem to know that a murder had been committed, — for I carried the first intelligence to Pine Hill, — I concluded that, when Buckstone went up to see Ross, you pulled over the channel, and went home.”

“And left Buckstone to be murdered by Mary’s savage brother, or at least to remain on the island all night?” said Dick, with a sneer.

“I confess it did not look reasonable that you would do so.”

“No man would do so.”

“You know best.”

“In your opinion, I went home, leaving my companion to take care of himself, and not even asking a question about him until eleven o’clock the next day!”

“Of course I know nothing of particulars. I know only what is proved.”

“It would be more reasonable to suppose that I remained; that I saw the murder; that I saw Buckstone hurled over the cliff into the sea; that I knew it all, and then held my tongue.”

“Ross was your friend — perhaps for his sake you did so; you know best. If you did, it was a mistaken policy. I advise you, if this was the case, to tell the whole truth.”

“It might be made to appear that I was an accessory, either before or after the fact.”

“If you would tell me the whole truth, I could advise you better what to do. If your complicity in the affair endangers you, I should recommend you as a friend, though not

as a stern lover of justice, to leave Poppleton — leave the country.”

“I do not ask for any advice. I only desired to obtain your views.”

“I am afraid, Mr. Birch, that you are more deeply implicated than any one yet suspects — you know best. If I can do anything to serve you, I will do it with pleasure.”

“I thank you for your exalted opinion of my character!”

“I regard you as a first-rate fellow, and the worst I fear is, that your zeal to serve your friend Hungerford has led you into a blunder, if nothing worse.”

“Thank you, doctor. Let me say once more that I was *not* the stranger.”

“I am sorry you still think it necessary to deny the fact.”

“Dr. Bilks,” said Dick Birch, jumping out of his chair, and throwing away his cigar, “you are either the most deeply injured man in the world, or you are the most infernal scoundrel that goes unhung.”

“Then I have been more deeply injured, in your estimation, than I supposed I had,” replied the doctor, meekly.

“Do you expect to prove that I was the stranger?”

“I think it will be proved — my general belief in the omnipotence of truth leads me to this conclusion.”

“Now, doctor, suppose we change the issue: my general belief in the omnipotence of truth leads me to the conclusion that *you* will be proved to be the stranger.”

Even the slight change which came over the face of Dr. Bilks was not unnoticed by Birch. He smiled, looked injured, and pronounced the conclusion a most unwarrantable one.

“Will you be as candid with me as I have been with you? On what grounds do you charge me?”

“Can you prove to me where you were from nine till two on that night?”

“I have already testified on that point.”

“And your testimony was not worth a brass farthing

Do you expect me, or any one, to believe this ridiculous story about the baby?"

"I certainly do."

"What became of the baby?"

"How should I know?"

"Did you report its birth and death to the town clerk?"

"I did — you will find the record of a still-born infant, if you look; though this is no part of my duty by law. I knew the child would not live when I left it."

"Could you induce Sandy McGuire to point out the place where the child was buried?"

"Undoubtedly I could, and I will do so."

"Do you know?"

"I do not. Sandy McGuire is an ignorant man, and is probably afraid that he has done something wrong. I am not surprised that he would not tell you."

It was midnight when Mr. Birch left the doctor's office, satisfied that he had not made a single point. Even in the matter of Dr. Bilks's baby, it certainly looked as though the author of the myth would be able to establish the truth of all he said. Dick was discouraged. He did not sleep any that night; he lay tossing upon his bed, thinking of his own doubtful position before the community.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE ROPE AND THE WEIGHT.

TO say that Mr. Richard Birch was unhappy as he tossed upon his bed that night, would not appropriately express his mental condition. He was not unhappy; he was vexed, perplexed, annoyed. He had devoted his first spare time since the murder to an investigation of the circumstances attending the event. The result of his inquiries was only evidence against himself.

But Dick was not unhappy — not troubled in spirit — only perplexed in mind. The Beatitudes have blessings for all but the wicked; and he who suffers most, being still innocent and pure, has most blessings. In spite of all the appearances, real and constructive, which were arrayed against him, his spirit did not falter. If what was external and beyond himself discouraged him, there was no loss of power in his soul. He had faith in the truth, and was satisfied that even his good name would be vindicated.

He tossed upon his bed all night long — not in misery and self-reproach, but as he who invents a machine, and is troubled to make one part harmonize with another. He did some tremendous thinking. He was struggling to solve a problem: to read the meagre hieroglyphical facts which the murder case presented. Twenty times, during the five hours he lay upon his bed, he drew up before him the naked facts, divesting them, as well as he could, of the opinions and prejudices with which they had been clothed. They bore fearfully upon himself. He could not invest the myth of Dr.

Bilks's baby with even the semblance of reality. The story of the child and the mother was too flimsy to be believed. If he could ascertain beyond the possibility of a doubt where the doctor had spent the hours between nine and two on the night of the murder, the case would be almost made out. But the people of Poppleton usually slept after nine o'clock, and no one had yet been found except Hubbard, who was out at the time.

The rope and the weight did not at first appear to possess much significance to him. Buckstone might have used them as cable and anchor to moor the boat, and lost them overboard. They might have been employed for another purpose, which suggested itself to the thinker. When he rose in the morning, even before the sun was up, he hastened to the house of Mr. Bangs, the deputy sheriff. The official was not up, but anything relating to the murder was enough to draw him from his bed, even in the middle of the night.

"You are up early, Mr. Birch," said the deputy sheriff, as he joined the visitor in the parlor.

"I did not sleep a wink last night," replied Dick.

"I am sorry for that."

"No doubt I shall sleep better when this business assumes a more definite shape."

"We were all a good deal surprised, Mr. Birch, when you swore that you were not with Buckstone that night."

"I know of no good reason why you should have been surprised. I can only say now, as I said then, I am not the person who was with Buckstone."

"I hope for your sake you were not. If you hadn't denied it, nobody would have thought it was not all right."

"You are entitled to the benefit of your own opinion, Mr. Bangs. So far as I appear to be implicated in anything which I deny, I am willing to wait till the truth comes out."

"That's all any of us can do."

"I intend to inquire into this matter till I get at the truth, either with or without your assistance."

“O, I am ready to do anything which will help uncover the matter.”

“That’s my business with you just now. You found the boat in which the two men went over to the island?”

“I did, as everybody knows.”

“You ascertained to whom the boat belonged.”

“Yes; it was Brown’s boat.”

“Of course you were informed that some articles were missing from the boat.”

“The painter and one fifty-six.”

“Have you found these articles?”

“No.”

“Have you looked for them?”

“Not particularly. We have looked for everything we could find.”

“Have you any idea of the use to which the rope and the weight were applied?”

“Not the least in the world.”

“Perhaps these articles, if found, might throw some light upon the subject.”

“Very true. I will search the shore again.”

“Of course you will not find them on the shore. If you please, I will assist in the search.”

The deputy sheriff looked as though he wanted to say that, if any man knew where to search for the rope and weight, Mr. Birch was the person; but he was polite enough not to say that, and it was agreed that the investigation should be commenced immediately after breakfast. Dick started for the hotel. On the way he passed the house of the town clerk. That functionary was at work in his garden, and the inquirer stopped to satisfy himself in regard to the record of the birth and death of Dr. Bilks’s baby. The official was communicative, and gave him all the information he required, verifying his statements by taking the early visitor into his office, and exhibiting the books.

Dr. Bilks either had such a case as he represented, at the

Settlement, or he had left no stone unturned to establish the apparent truth of what he asserted. Though the story was too ridiculous to be believed, Dick could not help thinking, once in a while, in the course of his investigations, that it was possible the doctor might be honest and conscientious.

Dick's relations with the cashier of the Poppleton Bank were in the highest degree pleasant and intimate. As the business man of Eugene Hungerford, Mr. Birch might make or unmake the bank. Some of the progressive and enterprising people of the Mills had already agitated the question of establishing a bank in the other village. Mr. Hungerford's agent had influence enough with his employer to induce him to favor the new institution; therefore Mr. Birch was treated with profound deference and respect by the officials of the Poppleton Bank. Dick called at the house of the cashier, after he left that of the town clerk. It was mean and low to inquire impertinently into any man's personal and private affairs, and nothing but the ends of justice could permit Dick to ask, or the cashier to answer, any questions in relation to Dr. Bilks's balance at the bank.

Dick Birch did ask, and the cashier did answer, such questions, solely in the interests of justice. The balance was between nine and ten thousand dollars. The cashier promised to inform Birch if this balance was reduced by the payment of any check greater than one thousand dollars. Dick left the cashier with the feeling that, if Sandy McGuire suddenly became a rich man, he should be promptly notified of the fact. But even now, Dick was not quite satisfied with what he had done, and he employed a smart young fellow, in whom he could place confidence, to watch Sandy McGuire, and follow him wherever he went. Having done all these things, he ate his breakfast and went down to the river. The sheriff was there, with three men whom he had employed for the occasion, and in two small boats they embarked for The Great Bell. These men were provided with grapnels, boat-hooks, eel-spears, and other apparatus, to

be used in ascertaining what was upon the bottom of the channel in the vicinity of the cliff from which Buckstone had been precipitated into the water.

Though the sheriff was the commanding presence of the occasion, Dick Birch furnished all the theories and suggestions. They were fishing for the rope and the weight, and the position and condition in which they might be found were expected to add another link in the testimony either for or against the identity of the stranger with Birch. Two men in one boat with the sheriff dragged a grapnel; Dick and another man, in the other boat, used eel-spears, with which they expected to fasten upon the rope. It was a tedious operation; and there was nothing which was in the slightest degree romantic or interesting about it. All they hoped to find was the rope and weight, and there was nothing even horrible about these articles.

“I’ve got sunthin,” said Hubbard, the fisherman, who occupied the boat with Dick.

“So have I,” replied Birch, who had too often been disappointed during the morning to be very hopeful.

“I’ve got hold of sunthin heavy,” continued Hubbard, as he tugged away at the eel-spear.

Dick hauled up a large, heavy piece of kelp at the same moment, as he had done fifty times before. It was nearly noon, and he was almost discouraged. The channel had been dragged, and there was little hope of finding anything. They were now at work directly under the cliff from which Buckstone had been thrown.

“Pull it up, and see what you have,” said Dick, as he disengaged the kelp from his spear.

“I cal’late I’ve got hold of sunthin heavier than a devil’s apron this time,” continued Hubbard, as Dick turned his attention to the operations of his companion.

“Pull away.”

“I’m a little afeard it will give way, Mr. Birch. Jest you

take that long-handled boat-hook, and kinder stidy it, when I pull. I cal'late I got hold of sunthin this time."

Dick was interested, though not very hopeful, and he thrust the boat-hook down till he grappled the object to which Hubbard had fastened with the spear.

"You've got it, Mr. Birch. I can feel it ease up when you pull. Don't yank it, Mr. Birch; pull kinder stidy. That's it! Now it gives."

"Pull away!" said Dick, beginning to be a little excited by the prospect of something, which from the feeling could not be kelp.

"Don't be in a hurry, Mr. Birch; if we lose it, we might fish all day without gittin hold on't agin. I cal'late we've got hold of sunthin this time; and don't le's lose it," said the cautious fisherman. "Stidy, now. There it comes. It's a rope as sure as you're alive!"

"Take hold of it with your hands," added Dick, when the rope came in sight.

"There's something tied to the end of it. There it comes."

"It's nothing but a stone."

The rope was drawn into the boat. There was a stone attached to it, which was taken in. As they pulled on the line, it was observed that the boat moved towards the middle of the channel, drawn in that direction by some heavier weight attached to the other end of the rope.

"There 'tis," said Hubbard, triumphantly. "I cal'late we've got the rope, if that's what you want."

"But there is something attached to the other end of it," replied Dick, as he pulled on the line.

"I cal'late there is; the fifty-six is hitched to that end. Though what in natur the stone is for, I don't know," said Hubbard. "Don't yank it, Mr. Birch; you may twitch it off. I cal'late we'd better tell the sheriff, and let him see to the rest on't."

Mr. Bangs, already satisfied by the appearances in Dick's

boat that something had transpired, ordered his men to pull in that direction.

“We have found the rope, Mr. Bangs,” said Dick.

“Have you? Are you sure it is the one?”

“It is a whale line, answering to the description of the one that was lost. We have got only one end of it; the other end seems to hang to the bottom.”

“What’s that stone for?” asked the sheriff, as his boat was hauled up alongside of the other.

“I don’t know; probably to sink this end; but let us pull it up, and ascertain what there is at the other end.”

Two men took hold of the whale line and pulled. The weight attached to the other end was very heavy. It was more than a fifty-six pound weight, and every one was intensely excited as fathom after fathom was hauled into the boat.

“I cal’late we’ve got sunthin’,” said Hubbard, who would have choked to death if he could not speak. “Stidy! stidy! don’t yank.”

The object could now be seen, and the men turned pale, and looked horrified. Even the stout-hearted sheriff wore an expression of painful anxiety upon his face, as though he wished some other person might have been called upon to perform this disagreeable duty. Birch was sick, and turned in disgust from the horrible sight.

It was horrible — it was a human body!

It was a headless trunk!

“Stop!” said Mr. Bangs. “We will not haul it into the boat. Secure it at the stern, and we will tow it to the beach.”

The men obeyed in silence, and both boats pulled to the beach. When the corpse touched upon the sand, it was dragged to the shore. The whale line had been passed around the middle of the body, and through the ring of the fifty-six, evidently so that the weight would keep the corpse in a horizontal position on the bottom of the channel.

The head was gone, and the flesh had been gnawed away by the fishes. It was a hideous object to look upon, and heart and flesh crept with horror as the eyes gazed upon it. The sheriff sent two of the men for the coroner, and covering the body with a sail from one of the boats, retired from the loathsome object, to await the arrival of the proper official.

"This appears to alter the whole aspect of the case," said Dick Birch, as they walked away from the corpse.

"Yes," replied Bangs, rather curtly.

"Do you know whose body it is?"

"Buckstone's, of course."

"It may be Goodwin's."

"In my opinion it is Buckstone's. The man who was with him the night he was killed did all this work."

"Undoubtedly."

"I hope he didn't cut the head off," added Bangs, with a look of horror and disgust.

"I hope not."

"What we have found out to-day will make it all the worse for the man who was with Buckstone."

"That is plain enough."

The sheriff glanced at Dick with a look of mingled pity and astonishment.

"I am sorry for you, Mr. Birch," said Bangs, apparently unable to conceal his thoughts any longer.

"Why for me?"

"Isn't it clear to you that the person who came down here with Buckstone helped to murder him?"

"It looks like it. And you mean to add, that you think I am the person?"

"I certainly think so."

"Do you believe, if I had known where this body was, that I would have asked you to come down here, and bring it up from the bottom before my very eyes?"

"Mr. Birch, I don't wish to say much about the matter just now; but it looks very bad. It may suit your purpose

to have this body found now. All I've got to say is, that the man who was with Buckstone helped to do the job," replied Bangs, walking away from him.

It seemed to Dick Birch, just then, that every thing he did to bring out the truth in regard to the murder more deeply involved himself. The very finding of the body by his agency was construed to his disadvantage.

The coronor came with a jury, with constables, with doctors, with witnesses. It required a whole squadron of boats to bring over the little army of interested persons, who flocked to see the loathsome object which had been dragged from its resting-place in the channel. Dr. Bilks, Dr. Hobhed, and Dr. White were summoned to view the body, and procure the medical testimony in regard to the death of the deceased. Only one of all this multitude attracted the attention of Dick Birch—Dr. Bilks. He watched him with the most intense interest. But the doctor presented nothing very noticeable in his looks and manners, except a disposition to be rather more jovial than seemed proper on such an occasion. He was a little paler than usual, though he smiled whenever he spoke, and manifested little or no feeling in the presence of the dead; but he was a doctor, and was familiar with such scenes.

The corpse was viewed by the doctors first. They looked for bruises and marks; but they found none. The head, upon which the fatal blow had been struck, was gone. The medical gentlemen were perfectly satisfied that the head had been removed with a knife, and by a person who had some knowledge of anatomy. The clothes were then examined by the sheriff and coroner. The deceased wore snuff-colored pants, and vest, and a sporting coat, with peculiar buttons. On the little finger of each hand there was a ring, one of which was identified by the clerk of the Bell River House as belonging to Mr. Buckstone. His watch was recognized by two or three witnesses, who had been brought over for the purpose.

The coat, vest, and cravat were removed, and sent up to Mary, who identified them as Mr. Buckstone's. The linen had the initials E. B. upon it. The contents of the pockets were various. A porte-monnaie and a pocket-book, both of which contained the name of the deceased, established the identity of Mr. Buckstone. But the most interesting and conclusive testimony obtained upon the headless trunk consisted of a couple of letters. They were soaked with water, but their contents were still legible after they had been dried in the sun.

The coroner's jury, having "viewed the body" in due form of law, went over to the Town Hall to hear the case, and make up their verdict, while the remains were placed in the care of an undertaker. When the inquest was opened, the doctors were first called upon for their testimony. What was purely surgical we have already given. Dr. Bilks added to his evidence some portions of the conversation which had taken place between Dick Birch and himself the preceding evening. He had advised Mr. Birch to tell the whole truth, which Mr. Birch declined to do. Mr. Birch had asked his advice in regard to his future course, and he (Dr. Bilks), having, of course, no idea that he was implicated in the murder, had advised him to leave Poppleton.

"Did Mr. Birch deny that he was the person with the deceased?" asked the coroner.

"He did, but not with so much energy as formerly," replied the doctor.

"What was your impression, derived from this interview?"

"I am not willing to give my impressions; they might injure Mr. Birch, who has been, and still is, my friend; but I told him I was afraid he was more deeply implicated than any one yet suspected."

"And you advised him to leave town — did you?" continued the coroner.

“I did; but, as I said before, I did not suspect him of complicity in the murder.”

Dick Birch was almost stunned by this evidence, so glaringly false, his real words so purposely twisted to meet the villain's ends. By this time Eugene Hungerford had arrived. He was summoned to the stand the moment he entered the room. He testified as at the examination.

“Mr. Hungerford, you were afraid Ross Kingman would kill Buckstone if he met him?”

“I was; but I had no suspicion that Buckstone was in Poppleton, then.”

“Did you mention your fears to Mr. Birch?”

“I did.”

“What did he say?”

“Nothing of any consequence.”

The letters were produced. They were directed to “Mr. Eliot Buckstone, New York City,” and one of them bore the post-mark of Poppleton; the other was from Providence. The Poppleton letter was opened and read by the coroner. The last part of it was as follows: —

IF you will marry the girl again, I will insure you five thousand dollars, and possibly you may have double that sum. Come and see me, at all events. Leave the train at Newington, and come over privately — after dark. Don't fail to come.

Yours truly,

RICHARD BIRCH.

Hungerford was shocked, stunned, overwhelmed. This letter had been taken from the pocket of the dead man by the sheriff.

“I did not write that letter, Hungerford,” said Dick, calmly, as he was called to the stand.

“You are a lawyer, sir; I need not tell you that you are not bound to criminate yourself,” said the coroner.

“You need not,” replied Dick, significantly.

“Did you write this letter?”

“I did not.”

“It bears your signature.”

“Will you let me look at it?”

It was handed to him.

“This is not my writing.”

“Did you ever write a letter to Mr. Buckstone?”

“I did.”

“More than one?”

“Only one.”

“What was it about?”

“I wrote it at Ross Kingman’s request. I threatened Buckstone with a criminal prosecution.”

“Did you look at the envelope of this letter?”

“The superscription is in my handwriting. The date in the post-mark is not legible; but I have no doubt this envelope is the one in which I sent the only letter I ever wrote to Mr. Buckstone. This is not my writing, though it looks something like it, and the paper is different from that I always use.”

Dr. Bilks gave a sudden start, as though he had thought of something forgotten or neglected. Hungerford saw him, and without signifying his intention to any one, left the hall. Dr. Bilks soon followed him.

The evidence was all heard, and the jury began to consider their verdict. The body was that of Eliot Buckstone; he had been killed by Ross Kingman. So far they had no doubt. One of the six men suggested that the verdict should include the name of Richard Birch, who aided and abetted in the murder. The others would not agree to it; the evidence did not justify such a verdict. Birch might be an accessory after the fact, for he must have aided in mutilating and concealing the body. Another intimated that Birch had gone over to the island, and induced Buckstone to meet Ross Kingman, believing that he would murder him. Birch left the hall before the verdict was made up, confident that he should be arrested within a few hours.

CHAPTER XX.

THE SHADOW AT PINE HILL.

EUGENE HUNGERFORD went to the office of Dr. Bilks when he left the town hall. Even the tremendous assaults made there upon his faith in Dick Birch had not shaken the citadel. The testimony of his friend in regard to the letter was suggestive to him, and he determined to act without delay. The look and the start of Dr. Bilks had not escaped his notice.

Dr. Bilks's office was not closed ; for he kept a boy to take care of his rooms, run of errands, and receive messages during his absence. Eugene walked in, went to the desk, and taking a half quire of paper from a shelf, proceeded to write a note to Julia ; not that he had anything to say to her, but simply for the purpose of obtaining a sheet of the paper for future use. While he was thus engaged, Dr. Bilks, who had left the town hall a moment later, entered the office.

“ Ah, Mr. Hungerford ! ” exclaimed the doctor.

“ How do you do, doctor ? I have taken the liberty to use your desk for a moment, in writing a note to my sister.”

“ Certainly ; but I am afraid you find no proper materials for writing.”

“ O, yes. Here is a whole ream of paper on this shelf,” replied Hungerford.

“ But that is very poor paper. Let me provide you with some better.”

Dr. Bilks had half a ream in his hand, which he had just

purchased. He opened the package, and insisted that his unwelcome visitor should use some of it.

"That is very good paper, doctor; but I like this better," replied Eugene, as he folded up his note, which included an extra sheet, and hastily thrust it into an envelope.

"Do me the favor to use some of this paper. It is a whim of mine; but you will indulge me," added the doctor, whose ill-concealed emotion did not escape the keen glance of the visitor.

"This paper exactly suits my purpose, doctor. I am very much obliged to you; but it is my whim to send the note just as I have written it."

Dr. Bilks would probably have said a great deal more if Parkinson had not at that moment entered the office, and interrupted the conversation.

"I've been looking for you, Mr. Hungerford," said the man. "Mrs. Hungerford sent me down to tell you that Mr. Lester, from Baltimore, had just arrived."

"Mr. Lester!" exclaimed Dr. Bilks, apparently very much annoyed at the intelligence.

"Do you know Mr. Lester, Dr. Bilks?" asked Eugene.

"I do not. I am acquainted with his son, who was in college with me, as I told you."

"I will return soon," said Eugene to the servant.

Dr. Bilks had thrown himself into a chair, and looked like a man who was discouraged — like a man who had purchased half a ream of paper, which could be of no earthly service to him.

Hungerford had accomplished his mission at the doctor's office. As he went out, he saw Sandy McGuire going in.

"Do you wish to see me, Sandy?"

"No, your honor."

"You are not ready to tell the truth yet."

"I am, faix! Sure, it's nothin but the blessed truth I heen tellin your honor from the big'nin."

Eugene left him. Sandy had not yet seen the doctor, who,

in Hungerford's opinion, would give one half of all he had in the bank for the paper on which the note to Julia had been written, and the other half to keep Sandy's tongue still.

Dick Birch was just coming out of the town hall, when Eugene joined him.

"Where are those letters, Dick?" demanded Hungerford

"The coroner has them."

"I must see him."

"Hungerford, I shall be arrested before night," said Dick, with wonderful calmness.

"Arrested!" exclaimed Eugene, to whose mind such a proceeding had not yet presented itself.

"The sheriff, the coroner, and the jury, in my opinion, think I had a hand in the murder. Hungerford, the shadow darkens over me. I am the man who cut off Buckstone's head after he was killed, and I sank the body in the channel."

"You!"

"They think so."

"Dick, there is my hand; my heart is in it. You understand me."

"I do!" exclaimed Birch, as he grasped the offered hand. "One such friend is all I ask."

Dick was more deeply moved than Hungerford had ever observed him to be before.

The coroner's jury were still engaged in discussing the verdict. Hungerford saw the sheriff, and procured the Poppleton letter. The paper was the same as that on which Eugene had just written the note to his sister. The quality, ruling, and stamp were identical, and there was room to believe that the letter to Buckstone had been written in Dr. Bilks's office. Several notes written by Mr. Birch were found. They were not written upon this paper.

In half an hour Dr. Bilks appeared again. He was apparently desperate. The case was not working right, and he had come to look after it. He heard what was said about

the paper. He laughed at it. Probably Mr. Birch had written the letter in his office; he was often there; and Mr. Birch would not deny that he had frequently written letters at his desk. If it did not look exactly like Mr. Birch's usual handwriting, it was probably because he had used a pen to which he was not accustomed. No one could say that the stained and hardly legible letter was not written by Mr. Birch.

"Mr. Sheriff," said Dr. Bilks, when he had disposed of the letter to his own satisfaction, "I came here for another purpose. I have come to acknowledge that I made a great mistake."

Everybody looked at the doctor.

"If not too late, I should like to add something to my testimony — something of the utmost importance."

The coroner was informed of the fact, and the case was reopened. Dr. Bilks was put upon the stand.

"I am obliged to leave town early in the morning, for New York. I shall return in a week. Before I go, I wish to set myself right with God and man; for I have done wrong."

People thought that the doctor was very conscientious, and wondered what could rest so heavily upon his mind.

"You wish to correct your testimony?" said the coroner.

"Not to correct it — to add to it. Mr. Birch has been my best friend in Poppleton."

Everybody knew this to be true.

"I am very grateful to him for his kindness to me. My feeling has been that I would rather die than injure him. That was my feeling when I stood on the stand. I have not told the whole truth. I confess it with shame; but it was only to save my friend from disagreeable consequences. On the night of the murder, I saw Mr. Birch, as I drove along the Point Road, with Buckstone. I have kept this back before."

"Why did you keep it back?"

“Because I preferred that Mr. Birch’s connection with Buckstone, since he denied it, should be proved by others.”

But even this strong evidence did not create much sensation. It only added another grain of testimony to what everybody believed before.

“Do you know when Mr. Birch returned from The Great Bell?”

“I do not.”

Dr. Bilks had conquered. Dick Birch was arrested, and hurried off to the Summerville jail, to the great grief and indignation of Eugene, who could not even bail him out until morning. The men of power in Poppleton were stern and inflexible, even to superstition, in the discharge of their official duties. But the people, among whom Dick had not been very popular, were prepared for this result. He was a villain of the first water now, who had been plotting to obtain half a million of Hungerford’s expected fortune. It was a righteous retribution upon him; and pious men and women went to bed that night more than ever convinced that the way of the transgressor is hard, and that the evil man shall not prosper in his way.

Eugene Hungerford went home to Pine Hill, and told the eminent merchant from Baltimore what had happened to his friend. Mr. Lester made a great many sage reflections, advised his host carefully to examine all his books and papers, assuring him that he would find some startling defalcation, and severely censured him for placing so much confidence even in his best friend.

“All men are human, Mr. Hungerford — all men are human,” said the eminent trustee, shaking his head.

“But I believe Mr. Birch is an honest man. I know he is!” protested Eugene.

“You delude yourself. You have tempted this Birch as no man ever was tempted before. It would have been strange if he had not fallen. I am afraid you are to blame. I never quite liked Mr. Birch’s manner of doing business,

When I return to Baltimore, I will send you a precise account of all the drafts I have forwarded to him and to you. In my opinion, you will yet have an action for embezzlement against him. As you grow older, you will grow wiser. You will learn to trust no man."

"But he is not charged with wronging me."

"It is all the same, Mr. Hungerford. In my opinion, he is guilty."

Eugene was out of patience with the eminent trustee, who was a cold-blooded man of business.

Julia was terribly distressed on account of Dick's misfortunes; and as she listened to Mr. Lester's comments upon him, she was sick at heart. She knew not what to believe, or what to disbelieve. Later in the evening, Mr. Lester resumed the subject, deeming it his duty to fortify the young *millionnaire* against the sin of trusting others, fully believing that Eugene was in danger of being swindled out of all he had and all he would have. He did his duty faithfully, and there was not much left of Dick Birch when he had finished his wordy harangue.

Mr. Lester had listened to all the evidence on both sides; and when Eugene ventured to suggest that Dr. Bilks was a villain, the eminent trustee warmly defended him.

The next day, Eugene, contrary to Mr. Lester's advice, and to his great disgust, bailed Dick, who was discharged from custody. Dr. Bilks had left by the morning train for New York. After dinner the eminent merchant went to sleep, and Eugene hastened down to the Port to see Dick. He found him at the hotel, rather blue, but not hopeless.

"Has anything new come out?" asked Eugene.

"Dr. Bilks drew five thousand dollars from the bank last night."

The bank opened at all hours in Poppleton.

"Of course, then, Sandy McGuire is a rich man by this time."

"No doubt of it."

“ I think we had better go and see Sandy now.”

They went ; but Sandy McGuire had left town.

He had hired one of his neighbors to convey himself and wife to Newington the evening before. Eugene sent the shrewdest man he could find in Poppleton to follow him. The messenger returned in a week with no tidings of him. When it was too late, Eugene blamed himself for not acting more decisively. Dr. Bilks had effectually cut off the only means by which his presence at Sandy's house on the night of the murder could be proved or disproved.

“ Hungerford,” said Dick, on their return from the settlement, “ Dr. Bilks is too great a villain for me. I have been weak. I did not strike when I should have struck ; and when I struck, I did not strike hard enough.”

“ Never mind, Dick ; it will all come out right.”

“ I have never doubted that ; but for the present I stand in a very bad situation. Everything I have done thus far has made the doctor stronger, and me weaker.”

“ By no means, Dick. Dr. Bilks will yet hang himself.”

“ I do not doubt it, Hungerford. I have followed these developments far enough to know their bearing. Can you tell me of what I am accused ?”

“ Simply of being an accessory after the fact.”

“ But what is the theory in men's minds ? What motives do they attribute to me ?”

“ I have heard all that has been urged against you. The theory is, that you went with Buckstone to the island to procure the re-marriage of Mary and himself. You are a justice of the peace. Some say you went to marry the parties if Mary consented.”

“ That is a new idea to me.”

“ It is a mere supposition. While you were there, Buckstone was killed. Some think you were in the confidence of Ross, and helped do the deed.”

“ Then, of course, if I wanted to kill him, my designs upon Julia and her half million fall to the ground.”

“Only a few take this view; and these the most ignorant and unreflecting. The general opinion is, that you sunk the body to conceal the crime of Ross, and without his knowledge. The justice who issued the warrant for your arrest takes this view.”

“Including the diabolical idea that I chopped off the head of the dead man,” added Birch, with a shudder.

“No one pretends to explain that.”

“I might have done all the rest, in a good cause, but I couldn't have done that. It makes me sick to think of it.”

“Then don't think of it.”

“What shall be done, Hungerford?”

“I hardly know. We can do nothing but wait. If you feel uncomfortable here, you can leave town for a week. The examination cannot take place till Dr. Bilks returns.”

“I will not leave town. I will not shrink. I shall show myself every day to the people.”

“Then attend to business as usual. Come up to Pine Hill ——”

“No, Hungerford!”

“Attend to my affairs as usual. I shall build two more houses at the Port.”

Dick would not dodge, even under the pressure to which he was subjected. Nothing could be done but wait the progress of events; and he devoted himself to the model houses, and other operations of Eugene.

Dr. Bilks was absent a week. On the day before his return, Mr. Lester departed, thus depriving himself of the pleasure of meeting the man who loved justice better than he loved his friend; for this was the flourish with which Mr. Lester described him. During this week, Eugene had devoted himself principally to his guest, driving him to all the towns within ten miles of Poppleton, showing him the factories, the ship yards, and the salt works, and taking him in the large yacht as far out to sea as Mr. Lester's susceptible stomach would permit.

The eminent trustee was pleased with his visit, and delighted with the Hungerford family. It is true he feared that Eugene was not quite so shrewd as he should be to possess such immense wealth. He was too sentimental; too willing to believe that human nature was not corrupt and wholly irreclaimable; too much disposed to trust men who assumed to be his friends. But the wise and worldly old gentleman was hopeful, and believed that he would put away childish things in due time. He counselled him to shake off "that Birch," whom the whole town, with one voice, condemned as a worthless, designing fellow. He saw no objection now to Eugene's helping him out of his troubles, and even being his friend, until he could decently get rid of him.

But the one thing which troubled Mr. Lester more than all others, more than even his confiding friendship for "that Birch," was his relation to Mary Kingman. The solid man of Baltimore was terribly severe upon this proposed connection; it was so disgraceful that he could not tolerate it. He pitied the poor girl; he would give her money, get her a situation; do anything for her, except make her his wife.

Eugene heard all this with what patience he could command, and did not weep when the old gentleman, with many stately compliments, departed for Baltimore. Mr. Lester was an old-fashioned man of the world. He never went against the popular current; he never stood by his friends after the rest of the world had deserted them; and he never made war upon the people's prejudices. He was gone, and Eugene escaped his daily lecture on worldly wisdom.

All that had been said about Mary by Mr. Lester, by Mrs. Hungerford and Julia, and by Dick Birch, had not cured Eugene of his love. The vision which had haunted his imagination for long years was still present in his mind, and not a day, hardly an hour, passed in which he did not think of her. He could not deny, even to himself, that she was not what she had been; but she was not contaminated, she was not deprived of any virtue he had prized; she was still

an angel. She had bestowed on another the caresses which should have been only his; for this he was grieved — for this only. But she was still Mary, still the being he had loved; and even with the knowledge that she had been in other arms than his own, she was more to him than any other could be.

He had seen her but once since the examination of her brother — on the afternoon of that day. He had talked only commonplaces then. He said nothing of his love, nothing of his intentions. The conversation related mostly to Ross and his trial. Julia had visited her several times; on the last occasion she had taken a violent cold, and on the day before Mr. Lester's departure, she had been confined to her room, threatened with a fever. Eugene heard from Mary often, therefore; for during his guest's stay, he had no opportunity to repeat his own visit.

Julia grew worse. Her mother began to be alarmed about her, and sent for Dr. White, a young practitioner, who had charge of Dr. Bilks's patients during his absence. Her symptoms did not yield to the usual remedies, and Mrs. Hungerford was not satisfied with the physician. On the morning after Mr. Lester's departure, the indications were still less hopeful. Julia had been delirious during the night, and in the morning she was stupid and wandering in her mind.

"We must have another physician, Eugene," said Mrs. Hungerford, at breakfast time. "Dr. White does not understand the case."

"Certainly, mother; but whom shall we have?"

"Could you get Dr. Hobhed?"

"I will try."

Eugene hastened to the dilapidated mansion of the author of the "Chemical Theory." He was in his library, and the visitor was shown into the apartment.

"Good morning, Dr. Hobhed," said Eugene.

The philosopher did not raise his head from his book. Eugene spoke again, and touched his shoulder.

“O, Mr. Hungerford!” said he, rather vacantly. “I am glad you have come. Sit down, and I will explain the chemical theory to you.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hobhed. My sister is very sick.”

“You are aware that certain sea shells have been found in coal mines ——”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hobhed,” interrupted Eugene. “Will you go and see my sister?”

“These sea shells prove that the salt water ——”

“I cannot stay to listen to your theory now. My sister is very sick.”

“Salt water is the principle from which all minerals have been created.”

“Will you go and see my sister?”

“All minerals exist in salt water. Gold and silver can be extracted from salt water, when ——”

Eugene interrupted him again. It was impossible to get an idea into his head outside of the “chemical theory,” and the visitor departed. There was no other physician at the Port, and Eugene returned to Pine Hill. There were two doctors at the Mills, and while they were considering which of them should be called, Dr. Bilks drove up to the door. It was evident that he had just come from the railroad station.

“Shall we have Dr. Bilks?” asked Eugene of his mother.

“Certainly; he is a very skilful physician,” replied Mrs. Hungerford, all of whose doubts seemed now to be removed.

“I believe he is a villain.”

“All we want is his medical skill.”

“As you please, mother.”

Dr. Bilks had already been shown to the library; and when Eugene appeared, he was warmly greeted by the doctor, as though nothing had occurred to mar the harmony of their relations.

“I called up to see you for a moment, before I go to the office. I have just returned from New York. I am very

sorry not to have met your friend Mr. Lester," said the doctor, as volubly as ever.

"I am glad you called, Dr. Bilks," replied Eugene, rather coldly.

"I merely came up to ask for our friend Mr. Birch. I have done nothing but think of him ever since I left Poppleton. How is he?"

"He is as well as usual."

"I suppose he will not even look at me, after what has happened; but I assure you Mr. Birch is still dear to me as a friend."

"Julia is very sick. I am glad you have come on her account. My mother is not satisfied with Dr. White."

"Miss Hungerford sick! I am sorry for that—very sorry;" and with the utmost tenderness he asked the particulars of her illness, which Eugene gave him.

"I am afraid it is too late to break up the fever. I will see her."

Dr. Bilks went to Julia's chamber. We must do him the justice to say that nothing could be more tender, delicate, and judicious, than his conduct in the sick room. He examined his patient with the nicest care; but he was compelled to inform Mrs. Hungerford that nothing could prevent her daughter from having a regular run of typhoid fever. More than this, he was magnanimous towards Dr. White; for, whether he knew anything about it or not, he assured her that the medical attendant had done all that any physician could do. His treatment had been proper and judicious; but Julia's health had been impaired by her travel in Europe, and by the excitement in which she had lived since her return.

Julia was very sick; and while Dr. Bilks promised well, he had some doubts in regard to the result. If Mrs. Hungerford was not satisfied, he hoped she would call in other medical advice. Eugene was not satisfied, and the two doctors from the Mills came, in the afternoon, to consult with

Dr. Bilks. All that had been done was approved, and the patient's condition, though dangerous, was not critical.

Pine Hill was filled with anxiety. Gloomy forebodings hung over the house. Mrs. Hungerford wept over her fair daughter, prostrate before her, perhaps never again to rise, and mother and brother prayed that God would avert the threatened blow.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE DEMIGOD OF PINE HILL.

DR. BILKS spent most of the day and all the night at Pine Hill. His presence inspired Mrs. Hungerford with courage and fortitude. He was regarded as a very skilful physician in Poppleton, and the heart distressed by doubts and fears clings to such a man, when the loved one lies low on the bed of disease and suffering, with a tenacity which no other relation can call forth. The physician seems to hold the issues of life and death in his hands. His mistake or his neglect is fatal.

Mrs. Hungerford was a religious woman; but while she trusted in God, she leaned also on the human arm of the physician. With God's blessing, he might save her daughter from the yawning tomb. Whether by choice or accident he had come to the sick bed of Julia, he was the mother's only earthly hope; he was the greatest among men in those hours of gloom and despondency; he was the appointed minister of God to ward off the shaft of death. Everything depended upon him. Ross Kingman, Mary, and Dick Birch were forgotten in the all-absorbing solicitude with which the fond mother hung over the sick daughter.

Eugene shared his mother's feeling. Trifling and insignificant now appeared the issues which had so deeply moved him. If he could not entirely forget that Dr. Bilks was tricky and politic, — if he could not entirely banish from his mind the belief, which a few days before he had entertained, that the physician was a villain, conspiring against the repu-

tation and happiness of his best friend, — if he could not forget these things, he forgave them, and it was painful to think of them. In the hands of Dr. Bilks was the precious life of Julia, and it seemed like sacrilege to doubt or suspect him.

Dick Birch went to Pine Hill again. It was like a tomb to him. He loved Julia; and for her sake he was content to let the shadows hang over himself. Even he, the wronged one, could forget that the doctor was a villain. Though he would have preferred that some other physician should attend the sick one in her perilous condition, he accepted the fact as he found it, and confided in Dr. Bilks's skill and devotion, as others did.

A week wore slowly and painfully away, not in days or hours, but in moments; for each instant was burdened with its own doubts and fears. Dr. Bilks went to Pine Hill half a dozen times a day, and spent all his nights there. He seemed never to tire, never to need the boon of slumber. He had a room next to Julia's, and hardly an hour passed without a visit to her bedside. He watched her as a mother watches her dying infant. He bent over her, and listened to her labored breathing, careful to detect the first symptoms of change for better or worse.

In the library and the drawing-room he never spoke of the events attending the murder; they seemed to be forgotten by all. As he crept with soft step to the sick room, it would have been difficult to believe that he was not an angel of mercy to that household; that a thought of cunning or malice ever crossed his mind. Mrs. Hungerford spoke kindly, tenderly of him, and even Eugene and Dick could not help calling to mind that nothing had been absolutely proved against the doctor.

Julia's fever reached its crisis. She was liable to pass away at any moment, the doctor said. Those in the house hardly dared to breathe, hardly dared to move, lest a rude current or a grating sound should sever from the body the

spirit that seemed only to be hesitating in its flight. Dr. Bilks sat by the bedside. The all-absorbing solicitude of the family was fully shared by him. He gave the medicines and restoratives with his own hand. Other patients, farther removed from the waiting tomb, were forgotten and neglected. All his thought and all his time, all his study and all his anxiety, were devoted to the fair patient whose loving soul seemed to be floating between heaven and earth, and knowing not whether to flee away to the mansions of the blessed, or linger yet longer with the loved ones below.

Mrs. Hungerford occasionally glanced at the doctor, to catch any expression of despondency or hope that might gather on his face. Though her frame was worn out with watching and care, she could not leave the room. Though the doctor had counselled her, as much for the sick one's sake as for her own, to take the rest she needed, it was impossible for her to be absent even for an hour. Eugene was in the library, thinking only of Julia. Vain and unsatisfying were all worldly hopes; his treasures were only dross. Dick came to Pine Hill often, for he, too, was struggling with emotions he could not conceal. He came not as a comforter; he needed comfort himself; but it was a solace to both to think of her and to speak of her.

While Julia lay in this critical condition, Mary Kingman, forgetting her own wrongs and her own woes, visited the silent mansion. The sick one had been her friend, as no other of her sex had been. She begged the privilege of doing what she might at the bed of Julia. She was permitted to enter the chamber, for the sufferer had often spoken of her in her lucid moments, and expressed much anxiety for her future welfare. A smile on the pale face of the sick girl assured Mrs. Hungerford that her visitor's presence was agreeable to her; and from that time Mary became a necessity in the sick room.

On one of these days, when a breath would have wafted the spirit of Julia from its earthly tabernacle, was appointed

the examination of Richard Birch as accessory, after the fact, to the murder of Buckstone; but there was influence enough to postpone it, and hardly a thought was bestowed upon the matter.

A few more days dragged heavily away, and Dr. Bilks began to speak hesitatingly, and with many qualifications, words of meagre hope; then more decidedly, but still doubtfully. Hardly sleeping an hour at a time, he continued his untiring vigil at the couch of the fair patient. Still mother and brother, friends and servants, watched his countenance, burdened with anxiety, for tidings of weal or woe. Sunday came, and Julia had lain a fortnight upon her bed, which had for many days seemed like the triumphal car upon which the Christian conqueror was to be borne to the courts above to receive her crown immortal. On this day passed away the shadow which had enveloped Pine Hill. Dr. Bilks, no longer doubtful and hesitating, declared that the crisis had been safely passed. Julia was out of danger, and there was nothing to dread but the possible relapse incident to the malady. The pale and haggard ones, who day and night had crept like spectres through the lofty rooms of the Pine Hill mansion, smiled upon each other; and from those hearts which now began to beat again went up a pæan of thanksgiving and praise to Him who had mercifully rolled away the shadow.

Mrs. Hungerford slept now, and Mary Kingman kept vigil at the bedside of the sufferer. The human sympathy which the sad condition of poor Mary had kindled in the heart of the invalid was even more than "twice blessed," for the kindness and devotion of the nurse were too real to be undervalued. No selfish thought, no calculating policy, entered into the mind of Mary. Julia had come to her when all others forsook her; this was her reflection; and she would gladly wear out her feeble frame in the service of such a friend. She did not see Eugene at all, except as she met him occasionally in the halls while in the discharge of her

duties; and then she lingered only long enough to speak a word of Julia.

The invalid continued to improve. She needed nothing now but patient, skilful nursing. Dr. Bilks still devoted his most earnest attention to the patient, though he spent less time in her presence. He not only prescribed costly wines, rare grapes, and other delicacies, but he procured them himself. The sweetest flowers that grew in the greenhouses near the great cities were every day placed in her chamber by his hand. There was nothing which ingenious thought could devise that was not done by him to promote her convalescence. And all this time Dick Birch could not even enter the room of the invalid. As she grew better his visits at Pine Hill became less frequent, and when she was able to leave her room they ceased altogether.

The days of the sunny summer had come. Dr. Bilks directed that his patient should ride out, and he went with her every day. He still spoke of the dreaded relapse, and watched the effect of the gentle exercise he ordered. But no relapse came; and that it did not come was ascribed to the skill and watchful care of the devoted physician. There was none in the house who did not believe that Dr. Bilks was the savior of Julia Hungerford; that if he had been less skilful or less devoted, she could not then have been numbered among the living. Dr. Bilks therefore was not only an honored guest at Pine Hill, but he was regarded with a kind of reverence akin to worship.

Julia herself shared the common feeling. What was outside of her own knowledge and experience was faithfully and enthusiastically delineated by her mother, to whom there was no person in existence, out of her own family, like Dr. Bilks. It would have been impossible for Julia, thoughtful, kind-hearted as she was, to be unmoved by the attentions bestowed upon her by the physician. He seemed to live for her recovery; to be studying all the time how he could cast a ray of sunlight across her path. In her chamber there

was always something to remind her of his devotion — a rare bouquet, a cluster of grapes, a toy, a game, the newest book, the finest engraving. And all these things were only the machinery of the physician's art; only devices to cheat Death of his intended victim; only offerings on the altar of Hygeia; so they were interpreted by those who blessed the doctor for the boon of that precious life.

Julia came down into the drawing-room; she resumed her place in the family, and everything went on as before the shadow dropped down upon Pine Hill. Mary Kingman had been the chamber companion of the invalid: she could not be her drawing-room companion. She declined, not in so many words, but by her actions, to join the family group gathered once more in the brilliant apartment. She felt that she did not belong there. She had come to heal the sick; she had no part or lot in the joys of that reunited household; only in their sorrows. Her mission was done.

"Julia, I must leave you to-day," said she, on the morning of the day after that on which the invalid had spent an hour in the drawing-room.

"Why must you leave me?"

"I think you do not need me any longer."

"I shall always need you, Mary."

"I have been away a month now."

"But you are not needed at home. Your father is better."

"I feel that I ought not to stay any longer, unless you need me."

"I am not so selfish as to say that I absolutely need you, Mary. I don't know what mother would have done without you. She was almost worn out. You have spent your days and nights over me when I could not help myself. I am sure I shall miss you very much if you go."

"You sleep well nights now, and I do not think I am really required."

"I should be very glad to have you stay."

"I know you would, Julia."

“Mary, why didn’t you come down into the drawing-room yesterday?” asked Julia. “Eugene inquired for you.”

Mary’s pale face flushed a little, and she was embarrassed. Her look was the key to her conduct.

“I could not,” she replied, with some hesitation, for she fully intended to avoid the topic to which Julia’s remark must inevitably lead.

“Why not?”

“It was hardly proper for me to do so.”

“Why, Mary?”

“You will not ask me, Julia, to say anything more about it,” pleaded Mary.

“After all you have done for me, — after the sleepless nights you have spent at my bedside, — I think you ought to regard me as your friend, Mary.”

“I do.”

“But you will not even permit me to be grateful to you. Why do you wish to go?”

“I think it best,” stammered Mary. “I must go; for your sake, if not for my own.”

“Not for my sake, Mary.”

“You do not know what your brother said to me yesterday,” added Mary, with averted eyes.

“I can guess.”

“He asked me to be his wife.”

“Well, what if he did?” said Julia, with a smile. “He loves you.”

“Think what I am, Julia.”

“Pray don’t repeat that. Mary, do you love Eugene?”

“I will not answer. If I did love him, that would be the strongest reason why I should avoid him — why I should refuse to let him contaminate himself by contact with me.”

“Mary, I will not forgive you if you talk so.”

“But you understand what I mean. Are you willing that your brother should become the husband of such as I am?”

"I am willing," replied Julia, firmly.

"You cannot mean it!"

"I do mean it. If you had asked me the question before I was sick, I might have answered it differently."

"Your first thought was the truest. I have been with you so much, that perhaps you have become reconciled to the idea, for Eugene says he told you of it before."

"He did; and, to be candid, both my mother and myself objected."

"With good reason."

"I know that Eugene never will be happy without you."

"This is the reason why you have withdrawn your objection."

Julia's sickness had chastened her spirit. Worldly distinctions were just now less clearly defined in her mind. What had seemed intolerable before was now considered upon its own merits. Besides, Julia and her mother had both been subjected to a powerful influence — that of Dr. Bilks.

"Mary, my objections were unreasonable. I am thankful they are removed," continued Julia. "I understood the reason why you would not visit the drawing-room yesterday. Now, let us be friends; let me tell you exactly how we stand. Your being here during my sickness has nothing whatever to do with our present views. By the way, Mary, do you know that Dr. Bilks is one of your best friends?"

"He was very kind to me."

"But he thinks there is no person in the world like you. He says you are an angel, in spirit and in person. Think of that."

"It isn't worth thinking of. Perhaps I have not so high a regard for Dr. Bilks's opinion as you have."

Julia blushed.

"He speaks as your friend. I believe, if it were not for crossing Eugene's path, he would make love to you himself."

“There is no danger,” replied Mary, with a faint smile.
“He seems to be already very well occupied.”

Julia blushed again.

“You are getting quite facetious, Mary. But we were speaking of your case, not mine.”

“Dr. Bilks is little likely to be turned aside from his present hope.”

“Do you think he looks upon me in any other view than that of a patient — an interesting patient, if you please?”

“Certainly I do; and I am only sorry that he has not a prettier name to give you. If you don’t love him, Julia, it is time for you to begin to demonstrate in that direction.”

“Love him! I hadn’t thought of such a thing,” protested Julia.

“It certainly lies between him and Mr. Birch.”

“Poor Dick!” said Julia. “I would give the world to see him out of his troubles. After what he said in court, I hardly dare to look at him — indeed, I haven’t had the opportunity, for he never comes to Pine Hill now. Poor fellow! I am sorry for him! But we are away from the subject; I was speaking of you and Eugene. The doctor has converted my mother.”

“Converted her?”

“When Dr. Bilks came to see me, day before yesterday, we had a long talk about Eugene and yourself. My brother has made no secret of his intention. He had even told Dr. Bilks and Dick of it a month ago. Mother did not like it, as I said; but the doctor argued the matter so prettily, that she even became anxious to have the marriage take place. So, you see, it is a settled thing.”

“I think not, Julia.”

“If you consent, it is.”

“I do not consent.”

“Why should you be obstinate? Do you love Eugene?”

“I will not permit him to disgrace himself.”

“Disgrace!” exclaimed Julia, petulantly. “If his friends do not object, why should you?”

“You have been argued into this position — converted to it. I am much obliged to Dr. Bilks for the trouble he has taken on my account; but I wish he had not spoken. Dr. Bilks is a demigod at Pine Hill now.”

“But, Mary, Eugene loves you; he will be miserable without you.”

The poor girl trembled with emotion. She knew what a joy it would be to be taken to the heart of him she had so long loved; to be plucked from the shame and disgrace to which she had been innocently doomed, and folded in the loving arms of one who would cherish only her. But while she would be raised up from immeasurable depths, he would be brought down; and she felt that it would be mean and selfish in her to consent to the base equilibrium, though his descent were infinitely less than her elevation. It was a trying ordeal: she would not consent.

Julia reasoned with all the eloquence of gratitude and friendship, with all the force of a strong will and a woman's logic. Dr. Bilks, often quoted, declared that Mary was an angel; that she was more beautiful in person, more gifted in mind, more varied in accomplishments, but, above all, more richly endowed in the higher graces of a lofty soul and a loving heart, than any other woman — “present company excepted” — whom he had ever met; and a physician is always in society, and sees women as they are. Dr. Bilks was very kind to say all this, but Mary was not especially pleased with it. It was too fulsome, and looked like a special plea. It was not surprising that Mrs. Hungerford and Julia should be converted by arguments so well put, particularly as they came from the mouth of the demigod of Pine Hill; but the fact that any argument at all was needed to remove acknowledged objections, was the best reason that Mary could think of for withholding her consent.

Dr. Bilks came upon his morning professional visit — all

his visits were regarded as professional. Julia endeavored to persuade her friend to accompany her to the drawing-room, but Mary could not be prevailed upon even to encounter the earnest gaze of Eugene, after the offer he had made. She had never walked in the Pine Hill grounds — had seen them only from the window. While the family were in the drawing-room, she would have an opportunity to walk an hour, and explore the premises. She went out at the side door, so that her exit could not be observed, and perambulated the grounds down to the river, admired the fine taste displayed, and enjoyed the cool breeze which fanned her cheek, as she sat in the elevated summer-house. On her return, when the hour had nearly expired, to her great annoyance she discovered Eugene approaching. Hoping he had not seen her, she stepped into an arbor concealed in a group of pines.

“Why do you shun me, Mary?” said Eugene, as he presented himself before her.

He had seen her; he had come out to find her, when he learned that she was not in the house.

“After what you said to me yesterday, it is better that I should avoid you, Mr. Hungerford,” she replied, hardly able to speak, so violent was the emotion that agitated her.

“Have I become offensive to you?”

“You know it is not that.”

“Why should you avoid me? Mary, I have not ceased to love you since we went to school together.”

“Do not speak of those things, Mr. Hungerford.”

“Mary, I love you! It is treason to my own heart to be silent.”

“Let me go, now.”

“Go, if you will, Mary; but I shall love you the same.”

She looked up into his face. It was more eloquent than his words. The expression of love which lighted up his noble countenance seemed to chain her to the spot. Her will was to go, but she could not. In his presence she was powerless.

“ Did you ever love me, Mary? ” he asked.

“ I must not answer. ”

“ You did ; if it were not so, you would answer me. ”

“ I did love you, Mr. Hungerford ; but that was when we were children. ”

“ Have you ceased to love me? ”

“ I was the wife of another — I believed I was — I had no right then to think of you. ”

“ Did you love your husband? ” he asked, solemnly.

“ If I answer you, it is only to excuse my own rashness and folly. If I did not love him when we were married, I knew that his devotion would soon conquer what was in my heart. ”

“ What? ”

“ I did love you — once ; I will not deny it. When I stood on the shore without a friend in the world, I yielded to the importunity of Mr. Buckstone. I could not have done so, if I had not been so poor and helpless ; if I had had even my father’s poor roof to cover me. You know it all, Mr. Hungerford. ”

“ I knew it all before. I surmised it all — I believed it all. If you loved me, Mary, why did you accept him? ”

“ I endeavored to banish the feeling from my heart ; I thought I had done so. ”

“ Why did you try to banish it? ”

“ Because it was hopeless. ”

“ Was it hopeless? ”

“ I believed it was. When I heard you spoken of as the wealthiest man in this part of the country, I did not despair. It was only when you were cold to me, when you told me we could be only *friends*, that my heart gave up its guest. I did not blame you. I was not a fit mate for one like you. I was not then ; still less am I now. ”

Mary wept.

“ I did not say we could be only friends, Mary. ”

“ That was what you meant, ” sobbed she.

“Far from it.”

“I thought so. This, and being driven from my father’s house, made me listen to Mr. Buckstone. He loved me — at first; at least, I supposed he did.”

“Mary, I am the author of all your miseries and misfortunes.”

“O, no, Mr. Hungerford!”

“I am; if I had spoken the thought that was in my heart, all this could not have happened. Let me atone for my fault by making you mine now.”

“Never, Mr. Hungerford! I should despise myself if I could be so selfish. You know what I am,” said she, bitterly.

“Mary, I love you still.”

“Nay, you cannot love me now.”

“With all my soul. I could have wished that nothing had come between you and me; but I still love you. Why should we be separated?”

“I can hear no more, Mr. Hungerford;” and she started to leave the arbor.

“Do you hate me now because I did not speak when I should have spoken?”

“I never blamed you for turning away from me when your position in society was so changed.”

“It was not changed, Mary. I ask nothing now. Perhaps it was wrong for me to speak of these things at the present time, but my heart would not be silent.”

“Mr. Hungerford, this subject is painful to me. May I ask you not to speak of it again?”

“Never?”

“After my brother’s trial, I will give you a final answer.”

“I am satisfied, Mary.”

They walked back to the house together; and that afternoon Mary returned to The Great Bell.

CHAPTER XXII.

DICK BIRCH'S SUGGESTION.

“EUGENE, why doesn't Dick Birch come here any now?” asked Julia, on the afternoon of Mary's departure.

“He was here a dozen times a day when you were sickest.”

“He doesn't come at all now.”

“Do you wish to see him, Julia?”

“Certainly I wish to see him. Dick was one of my best friends.”

“He is still.”

“He hasn't even called upon me since I got better.”

“He explained himself to you the night before the examination of Ross Kingman.”

“You had some suspicions of him.”

“They were all removed the next day, Julia.”

“Why need he have said what he did about me in the court-room? It was town talk for a month.”

“He was under oath, and it was dragged out of him; but he didn't say a word that betrayed a thought of yours, Julia.”

“There was not a thought of mine that he could betray,” said she, with some spirit. “I always liked Dick very well; but if he had any thoughts relating to me, he ought to have kept them to himself.”

“Dick is honest. He keeps back nothing.”

“I do not know that I blame him, if he was obliged to

say what he did in the court; but it has placed me in a very awkward position. I could not walk on the same side of the street with him without exciting remark."

"For this reason Dick has kept away from you, refusing even to see you."

"Do you think he wants to see me?"

"Of course he does."

"Why is he so fearful, then, of what people will say?"

"He is not, on his own account; only on yours."

"He is very considerate," replied Julia, rather ironically.

"He has too much regard for you even to subject you to any annoyance. For other reasons, too, he would keep away from you at the present time. He is to be examined to-morrow."

"Eugene, can it be possible that we have been deceived in Dick?" asked Julia, with a look of painful anxiety on her pale face.

"No, it is not possible. I can never doubt Dick again. If the charge against him is proved to my satisfaction, I must believe it."

"The evidence is very strong — is it not?"

"Yes, that cannot be denied. Just now, it is a question of veracity between Dick and Dr. Bilks, so far as we are concerned. If you believe one, you cannot believe the other. The doctor has sworn that he saw Dick on the Point Road that night; and Dick has sworn that he was at home, and in his own room."

"What do you think, Eugene?"

"I do not know what to think, Julia. Since you have been sick, I have hardly given the matter a moment's reflection. I have hoped that, by some means, both their statements might be reconciled; but this is not possible."

"Perhaps it may be yet; for I cannot believe that either of them would perjure himself."

"One thing is evident, Julia: either Dr. Bilks or Dick Birch is a most consummate scoundrel."

“It would be terrible to believe that either was such. I cannot think that Dr. Bilks would be so base, so vile, as to swear falsely.”

“Can you believe that Dick would be?” asked Eugene, warmly.

“I cannot; but the evidence is very strong against him, and there is none at all against the doctor.”

“If Dr. Bilks can explain where he was on the night of the murder, and show me how the letter found upon Buckstone’s body happened to be written on his paper, I could not reasonably doubt his truthfulness.”

“He says Dick wrote the letter in his office; and he explains where he was that night.”

“So he does; but when we want Sandy McGuire and his wife, his two witnesses, they are gone. The doctor drew five thousand dollars about this time, which, no doubt, went into Sandy’s pocket; for that is the sum I offered the wretch for telling the truth.”

“Perhaps he can explain all this.”

“Until he does, I shall have my doubts.”

“Think what the doctor has done for me!” exclaimed Julia.

“I do think of it; and I am as grateful to him as you can be, Julia; but justice must be blind.”

“Poor Dick! I am afraid——”

“Don’t condemn Dick,” interposed Eugene. “He has been at work on this case from the beginning. The truth will come out in the end; and I am willing to wait, without prejudice to either.”

Eugene was disposed to be impartial between his two friends. Since Dr. Bilks had become the demigod of Pine Hill, it was as painful to doubt one as the other. To the doctor he owed his sister’s life; to Dick, the obligations of years of friendship. Who could decide between two men having such claims?

At the appointed time on the following morning, Eugene

drove Dick over to Summerville. They paid a visit to Ross Kingman, in the jail, as they had often done before during his weary confinement. The prisoner was still comfortable and hopeful. He had ceased to believe that Birch was the person he had seen with Buckstone; for Dick's denial of the fact was enough for him.

The examination commenced. Dick, with the assistance of Mr. Darling, conducted his own defence. Much of the testimony was the same that had been presented at the examination of Ross; but there were many new faces in the court-room. Hubbard swore that he believed the person he had seen with Buckstone was Mr. Birch. Dr. Bilks swore positively that the person was Mr. Birch. Then Dick opened his battery on the doctor, and dragged out the whole story about "Dr. Bilks's baby" again; but the witness was easy and confident this time.

"Dr. Bilks, have you seen Sandy McGuire since you visited him on the day of Ross Kingman's examination?" asked Dick.

"I have, several times."

"When did you see him last?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Where is he now?"

"Here, your abnor!" shouted Sandy, from the crowd, to the great amusement of the court and the audience,

"My patient is also here," added the doctor, blandly.

"Have you paid this man any money?"

"Divil a cint!" shouted Sandy, which called forth a reproof from the officers; and Sandy was compelled to repress himself.

"I have not," replied Dr. Bilks.

"Did McGuire visit you on the day Buckstone's body was found?"

"He did."

"Did you draw any money from the bank that day?"

"I did; five thousand dollars."

“What did you do with this money?”

“Paid this note with it,” replied Dr. Bilks, taking from his pocket-book a note from which the signature had been torn off.

The document was examined, and Dick felt that one of his strong points was slipping away from him.

“Is this note in your usual handwriting?”

“It is.”

“Where did you pay it?”

“In New York.”

It would be impossible to make any one believe that the doctor had not drawn the five thousand dollars from the bank for the purpose of paying his note in New York. The witness appeared to so much better advantage at this time than on the former occasion, that what he had lost then he more than regained now.

Experts were put upon the stand to testify in relation to the letter found upon the body of Buckstone. They pointed out in what respect it differed from Dick's usual handwriting, and in what it resembled that of the doctor. They were satisfied that the body of the letter, and the superscription on the envelope, were written by different persons; but with all the points of difference, and all the points of resemblance, they were not sufficiently confident that the important letter was written either by Dick or by Dr. Bilks to establish anything. The evidence of the experts only created a doubt in the minds of the magistrate and the people; and partisans on both sides could ascribe the writing to whom they pleased. Nothing was settled.

The only thing that remained for the accused to do was to rebut the evidence of Dr. Bilks, if he could. The testimony of Sandy McGuire and the mother of “Dr. Bilks's baby” had not yet been introduced — it was not relevant; but Dick called both of them, and examined them at great length. Sandy knew just a few facts, and to these he testified; but he was utterly oblivious of everything else. Either he was

more devoted to the simple truth now than ever before, or he had been carefully trained to perform the part he acted so well. There were some discrepancies in his evidence, but they were slight. The mother of the baby was equally wise and prudent. What she knew was insignificant compared with what she did not know. She had an astonishingly bad memory of collateral facts. She had been unfortunate, she said; and she could not remember the name of the father of "Dr. Bilks's baby" at first; and the magistrate would not permit Dick to press the matter.

Though Sandy and this woman were hardly regarded as credible witnesses, they said nothing that absolutely injured Dr. Bilks. The magistrate — not the one who had occupied the bench at the examination of Ross Kingman — proceeded to review the testimony. It had been proved that Mr. Birch was with Buckstone just before the murder; but there was not a particle of evidence to show that he had been with him at the time of the murder, or that he concealed the body after the murder. Mr. Birch had desired to procure the re-marriage of the deceased with Mary Kingman. He had no motive in desiring the death of Buckstone, and no motive for concealing the body. If he had any selfish views, they would have been promoted by the living Buckstone, rather than by his death.

It was at least doubtful whether Mr. Birch wrote the letter found upon the body of the murdered man. If he did, it proved nothing except what was already granted. Dr. Bilks was not under examination, and the rebutting testimony of the doubtful witnesses need not be considered. So far as the doctor's testimony was material, it was amply supported by the evidence of Hubbard, and the acknowledgments of Ross Kingman. There could be no doubt that Buckstone was accompanied to the island by a man. Granting that this man was Mr. Birch, was it proved that he mutilated and concealed the body, or that he even knew of the murder? Buckstone went eighty rods from the spot where he

was seen with Mr. Birch, before he was killed. The accused may have crossed the channel at this time, landed where the boat was found, with his handkerchief and cigar.

On the morning after the murder, Mr. Birch appeared as usual, according to the testimony of Mr. Hungerford and Dr. Bilks. There was nothing unusual in his manner. He had always maintained a high character, and it was difficult to believe that such a man would resort to a measure so revolting as severing the head from a corpse, in order to conceal the crime of one in whom he appeared to have no especial interest. Why the head was removed does not appear, for all the papers, jewelry, and other articles, remained upon the body, and enabled the finders to identify it. The head would hardly have added any strength to the proof of identity. There was not a particle of evidence to show that Mr. Birch was present on the island, even at the time of the murder; and "*the prisoner is discharged.*"

The people generally were not satisfied with this decision. If Mr. Birch had not sunk the body, who had? Some thought the magistrate was unwilling to expose a brother lawyer to trial on such a charge; others, that he had eaten too many good dinners with Dick Birch and Mr. Hungerford; and still others, that he had been bribed to give this decision. If the result was not what was expected, — and it certainly was not, — it is more probable that the magistrate used his common sense, his knowledge of human nature, as well as the evidence spoken by witnesses. Whether he was right or wrong, the sequel will show to the satisfaction of the reader.

Without regard to the result of the examination, it was certain that Dick Birch had not gained anything in establishing his character for veracity and integrity. Though he was relieved from the terrors of the law, he was none the less guilty in the eyes of the people. He had not redeemed himself in the minds of even his best friends, who were still left in doubt and anxiety.

"Mr. Birch, I congratulate you!" exclaimed Dr. Bilks, rushing up to him, after the decision of the magistrate.

"Thank you; but why do you congratulate me?" replied Dick, languidly.

"Upon your escape. I knew it would be so. You have compelled me to defend myself, and I have done so; but I assure you, I have always regarded you as my friend, and I am rejoiced to find you relieved of this charge."

"You are very kind; but I should have preferred to be committed for trial."

"Why so?"

"Because the truth has not come out yet."

"I am very sorry if it has not. My position from the beginning has been established. Of course I knew you were with Buckstone, but I was satisfied that it was for a good purpose."

"Dr. Bilks, as I look at the result just reached, I am ruined."

"Ruined?"

"My character is spoiled, though I may keep out of prison. If this were the end, I would go into obscurity, and never show my face among men again."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! You have been vindicated."

"No; to-day has plunged me deeper than ever in the mire."

"Mr. Birch, you made some heavy charges against me at one time. You told me to my face that I was the person with Buckstone," said Dr. Bilks, with his heartiest laugh.

"I will not repeat the charge."

"Do you still believe it?" demanded the doctor, who appeared to regard the charge as one of the pleasantest of jokes.

"It does not matter now."

"Birch, let us be friends, as before. I am grateful to you for many kindnesses; and, whatever your opinion of me

may be, I shall always hold you in the highest respect and esteem."

Dick was silent. The court had adjourned, and they were almost alone in the room.

"Have I injured you, Birch?" demanded the doctor.

"You know best."

"Let us be friends, Birch."

"Doctor, that can never be. I shall treat you like a gentleman, but you and I can never be friends. I believe you are my enemy."

"I am astonished, Mr. Birch!" exclaimed Dr. Bilks; and he looked astonished. "What have I done?"

"I need not tell you — I will not. Your words, the very sight of you is loathsome to me."

"Why should it be so?"

"I believe that, under the guise of friendship for Mr. Hungerford and for me, you have endeavored to poison his mind; to set him against me," replied Dick, with energy.

"Why should I, Mr. Birch?"

"That is best known to you."

"Mr. Birch, I have been your friend in deed and in truth. I have never thrust myself in your friend's way. I seldom saw him before the sickness of Julia. I have done what I could for her, and my professional duty to my patient required frequent visits."

"You saved her life; and for that I am as grateful to you as her own family."

"She is well — go and see her, Mr. Birch."

"Never, until the stains are washed from my good name!"

"You judge yourself, as well as me, too harshly. Julia will be glad to see you."

"You know that I love her, and you mock me."

"Mock you, my dear fellow! I saved her from death for your sake."

Dick's face was red with anger. He had already spurned the doctor, who would not resent his words, and his profes-

sions of regard were repulsive to him. Although he could not prove it, although all the evidence was against him, Dick Birch could not help believing that the doctor was a villain, and that, sooner or later, a crash would come, when men would see him as he was. Dick tried to be politic, and treat the doctor as a friend, but his nature rebelled against the attempt. What he was, he appeared to be.

"Dr. Bilks, I think this conversation has been long enough," added Dick, rising from his chair.

"Mr. Birch, you have played this game out, and you have lost. You are disappointed and morose. I am sorry for you; I compassionate your misfortunes; and I excuse your rude speech. Let me add, that I am still your friend; when you think better of this thing I shall be happy to see you; until then, I am your obedient servant."

The doctor turned on his heel and walked away, not angry, apparently, but disappointed to find that the issue of the trial had not removed Dick's unpleasant manner towards him. Eugene had gone to the hotel for his horse. When he returned to the court-house he found his friend in a very unamiable frame of mind.

"Dick, you are not satisfied," said Hungerford, when they were seated in the buggy.

"I am not; I never was farther from being satisfied in my life," replied Dick.

"You have been discharged."

"Discharged!" exclaimed Birch, bitterly.

"You ought to be satisfied with the result, so far as it goes."

"Are you satisfied with it?"

"I am."

"Then you are not my friend."

"I am your friend, and it is for this reason I am satisfied."

"Am I not still a liar in the eyes of the people? Am I not liable to be arrested for perjury, at any moment?"

"There is no danger."

“I do not fear an arrest. I do not care for that. Hungerford, can I be satisfied to be regarded as a liar and a perjurer?”

“Of course not.”

“Will you associate with one who stands before the community branded as a liar?”

“Don’t disturb yourself about me, Dick; I am still your friend.”

“If Dr. Bilks is not a scoundrel, I am!”

“Not at all. It is possible, it is probable, that both of you are honest and true men.”

“Impossible!”

“So far as you and the doctor differ, it is possible that he is mistaken.”

“Mistaken, Eugene Hungerford! Am I a fool, as well as a knave? Did Dr. Bilks write that letter to Buckstone, or did I write it?” demanded Dick, with something like fierceness in his tones and manner.

“No matter who wrote it.”

“It is matter. You cannot help believing that one of us is a villain. If I wrote it, I am no more worthy to look you in the face and call you my friend!”

“Dr. Bilks has rendered us a great service, Dick ——”

“Do not remind me of that; I know it. I am as grateful to him for that as you are; but truth and justice come before even the life of the one we love best.”

“Must I condemn him?”

“Him or me! If you believe he did not write that letter, you must believe I did.”

“I will not decide.”

“I say I did not write it. There is no room for a mistake here. Do you believe me, Hungerford?”

“I do, Dick.”

“Then is Dr. Bilks condemned?”

“Not at all. A third person may have written it.”

“That is not possible.”

“Dick, you say the envelope was the one in which you sent your letter to Buckstone?”

“There is no doubt of it.”

“Where could Dr. Bilks have obtained it?”

“From the dead body of Buckstone.”

“That is absurd.”

“Dr. Bilks is the man who severed the head from the body, and sunk it in the channel,” said Dick, fiercely.

“Why should he have done this?”

“I don't know. There is a mystery which I cannot fathom yet; but I will fathom it. I will probe this matter till the daylight shines through it in every direction.”

“I cannot believe that Dr. Bilks had anything to do with the murder, or with the body.”

“Dr. Bilks saved Julia's life — God bless him for that! I ought not to ask you to decide between him and me,” added Dick, sadly.

“I hoped there would be peace now; that both of you would be content to wait till time should solve the mystery. Dr. Bilks expresses himself in the kindest terms towards you, Dick. He assured me, a week ago, that you would be discharged; and certainly no man could have been more gratified with the result to-day than he was.”

“He is a hypocrite. If he was gratified, it was only because the mark of Cain is upon me, and he asks nothing more for me.”

“You wrong him, Dick.”

“On my soul, I do not! He is a miserable, sneaking villain!”

“Come, Dick! This does not sound like you.”

“I speak only the truth; but forgive me, Hungerford; he is your friend.”

“He is,” replied Eugene, firmly.

Dick was silent. He felt that he was condemned. But he was considerate towards his friend. He realized that Eugene's eyes were blinded by the services which Dr. Bilks

had rendered his sister. He could not blame him — he did not.

“Hungerford, I submit with what resignation I can command to my fate. I shall leave Poppleton to-morrow.”

“Leave, Dick!”

“Yes, for a time — perhaps forever. I shall attend Ross Kingman’s trial, at Summerville.”

“Why should you leave?”

“Why should I stay? There is nothing more for me to do in Poppleton.”

“Attend to my affairs as usual.”

“Can you trust a liar, a perjurer?”

“You are unjust and unkind, Dick. You know I have no such opinion of you.”

“You cannot well avoid having such an opinion. I shall go, Hungerford; I shall return only when Dr. Bilks is sent to the state prison, or driven from the town. Whatever his purpose, he has accomplished it.”

Dick looked sharply into Eugene’s face.

“What purpose can he have?” demanded Eugene.

“Hungerford, what I am going to say will almost choke me, but I must say it;” and Dick actually trembled with emotion.

“What, Dick?” asked Eugene, as he drew up his horse before the Bell River House.

“Hungerford, don’t let Dr. Bilks marry Julia until you have seen the end of this matter. Good by, Hungerford;” and Dick Birch, after convulsively grasping the hand of his friend, leaped from the vehicle, and rushed into the hotel.

Eugene was paralyzed by the suggestion contained in these words. He looked at the door a moment, then turned his horse and drove towards Pine Hill. Dick was angry and excited; he was in no condition to speak calmly. It was best to leave him alone for a time. He would drive home and inform his mother and Julia of the result of the examination, and then return.

“Marry Dr. Bilks,” repeated he several times, as he drove towards Pine Hill. Had the doctor driven Dick from Julia’s presence for this purpose? He had been more than a physician to Julia — he was now, when she no longer needed his services as such. Dick’s words were suggestive, at least.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JULIA HUNGERFORD.

“AND this is the end of all my hopes!” exclaimed Dick Birch, as he rushed into his room in the Bell River House. He was gloomy, sad, and despondent. The brightest vision of life had eluded his grasp, for Julia Hungerford was already in the toils of Dr. Bilks. She had forgotten him. If she ever cherished a sentiment of regard for him, it had passed away. He was an outcast from her presence, while the demigod of Pine Hill was constantly with her. There was no difficulty in prophesying what the result would be. In a few months, perhaps a few weeks, she would become the wife of Dr. Bilks; and people would sentimentally add that the life he had saved was consecrated to him.

Eugene was blinded by his sense of obligation to the doctor. What he had seen before he could not see now; but Dick had given him a solemn warning, and he hoped that he would profit by it. The attentions of Dr. Bilks had been too marked to escape the notice of the gossips of Poppleton, and a marriage was confidently expected. Even Dick, now banished from Julia's presence, accepted the reports; but he could not reconcile himself to such a union. He loved Julia, but he felt that he could conquer his own passion if the one who led her to the altar were worthy of her. To see her the wife of such a man as he believed Dr. Bilks to be was intolerable. He had uttered his warning; it had cost him a great sacrifice of pride to do it; but he had done it, and he could do no more.

Dick Birch had decided what to do ; he had already said good by to Eugene, and he intended to leave Poppleton that night. He had not utterly despaired of doing justice to himself and justice to Dr. Bilks. If an angel from heaven had assured him that the doctor was a villain, he could not have been more confident of the fact ; but his enemy was as cunning as he was unscrupulous. Thus far he had had his own way ; thus far he had explained everything that tended to implicate him, even in a falsehood, and had fortified all his statements till they were plausible to the public mind.

Dr. Bilks was a popular man. He drank whiskey with the tap-room politicians ; he talked slang with the fast young men ; he breathed piety to the parsons, and gave twenty dollars for foreign missions ; he ate the best of suppers at the Bell River House with the lawyers, sea captains, and mill agents ; and as a physician, he made old women of both sexes believe they were dying, and then miraculously gave them a new lease of life. He talked and laughed with all men and all women, and compelled even the cavillers to be his friends. He planted an old woman's corn and potatoes for her with his own hands, and somehow everybody in the place found out what a kind act he had done within twenty-four hours. He carried nice things to the sick rooms of the poor whenever there was a possibility of the fact being known. People did not wish to believe anything ill of such a man ; and not wishing to do so, it would have been hard to convince them that the doctor was not a first-class angel.

On the other hand, Dick Birch was rather brusque in his manner. He never went out of his way to make a friend of any man. When he did good deeds, he did them in silence and darkness. If he liked a man, he manifested it ; if he did not like him, he did not " toady " to him because he was one of the selectmen, the owner of a factory, or a member of Congress. Dick, therefore, was not a popular man, in the sense that Dr. Bilks had earned this distinction. He was a straightforward, blunt man ; but being a gentleman by

nature as well as by education, he treated all men with courtesy, and therefore he was not unpopular.

The people were more willing to believe that Dick Birch was a scoundrel than that the doctor even told a falsehood, to say nothing of the crime of perjury. Against such odds it was not easy to contend. Dick did not purpose to contend any longer at present in Poppleton; but he meant to inquire into the doctor's antecedents. He wished to know whether the popular physician had always been what he appeared to be now. He had been intimate with Dr. Bilks for several months, and he had sufficient material upon which to base his investigations. He intended to follow the doctor from college down to his arrival at Poppleton.

Dick believed that Dr. Bilks had a purpose, though its nature was not readily fathomed. Why did the doctor labor so hard to prove that he, Dick, was with Buckstone on the night of the murder? Was it to conceal his own agency in the affair? Was it to bring him into bad repute with Hungerford, and thus drive him from Pine Hill, and from Julia, that he might woo and wed her himself? Dick would have been satisfied with this last suggestion if it had not involved a greater difficulty. Why was Dr. Bilks persuading Buckstone to marry Mary? In what manner did it concern him? Had all these events, including the murder, been contrived by him to accomplish the one purpose of winning the hand of Julia?

The more Dick thought of these things, the more confused they became. There was something which could not be explained,—a mystery too deep to be fathomed with his present means,—and he resolved to follow up the doctor until he obtained the clew. A purpose makes a man cheerful. Something to be done is a sovereign balm for all the ills of life, and Dick rose from his reflections with a vision of triumph crowning his thought. He left the hotel, and walked over to the bank building, where he had an office, and where, since his voluntary banishment from Pine Hill,

he had kept the books and papers of his employer. He adjusted the former and arranged the latter. He drew the balance of his salary, and then carried all the valuables into the bank to be deposited in the safe. He left Eugene's business in perfect order, as he had always kept it. He wrote a letter, explaining all the operations that needed explanation. His employer's affairs could not suffer from his absence. He locked the office, left the key with the cashier, and returned to the hotel. His trunk was already packed. He did not wish to see Eugene again. The sight of his friend was almost painful to him, since he could not justify himself.

There was a schooner in the river which was ready to sail for Boston, and would leave at high tide. He intended to depart by this vessel if her captain would take a passenger, and he procured a wagon and driver at the stable to convey him down to the wharf. The captain of the schooner, without giving any reason, refused to take a passenger; probably on account of the popular prejudice against the applicant. He then decided to go as far as Summerville in the wagon. He was fearful that Eugene would follow him, for he knew that his friend would not abandon him, and would not permit him to depart without more remonstrances than he cared to hear. To avoid going by Pine Hill, he ordered his driver to take the Point Road.

He had proceeded but a short distance before he met Hubbard, the fisherman, coming up from his boat. The man hailed him, and expressed a strong desire to speak with him in private. Dick got out, directing his driver to wait for him, and followed Hubbard a short distance down the beach.

"Mr. Birch, I cal'late you think hard of me for what I said on the stand to-day over to Summerville," Hubbard began.

"By no means; I think you said what you believed to be the truth."

"I cal'late I did, Mr. Birch. I allus liked you. You did

me two or three good turns, and I ain't the man to forgit a favor."

"I think you are an honest man, Hubbard; but I am in a hurry just now, and I hope this will satisfy you, so far as I am concerned."

"I cal'late I've got sunthin that you want," continued Hubbard, with an expressive grin.

"What have you got?"

"I don't exactly know what it is. This has been a kind of a broken day to me, and I thought, when I got back from Summerville, I'd jest take a turn over to the rocks there on The Great Bell, and see if there was any lobsters there."

"Did you get any?" asked Dick, with a smile, but rather impatiently, for, not being in the lobster trade, he was not particularly interested in the fisherman's narrative.

"I cal'late I did get some nice ones; but I don't reckon you keer much about the lobsters. I found sunthin else."

"What, Hubbard?"

"I cal'late it's a piece of paper. I don't know as it's good for anything," continued Hubbard, as he took his greasy wallet from his pocket. "Clean up under the rocks there, beyond the cliff, I found this 'ere." He took from the wallet a paper stained with dirt, and half pulverized by the action of the salt water. "I cal'late it has been there since the night of the murder. I see Buckstone's name on it, and that made me think it might be wo'th sunthin to you."

Dick Birch eagerly took the paper. It was the letter he had written to Buckstone. It had been taken from the original envelope, and thrown away, while the letter written by Dr. Bilks for the occasion had been substituted, and replaced in the pocket of the murdered man, where it had been found. This was Dick's explanation; it might be correct, and might not.

"I thought I would give this to you, Mr. Birch," added Hubbard.

"You did quite right."

“I cal’late it’s sunthin to do with the letter you told on in the court.”

“It is; I wrote this letter, but I did not write the one found on the body of Buckstone. Hubbard, Dr. Bilks would have given you a fifty-dollar bill for this letter.”

“Would he?” replied the fisherman, honestly.

“He would. Dr. Bilks is a villain. He sunk that body.”

“I cal’late you can’t make folks believe that,” said Hubbard, incredulously.

“I shall make them believe it, Hubbard, one of these days,” replied Dick, as he took a fifty-dollar bill from his pocket. “You shall lose nothing by bringing this letter to me instead of the doctor.”

“Go ’way, Mr. Birch,” said Hubbard, pushing aside the hand that offered him the bank note. “I don’t want none of your money. I don’t take nothin I hain’t earned.”

“But the doctor would have given you this—perhaps more.”

“I don’t keer for that; I cal’late I ain’t goin to take no fifty dollars for pickin up that letter.”

“But you have done me a very great favor, Hubbard.”

“So much the better for you, and me too. I’m glad on’t. When I earn any money, I allus take it.”

Hubbard positively refused to take the gift, and Dick determined, at some future time, that the honest fisherman should be fully compensated for the important service he had rendered. Hubbard was a simple-minded man, and it is probable that he would have given the note to Dr. Bilks as readily as to Dick if he had happened to meet him first. He did not pretend to know much about the apparent controversy between Mr. Birch and Dr. Bilks, and he was certainly free from any bias for or against either.

Dick requested the fisherman not to mention to any person the fact that he had found the letter, and Hubbard promised not to do so when assured that he might himself

be injured. Returning to the wagon he proceeded on his journey to Summerville. He had enough to think of now; though the finding of the letter on the beach, while it confirmed what he had publicly stated, did not add much to his own knowledge. It was passing strange that Dr. Bilks should throw this letter away; it was more remarkable that it should have been preserved so long. Hubbard had volunteered the opinion that the paper had been rolled around a stone and thrown into the water; that the stone had fallen out, and the letter, all crumpled up, had floated, and been driven by the wind under the sheltering rocks, where he had found it. It was certainly more prudent to sink the letter with a stone, than to tear it up, and throw the pieces away, for some of them might be found.

Why had not the letter been burned? Dr. Bilks must have written the forged letter in his office. Did he go over to the island with this letter in his pocket? or did he return to prepare it after Buckstone was killed? Dick adopted the latter theory as the more reasonable; but he made very little progress in his investigation, for the facts were too meagre to enable him to establish a single point. He reached Summerville, discharged his team, and procured another to convey him to Newington, where he intended to take the morning train, and where Eugene would not be likely to follow him. Dick went his way; went to Boston; went to New York; went to Philadelphia; went to Ohio; but we will leave him to pursue his inquiries, and return to Pine Hill.

“Marry Dr. Bilks,” repeated Eugene, as he drove home. Certainly the doctor’s frequent visits — all of which could not be regarded as professional — pointed in this direction. He was more than a physician to her, and yet Eugene had hardly thought of the possibility of such an event as his sister becoming Mrs. Bilks. He had hoped and believed that Dick would be his brother-in-law; but his friend’s sensitiveness had driven him from the field, leaving it open to the doctor.

As Eugene did not wish to believe that Dr. Bilks had artfully conspired to expel Dick from Pine Hill, he found evidence enough in his memory to convince him that such had not been the fact. He was laboring to satisfy himself that both the doctor and Dick were honest and true men, and he finally came to the conclusion that his friend was jealous — that the green-eyed monster was the cause of all his troubles. He would return to the hotel, see Dick again, and persuade him not to leave Poppleton.

“ Well, Eugene, what was the result of the examination? ” asked Julia, as he entered the sitting-room.

“ Dick was discharged. ”

“ O, I am so glad! ” exclaimed she.

“ Dick is sorry. ”

“ How can that be? ”

“ He thinks his character has not been vindicated. ”

“ Poor fellow! He is too sensitive. ”

“ I know he is. Julia, what do you think of Dr. Bilks? ” demanded Eugene, abruptly.

“ You know what I think of him, Eugene, ” she replied, coloring slightly, as though she feared that the gossips' story was to be rehearsed by her brother.

“ Do you think he is an honest man? ”

“ Certainly I do. ”

“ Do you think Dick Birch is an honest man? ”

“ Certainly I do. ”

“ Both of them cannot be. ”

“ I am sure they are. ”

“ Dr. Bilks says he saw Dick on the Point Road the night of the murder; Dick says he was in his chamber. ”

“ The doctor may be mistaken. ”

“ He swears, in court, with no qualification whatever, that he saw him with Buckstone. Dick swears to the contrary. One of them has perjured himself. Which is it? ”

“ Neither; there is some mistake. ”

“ Julia, do you love Dr. Bilks? ”

“What a question!”

“This is a very serious matter; let us consider it before it is too late. Will you answer me? Do you love him?”

“I never thought of such a thing!” exclaimed she.

“Do you love Dick Birch?”

“I never thought of such a thing!” she replied, laughing in her confusion.

“Do you like either of them?”

“Both.”

“Be candid with me, Julia.”

“I am, entirely so.”

“You evade my questions.”

“Indeed, I do not! I like them both.”

“Do you love either of them?”

“No.”

“If either of them had sincerely offered you his hand and heart, would you have accepted him?”

“How should I know?” laughed Julia, to whom these interrogatories were exceedingly distasteful.

“You know that Dick loved you.”

“I ought to know it; he made oath that he did on the stand in court.”

“I am very serious, Julia; and you treat the matter too lightly.”

“As neither Dr. Bilks nor Dick ever spoke a word to me on the subject to which you allude, how can I answer you?”

“Could you have loved Dick well enough to accept him?”

“I could; but I did not.”

“Can you love Dr. Bilks well enough to accept him?”

“I can; but I don’t,” laughed Julia.

“Do you regard his present attentions as merely professional?”

“Friendly, as well as professional.”

“You are not blind, Julia.”

“I am not.”

“You can see what the doctor means.”

“I do not know that he means anything.”

“You must be satisfied that he loves you. Why, he spent seven eighths of his time at Pine Hill, when you were sickest! I don't think he slept an hour a night for a fortnight. The whole town began to cry out against him because he neglected other patients for you. When you were out of danger, he still came six times where he need have come but once. He has sent special messengers to Boston after grapes and flowers for you. Does all this mean nothing?”

“I think he likes me — loves me, if you please,” replied Julia, more seriously than she had before spoken.

“And you encourage him?”

“He is my physician; I cannot very well discourage him. He has never spoken a word to me of love. I cannot refuse his flowers, or decline to ride or walk with him, without giving him pain. I am very grateful to him for what he has done. What can I do, Eugene?”

“If you do not love him, you ought not to encourage him.”

“I do not dislike him; and I cannot decline his attentions. If he asks me to walk, it is for my health; if he asks me to ride, it is because a ride will benefit my health. He has done nothing which any one might not do for a sick friend.”

“Of course you expect him to make some progress.”

“What do you think I am, Eugene?” demanded she, impatiently. “I expect nothing. I do not dislike him; that is all I can say.”

“Julia, Dick Birch says that Dr. Bilks is an artful, cunning villain.”

“I do not think any better of Dick for saying so,” replied Julia, indignantly.

“Dick honestly believes it.”

“He must not expect me to believe it.”

“You used to think that what Dick said was law and gospel.”

“He did not use to say such things as that.”

“Julia, Dick is going to leave Poppleton — never to return, he says.”

“Of course he has good reasons for going.”

“Do you condemn him, Julia?”

“Far from it! I am sorry for him. I should not think he would go away while everybody doubts his integrity.”

“Julia, have you lost all your regard for Dick?”

“No, Eugene.”

“Which do you like best — him or Dr. Bilks?”

“I cannot answer such questions. I don't know. I always liked Dick very much. I looked upon him as my best friend, as well as yours. After his confessions on the stand, I thought it best that we should be less intimate. It seems that Dick thought so himself, for I have not seen him since.”

“The best evidence in the world of his noble and generous nature! He loved you too well even to subject you to any invidious remark. He suffers himself to save you from annoyance.”

“Poor fellow!”

“Dr. Bilks is near you all the time, while Dick is self-banished from your presence. But, Julia, you must not encourage Dr. Bilks.”

“Must not?”

“Of course I mean you ought not to do so — at least for the present.”

“I do not mean to encourage him. I am not a beau-hunter.”

“Do not commit yourself, either in word or deed, until this mystery has been solved; until we know whether Dick or the doctor, or both, or neither, is the scoundrel. There is something wrong somewhere. I do not know where. I am completely befogged and bewildered. Like yourself, I cannot condemn either of them. Both are my friends; but one of them must be wrong.”

“Which, Eugene?”

“I don't know.”

“You have an opinion.”

“There is much that I cannot explain on both sides. Let us wait.”

“Certainly we shall wait; we cannot do otherwise.”

“But, Julia, you must check the doctor.”

“I see nothing to check.”

Julia could not even answer to herself whether she loved Dr. Bilks or Dick. Both of them were friendly, both agreeable. In a comparison of the characters of the two gentlemen, the advantage was in Dick's favor; but her gratitude to the doctor for his kindness and devotion during her sickness more than offset the other's advantage. She did not think of a husband, save in the abstract; if she had, perhaps she would have considered one as eligible as the other, and would have been prepared to accept him who spoke first. She did not yet love either, though both were lovable. With one so fair, so young, so accomplished, love could not exist without its complement. A loving look, a sweet word, a pressure of the hand, would have developed the treasures of her affection. She waited, unconsciously, for these tokens; if Dick had given them, probably he would have been accepted; and the same was true of Dr. Bilks.

Julia made no promises; they seemed unnecessary to her. Perhaps she knew less of her own heart than others knew of it. She was not hungering and thirsting for a husband. Fortune had been over lavish to her, and she was too much enamoured of Pine Hill, too much devoted to her mother and her brother, to think of leaving them without the strongest of provocations. Probably she expected to be a wife some time; but she regarded a husband as she did the airs of heaven, that came unbought and unsought. She thought that he who was to be her all-in-all must be the gift of God, in some special manner, and she floated on the tide, a creature of fate and circumstances. She could not possibly

marry one she did not love, and she waited unresistingly for her heart to speak her destiny.

Eugene drove down to the Port again, after he had, as he believed, made a proper use of Dick's solemn warning. He was very nervous, uneasy, perplexed, and anxious, as a man in prison when life and hope are without its walls. He wanted the truth, which should enable him to decide between his two friends, now doubly necessary for Julia's sake as well as his own. If he could not satisfy himself, he might comfort Dick, and enable him to wait with patience till the final judgment could be pronounced.

He drove up to the hotel. Dick had gone — had taken his trunk, and left with no present intention of returning. Where he had gone no one knew; the man who had driven him to Summerville had not yet returned. When he did return, Eugene hastened to pursue his friend, and win him back. Late in the evening he returned to Pine Hill. Dick was fleeing even from him.

CHAPTER XXIV.

POPPLETON GOSPEL.

THE long summer and part of the autumn wore heavily away to Ross Kingman, within the walls of the county jail, before his trial took place. The grand jury had found a true bill against him for the murder of Eliot Buckstone; and he waited hopefully for the time when a jury of twelve men should justify him for the deed he had done.

The months wore away less heavily at Pine Hill, though the Hungerfords were not without their trials and anxiety. Millions of money could not purchase exemption from the common lot of humanity. A hundred thousand in the Poppleton Bank, and the same sum invested in stocks and real estate, did not banish a single care from the mind of Eugene. He loved and feared, he hoped and desponded, like the poor man who fed his children by his daily labor. The loss of Dick Birch, even for a time, was a severe trial to him, in connection with the doubt and uncertainty which environed the name and reputation of his friend.

Dr. Bilks still came often to Pine Hill; still sunned himself in the smiles of Julia. He loved her; but he made no progress. The solemn warning of Dick Birch had not been in vain; and when the enthusiastic wooer found himself ready to speak tenderly and confidentially on the subject nearest to his heart, Julia darted away from him. It so happened that he was rarely alone with her; never, except in the house or the garden. If the doctor proposed a ride, she instantly ordered the carriage, and either Eugene or her

mother was always sure to be invited. If they could not go, Julia did not feel like riding. She did not discourage his attentions; she only checked them. There was no unkindness on her part, and apparently no undue caution. By some of those expedients always within the reach of a woman, the doctor was invariably repressed, the decisive moment was deferred, and he was not permitted to speak of the love which warmed his heart. But the doctor still hoped. He had only been checked, not defeated. Day after day he resolved to "propose," — and he did not lack the courage to do it, — but these provoking impediments always prevented him from taking the important step.

Dr. Bilks had no reason to suppose that obstacles were intentionally thrown in his way. Julia was always kind. As she had said herself, she did not dislike him; and without the warning she had received, she would have permitted events to take their natural course. Julia was herself. She practised no arts, stooped to no hypocrisy. What she felt she did not wholly conceal. As Dick Birch came no more to Pine Hill, as she hardly heard from him, she had come to look upon the doctor as the man of her choice, though a man deferred simply for prudential reasons. He was unexceptionable to her; and if the current of love had not begun to flow, it was only because it was dammed up in the parent fountain. Dick Birch was absent, but not forgotten; and she could not help comparing the characters and manners of the two men who loved her. She did not absolutely love either of them; for one seemed to be a check upon the other. Her strong mind asserted itself.

Eugene now managed his own business; and it gave him sufficient occupation to save him from the pangs of *ennui*. About once a week he went to The Great Bell; but he spoke not of love to Mary Kingman, though his heart still longed to have all restraint removed. He saw her as often as he called, and she always blushed and smiled in his presence.

Captain Kingman was still confined to the house, and hobbled on crutches every day from his room to the kitchen. He was feeble and helpless. The family had no means of support, and debt pressed heavily upon them. Eugene, as a pretence, paid Ross's salary to Mrs. Kingman every month, which was sufficient to keep the family comfortable. The farm was mortgaged; and as no interest was paid, the creditor became importunate for his dues. He threatened to take possession. Mrs. Kingman told Eugene of this, with tears in her eyes; for the threat implied ruin to her. He paid the principal and the interest; indeed, he discharged every debt he could find against the Kingmans.

Captain Kingman did nothing but moan and groan from morning to night. He was paying the penalty of his transgressions. He did not concern himself about family affairs. He had nothing to say about Ross or the murder; nothing about his debts; nothing about Mary. He was stupefied by his pains and his misfortunes. He had lost all interest in his family and his business. Years of dissipation had made him an imbecile. Mrs. Kingman told him nothing of what Eugene had done; and as far as possible, at his request, she kept it from Mary, whose sensitive nature was outraged by dependence.

But, poor girl! she knew that Eugene paid the expenses of the family without any equivalent, and she had struggled to resist this accepting of his charity. She was helpless at first; but when her strength was fully restored, she determined that the family should no longer live upon his bounty, however freely and gladly it was bestowed. She procured from her step-mother a full account of all sums Eugene had expended, so far as Mrs. Kingman knew them, and imposed it upon herself, as a solemn obligation, to pay back every dollar.

Undoubtedly this resolution gave her some comfort, and partially satisfied the promptings of her pride. She fully intended to carry out this design, and believed that, in time,

she could earn money enough to do so. She was not content merely to have a purpose, but she immediately set about its execution. There was a vacancy in one of the schools, and she attempted to obtain the situation. She applied for the place; and one of the committee, knowing her to be a superior teacher, gave her considerable encouragement. His associates were ministers of the gospel. They were horrified at the very suggestion of appointing "such a person."

Mary was repulsed. She called upon her minister to aid her. He was willing to do so, if he could. He could not. He did not believe she ought to think of teaching school; it was not proper for her to do so. She had made a mistake; she must suffer for it, as all must. Society must protect itself even from the appearance of sin. It was right that it should do so. It was hard for her, who had really done no wrong, to be banished from the presence of the good and the upright; but it was necessary. She must submit. It was the way of the world. Even bad men frowned upon a woman's sin, and turned from her, in society, when the stain of suspicion hung about her. It was well; for virtue was to her the pearl of great price, and it must be guarded even by men's prejudices.

Mary was terrified by her own sin. She fled from her minister almost with the feeling that God had ceased to love her; that the demons had taken possession of her soul. She examined her own heart; she prayed for wisdom and for strength; but with all her searching, she could not believe she was so lost and depraved as the fiat of the prudential committee, and even of her own minister, had declared her to be. But her own clergyman had not accused her of sin or wrong; he had only said that society must protect itself at her expense. She had been deceived, mocked, cruelly wronged. At the worst, she had only been imprudent, she reflected; but she had always been true to her womanly instinct of purity. Why should she be spurned? It was

hard; but it was the way of the world, and she could not resist it.

She applied for a school in a neighboring town. One laughed; another frowned; all refused. The minister was right, in point of fact: society would protect itself at her expense. She could not obtain a situation to teach. She gave up the point in despair. She asked for work in one of the factories. It was given to her simply because the agent, who was anxious to conciliate Eugene, dared not refuse her. The operatives, with one voice, protested. Some of them were sinners; but these protested louder than the others. It was a shame to admit "such a person" into the mills with respectable girls. They threatened to stop work; and Mary fled in terror from the tempest she had created.

Eugene heard of all these things, and he asked if there was a God in heaven. He was indignant, almost furious. He went to Mary; and in a tumult of woe, she told him the truth. Then, more than ever before, he wished to fold her in his arms, make her his own, and bravely breast the storm of worldliness that would beat against them both. He went to the mill agent, and reproached him for permitting Mary to be driven from the factory by a mere prejudice. She had done no wrong; she was more free from stain than half who had fled from her presence. The agent knew it. He could not help it. If Mary would stay, he would protect her. There was a principle at stake, and Mary went back to the mill. The girls withdrew in a body. Eugene paid the damages of the suspension. Other girls came, and there was a tempest. Society was protecting itself. Money, for once, fought the battle of the oppressed. It conquered in the end. Half the girls returned. They could not contend against money. Indignant fathers and brothers threatened to break down the dam, to burn the mill, to disable the wheel; and the great building was guarded day and night like an arsenal in revolutionary days. Again the factory worked all its spindles.

Those in the mill who came in contact with Mary began to love her. She was a true Christian; not after the forms of the church alone, but after the law of God and Christ, which she had transcribed upon her own heart. One who worked by her side was taken down with a violent fever. She was far away from home; and Mary tended the loom all day, and watched all night with the sick one.

“Truly, this girl with a bad reputation is better than any of us,” said the girls in the mill.

Mary became pale and feeble herself. Eugene heard of it. She had lived down her bad name. Those who knew her loved her; and there was not an evil-minded man that dared look disrespectfully upon her. She visited the sick and the sorrowing; she spoke true and holy words to the erring; she was the friend of all who needed a friend.

Eugene went to her. He insisted that she should leave the mill, and nurse the sick girl, if she could not trust this sacred duty to another.

“Mary, you shall be a missionary among the poor and suffering. I shall build a chapel for the poor, where they may go without money and without price. John Porter, whom I knew and loved in college, shall come and preach to them; and you shall help gather his flock. I shall pay him and you a salary. Will you take the position?”

“I cannot take money from you.”

“False pride!” replied he. “I shall pay another, if not you.”

“Better another than me.”

“I know of no one who will do so well as you.”

Long and faithfully he pleaded with her to become his missionary before she would accept a salaried position; but she consented. The chapel was commenced; but the harvest, ripe for the reapers, did not wait for a building. John Porter came — came to preach practical Christianity. Both he and Mary visited the poor with provisions, clothing, and fuel in their train. More cheap tenement houses were built.

The poor were well lodged, well clothed, well fed; the chapel was filled with attentive hearers; but more than all, — for it is the foundation of all true self-respect, — the poor were taught to be independent. It was found that the model houses were good, paying property, and prudent men, for their own interest, helped to carry out Eugene's idea. Men and women, who had received gifts from the chapel treasury, insisted upon paying their full value; for with well-filled stomachs and well-covered bodies came a self-respect and a self-reliance which refused charity.

But, in spite of all that was done, Eugene did not dream of founding a Utopia. He did not succeed in building up a colony of saints and heroes. There were still hundreds of men and women who could hardly be anything but vagabonds. The foreign population, though much improved in condition, still obstinately clung to dirt, and rags, and bad whiskey; paradise and Poppleton were still dissimilar.

When Eugene had bought the land, and staked out the chapel, Father McCafferty, the Catholic priest of the Mills, called upon him in high dudgeon, and squarely accused him of attempting to convert his flock to the "abominable religion."

"Not at all, Father McCafferty," replied Eugene, calmly.

"You are building a chapel for them," added the indignant priest. "Of what use is it to them if you build houses for the poor, feed, and clothe, and warm them, if you steal away their souls?"

"I assure you, sir, I have no designs upon their souls."

"What else can it mean? The chapel is for the poor; and that means my people. Sure you have done everything for them, and you are stealing them away from me."

"I have no desire to convert them from anything but dirt, rags, and vile liquor."

"God bless you for that; if you will only stop there. But your chapel and your Sunday school will rob them of their souls. I have no church — nothing but an old shed; and

some of them may be led into a nice place like that you mean to build."

"Father McCafferty, it makes no difference to me what these people believe, if they only have a religion that will save their souls, and keep them from vice and sin."

"That is what their religion is for," said the priest, warmly. "I have no means to work with."

"Do you want a church?"

"I do, badly."

"You shall have one. What will it cost?"

"Six thousand dollars," replied the astonished priest.

"Build your church, and I will pay all the bills."

"God bless your honor."

Father McCafferty was a true Catholic, but none the less a true Christian. If he placed more stress on mere forms than those of a different faith, it was because he believed they were vital. Eugene thought that any Christian faith would save a man from sin, if it was earnestly believed and faithfully followed. It made no difference to him what other men's theological opinions were, if the holders of them were only earnest and faithful.

So the Catholic Church was built, and Father McCafferty was a happy man, and joined Eugene in good works, while he refused even to utter the Lord's Prayer in worship with him. The *millionnaire* went a step farther. The priest, at his suggestion, imported half a dozen Sisters of Charity into Poppleton, and Eugene filled up the exchequer from which these self-sacrificing ladies drew for the needy ones. Under the tuition of the good father and the benevolent sisters, the people of the Catholic parish struck a terrible blow at the demons of filth, rags, and bad whiskey. But yet, with all that had been done, paradise and Poppleton were still leagues apart.

Thus passed away the summer and the autumn, till the first Tuesday in November, the day appointed for the trial of Ross Kingman. As Julia insisted upon being the com-

panion of Mary, the carriage was ordered for them, and Eugene and Dr. Bilks occupied the front seat. On their arrival, the vehicle was left at the hotel, and the ladies, attended by Eugene, walked over to the jail to see Ross, where an awkward meeting took place, for Dick Birch was there, preparing himself for the trial.

Dick blushed up to his eyes; so did Julia. A friendly greeting followed, and she retreated as soon as possible.

“Dick, I am glad to see you again,” said Eugene, as he grasped the offered hand.

“Equally glad am I,” replied Dick.

“Where have you been these four months?”

“At work. I have written to you half a dozen times.”

“You have; but you didn’t say anything in your letters.”

“I thought it was best to let old matters slumber for a while. I have been as busy as a bee. But you must excuse me now, for I have two or three points to settle before the trial comes on.”

Ross was cheerful, and seemed to have no fears of the result. Mary had been to see him several times during his long confinement, and Eugene had been careful to supply him with everything he needed, which the rules of the jail would permit. As Dick Birch wished to confer with the prisoner, the party left him, and went to the court-house, where Dr. Bilks had already preceded them.

“Have you seen Mr. Birch? They say he is here,” said the doctor to Eugene.

“I saw him at the jail.”

“How does he seem?”

“Remarkably cheerful.”

“What has he been about?” asked the doctor, rather nervously.

“I don’t know; he says he has been at work all the time.”

“What has he been doing?”

“He does not say; but I suppose he has been at work upon his own case.”

“His own case, it seems to me, was pretty effectually settled the last time we were here.”

Dr. Bilks did not appear to be at all satisfied with Dick's labors during his absence, or rather with the fact that he had been at work. Perhaps he thought it was very unreasonable of Dick, after he had been so fully condemned by the popular voice, to resist the conclusion that he was a liar and a perjurer.

The court came in; the prisoner was placed in the dock, and after the usual difficulty in impanelling a jury to try a capital case, the trial commenced. We do not propose to follow it through its tedious length. Dr. Bilks was the first witness called in the afternoon. He took his place upon the stand with an easy assurance, and Mr. Lowe, the government attorney, drew from him all the evidence he wanted, substantially as it had been given before, with the additional fact that he had seen and recognized Mr. Birch, in company with Buckstone. The doctor was as tender of his friend, as he had been before; and he appeared like a man who was anxious for nothing but to tell the truth. Mr. Lowe, entirely satisfied with the witness, turned him over to the defence for cross-examination.

“Your name, if you please,” said Dick, to whom this duty was again intrusted.

“Dr. Bilks.”

“Your name in full, if you please.”

“Thomas L. Bilks,” replied the doctor, with a smile.

“What is your middle name?”

The doctor hesitated, and looked slightly embarrassed.

“Lenox,” he added, at last.

“Thomas Lenox Bilks,” repeated the lawyer.

“Yes, sir.”

“Is that your name?” demanded Dick, sharply.

“That is my name.”

“Are you willing to swear that that is your name?” continued the thorny lawyer, rising from his chair, and gazing earnestly into his face.

Mr. Lowe interfered; even the judges, feeling that the lawyer meant to browbeat the witness, suggested that he was under oath. To the astonishment of everybody, Dick declared that the doctor had not given his true name.

“You take your oath that your name is Thomas Lenox Bilks — do you?”

“I do.”

The doctor was pale as a sheet. He trembled, and his attempt to smile and seem indifferent was an utter failure. The people in the court-room were breathless with interest.

The lawyer pressed him on this point for some time, until the court interfered.

“May it please the court, the witness has not given his true name. We shall be able to prove, if necessary, that he is here under an assumed character, that his evidence is utterly unreliable and worthless,” said Dick, turning to the judges; and he was permitted to proceed.

“Once more, Dr. Bilks, what is your real name?”

The doctor was silent. It was evident that Dick Birch had not worked for nothing during his absence.

“Answer me, if you please,” said Dick, sternly.

Dr. Bilks looked around the room, as if to measure the full extent of his difficulty. He saw some one, apparently, whose presence startled him.

“My real name is Thomas Lynch,” replied the doctor, as the cold sweat stood upon his forehead.

“I thought so,” replied Dick, triumphantly, as he glanced at Hungerford to see the effect of this astonishing revelation.

Eugene actually leaped to his feet with surprise, for that name was the key to everything which had been dark and mysterious.

“Why did you change your name, Dr. Lynch?” asked Dick.

“Because the name of Lynch does not suit me. It was an injury to me in my practice. I have been taken for an Irishman so many times that I assumed my mother’s maiden name.”

“Was that the only reason?”

“It was.”

“Is your mother living?”

“She is not.”

“What was the name of her last husband?”

Dr. Lynch, as we must hereafter call him, was not disposed to answer this question. The court thought it was unnecessary; and Dick explained what he intended to prove.

“The name of your mother’s last husband, if you please?” repeated Dick.

“John Hungerford,” replied the doctor, desperately, as he glanced at a woman in the witness seats, who was a stranger to most of the people present at the trial.

CHAPTER XXV

DR. LYNCH.

DR. LYNCH struggled against a bad appearance. He had turned pale; he was shaking in the knees; he did not look his torturer in the face. He knew that all these things were against him. He had seen the woman in the witness seats. Her presence alone had induced him to tell the truth. She had been John Hungerford's housekeeper, and she knew Tom Lynch as well as she knew the three eminent trustees who had daily visited the *millionnaire* while he was in the throes of making his will.

By the time the doctor was ready to answer the question relating to his mother's second husband, he had measured his surroundings; he had weighed Mrs. Black, the housekeeper, and had apparently satisfied himself that she could not turn the scale wholly against him. He had sufficiently explained the reason for adopting a new name—a simple and very satisfactory reason, it seemed to him. Dr. Lynch had decided what course to pursue, and the decision had to a great extent restored his self-possession. He looked around the room, and smiled. It was a rather ghastly smile, and the doctor would have done better not to attempt it.

“Dr. Lynch, had you any personal interest in the marriage of Mr. Eugene Hungerford?” continued Dick, when the sensation attending the last answer of the witness had subsided.

“None whatever,” replied the doctor, promptly, and with

an elasticity in his tones which indicated his belief that all his troubles on the stand were ended.

“If Mr. Hungerford should not marry, what effect would it have upon you?”

“I suppose I should come into possession of one sixth part of the late John Hungerford’s property,” answered the doctor, with a cheerful look.

“Have you, at any time, done anything to prevent his marriage — with Miss Kingman, for instance?”

“On the contrary, I have always advised him to marry her, and done what I could to remove certain objections on the part of his mother and his sister.”

This was certainly true, and there was a strong reaction, even in the mind of Eugene, in favor of the doctor. If the witness had been selfishly bent on obtaining the fortune, he would certainly have done what he could to prevent the marriage, which might, and probably would, vitiate his individual claims. The face of the doctor now wore an expression of triumph. He felt that he had nailed to the wall the insinuation implied in the lawyer’s question.

The doctor had apparently made a point, and Dick had lost one.

The cross-examination was continued, and extended over about the same ground as on the former occasion. The witness testified to the old story about the baby, and the woman from Newington. He had paid them no money; he had done nothing to cover up the truth. Other witnesses were called; but nothing essentially different from the evidence given at the examination was elicited; and at six o’clock the court adjourned.

Dr. Lynch, in spite of the point he had made, and in spite of the bold face he had finally assumed on the stand, was nervous and agitated. It was clear to him that he was walking among traps and pitfalls; that he was liable to be tripped up at any moment. He could form no conjecture

of what was coming, for Dick Birch had carefully masked his battery, and did not indicate what he intended to do.

“Well, Julia, Dick is beginning to unveil the machine he has been building,” said Eugene, when the court adjourned.

“Do you believe that Dr. Bilks is Tom Lynch?”

“He swears to the fact.”

“What does it all mean?”

“Don’t you see?”

“I can see, but I cannot believe.”

Dick Birch joined them.

“Dick, Julia can see, but she cannot believe,” said Eugene.

“He who runs may read,” laughed Dick, in the best of humor. “Let us walk over to the hotel.”

“Mr. Birch,” asked Julia, timidly, “do you attribute any bad motives to Dr. Bilks?”

“To Dr. Lynch?”

“Dr. Lynch, if that is his name.”

“I do; the very worst of motives. In the course of this trial, if my testimony is not ruled out, I shall prove enough to satisfy all what the doctor is.”

“Don’t be too hard upon him, Dick,” added Julia, with a little of her old playfulness towards him.

“I shall exhibit nothing but the truth.”

“What is the truth, Dick?” asked she.

“I would rather have others tell it.”

“I am under very great obligations to the doctor — I owe my life to him,” added Julia. “I hope you will spare him as much as you can.”

“I cannot spare him at all; or rather he has not spared himself. If he will speak the truth, I will be as gentle with him as possible.”

“That is all I ask.”

“If you will excuse me, Miss Hungerford, I think you had better remain at home to-morrow.”

“Why, Mr. Birch?”

“You may hear something which will not be pleasant.

As a friend of the doctor, I think you had better not hear any more of the trial."

"I thank you for your consideration. I will stay at home. But I would rather know the worst. Your words are really quite terrible to me. Won't you tell me what you think the doctor's motives were in coming to Poppleton?" pleaded Julia, who could not resist the painful and shocking conclusion that the demigod of Pine Hill was the cold, calculating villain which Dick had described him to be.

"I am still under the shadow, Miss Hungerford," replied Dick.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Eugene. "I protest against your shadows. I have never ceased to trust you."

"But your sister has."

"I have not, Mr. Birch. I confess that I was vexed at what you said in relation to me in the court. That is all."

"I could have made Dr. Lynch say all that I said," added Dick, blushing and confused. "Nothing but regard for your feelings prevented me from doing so."

"You were very kind," replied Julia, coloring crimson.

"By the way, Hungerford, Lowe told me last night how he happened to press me so hard on my relations with your family," continued Dick, trying to laugh off his confusion.

"How was it?"

"The doctor suggested the idea to him."

"Impossible!"

"Lowe says so; he begins to see through the doctor, which was the reason why he told me of a fact he was asked to conceal. By the way, Ross Kingman has not a better friend than Lowe in the county, though, of course, he must do his duty."

"The doctor suggested it?" repeated Julia.

"That is but a trifle, Miss Hungerford, compared with other things he has done."

"You have not answered my question yet, Mr. Birch. What were the doctor's motives?"

“In my opinion he intended to obtain one third of John Hungerford’s money!”

“One third!”

“One sixth in his own right, one sixth in yours,” replied Dick.

“But he advised Eugene to marry Mary Kingman; and he overcame all my mother’s and my own objections to the marriage.”

Mary had gone to the jail with Dr. Lynch to see Ross, or, of course, this could not have been said.

“I do not know by what means he intended to effect his purpose; but I am satisfied that I have correctly stated his design.”

“It is quite impossible, Mr. Birch,” persisted Julia. “He has labored to bring about the very event which would deprive him of his own share of my uncle’s property.”

Dick could not answer this obstinate objection to his belief. Here was an obstacle to his theory which all his investigations could not explain away. So there was a saving element which still redeemed the doctor from condemnation. Julia went home almost convinced that Dick Birch was again mistaken, and the crown was not yet wrested from the head of the demigod.

The carriage was driven over to the jail for Mary. Dr. Lynch had important business, which would detain him in Summerville for an hour, but he would call at Pine Hill on his return. Eugene offered to wait, but the doctor would ride back with a friend. The party left him, and Dr. Lynch hastened to the hotel, where they had just parted with Dick Birch. He wished to see the lawyer, and he did see him. Might he beg the favor of half an hour’s private conversation with Dick, who, feeling that he was now on the winning side, was magnanimous enough to grant it. They took a private parlor up stairs.

“You have begun to thorn me again, Mr. Birch,” the doctor said, with a smile.

"No; the truth begins to thorn you."

"We used to be friends, Mr. Birch."

"That was before I knew you."

"You are harsh."

"I am only just."

"What do you intend to prove?"

"That's my business."

"You understand my position in Poppleton?"

"Perfectly."

"You have already placed me in an awkward situation."

"You placed yourself there."

"I took my mother's name, instead of my father's, for the reason I mentioned. That is not a very heinous sin; but it will create very strong prejudices against me."

"I know it."

"Groundless prejudices."

"No."

"Why should I suffer for so trivial an offence? My name wrongs no man. Lynch is an Irish name."

"It has been naturalized."

"The name injured me in my profession, and I was about to take the proper legal steps to have it changed," whined the doctor.

"Why did you come to Poppleton, Dr. Lynch?"

"Why?"

"That's the question."

"To practise my profession, of course."

"You were doing remarkably well in Dayton."

"Dayton?"

The doctor was quite sure he had never mentioned the name of this place to the lawyer, or any other person in Poppleton.

"Dayton, Ohio," added Dick. "You had a large practice there, and everybody was surprised when you abandoned it."

"The climate did not agree with my health," replied the

doctor, with a ghastly smile. "I find it necessary to keep near the salt water."

"Precisely so; and you chose Poppleton."

"I liked the place. I went there, as you are aware, to spend a month in the summer. The locality suited me, and I decided to settle."

"Of course your decision had nothing to do with the fact that Eugene Hungerford lived there?"

"None."

"Wasn't it a little singular you never mentioned the circumstance that you were one of John Hungerford's contingent legatees?"

"I deemed it best not to mention the fact; it might have bred suspicion, and deprived me of the good will of Mr. Hungerford and the family. I have done what I could to serve them."

"You have done well for them; you saved Julia's life, Dr. Lynch. She is lost to me, but I am unselfish enough to be grateful for this, though you may have done it for your own purposes."

"It was not for me to save her; God only could do that."

"None of that, if you please. When the devil quotes Scripture, I am not one of his congregation. No cant."

"I only intended to say that I did what any physician should have done. No human hand could have saved her; though I think her life was preserved by careful nursing, and, if you please, skilful medical attendance."

"I believe it; and I am willing to grant that she owes her life to you."

"But you say I labored for my own purposes."

"In a word, you intend to marry her."

"I have never spoken to her on that subject. I will not deny that I cherish a very warm regard for her; and herein I have crossed your path, and excited your wrath against me."

"I have nothing to say upon that point. The lady shall speak for herself. On account of what you have done for

her, I am disposed to let you down as easily as possible, consistently with truth and justice."

"Let me down?" said the doctor, curiously.

"If you will confess your agency in the events which have transpired in connection with the murder of Buckstone, I will do all that I can to save you from disagreeable consequences, and even to protect your good name," said Dick, in a serious tone.

"Confess?"

"Why do you repeat my words after me? You know what I mean?"

"I have nothing to confess," replied Dr. Lynch; but awful forebodings were apparently creeping through his mind.

"If you have not, let us waste no more time."

Dick rose from his chair, as if to terminate the interview.

"What could I have to confess?"

"First, that you sent for Buckstone, and that you went over to the island with him."

"But I did not."

"We waste time; I have business with Mr. Darling to-night. You must excuse me if I decline to say anything more about it."

"Don't be harsh, Mr. Birch."

"I am not harsh. Confess, and I will spare you as much as I can."

"I have nothing to confess. You are laboring under some mistake, Mr. Birch."

"Perhaps I am," sneered Dick. "To-morrow will show whether I am or not."

"To-morrow?"

"Don't repeat my words, doctor."

"You threaten me."

"Did I seek this interview, or did you?"

"I did, of course, and I am grateful to you for your kindness in granting it."

“What do you want of me?” demanded Dick, impatiently.

“I wished merely to explain the matter about the name.”

“Well, you have done so.”

“But that opened other matters.”

“I do not wish to say another word. I prefer to let the trial take its course. For your sake, I proposed that you should make a clean breast of it.”

“Why for my sake?”

“Because we may be able to temper the facts so that they will not bear so hard upon you.”

“What facts?”

“All the facts.”

“Mr. Birch, you assume that I have not told the truth.”

“I distinctly say that you have not.”

“That I have perjured myself?”

“You have.”

“Very well, Mr. Birch; and I thank you for your candor in stating just what you mean. Now, grant for a moment that I have been base enough to falsify the truth — assume it for a moment.”

“Assume it for a moment,” repeated Dick, with a significant smile.

“Should you expect a man who had made and sworn to certain statements, to retract them, merely upon your invitation to do so?”

“Not unless he were to obtain some advantage by doing so.”

“Precisely, Mr. Birch. Now, assuming still that I have not told the truth, what advantage should I gain by retracting?”

“Now I understand you, Dr. Lynch; and I am ready to meet your views.”

“Of course we only assume that I have not told the truth.”

“Of course; but I shall take the liberty to answer your

question just as though it were an actual state of things. 'What are you to gain?'

"What should I gain, if the case were real, instead of supposed?"

"Not much, perhaps. I must be vindicated; therefore you must confess, on the stand, that you were the person with Buckstone just before he was killed."

"That would ruin me."

"It will ruin me if you don't. If you were there for a good purpose, it will not injure you any more than it has me."

"I should gain nothing by this."

"If you tell the whole truth, voluntarily, you will gain much in the estimation of honest men. And the lawyers will spare you. All this matter is really foreign to Ross Kingman's case. It has nothing whatever to do with it."

"Why was it brought in, then?"

"Because the person with Buckstone is an important witness. If I had testified that I was the man, I should simply have been required to tell what I knew of the murder. If I had known nothing, that would have been the end. If you were the stranger, you can tell what you know about it. If it implicates you in the murder, you need not criminate yourself."

"We are only assuming a case," interposed the doctor.

"Certainly — if you please."

"What questions would be asked of me?"

"Were you the person with Buckstone?"

"I was," replied the doctor, with a sickly smile. "Let us suppose we are in court; I am on the stand, and you are Mr. Lowe."

"Did you see the murder committed?"

"I did not."

"Did you know a murder had been committed?"

"I did. Of course you understand, Mr. Birch, that we are merely supposing a case."

"What did you do?"

"I went down to the cliff in the boat, and found the body."

"Was life extinct?"

"It was."

"What did you do with the body?"

"I took it back to the beach."

"Did you remove the head?"

"I did."

Dick Birch began to be very much excited, when the doctor again called his attention to the fact that they were merely supposing a case.

"Why did you remove the head?" continued Dick.

"I wanted it for dissection. One of my patients was sick with brain fever, and I wished to study the case with a real brain."

"Did you dissect it?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"In my office, that night."

"Where is the head now?"

"I have the skull."

"Who was your patient?"

"Mr. John Dunbar."

So far the case was real, for such a person had been sick with brain fever at the time.

"What did you do with the body?"

"Sunk it in the channel, as the witnesses have described."

"For what purpose?"

"That I might reclaim it for dissection. I spoke about a 'subject' to Dr. White, and invited him to assist me; but I had no opportunity to recover the body before it was found by the sheriff."

"When did you make the acquaintance of Mr. Buckstone?"

"I never saw him till after dark on the night he was murdered."

“Did you send for him?”

“I did.”

“Did you write the letter signed Richard Birch?”

“I did.”

“Where did you get the old envelope?”

“Am I to answer all these questions in court?” demanded the doctor.

“No, not all of them; in fact, not many of them.”

“Why do you put them, then?”

“Because I wish to know how the affair was managed.”

“We are only supposing a case,” added Dr. Lynch, with a hideous grin.

“Very well; let us go on supposing the case a little longer. Where did you get the old envelope?”

“It is hardly necessary to be so minute.”

“Quite necessary; answer, if you please.”

“I found it on the body.”

“Where did you write the letter with the signature of Mr. Birch?”

“In my office. I went up with the head, and wrote the letter. On my return, I threw away the original letter, and put the one I had written in its place.”

“Then you intended that Mr. Birch should be compromised?”

“I did.”

“You intended to recover the body, but you prepared it to be found by others.”

“I was afraid it would be found.”

“Why did you intend to implicate Mr. Birch?”

“There was good reason why he should be with Buckstone — there was none to explain why I should be his companion.”

“Why did you send for him?”

“I will not answer another question!” exclaimed Dr. Lynch. “I have been a fool.”

“We were only supposing a case.”

“We have supposed enough, until you can satisfy me what I am to gain by supposing more.”

“Are you willing to answer the questions up to the point where you secured the body for dissection?”

“No; the friends of Buckstone, if he has any, would murder me for what I did.”

“It was in the cause of humane science. For aught we know, you saved Mr. Dunbar’s life by dissecting that head.”

“I think I did; but a man’s friends would not consider this a good excuse for dissecting his brain.”

“Perhaps you are right; and as no truth or principle will be sacrificed, we had better keep these facts out of the case. Besides, what doctors do in the cause of science and humanity is hardly a fit theme for public comment. In a great murder case, within my knowledge, some of the strongest evidence in regard to the identification of the victim was withheld to spare the feelings of a witness, and to avoid low remarks in public. It is a safe precedent, and I think Mr. Lowe will consent to keep this evidence out of court, especially as it proves nothing. It was wrong in you to mutilate the corpse; but to expose you would do a greater wrong by lacerating the feelings of the dead man’s friends, if they should hear of it, and by outraging the delicacy of the community generally. Pass this by; we will arrange it by and by.”

“Is the suppression of this evidence all I am to gain?” asked the doctor.

“No; here is the deposition of Sandy McGuire,” replied Dick, taking the document from his pocket. “I shall rebut your evidence with it, if necessary, and prove that ‘Dr. Bilks’s baby’ was a myth. You will save this.”

“My God!” groaned the doctor.

“You will be proved to be a liar in all this story.”

“Where did you get this?”

“It was done in due form, you perceive, before a magistrate, and has the seal of a commissioner for this state in New

York upon it. Sandy McGuire spent and lost all the money you paid him, and then got into a fight, killed his man, and was sent to the state prison for life. I was in New York city at the time, looking up Buckstone's affairs. I went to him; did what I could for him. As his money was all gone, he had no incentive to keep your secret any longer. Here is the whole truth in this paper; and I can support it with other witnesses. Unless you make it necessary, the document need not be used."

Dr. Lynch paced the room in violent agitation. This time he was defeated. It was useless to contend. Dick had him in his toils.

"One thing more, doctor; I have the original letter which I wrote to Buckstone, and which you threw away upon the beach."

"I threw it overboard with a stone in it."

"It was found on the rocks, by a witness who will testify to the fact, if called upon."

"Mr. Birch, I am in your power. Do with me as you will," groaned the doctor. "I will confess whatever you say."

"Confess the truth. I have three or four letters written by you to Buckstone."

"Spare me, if you can! Let me leave the town at once."

"No; now sit down, and write a full confession of your agency in the affair; tell the whole truth; and I pledge you my honor, that, beyond the simple facts necessary to vindicate my good name, none of it shall be made public."

Dr. Lynch sat down at the table, and commenced writing, and Dick went down to his supper.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PENITENT DEMIGOD.

DR. LYNCH wrote his confession. It contained the substance of his answers to Dick's questions; the supposed had become the actual. The doctor was diligent and thoughtful in his labor; but his face had entirely lost that aspect of slavish fear it had worn when Dick was present. His expression was that of low cunning; and one who looked upon him now would have regarded him as the conqueror, instead of the conquered. He finished the document, glanced at it, laid down the pen, smiled, rubbed his hands, rose from his chair, walked the room like a cabinet minister who has just elaborated a very satisfactory state paper. Through apparent defeat the doctor was evidently winning his most decisive victory.

The author of the confession read it over, inserted a few words accidentally omitted, punctuated it as carefully as though it were to appear in the Poppleton Mercury, and then coolly awaited the return of his persecutor.

"Vindicate him! Yes, I'll vindicate him," muttered the doctor, as he sat gazing at the burning sticks in the fireplace. "I can afford to do that. I can give the inch for the sake of the ell."

Dick Birch finished his supper, and returned to the room. The moment the door opened, Dr. Lynch looked as timid and abject as when his tormentor had left him. He handed the confession to the lawyer, who read it through with as

much care as though it had been a deed of some valuable estate.

“What do you think of it, Mr. Birch?” asked the doctor, with much apparent emotion.

“It is all very well as far as it goes,” replied Dick, in business-like tones.

“I have told all I know, Mr. Birch,” pleaded Dr. Lynch.

“You have written out a very full history of your operations on the night in question; and so far, your paper is entirely satisfactory; but you have not told why you came to Poppleton.”

“I came only to practise my profession. I had no other object in view.”

“You had,” said Dick, bluntly.

“Upon my honor I had not.”

“Very well; pass that for the present, but it will come up again. Why did you send for Buckstone?”

“My motives were good,” whined the culprit.

“No doubt of that; all your motives were good,” sneered Dick.

“You will remember that I was the medical attendant of Mary Kingman.”

“You were; go on.”

“Possibly I may have been, to some extent, influenced by selfish motives.”

“Possibly!”

“But I assure you, Mr. Birch, that my principal object was to redeem Miss Kingman from the misery to which she was reduced. I was afraid she would die on my hands.”

“Did you tell her that you had written to Buckstone?”

“I did not dare to raise any hopes till there was some prospect of their being realized.”

“You were very kind, doctor. You suggested that it was barely possible you might have been influenced to some extent by selfish motives. What selfish motives had you?”

“Mr. Birch, I am no hypocrite, however much I have

erred in this unpleasant business. I will not deny that half a million of dollars was not a disagreeable prospect to contemplate ;” and the doctor added one of his most ghostly grins to this speech. “Doubtless you have felt the same yourself.”

“I never contemplated any such prospect,” replied Dick, his cheek flushing as he thought what motives might be attributed to him in making love to Julia.

“Doubtless you loved Miss Hungerford ; perhaps you still love her, Mr. Birch. You were honest and sincere in your love, but at the same time you could have no possible objection to her being the possessor of half a million of money.”

“Silence, sir ! I will listen to none of your insinuations.”

“O, I didn’t intend anything disagreeable,” added the doctor, humbly.

“Then you acknowledge that you sent for Buckstone to forward your own views ?”

“Partly for that ; mainly for Miss Kingman’s sake.”

“Put that in your confession.”

The doctor complied, with some objections.

“Why did you wish to prove that I was the person with Buckstone ?”

“I thought it would injure you less than me. I was led from one thing to another, in order to make good my first statements.”

The doctor added to the confession till Dick was satisfied.

“Now I will call in two persons to witness your signature.”

“Then I am ruined !”

“Not at all : they need not even know the contents of this paper.”

“But what use do you intend to make of the document, Mr. Birch ?”

“If you keep your promise in the court-room to-morrow, no use whatever.”

“Will you give it to me then?”

“No; but I will promise that no one shall see it while you behave like an honest, upright man.”

“I understand you, Mr. Birch,” replied Dr. Lynch, gloomily. “You mean to hold it over me, as a guaranty that I shall do as you bid me.”

“I will make no unfair use of the paper.”

“I am helpless, Mr. Birch; you can do with me as you please.”

“I can; but no advantage shall be taken of you. I will call in Mr. Lowe and Mr. Darling as witnesses.”

The paper was duly signed and witnessed. Dick put it in his pocket, and felt that he had the enemy within his grasp; as though he had conquered the serpent of evil, and had him in chains at his feet.

Dr. Lynch did not think so.

“You haven’t been to supper, doctor,” said Dick, when the witnesses had departed, as they did without asking a question.

“I have no appetite.”

“I am not surprised.”

“I feel like a ruined man.”

“Dr. Lynch, you have wronged me as one man never wronged another.”

“I confess it. I am sorry for it. I will do all I can to atone for my error.”

“That is all I ask.”

“I will leave Poppleton at once.”

“You need not.”

“I will go to Pine Hill no more,” added the doctor, significantly.

“Go there as often as you please.”

“The family feel that they are under some obligations to me; Julia feels so.”

“They are. She is.”

“I will keep out of your way,” replied Dr. Lynch, more plainly.

“I do not wish you to do so. Though you have wronged me, though you have perjured yourself, though you have suborned witnesses, I will not injure you. I forgive you.”

“You are more forbearing than I deserve.”

“You are liable to be sent to the state prison for your crimes, but I will not proceed against you.”

“Mr. Birch, I do not deserve this kindness at your hands.”

“Sin no more ; that is all I ask of you.”

“Mr. Birch, wretch as I am proved to be, I believe you think me worse than I am. I am not the villain you take me to be. I did love Julia Hungerford : I do now. I am not worthy of her.”

“That’s true.”

“But my love purified my soul. If I was selfish when I wronged you, I have repented in dust and ashes. When I watched day and night at the bedside of Julia, there was not a selfish thought in my heart. Her wasted form, her glazing eyes, the fear that she would soon die, drove every consideration of self from my mind. I loved her ; and if, without ruining my reputation and driving me from her presence, I could have confessed my sin to the world, and redeemed your good name, I would gladly have done it. I forgot her half million, and I forgot my own. Eugene loved Mary Kingman ; I saw that he could never be happy without her. I advised him to marry her : I removed all objections from the minds of Julia and her mother. Was this selfish?”

“I am told that you did all this,” replied Dick ; and the fact, fully established, was so utterly inconsistent with the doctor’s course that the lawyer could not explain it.

“You perceive that I voluntarily labored to shut out myself and Julia, at the same time, from the fortune which it had before been my ambition to obtain. If ever a man loved

a woman truly, and for her own sake alone, I so loved Julia."

Dick was generous; he was magnanimous. To him Julia was more than human, and it was not strange that the love of her should have conquered the doctor's selfishness. To him this view was reasonable; and on no other ground could he explain the conduct of Dr. Lynch in promoting the marriage of Eugene. But the character of the doctor, as laid bare to him, was so base that he could not resist a strong tendency to scepticism.

"Of course Julia can now be no more to me," continued Dr. Lynch, gloomily. "I resign her to one who is more worthy of her."

"She is not yours to resign," replied Dick, indignantly.

"I will keep out of your way, I mean."

"You need not; you shall not. It is for her sake, more than your own, that I have spared you the pain of a public exposure of all your iniquities. I ask only enough to vindicate myself. If, after you have done me this justice, she will permit you to come into her presence, make the most of your opportunity. Between you and me, or any one else, Julia shall be the arbiter. If she loves you, marry her. That is all I have to say. You will be at the court-house at nine o'clock to-morrow morning; if you are not there, I will publish your confession in the newspapers."

"I will be there, without fail."

The doctor took his hat, and left the room. In spite of his meagre appetite, he ate a hearty supper, and then returned to Poppleton with a neighbor, who had been waiting two hours for him.

Dick Birch sat in his chair before the fire, thinking of what had just transpired. He was full of thoughts. Possibly he was troubled with some doubts in regard to what he had done. Had he compounded a felony? Had he bargained to shield a scoundrel from the penalty of his crimes?

Had his desire to "whitewash" the doctor for Julia's sake led him to do a wrong to the community?

When the serpent is beneath your heel, crush him!

Dick did not do so.

But the doctor was to retract his evidence; was virtually to confess his perjury, and his subornation of witnesses. The lawyer insisted that he should do this. The crimes were to be actually confessed, but not in detail. They were simply not to be set forth in their most revolting shape. The only thing to be concealed was the disposition of the body. Was it wrong to conceal this? The body was illegally dissected; but would not a greater injury result from the disclosure of these revolting details than from their suppression? Dick was not quite satisfied.

The lawyer had a client to defend. Ross Kingman's life was in peril. Though the prisoner had nothing to do with the body, his cause might be prejudiced by the exposure of the sickening particulars.

Why had Dick Birch been merciful to his apparent victim? The strongest incentive has not yet appeared. The thought of crushing Dr. Lynch that a rival in his love affair might be removed, was intolerable.

"Julia, I have disposed of my rival," he fancied himself saying to her. "I have vindicated my character. The doctor is a villain, as I told you; and I am a saint, as you might have known. Here I am. Take me!"

Dick jumped out of his chair, ashamed of the very thought. He loved Julia, but he could not think of her on these terms. He was unselfish, magnanimous. He preferred that the doctor should not suffer on his account; that the way might not be opened to him through the disgrace of his rival. It was mean to take the prize on such terms. He desired to stand before her as the doctor's equal, with no advantage of any kind. If Julia did not love him above all others, she would be no treasure to him. Dr. Lynch had taken advantage of him; had conspired against his good name; but Dick would

accept no more concession than just enough to restore his reputation. If it had been possible, he would have spared the doctor even this; if, consistently with his own standing in the eyes of his friends and the community, he could have permitted his rival still to be the demigod of Pine Hill and of Poppleton, it would have suited him better.

He scorned to crush a rival; his nature, in its nobility and magnanimity, cried out against such a proceeding. Base, low-minded men might do it; he could not. He did not consider that, if it was not his duty to crush the rival, it was his duty to crush the evil-doer.

The serpent was not crushed.

Dr. Lynch stopped at Pine Hill, on his return to Poppleton. He was admitted by Parkinson and shown to the library. What could he say for himself?

Eugene was not particularly cordial in his greeting. The doctor did not expect him to be.

"Mr. Hungerford, I have come here for the last time. I shall go out of your house before I am kicked out," the doctor began.

"Dr. Lynch, your name explains your position."

"No, sir; it does not."

The doctor did not often speak so decidedly, and his manner attracted Eugene's attention.

"It explains why you came here."

"Mr. Hungerford, I have a confession to make, before I depart. To-morrow morning I shall go upon the stand, and publicly acknowledge that I have wronged Mr. Birch. I shall tell the simple truth. Justice to him and to you requires this at my hands. It would have been done before, if I had had the courage to do it, for my error has caused me more suffering than it has him — infinitely more. I bow my head with shame."

When a man repents, who can frown upon him? Eugene could not. Neither he nor Dick Birch was what the world

calls a shrewd man. Penitence, confession, a desire to be true and manly, would wipe out any offence.

“I am sorry you have been led into error.”

“I repent it in sackcloth and ashes; I did repent it months since.”

Dr. Lynch explained why he had sent for Buckstone, for what purpose he had gone with him to The Great Bell; in fact, he told all that he had written out in his confession. Eugene shuddered when he spoke of the body, and wondered how even a doctor could cut off the head, and dissect the brain of one with whom, a few hours before, he had walked and talked.

“Buckstone was dead, Mr. Hungerford,” said Dr. Lynch, solemnly. “If his tenantless clay could serve the living, I deemed it my duty to put it to that use. I believe the knowledge thus gained enabled me to save the life of Mr. Dunbar, one of the best and most useful men in Poppleton. I grant that it was wrong for me to take the body for the purpose of dissection; but it would have been a greater wrong to let Mr. Dunbar die.”

“Were you not fully informed before in regard to the brain?”

“I should have been; but I was not. There was a certain point which was quite dark to me. The brain of Buckstone made it clear.”

“How came Dick’s handkerchief and cigar in the boat?”

“I put them there. I confess with shame and humiliation that I intended to wrong your friend.”

Eugene cast a loathing glance at him.

“You despise me, as I despise myself. If I had repented to-day, for the first time, I should not have dared to come into your presence. Will you hear my story from the beginning?”

“I will hear whatever you wish to say. I shall not scorn you any more than you seem to scorn yourself.”

“You could not. When I went to Baltimore, after the

death of Mr. Hungerford, I saw Mr. Loring, one of the trustees. I learned — with what disappointment I need not describe — that only twenty thousand dollars had been left to me. I was vexed and indignant, for I had endeavored to be like a son to my step-father. I expected at least one third of his fortune. Mr. Loring described your family. He spoke of Julia as a lovely and accomplished woman. I asked myself why I might not marry her.”

Eugene looked contemptuous.

“I went back to Dayton, and, as soon as possible, wound up my business, and sold out my practice. I wished the trustees to lose sight of me. A friend of mine wrote to Mr. Loring, at my desire, on business; to make inquiries in regard to me, and added that Dr. Lynch was going to ruin, and had actually spent most of his little fortune in three months. I knew the trustees would ask no questions about me after this.

“I came to Poppleton. You had gone to Europe. I used every effort to establish myself, and succeeded beyond my most sanguine expectations. How I stand you know. My practice is larger than it was in Dayton, and is worth, at least, four thousand dollars a year. Just before your return, I was called to Mary Kingman. Mr. Birch had told me her story. I pitied her; but she was in my way. It was indispensable to the success of my plans that she should be reunited to Buckstone. I attempted to do this, as I told you, fearful that Mr. Birch, who never had a selfish thought, would fail to do it.

“I had already satisfied myself that Mr. Birch was devoted to Julia; he was in my way. I liked him so well, and he had been so good a friend to me, that I could not patiently think of injuring him. It was the vilest, most wicked thing I ever did in my life, bad as I have been.”

Dr. Lynch wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Eugene thought there was hope of one who could so strongly condemn himself. It was true repentance.

“I did not mean to injure Mr. Birch till my own safety seemed to require it. When Buckstone was killed, I knew the fact that he had a companion would be discovered through Ross. You know the rest of it. Dick was suspected, was generally condemned by the people. He abandoned Pine Hill, as I was sure he would. I went away for a week.”

“In order to avoid seeing Mr. Lester?” said Eugene.

“Partly, not wholly. On my return I found Julia sick. She had a settled fever—the worst kind of typhoid. I had serious doubts if she could survive the attack. If she had been my mother or my sister, I could not have been more interested. I was not selfish then. I thought of nothing but my fair patient. God knows that not a mercenary thought crossed my mind in those hours I watched her. I wept and I prayed for her. When I was not here, I was studying the case.”

“We all feel that we owe her life to you, doctor,” added Eugene, as he recalled the weary days and nights they had watched with fear and trembling.

“She passed the crisis; she was out of danger. She smiled upon me. O, Mr. Hungerford, I cannot tell you what I felt then! I loved her! From that moment I have not ceased to love her. That love purified my soul, and sanctified the hope which had been base and unworthy before. I was ashamed of the purpose for which I came to Poppleton; I cursed my own soul for the wrong I had done Mr. Birch. I repented; but I had not the courage to confess my errors, for that would banish me from the presence of Julia—drive me in disgrace from the town. When the change came over Julia, another change came over me. As she warmed back into physical life, I grew into moral and spiritual life. Whatever my lot, wherever I go, she will still be the saver of my soul. I have done, Mr. Hungerford.”

The doctor wiped his brow again. He did love Julia Hungerford. This was true, whatever else was false.

“I am sorry you love her, Dr. Lynch.”

“I am glad!” replied the doctor, exultingly.

“She may not be willing to see you after what has transpired.”

“I do not expect it. I am willing to suffer — I deserve to suffer. A lifetime of penitence will not atone for the wrong I have done. I love her, and loving her has saved me from my own vain and wicked ambition.”

“You loved her for her money — for what might be hers.”

“Did I not counsel you to marry Mary Kingman? Did I not remove the objections of Julia and your mother? Was this selfish? Did I not persuade you to do the very thing which would deprive both Julia and myself of the contingent fortunes?”

“You did.”

“But it matters not now. This is the last time I shall enter your house, unless I am called here as a physician: in that capacity I will serve you to the utmost of my ability. Good night, Mr. Hungerford;” and Dr. Lynch moved towards the door.

“I am not quite prepared to adopt your view of this unpleasant business, doctor. Whatever you are, and whatever you have done, we are still deeply indebted to you,” interposed Eugene.

“It is not for me to speak, Mr. Hungerford. I feel that I have outraged and insulted you and every other member of your family. I have been a base, designing knave. I do not ask your forbearance.”

“But you shall have it none the less.”

“I cannot even ask to be forgiven,” pleaded the doctor, humbly, as he still stood, hat in hand, ready to leave.

“For myself I can, and do freely forgive you.”

“This is more than I deserve.”

Dr. Lynch threw himself into a chair, and covering his face with his handkerchief, actually sobbed.

Eugene’s tender heart could hardly endure this. To see

a strong man weep — and that man the skilful physician, the demigod of Pine Hill — was pitiable in the extreme.

“What does Mr. Birch say to all this?” asked Eugene, after the doctor’s woe had partially subsided.

“Mr. Birch is noble and generous. He is kind to me beyond expression. He forgave me the wrong I did him I confessed everything; I put myself wholly in his hands.”

“If Mr. Birch can forgive you, surely we can,” said Eugene. “Here is my hand, doctor. We will be as though nothing had happened.”

“You overwhelm me, Mr. Hungerford,” exclaimed Dr. Lynch, in tones broken with emotion. “I am unworthy to take your hand.”

“As a man who has done wrong, and truly repented, you are worthy of respect and admiration. Not many men have the courage to confess their fault.”

“It is only tardily that I have done so. Courage was all I lacked. The truth has been too mighty for me. Mr. Birch, with the truth on his side, has overwhelmed me. I have no merit. Mr. Hungerford, you have saved me. I could not endure my disgrace. When I left Mr. Birch, it was with the intention of ending my miserable life before to-morrow morning.”

“That would be cowardly.”

“If I had not been a coward, I should have done justice to Mr. Birch four months ago, when I was convicted in my own heart of this foul wrong.”

“You will suffer some, doctor, but not much. You have disarmed reproach.”

“You are too kind, Mr. Hungerford.”

“Come to Pine Hill as before, doctor. You will always find friends here.”

“How can I hold up my head in the presence of your mother and Julia?”

Eugene thought he could not; he did not say so. He added what he could to console the suffering penitent, and

the doctor departed, apparently reconciled to his lot. Julia and her mother went into the library when he had gone. Eugene explained the position of the demigod. Julia was indignant when she heard of his confession; she pitied him when she heard of his penitence and grief.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE VERDICT.

THE court came in on the second day of the trial. Dr. Lynch was present, as he had promised to be. His appearance had greatly changed since he went on the stand the day before. He looked like a man who had endured a lifetime of misery in a single night. His pale face and sunken eyes were the emblems of penitence. People were prepared by what had occurred on the first day for some extraordinary event. The doctor was suffering; he showed it in his looks and in his movements; the damp of the night watch seemed to be clinging to him. Those who saw him pitied him. It was sad to see a man so mighty as the popular physician fall from his high estate.

Doubtless Dr. Lynch had suffered intensely; doubtless he had not closed his eyes to sleep during the night; doubtless he had endured untold agonies between the setting and the rising of the sun. He was sorry for something; for what has not yet been told. He was certainly in excellent condition to appear on the stand as a penitent; he was well "made up" for this character.

The doctor was placed upon the stand as soon as the court was opened. There was a breathless silence in the room. The audience strained their eyes to obtain a glance at the face of the witness. People were almost prepared to hear him say that he himself had slain Buckstone. That he was in Poppleton under an assumed name was enough to excite the gravest suspicions.

“Dr. Lynch, I am informed that you desire to correct your testimony as given yesterday,” began the attorney for the government.

“I do.”

“What correction do you wish to make?”

“So far as my evidence related to Mr. Birch, it was false,” replied the witness in quivering tones, hollow and sepulchral. “I acknowledge, with the utmost shame and with a loathing of myself I cannot describe, that I have attempted to injure Mr. Birch; that I have sworn to what I knew to be untrue.”

The fall of a pin could have been heard in the court-room. This open, square, and unequivocal confession excited the contempt of all honest men, but pity was by far the stronger feeling. Some thought the doctor was a fool to confess; others that he need not have said so much; and fast men blamed him for not “putting it through” as he had begun: but the general sentiment was grief that one standing so high in the estimation of the community should have sacrificed himself. Christian men thought that, great as was the wrong he had done, the humiliating atonement he made ought to satisfy the sternest lover of justice.

“Were you with Mr. Buckstone on the night he was murdered?” continued Mr. Lowe, very gently.

“I was.”

“Was Mr. Birch with him also?”

“He was not.”

“Did you go to the island with Buckstone?”

“I did.”

“Did you see the prisoner on that night?”

“I did; Buckstone left me on the beach, and went up the rocks to speak with Ross Kingman. They went off together.”

“Did you see the murder committed?”

“I did not.”

“While you were on the beach were you conscious that a murder had been committed?”

“I was not.”

While he was on the beach he certainly was not conscious of the fact; it did not take place until after he had left the beach.

“Have you any knowledge whatever of the murder except what you obtained from Ross Kingman?”

“I have not.”

“Did you see the blow struck? Did you hear any angry words?”

“I did not.”

“That is all; the witness is yours, Mr. Darling,” said the government attorney.

Mr. Lowe deemed it his duty to prove that a murder had been committed, and that it had been committed by the prisoner. This was the issue which the jury were to try, and the government had nothing to do with the question in dispute between Dr. Lynch and Mr. Birch. The latter had been vindicated, and the truth, so far as it related to the murderer, had been fully elicited.

Mr. Darling asked a few questions of the witness, and he was permitted to retire. Of course, Dr. Lynch was in very bad odor, and everybody suddenly knew that Dick Birch had always been a just and upright man.

The trial proceeded. The fact that Mary Kingman had been grievously wronged, outraged, insulted, was made apparent. This was the terrible provocation of the prisoner. Mr. Darling made the most eloquent plea of his life. He pictured the condition of the deserted girl, who had believed she was a wife; the strong affection that existed between the prisoner and his sister. She had no friend, no protector, but this brother. Her father had absolutely driven her from his roof in his drunken frenzy. To whom could she look for justice but to this brother?

He depicted her sick room, with Ross watching night and

day by her side, loving and pitying her, and nursing his vengeance against her betrayer. He had gone to New York, plucked her from the poverty and disgrace to which she had been reduced by her unnatural protector. He had brought her home. He held in his fraternal arms the wreck of the beloved sister, wasted by disease, shattered by her mental suffering, disgraced, defiled, cast off. It was not right that the prisoner should slay the villain who had desolated the fond hopes of this loved one; but if ever man was justified in wielding the bolt of vengeance, Ross Kingman was.

He reviewed the evidence, drawing from it every item which tended to show the sad condition of Mary, the strong provocation of Ross. Mr. Lowe followed with legal definitions, distinctions, and discriminations. He showed what murder was; what was English law, what was French law, what was American law. Having done enough to satisfy himself, and the bar, and the bench, that he was a sound lawyer, he contented himself with arguing very lucidly that a murder had been committed, and that the prisoner had committed it. As no one doubted this, not much was gained by his plea.

In the matter of the provocation, Mr. Lowe was more useful to the jury. A sufficient provocation sometimes reduced the killing from murder to manslaughter; and this was the answer to the presumed malice which was the essential element in murder (1 Russ. Cr. 440); but the killing, except in self-defence, could not be absolutely justified by law, common or statute. He argued that if the prisoner was not guilty of murder, he was surely guilty of manslaughter. The jury could not avoid this conclusion.

The presiding justice charged the jury. He defined murder, manslaughter, homicide, and pointed out the legal distinctions, so that the old farmers were as clear as noonday on the subject. He told them what malice was, what provocations were legally recognized. He convinced them that the court had a full and earnest conviction of the enormity

of Buckstone's offence ; but society must be protected from the dagger of the assassin. He pointed out the exceeding great peril of justifying a man in taking the law into his own hands to resent real or fancied injuries.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the jury went out to consider their verdict. Mary Kingman fainted before the door had closed behind them. The words of the stern and impartial judge, who had spoken for the bench, had filled her with awe and terror. Eugene lifted her up, and bore her to an adjoining room : but she recovered, and the words of assurance spoken by Dick Birch enabled her to return to the court-room in season to hear the verdict.

The jury came in. They were grave men, impressed by the heavy responsibility which rested upon them, and nothing could be gleaned from their faces. They had been out less than an hour, and it was plain that there had been no serious disagreement among them. The court-room was hushed as the twelve men stood up, and the usual formalities were solemnly disposed of.

"Mr. Foreman, have you agreed upon your verdict?" asked the clerk.

"We have."

"What say you — is the prisoner at the bar guilty or not guilty?"

"NOT GUILTY!"

Though this result had been expected, it was not the less welcome. A storm of applause followed the rendering of the verdict, which all the hammering and shouting of the sheriff could not silence for a moment. The people had spoken through the jury, and now they spoke for themselves.

Ross Kingman was discharged. The court adjourned, and he rushed to Mary, clasped her in his arms, and both wept tears of joy. Ross was a notable. Hundreds took him by the hand, and congratulated him. Dr. Lynch was one of the number. When he had done so, he left the court, and drove home.

Mary and Ross, Eugene and Dick, occupied the Pine Hill carriage. Ross asked a great many questions about Dr. Lynch and the astounding event of the morning. To his surprise, both of his friends spoke kindly and charitably of the erring man. He had done wrong; he had publicly acknowledged his error, and they had forgiven him.

The party were warmly welcomed at Pine Hill by Julia and her mother. The exciting events of the day were narrated, and Eugene volunteered to accompany Mary to her home. He had no opportunity to speak to her of the subject nearest to his heart until they reached the house on The Great Bell. He was not willing to waste a moment. Mary was dearer to him than ever. Her missionary labors had more clearly exhibited her character to him.

"Mary, the trial is over, and Ross is free," said he, while they were seated in the parlor, her brother being with the rest of the family in the kitchen.

"He is; and how much we owe to you and Mr. Birch I need not remind you," replied she.

"You need not, Mary. I have done for him what I would have done for my own brother. But I did not remind you that the trial was over in order to speak of what has been done by any one. You remember your promise."

"I do," she replied, much embarrassed.

"I have faithfully kept mine. I have not spoken to you on the subject which was always claiming a word in my heart."

"You have not, Mr. Hungerford."

"Why do you speak so coldly and formally to me?"

"I dare not speak otherwise."

"Mary, all my happiness in this world is bound up in you. If you do not love me, Mary, say so."

"Eugene, I do love you!"

She wept in spite of all her struggles to repress her tears.

"Then why do you hesitate? Say that you will be my wife."

“No ; I cannot say it.”

“Then you do not love me.”

“It is because I love you — because I respect and reverence you — that I cannot be your wife. My conscience smites me when I think of dragging you down from your lofty height to the plane of shame and disgrace upon which I dwell.”

“Mary, you are true and good. I care not what men say. Be mine ; that is all I ask.”

“I cannot consent to injure you so much.”

“I fought your battle at the mill ; let me fight it in the great world.”

“Do not ask me yet.”

“When will you answer me, Mary ? I shall not be happy until you do.”

“To-morrow — next week ; but not now.”

“Let it be to-morrow.”

“Perhaps to-morrow.”

There was a knock at the outside door. Dr. Lynch was admitted. He expressed his surprise at finding Mr. Hungerford there ; if he had expected to meet him, he should have deferred his visit.

“I will retire, Dr. Lynch, if you have business with Miss Kingman.”

“I have business with Mrs. Buckstone, but it is a matter in which you are interested, Mr. Hungerford. You observe that I call our mutual friend Mrs. Buckstone. I do so purposely, as my errand will explain,” continued the doctor.

“Of course you do not call her so without good reasons.”

“Certainly not. I intend to leave town to-morrow morning, and it is necessary that I should dispose of this matter at once.”

“Why do you leave town, doctor ?” asked Eugene, surprised at this announcement.

“I think it better for me to do so.”

“But you intend to return ?”

“That will depend upon circumstances.”

“What circumstances?”

“If the people of Poppleton can be as generous towards me as you and Mr. Birch have been, I should be glad to remain, and prove the sincerity of my contrition.”

“Doubtless they will be.”

“Let the future determine,” added the doctor, as he took a package of papers from his pocket. “Mrs. Buckstone, if I have wronged others, I have not wronged you. I think I have been a true friend to you.”

“You have, doctor; you have always been very kind to me.”

“As you have doubtless heard, I sent for Buckstone to come here. I felt that it was necessary, in order to preserve your life and health, that your wounds should be healed. I have endeavored to heal them. When it was no longer possible for you to become the wife of Buckstone,—which was the purpose I had in view when I sent for him,—I endeavored to give you the means of proving the marriage which had already taken place. Mr. Hungerford, what was your opinion of the legality of that union?”

“I had no doubt whatever in regard to its legality, if it could be proved. By the humane laws of many of the states, a mock marriage is impossible,” replied Eugene. “If either of the parties intend to marry, the marriage is legal. The difficulty in this case was, that we could obtain no evidence, and Buckstone repudiated it.”

“Mrs. Buckstone, here is your marriage certificate,” added the doctor, handing her the important document.

“Impossible!” exclaimed Eugene. “Dick and myself have used every effort to obtain proof of the marriage. We could not obtain a particle of evidence.”

“After the death of Buckstone it was an easier matter,” replied Dr. Lynch. “I found Dorning, the artist. He is a miserable fellow. At first he refused to speak a word, but I finally induced him to tell the whole truth. The marriage

was solemnized by a broken-down minister; he is a blacksmith now, but preaches when he can find a pulpit. He was fully authorized to marry parties, though, in my opinion, a ten dollar bill would persuade him to marry a man to his own grandmother. The marriage was duly recorded. Dorning, his wife, and a servant girl were witnesses."

"When was it recorded?"

"Not till after I had seen the minister. Here is the city clerk's certificate of the fact, and here is the affidavit of Dorning and his wife, and of the servant, duly sealed and attested for use in any court in the state."

"But you obtained all these papers last summer?"

"I did."

"We never heard of them before. Why did you not exhibit them?"

"And let Ross be hanged for killing his brother-in-law, instead of being acquitted? Perhaps I was wrong, but this was the reason."

"I will not pretend to say whether you were right or wrong."

"The facts have been presented to the court and the jury just as they appeared to Ross and his sister. Buckstone denied his marriage, and deserted his wife. What Ross did was done with this understanding of the facts. It might have prejudiced the jury if they had known what was apparent to no one until long after the killing had been done. For this reason I kept the papers to myself until after the trial."

"I am very grateful to you, doctor, for what you have done. It is a greater joy to me to know that I was truly a wife than it would be to possess all the world can give."

"I knew it would be. These papers are the best prescription I can give for your bodily ailments."

There could be no doubt in regard to the validity of the papers or the marriage, and Eugene was as grateful as Mary. The doctor took his leave as humbly as though he had not

done a good deed — if he had done one; whether he had or not, so far as he was concerned, did not yet appear. So far as Mary was concerned, he had given back to her the reputation she had lost. She was happier in the possession of these papers than she would have been if they were the titles to an empire.

“You can speak now, Mary,” said Eugene, when the doctor had gone.

“Let it be to-morrow, Eugene,” replied she, with the sweetest smile he had seen upon her face since the death of John Hungerford.

“As you will, dearest,” added he, taking her hand. “I can wait, because your smile tells me what your answer will be.”

He kissed her blushing cheek. It was the first time since they had been scholars together. The clouds appeared suddenly to have rolled away. They were happy; both forgot the past.

“I hope Dr. Bilks, or Dr. Lynch, will not leave Poppleton,” said she. “I am sure he is a good man at heart. He could not have done so many kind things if he had not been.”

“He has many good traits of character. Of course I can never regard him as I did before; that would be impossible.”

“Self-interest and ambition often lead men astray. He has done very wrong.”

“And we will freely forgive him.”

Eugene returned to Pine Hill. Though it was late, Dick Birch and the family were still in the sitting-room. They had been talking of Dr. Lynch, but they had unanimously forgiven him.

“You are late, Hungerford,” said Dick, with a smile.

“I was detained.”

“No doubt of it,” laughed Dick. “A fellow is very apt

to be detained under certain circumstances. I hope you are not committed."

"I have been committed from the beginning. I intend that Mary shall be my wife; and the sooner the better."

"Of course I have nothing to say."

"Are you still opposed?"

"I am."

Eugene exhibited Mary's papers, which he had brought with him for this purpose. There was not a legal doubt expressed in regard to them, and all were pleased to have the appearance of wrong removed from Mary, especially since it had become a settled fact that she was to be the mistress of the Pine Hill mansion. For some reason, not apparent to others, Dick Birch did not seem to be so much interested in the marriage papers as might have been expected. He said but little about them, and avoided the subject; but no one doubted that he was as much pleased with her vindication as Eugene himself.

"Now, Dick, what have you been about all summer?" asked Eugene, after the ladies had retired.

"I have been following Dr. Bilks that was. I went first to the medical colleges in Philadelphia; there was no such name as Bilks on the books. I described him to the officers of the one at which the doctor said he was graduated. I had his photograph. They told me the picture was Tom Lynch's. Of course I was satisfied then. I went to Baltimore, and saw Mr. Loring. He told me Tom had 'run himself out,' spent his money, and left Dayton, where he had settled. I went there. So far from having ruined himself, he had left the place in the full tide of success, and with plenty of money in his pocket. I next went to New York. I was there six weeks, looking up Buckstone's affairs. While I was thus engaged, I saw the name of Sandy McGuire in the court column. He had lost his money, or part of it, and in a drunken brawl had struck a man a fatal blow. He was sentenced to the state prison for life for manslaughter.

"I went up to Sing Sing, and found him. He told me the whole truth, and I had his deposition taken. I found his wife, who was a nurse in the hospital. I came to Summer-ville next, where I staid a week, and worked up my case."

"What did you learn about Buckstone?"

"I found his rooms, and obtained some of the doctor's letters. My only object in looking him up was, to establish his relations with the doctor. But up to Tuesday night, though I had the means of showing that the witness had lied a dozen times, I had no actual proof that he was the stranger."

"Why did he confess?"

"He whined around me until I told him I should overwhelm him the next day. He confessed the whole then, and seemed to be very penitent."

"I have no doubt he was."

"It was good policy to be so."

"I think he was really sorry."

"I hope he was."

"He is going away for a time."

"Indeed? Will he return?"

"If he thinks he shall be well received, he will."

"I hope he will remain. Julia, I dare say, will not be quite willing to have him go," added Dick, trying to look indifferent, which was as impossible as for water to run up hill.

"Julia is a mystery to me. I don't know what she thinks."

Dick took this answer as a rebuff, and he said no more of Julia. Eugene was not willing to speak for her, and he changed the subject. He talked about his chapel and his missionaries, his model houses, and his battle with the mill people. But these were dry topics after the exciting events of the day; and at midnight both of them retired.

The next day the Poppleton Mercury came, with a full account of the trial of Ross Kingman; but this was already an old story, and Eugene's thought was soon riveted to a

paragraph which called the attention of the reader to the appropriate column where would be found the announcement of the marriage of Eliot Buckstone and Mary Kingman. The article stated that Mrs. Buckstone had her marriage certificate and other papers to confirm the fact of her union with the unfortunate man who had sought to rob her of her title of wife. These papers had been sent to Mrs. Buckstone at a late hour on the day of the trial, up to which time she had been entirely ignorant of their existence.

Of course Dr. Lynch was the author of the paragraph, and the people of Poppleton must by this time be satisfied that Mary had been a wife, and was now a widow.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DOCTOR HIMSELF AGAIN.

ON the morning after his return to Poppleton, Dick Birch went down to the Port, and resumed his duties as the business man of Eugene, just as though nothing had happened. People were glad to see him; they said so, and most of them knew he was "all right" from the beginning. There was not the shadow of a stain resting upon him. Some enthusiastic individuals proposed to give him a public reception — welcome him with speeches, and glorify him in the choicest rhetoric of the Poppleton orators; but those who knew Dick best were sure that he would not submit to the operation.

Eugene's income had been accumulating with fearful rapidity, and the balance in his favor in the Poppleton Bank was absolutely appalling. The affrighted *millionnaire* began to reproach himself for his own laziness. The chapel and the church, the missionaries and the Sisters of Charity, seemed hardly to affect the mighty balance, and the model houses paid their own way. Something must be done to mitigate the severity of the balance, which reproached the unfortunate owner for his want of enterprise.

Dick sympathized with him, and before dinner time the balance was happily disposed of, and the bewildered man of money dined in peace. A public library and reading-room were projected. A site for an elegant building was agreed upon, and an investment for its perpetual support and improvement was arranged. Several vacant rooms in the bank

building were at once hired for the temporary accommodation of the library, for the projected edifice could not be completed before the autumn of the next year.

“Of course this will be called the ‘Hungerford Library,’” said Dick Birch, when the plan was satisfactorily adjusted.

“Bah!”

“Why not?”

“I will not permit my name to be applied to any public institution.”

“But the people who are to receive the benefit of this library will insist upon it.”

“I will never consent. It shall be called the ‘Poppleton Library,’ or something of that sort.”

“Just think of the immense value of this institution to the people. Here will be a large library, from which the whole town may take books without cost. Here will be a great hall, warmed and lighted, open day and evening, supplied with all the newspapers and magazines of the day, where the citizens can sit and read publications which would cost them a hundred dollars a year to obtain individually. Here is a conversation-room, where they can meet to talk politics, religion, ships, and factories. Don’t you think they will be grateful to you?”

“Doubtless.”

“They will insist upon having your name in connection with the enterprise.”

“If that were the alternative, I wouldn’t do it at all. I intend to do this thing for the public good, not for my own glory. Giving my own name to such an institution, seems to me very much like putting ‘esquire’ to my own signature. I will not do it, or let it be done.”

“Of course you will do as you please.”

“I know of nothing that would make me feel cheaper and more insignificant, than to see my name in great letters on the proposed building. I abhor the very idea.”

Eugene was decided, and he was sincere. He was not

the man who offered to give a large sum of money to any town that would adopt his name; he could not have been even a friend of such a man. The balance was effectually used up, and Hungerford and his friend went to dinner with better appetites for the good work they had done. Dick had dropped back very easily into his old position, which was not less satisfactory to the family than to himself.

Julia was in no respect altered from what she had been before Dick's withdrawal from the mansion. She treated him now with the intimacy of friendship, but he did not seem at all disposed to improve his opportunity. He did not attempt to make love to her, resorted to no expedients to win her favor; in fact, he conducted himself in the most commonplace manner, precisely as though he did not intend to take advantage of Dr. Lynch's absence.

"Dick, we must get up a list of books for the public library," said Eugene, after dinner.

"That is no small matter."

"No; and as you and I have enough to do, I propose to leave the selection to another."

"I am entirely willing."

"I will carry what catalogues we have to Mary, and let her do this work. She has good taste and good judgment."

"Excellent!" laughed Dick.

"John Porter will assist her."

"I think you had better assist her yourself."

Eugene took the catalogues and went to The Great Bell. He laid his bundle on the table in the parlor, and came away without saying a word about the public library. He forgot it.

"To-morrow has come, Mary," said he, as he took her hand, and kissed her cheek.

Mary was troubled.

"It has come too soon."

"Don't you love me?"

"I cannot deny it."

“Would you deny it?”

“If I could I might be more true and just to you.”

“If you love me, it is all I ask. You consent?”

“I do not — yet.”

“Why not, Mary?”

“I do not deserve you.”

“Do I deserve you?”

“O, yes!”

“Then would you deprive me of my desert?”

“Eugene, my heart says yes; my reason says no.”

“The heart before the reason, Mary.”

“I am afraid that, months or years hence, when this step cannot be recalled, you will see me as I am. You will think of the odious events which once separated us, and wish you had passed me by on the other side.”

“You wrong me, Mary.”

“It would not be unnatural, Eugene. You know what a break there was in the love which began while we were children. Even now you wish this had not happened.”

“I do,” replied Eugene, candidly. “If I could to-day be reduced to poverty, and possess you as you were before Buckstone stepped into your path, I would take the poverty, and rejoicingly clasp my treasure to my heart.”

Mary shrank from him.

“Then you do not regard me as you did before?” said she, sadly, and with quivering lip.

“I love you the same; do not shrink from me. I have only said that I would give the poor boon of wealth to have you as you were. This cannot be. Mary, I am cool, self-possessed; I am not carried away by any silly enthusiasm. I have thought calmly and dispassionately of our marriage. I have compared you with all the women I know — with all I have seen here and abroad. You are beautiful; if it were for your beauty alone I sought you, I could distrust myself. It is not. You have a Christian heart. You were my ideal of a woman. You are still. What has happened does not

affect the qualities for which I seek you. Morally, mentally, spiritually, you are the same. I love you in spite of what has come between us. I cannot love another. I could not help looking coldly upon the fairest and most accomplished, even after I knew that you were the wife of another. If I had been doomed never to see you again, I should still have cherished the Mary I loved, and never thought of supplying her place with another. I feel what I say; I mean it. I am not making a special plea; I am only telling the simple truth."

She did not shrink from him now.

"Could I have known that you still loved me," replied she, as he took her hand again, "I should not have done violence to my own heart as I did. I would have slept in the woods, and fed upon acorns, rather than be false to the love that was in my heart. I thought you repelled me. I gave you up, and believed that I had conquered my heart."

"It was my fault; but let us not speak of these things. They are loathsome to me. Let me atone for my error."

"I wish you to know the whole truth. The past is more painful to me than it can be to you."

"Let the dead bury their dead; let us never allude to these things again."

"Never, Eugene."

"You are mine, Mary?"

"I cannot say no, and I dare not say yes."

His arm encircled her waist, as she leaned her head upon his shoulder. There were tears in her eyes—why they came she could not tell.

"Do not rob me of this highest earthly joy, Mary."

"I can rob you of nothing, Eugene; no word or deed of mine can add a joy to your lot."

"The word can hardly add to the consent your looks and actions give, Mary, but speak."

"Yes, Eugene! Do with me as you will. I am not worthy, but such as I am, I am yours, since you desire it."

She smiled through her tears, as he printed his warm kiss upon her lips, and the compact was sealed.

They were to be married in the spring; to no earlier time than this would she willingly consent. When he had gone, Mary wondered what the bundle of catalogues could mean; but Eugene came every day after this, and in a week the list of books for the Poppleton library was ready.

Mary still applied herself with unremitting diligence to her missionary duties in connection with the chapel. John Porter preached and labored among the Protestant poor, and Father McCafferty and the Sisters of Charity among the Catholic. The keepers of grog shops complained of hard times. The reading-room was opened; the books of the library began to circulate; a course of lectures was commenced; and then the keepers of the billiard and bowling saloons began to grumble, as their patrons decreased in number.

"I have it!" exclaimed Eugene, as soon as the effects of his enterprise began to be apparent.

"What, Hungerford?" asked Dick, taking his cigar from his mouth.

"We must have the library building three stories high."

"Is that all?" laughed Dick, who did not regard this as a very brilliant idea.

"The structure will be on a side hill. We can have it two stories on the street, and three in the rear."

"No doubt we can; what are you talking about, Hungerford?"

"In the lower story we will have a bowling alley and a billiard-room."

"Will you, indeed? I thought you were opposed to these institutions."

"Not to the bowling or the billiards, but to the gambling, drinking, and swearing, which always go with them. We will make these amusements decent and respectable. No drinking, no profanity, no gambling will be allowed or our

premises. Young men must have amusements; let them be innocent amusements, and we may cheat the devil out of many a fine young fellow."

"What is the next story for?"

"The library, the reading and conversation rooms."

"Good; but a ten-strike in the basement might disturb the politicians up stairs, or upset the lucubrations of the philosophical student, buried in the contents of the Edinburgh or North British."

"The floor can be made of brick or stone, so that the noise will not disturb the readers or the talkers. The upper story will be for the lecture-room."

Eugene was satisfied with the idea, and so was Dick Birch. Both were confident that this institution would place Poppleton one step nearer paradise. New instructions were immediately sent to the architect, who was preparing the plans.

Dr. Lynch had been absent a month. Poppleton missed him very much. The people spoke kindly of him. He "felt bad," and they pitied him. The invalids wanted their physician. Dr. White could not fill his place. Dr. Lynch had a way of making people believe they were very sick, when they desired to think so; then he understood their cases; he knew their constitutions better than any other man. He could look so sad and sympathizing in an emergency which required nothing but a brown-bread pill to restore the patient to perfect health. If a man did not want to be very sick, he could often accommodate him. A patient with a bad liver had his pork and coffee stopped for a month, and got well on faith in a compound of molasses and water, medicinally impregnated with essence of sassafras. The doctor had tact; he doctored people's imaginations, quite as much as their bodies, when the circumstances indicated such an array of remedial agents.

The invalids wanted their doctor. Mrs. Brown hoped the Lord would spare her from any sickness till Dr. Lynch came

back. Mrs. Jones would certainly die if she had one of her ill turns in his absence. Squire Green was sure he could not survive another attack of liver complaint, if his old doctor, who had twice saved his life, could not attend him. Deacon Smith might as well speak for his gravestone at once if Dr. Lynch did not return before spring. The popular physician had made a bad mistake in the Buckstone business; but all men make mistakes, and he was no worse than others. He had perjured himself, wronged an innocent man; but he had taken it all back; he had done all he could, and angels could no more.

The ship-masters, the ship-builders, the bank officers, and the mill agents, who were wont to eat evening suppers at the Bell River House, declared that the doctor had been the life and soul of the party; and they hoped he would come back. He had been a little too sharp for his own interest; but there were a great many worse men than Dr. Lynch, who still held up their heads in society.

Everybody condemned the conduct of the doctor, but all hoped he would return. Eugene Hungerford spoke tenderly of him, and Mr. Birch, the man of all others who had the right to denounce him, was never heard to say a word against him. The public voice preached the cardinal doctrine of Christianity: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity — these three; but the greatest of these is charity." So said Poppleton, and the doctor was forgiven.

At the end of the month Dr. Lynch came back, to close up his business affairs, previous to his final departure. The people protested. Squire Green was down with the liver complaint, and as a special favor, the doctor consented to see him; then to attend him while he remained. There was a supper of the club at the hotel; seven times the doctor positively refused to be present, and finally went. A man at the Mills had his leg crushed on the railroad; the doctor reluctantly consented to amputate it. Mrs. Jones had an ill turn; he could not refuse her earnest petition. He

performed all these kind acts with apparent unwillingness, and still continued to talk of going. The pressure brought to bear upon him was tremendous, and he could not resist it. A new sign, with the name of "Dr. Lynch" upon it, was nailed to his office door, for, the doctor facetiously added, his practice was already sufficient, and the name could no longer injure him.

The doctor was invited to visit Pine Hill; he declined. He could not look Julia in the face, he said. He was ashamed of his conduct. She could not help despising him. He did love her, but it was right that he should suffer.

"Mr. Hungerford, I am no hypocrite," added the doctor. "When I say suffer, I mean so. God knows how gladly I would resume my old intimacy with your family; but I shall remain a voluntary exile. I do not deserve any further kindness at your hands."

"We shall forget the past. We do not ask you to punish yourself so severely. Mr. Birch would be as glad to see you at Pine Hill as I should."

"He overwhelms me with his generosity. He loves Julia; so do I. I will not go."

"That does not alter the case."

"I will not seem to come between him and her."

"Julia cannot be bargained for."

"No; but I can prove my regard for Mr. Birch, my willingness to suffer for his sake, by not attempting to win her. If this involves any presumption on my part, it does not affect my intentions towards our mutual friend. Let us change the topic, Mr. Hungerford," added the doctor, as he unlocked a closet and took from it a human skull.

Eugene was annoyed.

"One more act of justice yet remains to be done, Mr. Hungerford. This is the skull of Buckstone."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Eugene, disgusted at the idea it suggested.

"Here is the part where Ross struck the fatal blow,"

added the doctor, pointing to a place on the skull where the bone was beaten in and broken.”

“Why do you keep it?”

“I do not purpose to do so. I shall employ the sexton who buried the body to put this in the coffin. I will restore the brain, which I have kept in spirits. If you please, I will explain to you the nature of Mr. Dunbar’s disease, and show you in this brain just what the trouble was.”

“No, I thank you,” replied Eugene.

Whether the skull and brain were ever returned to the body in the ground Eugene never inquired. He went home and reported what the doctor had said about coming to Pine Hill. Even Julia declared that he was too nice — more nice than wise. But, in less than a week from this time, Dr. Lynch did go to Pine Hill. It was midnight — dark, cold, and stormy. Mrs. Hungerford had been suffering, for several days, with a severe cold; and in the night her symptoms had suddenly assumed a form which alarmed Julia. The sufferer wanted Dr. Lynch, if she had any physician. She had unbounded confidence in him. Eugene went for the doctor himself.

“Don’t you think you had better procure some other physician, Mr. Hungerford?” asked the doctor, who seemed to be much troubled at the idea of going to Pine Hill.

“You surely will not refuse to go, Dr. Lynch?”

“Of course I am entirely willing to go; I would do anything for your family; but don’t you think, under the circumstances, that it would be better to call another physician?”

“My mother particularly desired to have you. If you are not willing to go ——”

“I am entirely willing to go, Mr. Hungerford. Do not misunderstand me.”

“My mother is very sick; be as quick as possible.”

“I will be with you in a moment,” replied the doctor, as he hastened his preparations. “I would go a thousand

miles to serve your mother, but of course I must meet Julia."

"That cannot be avoided, even if you wish to avoid it."

Eugene thought that Dr. Lynch exhibited a degree of delicacy and consideration which few men possessed. He certainly appeared to be sincere in his purpose to renounce his claims, if any he had, upon Julia.

The doctor was shown to the room of Mrs. Hungerford. Julia was there, sad and troubled. She gave her hand to the physician, and warmly greeted him. She thought only of her mother, and she believed that he would save her if human skill could do so.

"I am sorry to meet you under such unpleasant circumstances, after my absence," said the doctor, as he took off his overcoat, and opened his trunk.

"Why didn't you come when we sent for you? We should have been glad to see you."

"Thank you; but I did not feel like coming. You have learned to despise me, and I submit, for I deserve it."

"Far from it, doctor. We have never ceased to be grateful to you. I am afraid mother is very sick."

"I fear she is, from the sound of her breathing."

The doctor bent over her. She gave him her hand, and, hardly able to speak, expressed her pleasure at seeing him again. He felt her pulse, applied his ear to her chest, making a very careful examination of her condition. He shook his head, and Julia trembled like an aspen. He spoke of lung fever. It was a dangerous disease at the patient's time of life, and with her peculiar constitution. But the doctor went to work. He gave her medicine; he applied poultices, draughts, lotions. He did not leave her bedside during the remainder of the night. Before daylight she was comparatively comfortable, and slept a little.

Dr. Lynch said the physician had not been called soon enough; and Mrs. Hungerford had typhoid-pneumonia. For two weeks he was as diligent, as watchful, as interested.

apparently, as he had been in Julia's illness. It was a sickly season in Poppleton, and he was worked night and day. He grew pale; he would drop asleep while sitting at the bedside of his Pine Hill patient. Julia was afraid the doctor would be sick himself; but he would remit no portion of his attentions to her mother.

Mrs. Hungerford began to improve. Again came rich wines, grapes from foreign shores, and bouquets from the conservatories of the great city; but whether or not the doctor brought these things for consistency's sake, the reader may judge. At any rate, no one at Pine Hill thought of the errors of Dr. Lynch; in fact, he was again the demigod of Pine Hill. His patient had not been as near to death's door as Julia was; but she might have been if the doctor had been less faithful, less skilful; might have died in the hands of an ordinary physician; so the family were willing to believe.

Dr. Lynch saw Julia every day, several times a day, during her mother's severe illness. He sat for hours with her by the bedside of the invalid. His former relations were apparently reëstablished, and he did not conceal from her the pleasure her society afforded him.

"Your mother is pretty well now, Miss Hungerford," said he, one day, when the patient was down stairs. "I think she needs a physician no longer."

"But you will see her occasionally, doctor?"

"Perhaps not; it is hardly proper for me to come here, except professionally," replied the doctor, glancing into the fair eyes of the beautiful girl.

"Proper — why not?" said she, her cheek glowing.

"It depends upon circumstances. If you will favor me with ten minutes' private conversation, I can answer better."

"I will, with pleasure. Take a seat, doctor."

It was in the sitting-room, and they were alone.

CHAPTER XXIX.

FORGIVE AND FORGET.

JULIA doubtless anticipated the subject of the interview. Her cheek was crimson, but there was a certain resolution manifested in her eye which might have foreboded ill to the doctor's hopes, or might have been merely the effect of that bracing up of the nerves which is necessary to enable a maiden to meet what she desires, yet dreads.

"Miss Hungerford, perhaps I am rash and foolhardy. I feel that I am; but I cannot endure the painful anxiety in which I have existed during the last two months," the doctor began. "You despise me; you are disgusted with me."

"You wrong me, and you wrong yourself, Dr. Lynch."

"It would not be unnatural that you should do so."

"On the contrary, it would be more than strange if one for whom you have done so much should regard you with any other feelings than respect and esteem."

"Miss Hungerford, you know what wrong I have done; you know how grossly and inexcusably I have injured your brother's best friend — one who had been more than a friend to me."

"Why need you mention this unpleasant matter, doctor? It is past and forgotten."

"It cannot be forgotten; at least, not by me. The wrong was too grievous to rest lightly on my awakened conscience."

"It was a grievous wrong, Dr. Lynch; it would be worse than foolish to deny it."

The doctor did not appear to be encouraged by this remark.

“There was nothing to palliate it,” he added, meekly.

“Nothing, doctor; no attempt was made on your part to justify or excuse your conduct, which makes your friends all the more ready to forget and forgive.”

“I may be forgiven as the condemned criminal is forgiven, but I am despised as he is despised.”

“Far from it, doctor. Your confession, and the manly reparation you made, have atoned for the error; and for one, I must beg you never to allude to it again. One who has been so kind to us cannot be despised, or even regarded with coldness.”

“Miss Hungerford, you do not know what I have suffered. Long before the trial, long before Mr. Birch had the means of proving his innocence, I was convicted of my error. My penitence dates, not from the day Ross Kingman was tried, but from the day when you, lying at death’s door, opened your eyes and smiled upon me. It was your look that conquered me, not the fear of public disgrace. Miss Hungerford, I love you! Do not spurn me.”

“I am honored by your preference,” stammered Julia.

“You saved me from myself. As I bent over you, pale, wasted, almost in heaven, you seemed like an angel sent to convict and condemn me. I was convicted and condemned. O, how I loathed myself!” continued the doctor, earnestly.

“You were very kind to me then.”

“If I could have lain down in the grave, and gone to heaven with you, how happy I should have been! I was not fit for heaven; I was not fit even for the presence of the angel whom I had labored to save from the arms of death.”

“You are sentimental, doctor,” added Julia, trying to smile.

“The feeling of my own unworthiness as I looked upon you, as I watched your dimmed eye and your wasted form, was terrible to me, for I could not help loving you. When

you were better, I tried to tear the idol from my soul. I could not; it had become part of my being. I was banished from your presence. Every day of absence was a day of misery. I would not even have you know what I endured. There was no hope, no comfort for me. But I had been so base and wicked that I deserved to suffer. I could reproach no one but myself."

"Why need you indulge in this morbid self-condemnation? You have confessed your error; you have atoned for it as far as you can. Why need you repine any more?"

"Because my error has robbed me of all the joys of life," replied the doctor, in the bitterness of desperation.

"That cannot be."

"It can be; it is."

"Your profession still enables you to do good to your fellow-beings, and your kind heart finds abundant objects of charity. You can be happy in being true to yourself and useful to others."

Dr. Lynch was surprised into an expression of contempt, but it was instantly supplanted by his sad look of humiliation and self-abasement.

"You did not quite understand me. I have all these joys, and they are joys indeed. I am human, and therefore selfish. That which I have regarded as the greatest joy of earth has fled from my grasp, if it were ever within my reach."

Julia knew what he meant, and her cheek betrayed her consciousness.

"If you desire any selfish joy, you should be willing to dispense with it. We should not repine because we cannot have all that we desire in this world; that is the common lot of humanity."

"What I desire is absolutely necessary to save me from hopeless misery."

"I trust not."

"Miss Hungerford, I have been self-banished from this house for your sake"

“For my sake!”

“Truly for your sake.”

“I should always have been glad to see you.”

“The feeling that I was not worthy to come into your presence has made me an exile from the society which I have longed for, pined for. I had fully resolved, bitter and terrible as was the fate to which I doomed myself, never again to see you.”

“Why should you?”

“Because I love you! You spurn me; you shrink from me!” exclaimed the doctor, with passionate earnestness.

Julia did not move, did not start, did not shrink. As she had no feeling of disgust, she did not manifest any. The suitor was poetic, rather dramatic, in his demonstrations. Julia looked anxious, troubled, rather than agitated.

“I am sure, Dr. Lynch, no one of our family, least of all myself, regards you with aversion. We are weighed down with obligations to you; and if we were so disposed, we could not afford to think unkindly of you.”

“You are noble and generous, and your generosity makes my error all the more loathsome to me. I have never ceased to feel your kindness and generosity; but I could not tax it to the extent of compelling you to tolerate one so base and despicable as myself.”

“You really hurt my feelings by applying such epithets to yourself.”

Perhaps that was what the doctor intended to do.

“I am what I am. I would sacrifice everything to win back the integrity I have lost. I cannot hide myself from my own eyes. I was willing to hide myself from yours. I intended not again to burden your family with the sight of me.”

“We should have been glad to see you every day since your return. Eugene invited you, and tried to persuade you to come to Pine Hill. Does not this fact convince you that you would have been welcome here?”

“I have never doubted that I should be welcome. To stay away seemed to me to be a sacred duty, though it was contrary to my own inclinations. Does this convince you of the sincerity of my repentance?”

“We knew you were sincere, and we asked no such proof.”

“I believed it was my duty to stay away. I faithfully followed my conviction. I should have persevered, but your brother insisted that I should attend your mother in her sickness.”

“Mother could not think of having any other physician.”

“It was not my fault that I came.”

“Your fault! It was kind of you to come. Mother might have died if you had refused to come.”

“But I dreaded to come; not on your mother’s account, of course, for I respect and esteem her more than any other woman in the world. I feared to come.”

“Why should you?”

“I suggested to your brother that he had better call in another physician.”

“So he told me.”

“If I could honorably have avoided coming, I should have done so.”

“I am sorry you had so strong a dislike to coming to our house.”

“Dislike! Far from it!”

“What was it, then?”

“Simple duty. I could not avoid seeing you.”

“Did you object to seeing me?”

“It was rapture even to look upon you! Julia, I came. Right or wrong, I cannot help loving you. I would have spared you this, for I know you hate me, if your gentle nature is capable of hating.”

“I do not hate you; I do not dislike you, doctor. Your words pain me.”

“I have thought that it was the guidings of Providence

that brought me here after I had so solemnly exiled myself from these halls. The happiest hours of my life have been spent here; but, like our first parents, I have been driven from Eden by my own transgression."

"Be more reasonable, doctor. Promise me that you will come here as you used to come. I will insure you a glad welcome at all times."

"Heaven knows how joyfully I would give such a promise! Julia — will you pardon me for speaking to you thus familiarly?"

"Certainly; it is all in the family," laughed she.

"Julia, how many times have I said I loved you! You do not speak of this."

"I cannot," she replied, with some confusion.

"Do you hate me?"

"No."

"You despise me."

"No."

"You believe that I am unworthy of you."

"No; we have all done wrong, and we need to be forgiven."

"Have you forgiven me?"

"I have."

"Do you regard me now as you did before my great transgression was exposed?"

"I do not."

"I feared it," replied he, with a kind of hopeless gasp between a sigh and a groan.

"Do not misunderstand me, Dr. Lynch. While I respect and esteem you; while I am grateful to you to a degree I cannot express; while I forgive and forget the wrong you have done; while there is nothing in the world that I would not do for you, — I cannot regard you as I did before."

Dr. Lynch breathed forth a sigh which seemed to come from the deepest depths of a hopeless and desponding soul. He rose from his chair, and walked across the room,

apparently to hide his emotions from Julia. He stood facing the corner of the room. He took a spotless white handkerchief from his pocket.

“Doctor, you do not understand me,” said Julia, greatly troubled by the apparent anguish of her suitor.

“You speak too plainly to have your meaning mistaken,” he replied, as he turned and walked towards her again.

There was an expression of agony on his face which appealed to her woman’s heart with tremendous force. His eyes looked misty, and if his spotless handkerchief was not stained by a tear, perhaps it was because it is not manly to weep.

“I do not condemn you. I shall meet you as I have always met you. I shall have the same regard for you.”

“But you have not even forgiven me.”

“I have, fully and freely.”

“You cannot *forget* my transgressions.”

“I have forgotten them.”

“Then why do you say you shall not again regard me as you did before?”

“You have proved your capacity to do what is as loathsome to you as it is to me. My estimate of your character has been affected. I cannot help it. It is involuntary on my part. I can forgive and forget the wrong, but I cannot blot out the influence which it has had upon my mind.”

“Then you are always to look down upon me, from the pinnacle of your own goodness, as a base and hopeless transgressor?”

“How much you wrong me! St. Paul, who called himself the chief of sinners, came to be the holiest of saints. The stone that was rejected becomes the head of the corner. I shall not think — none at Pine Hill will think — of what you were, or what you have done. We shall esteem you, and judge you by what you are. We may all learn to regard you even more kindly than before anything occurred to lower our estimate of you.”

“That is hopeful,” said the doctor, apparently somewhat comforted by her explanation.

“I trust you are satisfied.”

“As far from it as Tantalus when the cool waters which he could not drink rippled within reach of his parched lips,” replied the doctor, vehemently. “Julia, I love you with all my mind, heart, and soul. I have not a thought of existence which is not wedded to you! I have not a hope or a joy which is not colored by your smile! I have not a waking hour which is not haunted by your image! Life without you is misery, torment, desperation; with you it is heaven. Is there any hope for me?”

“I am afraid not.”

“You do not love me.”

“I do not dislike you.”

“There was a time when I believed you were not wholly indifferent to me.”

“I am not now, any more than then,” she replied, with a calmness which almost prostrated the ardent wooer.

“You distort my meaning. I speak not of simple friendship or mere regard. Do you love me, Julia?”

“I do not.”

Dr. Lynch sprang from his chair. He seemed to be furious in his disappointment; like one of those sunny-clime lovers who, refused, clap a pistol to their heads, and blow out their brains, or find a grave in the deepest waters that flow within their reach. He indulged in sharp, impatient, convulsive movements; his eyes glared out the window, at the floor, at the ceiling. And Julia was calm as a summer rainbow while the lightnings gleam and the thunder roars in the opposite horizon. This is something which some men must have, as some children must have the whooping-cough. It is really terrible, but nothing can be done.

“Julia,” cried the doctor, suddenly dashing across the room to the place where she sat, — “Julia, *can* you ever love me?”

“I don't know.”

“Can you permit me to hope?”

“I fear it would be useless to anticipate such a conclusion of the whole matter,” she replied, smiling.

The doctor demonstrated again for a few moments. She was as cold as an iceberg.

“You close the door of hope against me?”

“I do not.”

“You permit me to hope?”

“Yes, if you will.”

“Forgive me, Julia; do you love another?”

“Not even my best friend may ask me such a question.”

She blushed deeply.

“You love Mr. Birch; and he is worthy of you,” groaned the doctor.

“Mr. Birch never spoke a word to me on such a subject; never even hinted at it.”

“Do you not love him?”

“I will not answer.”

“If you do, Julia, it is right that you should say so to me.”

“I have said all that I would say, even to my own mother, concerning Mr. Birch. Neither you, nor any one, has the right to catechise me on that which every woman must conceal until it reveals itself.”

“I did not ask for the purpose of impertinently prying into your affairs, Miss Hungerford,” continued the doctor, rather coldly. “If you love Mr. Birch, any attentions from me would be an annoyance to you.”

“I wish to meet you as we have always met. I regard you as a strong personal friend, to whom I am under no common obligations.”

“Do not speak of obligations.”

“It gives me great satisfaction to acknowledge them. Any attentions you may be disposed to bestow upon me will always be gratefully received.”

“You do not accept the issue as it is. I love you. I have committed myself both by word and deed. I have given you the power to say you have rejected me.”

“I have not rejected you; if I had, I could not mention it.”

“You have not?”

“No.”

“You have said that you regard my suit as hopeless.”

“That is my opinion.”

“If Mr. Birch ——”

“No more of Mr. Birch, if you please. I am committed to no one. I have decided nothing. I am as ignorant of the future as you are. I am content to let events take their course. Am I a flirt? No. I will marry no man unless I love him well enough to be his wife.”

“You neither accept nor reject me.”

“I do not. I hope to meet you as a friend.”

“Julia, this is misery for me.”

“I have told you the simple truth. I am passive. I cannot control my heart. I will obey its dictates as I shall those of my conscience.”

If Dr. Lynch was not satisfied with the result of this interview, it certainly was not Julia's fault. Nothing was decided, and the doctor joined Eugene and Dick Birch in the library without a very clear apprehension of his own position. It looked rather hopeless from one point of view, but the gates of paradise had not been closed against him. Of course he believed that Birch had all the advantage now, though it appeared that he had not been forward to avail himself of his opportunity.

There was a stranger in the library when he entered — a plainly-dressed, but very good-looking lady of twenty-five. She was introduced to the doctor as Miss Thompson.

“This lady is to be our new missionary,” said Eugene. “I find we need such a person.”

“There is plenty for her to do,” replied the doctor, who

did not appear to have much interest just then in missions or missionaries.

The doctor did not say much, and in a short time took his leave. Miss Thompson was to take the place of Mary, whose approaching marriage would soon deprive the chapel enterprise of her valuable services. Eugene had spoken of the loss which would thus be involved, and Dick had mentioned this lady as one residing with his family for a brief period. She was said to be a poor girl, of excellent character and a Christian spirit, who would be glad to do anything to help herself. Dick said nothing of her antecedents; indeed, he carefully avoided telling more about her than was absolutely necessary. Eugene was not very curious, any farther than to satisfy himself that she was qualified for the position for which she was wanted.

She had arrived at Poppleton while Dr. Lynch was pleading his cause before Julia. Eugene had conversed with her for half an hour. Her manners were pretty, as well as her face, and her speech was modest, and indicated intelligence. Eugene was entirely satisfied with her.

“I have the buggy at the door, and I will drive Miss Thompson down to the Port and over to the Mills. I suppose you are going to The Great Bell,” said Dick.

“I am; I will tell Mary to meet Miss Thompson tomorrow, and point out to her the duties of her office,” replied Eugene.

“Very well. Where is Julia?”

“The last I heard of her, she was with the doctor in the sitting-room.”

“With the doctor!”

“Between us, Dick, I think he has proposed to her, for he certainly looked like a man who had been rejected,” added Eugene, in a low tone. “I doubt whether we see him here again.”

“I hope we shall.”

“So do I; but it was hard work to get him here, and I

think he will not come unless he finds it pleasant to do so. My mother thinks so much of the doctor that she will be likely to plead his cause for him."

Julia entered the library just as Dick was going out. Miss Thompson was warmly greeted, and Eugene looked for any change which might have come over his sister since her interview with the doctor. There was none. She was as placid as a summer sea.

Dick drove off with the new missionary. He explained to her what his friend was doing for the poor of Poppleton; he described the chapel, and gave John Porter an excellent character. Miss Thompson was sad, silent, and thoughtful. She listened attentively to all that was said to her until they came to the burying-ground.

"Was he buried there?" she asked, with much emotion.

"He was."

"Has any stone been erected over his grave?"

"Not yet."

"That shall be my first duty."

"He was placed in the tomb first, and efforts were made to find his friends. As no one claimed the body, it was buried last summer."

"Do you know where the grave is?"

"I do."

"Would it be asking too much of you to show me the way?"

"By no means; but do you think it would be best for you to visit the spot?"

"I would like to do so."

Dick hitched the horse at the gate of the cemetery, and conducted her to the grave of Eliot Buckstone. Miss Thompson stood in silence gazing at the mound capped with turf. A bunch of flowers which Eugene had gathered for her in the conservatory — for he could not judge of her fitness to do missionary work until he knew whether she really loved flowers — was placed at the head of the grave.

Dick retired from the spot, and presently she knelt down, and bowed her head. There were tears in her eyes; they were the first that had been shed at the grave of the murdered man.

“Father in heaven, forgive him for the wrong he has done to me and to others,” murmured she.

She rose, wiped away her tears, placed the bunch of flowers on the sod above the breast of the sleeper beneath, and turned away.

“Mr. Birch, you have been very kind to me; may I dare to ask one more favor of you?”

“Certainly.”

“Will you have a white marble stone placed at the head of his grave? I will pay for it with the first money I earn.”

“We will select one at the Port to-day.”

“Thank you. I cannot bear to think of his sleeping there without a stone to mark his resting-place.”

“Every thing you desire shall be done; but you must not even mention his name.”

“I will not.”

They went to the marble works, and the stone was ordered. In a few days it was erected. It bore no record but the name, age, and date of his death. Through the summer that followed, a bunch of fresh flowers was occasionally found on the grave of the murdered man; but no one was seen to place them there, and no one but Dick Birch knew that the female missionary of Eugene Hungerford had ever been interested in the clay beneath the stone.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE RUSTIC BRIDGE.

PINE HILL blazed with glory on the evening of the fifteenth of May. Eugene and Mary were married. The ceremony had been performed at the farm-house on The Great Bell, at six o'clock, in presence of the two families, and a few intimate personal friends. Dick Birch and Julia, Dr. Lynch and Miss Perkins, were groomsmen and bridesmaids. At half past six several gayly-decorated barges, prepared for the occasion by Ross Kingman, bore the party over the channel, and by seven o'clock the festivities at the Pine Hill mansion were fairly inaugurated.

For certain cogent reasons, Eugene, generally opposed to much display, favored a universal gathering; and the most elaborate preparations had been made to celebrate the joyous occasion. Mary had been under the ban of public displeasure; she had been frowned upon, had been neglected and despised. Her husband wished to make this her triumph. If it was the way of the world to cast her off when in poverty and subjected to odious suspicions, it was also the way of the world to smile upon those whom fortune favored. Brilliant lights, gorgeous dresses, inspiring music, a sumptuous feast, put the world in excellently good humor with itself.

Men from the city — caterers, decorators, fire-kings — had been at Pine Hill for a week. The house, large as it was, was not large enough to hold the multitude; for all Poppleton was bidden to the feast. Thousands of fantastic

lamps and Chinese lanterns flashed among the trees of the grounds. Pyrotechnic fires, of all colors, illuminated the scene, and one might see to read fine print anywhere between the house and the river. A vast pavilion had been erected for the supper, and a small army of cooks and waiters were as busy as bees in their temporary quarters. The Poppleton Brass Band played near the river, and the Germania, from the city, on the lawn before the house.

At seven o'clock, when the guests began to arrive, Eugene and the bride stood at the head of the great drawing-room. Mary had been subjected to the manipulations of Madame La Somebody, from Paris, and her dress of white satin was the perfection of the mode. Nothing more beautiful in human form could be conceived of than Mrs. Eugene Hungerford, and the admiration bestowed upon her was unmeasured and unstinted. She was happy; the clouds had rolled away, and behind their dense volume, paradise had opened to her. Earth had become heaven. The fondest dream that ever gladdened the heart of woman was realized in that blissful hour. She was the wife of the man she loved — who loved her. This was joy enough without the gorgeous surroundings with which she passed to her estate of bliss.

Eugene Hungerford, tall, well formed, and elegant in his manner, never looked better, and never felt happier. Even the thought that she who stood by his side had been another's for a brief period, was forgotten. His cup was full; the one dreg at the bottom could not be seen.

Parkinson was master of ceremonies in the house, and he ushered the guests into the drawing-room with a suavity and a dignity which would have been distinguishable in a grand chamberlain. It required no little strategetic skill to keep the programme from being suddenly blocked by the crowd; but without any jarring, or even any loud words, the interminable line of visitors passed by the bridal couple, congratulated them, and disappeared, to mingle with the festive throngs that filled the gardens and the grounds.

At nine o'clock the festivities became a little more old-fashioned. Eugene and his wife abandoned the stateliness of their position in the drawing-room, and mingled with the guests. Dancing, games, and merrymaking prevailed. Laughing, shouting, hilarity, and even rudeness were not frowned upon, and everybody was encouraged to make the most of the occasion.

At ten the great pavilion was opened. The tables were profusely spread with every luxury which Monsieur the *Chef de Cuisine* could invent or procure. It is true that some of the old sea captains and mill agents grumbled, in a quiet way, because there was no champagne; but Eugene had resolved that the joyous occasion should not be a stumbling-block in the way of any man.

At eleven o'clock the fire-kings were in their glory; rockets, squibs, serpents, Bengal lights, and Roman candles, as well as whirligigs and set pieces, fizzed, banged, screamed, hissed, and blazed in every direction. The stars disappeared, and the floating clouds glowed with crimson lights. The air was redolent of smoke and sulphur. All Poppleton was excited to the highest pitch of ecstasy. Such fire and smoke, such lights and music, such wonderful dishes and astonishing pastry, such brilliant scenes and gorgeous displays, had never before been seen or known in the town.

Some of the farmers from the Summerville road estimated that twenty thousand dollars would not cover the expenses of the evening; that half a dozen good farms were eaten up and drank up, fizzled away and flirted away, in six hours' time. They did not add that all the money went into the hands of merchants, mechanics, artists, and laborers, and that some portion of it doubtless went into the half dozen farms. It was an awfully extravagant affair, and they regarded it as so much money out of pocket. So it was to Eugene; but what goes out of one pocket goes into another, and as he could unquestionably afford the expense, it was only so much money transferred from his exchequer to the

purses of those who needed it more than he did. The old farmers from the Summerville road took a one-sided view of the matter.

At half past eleven, the bridal party, groom and groomsmen, bride and bridesmaids, took carriages at the door, and went to the Mills, where a special train was waiting for them. The festivities continued at Pine Hill till two o'clock in the morning. At one o'clock the party were in Boston. They were absent a fortnight on the bridal tour. On their return to Poppleton, the current of life began to roll on as before — yet not as before, for Eugene and Mary were one now, and it was a new life. The loving wife was duly installed in her new position as the mistress of the Pine Hill mansion. The dignity sat easily upon her, and every day was a day of joy.

Dick Birch was a member of the family, and Dr. Lynch, still hopeful, was a constant visitor. Julia did not permit him again to plead his suit before her. She treated him with the utmost consideration and kindness; but she avoided every appearance which was liable to misconstruction.

Eugene was married. The first step towards acquiring the three millions, now in trust, had been taken. After all doubts in regard to the first marriage of Mary had been removed from the minds of others, Dick Birch had ceased to reason with his friend upon the impropriety of making her Mrs. Hungerford. Doubtless he would still have opposed the marriage, if there had been any hope of preventing it. Eugene was determined; his mother and sister favored his wishes, and Dr. Lynch absolutely urged it with the strongest arguments which could be presented to a willing mind.

Dick had not been selfish. When he had been compelled to expose his hopes of winning Julia, an insurmountable barrier had been raised up before him. He was virtually accused of seeking her for the sake of her contingent half million, and he had solemnly resolved never to think of her again until Eugene was married, even if she was forever lost

to him by the delay. He had kept his vow, as far as such a vow could be kept. He loved her, and concealed his thoughts and feelings. He had prudently avoided every demonstration which could incline her to favor his suit. Though he had been a member of the family since the trial of Ross Kingman, he had seldom spent an evening in the sitting-room with the family.

The marriage of Eugene had removed his disability. He could not now be accused, even by the most invidious critic, of loving her for her fortune. On the bridal tour, he had been more sociable with her; but Julia appeared to be very impartial between him and the doctor. Since the return of the party, he was often by her side. Little attentions were more profuse than before; but Dr. Lynch was in his way. Contrary as it may appear to human experience, he cherished no ill will towards his rival. If Julia preferred the doctor to himself, justice and generosity to her required that he should be magnanimous.

Dick's term of probation had passed away, and his affection gathered power as the obstacles were removed. He had not ceased to love her since they resided together in the cottage of James Hungerford. He had not concealed his love; he had even been compelled to proclaim it in public. He was ready to speak now; and when the party returned to Pine Hill, he had begun to watch for his opportunity.

It was a bright June day, and the garden was in the flush of its summer beauty. Dick had taken his early morning walk through the estate, and on his return he met Julia. She wore her morning dress. She was in easy costume; and Dick thought she had never looked so beautiful, though it is quite probable she always had. He had been thinking of her, and very likely he was in condition to be peculiarly enthusiastic.

“Good morning, Dick” — she always called him so, except in the presence of strangers. “Have you finished

your morning ramble? No matter if you have; you must come with me."

"With the greatest pleasure. I like to walk here; with you it will be a double satisfaction."

"Were you ever in Ireland, Dick?"

"Never."

"I thought you had been."

"Why, Julia?"

"I judged so from the remark you made — a double satisfaction! You must have been to Cork; you must have kissed the blarney stone."

"I think I could kiss something nearer home that would give me the persuasive tongue."

"Why, Dick! I am positively afraid of you," laughed she.

"I assure you I am entirely harmless."

"You talk like a Spanish gallant this morning. What is the matter with you? What has come over you? Have you been reading Don Quixote?"

"No; I have only been thinking of you."

"Thinking of me! I thought you never indulged in trivial reflections. But I have a very serious matter to propose."

"So have I."

"You!"

"I have, but of course it is your right to be heard first."

"Do you know that it was very stupid of you not to think of a rustic bridge when you were making these grounds?" replied she, evidently gathering some intimation of the subject of Dick's intended discourse from his looks.

"I am glad I was so stupid."

"This is rebellious."

"By no means. It is a happy reflection now, that everything was not done in the beginning."

"Why, Dick?"

“Because the neglect has given you a thought, and afforded me this opportunity.”

“What opportunity?” she asked, turning away to hide her confusion.

“The opportunity to do what you wish me to do—build a bridge, if that is what you desire.”

“That is what I desire. This way, Dick; I propose to build the bridge over the brook— not over the river.”

“Over both, if you wish.”

“How complaisant you are, Dick! Why can't you be a little obstinate, and tell me that a bridge cannot be built; that it would spoil the grounds; that it wouldn't be safe, or something of that kind? This is the place. You ought to have put a rustic bridge here, instead of such a one as the stupid county commissioners would put over the river.”

“Have you made a plan of what you desire?”

“A plan! Do you think I could be guilty of such an absurdity as drawing a plan?”

“How shall I know what you wish, then?”

“I said a rustic bridge; you know what that is. I leave all the details to you.”

“It shall be commenced to-day.”

“You are very obedient.”

“I intend to be. I will build you a bridge; but Julia——”

He paused, and looked her in the face—only a glance, then gazed upon the ground.

“But what? Are you going to tell me it is impossible, now you have promised to do it?”

“Not at all; but if I build a bridge for you, Julia, you must build one for me.”

“I am not a bridge builder.”

“Neither am I.”

“What do you mean, Dick?”

“I find myself on the wrong side of the river.”

“The wrong side?”

“I am on one side, and you are on the other.”

“Are you demented?”

“As sane as a man in my condition can be.”

“Pray, what do you mean by your condition?”

“In love.”

“Poor fellow! That’s a serious malady to some people.”

“Very serious to me, if you refuse to build me the bridge.”

“Has Susey Perkins stolen your heart?” stammered Julia, struggling to recover her self-possession.

“Julia, I love you!”

“Why, Dick! I wonder those words did not choke you.”

“They will, I am afraid, if you laugh at me. Sit down on this bench, Julia, and we will see how the bridge will look when it is done,” said he, taking her by the hand, and conducting her to the seat.

She did not resist, and he seated himself by her side. He said something more about the bridge, and described to her the structure he intended to erect, if she was pleased with the idea.

“Will you build my bridge, Julia?”

“That is a very blind figure, and I don’t understand it.”

“The bridge upon which I may pass from doubt and uncertainty to joy and peace. I need not tell you, Julia, how long I have loved you.”

“I don’t think you love me, Dick; it is only a spasm; you will recover in a week,” laughed she.

“You doubt my words.”

“How can I help doubting them?”

“Why should you doubt them?”

“For more than a year you have been hardly sociable as a friend.”

“You know the reason. It would have been mean for me to press my suit before my character was vindicated.”

“But since that?”

“My motives were liable to misconstruction. Eugene is married now ——”

“Don't say a word about those disagreeable matters, Dick. They are loathsome to me. I used to think before I went to Europe, and while I was there, that you were just a little fond of me.”

“Not a little, for I loved you with all my soul, Julia.”

“Not since I returned?”

“Every moment of the time since I first came to Poppleton.”

“But you have been so cold and distant since the trial!”

“There was good reason for that.”

“What?”

“Dr. Lynch.”

“What of him?”

“If you love him better than me, I have no right to complain, and I will not. I did not, at any time, wish to step between you and him.”

“You were very prudent.”

“For your sake I was.”

“Why are you less considerate now?”

“I do not perceive that you are any more partial to him than to me.”

“I am not, Dick.”

He looked at her; he took her hand, but she gently released it from his grasp.

“Julia, I love you with all my soul. My fate is in your hands.”

“That is very dramatic.”

“You mock me.”

“I cannot really determine, Dick, whether to be serious or not.”

“I am so.”

“I will not laugh again — if I can help it. I don't know what to say.”

“There is one thing you can say.”

“What is that?”

“Whether you love me or not.”

“I don’t know whether to say that or not.”

“You know whether you do love me or not.”

“Perhaps I don’t,” replied she, musing. “You have never given me an opportunity to love you; or, at least, to find out whether I did or not. Do you think, Dick, that ladies fall in love with gentlemen just as they do with new bonnets, without any excuse for doing so?”

“Not often.”

“Sometimes they do, I grant; but I am not so impulsive.”

“Do you dislike me, Julia?”

“Very far from it; indeed, I like you very much.”

“Then will you be my wife?”

“I am not prepared to answer you now. You have been so distant that I do not yet know my own heart.”

“If you will say that you do not love me ——”

“You will be just as well satisfied,” interposed she.

“You are cruel, Julia.”

“Do you wish to persuade me to say now that I do not love you?”

“If it be true, say so.”

“And what then?”

“I will never annoy you again.”

“You do not annoy me.”

“I am afraid I do.”

“Well, if you will have it so.”

“I will leave you; I will leave Pine Hill, if you desire.”

“Now you are absurd!”

“I will not thrust myself into your presence.”

“You know I like you, Dick.”

“Like me; but you do not love me.”

“You say that, not I.”

“We are almost quarrelling, Julia.”

“You are; I am not.”

“Let us be very serious for a moment. If you do not love me, Julia, I have no reproaches for you. I should be greatly grieved, but not angry. If you do not love me, say so, I entreat you.”

“Dick, I’m afraid I do love you, just a very little.”

“Ah, Julia ——”

“Only a very little.”

“I am satisfied, Julia.”

“I am not,” she added, apparently with a feeling that she had committed herself too far. “I do not love you well enough to become your wife. You must wait, Dick. I think I have said enough.”

“Not quite, Julia; you have not told me whether I may hope or not.”

“I can tell you that. I will not be the wife of any man unless I love him with all my mind, heart, and soul; unless I can have perfect confidence that he has not now, and never will have, any other god than myself. I must be wholly his, and he must be wholly mine.”

“Then be wholly mine!”

“Not yet can I say that. Marriage on any other terms than those I state would be absolutely loathsome to me.”

“It would to me; but I could have no other god but you.”

“Perhaps not; but we must wait.”

“May I hope?”

“On your own responsibility you may — not on mine.”

“But you said you did love me a little.”

“A very little.”

“Will that little increase?”

“It may — it may not. If it does not, I can never be your wife. You must not ask me to unsay what I have said. I have been sincere. There is my hand, Dick. We are the best of friends — let the future determine your fate and mine.”

"You do not bid me cease to hope?" he said, taking the offered hand.

"No; we are both free."

"You are; but I am not."

"What more can I say, Dick? This I will add — that you ——"

"Ahem!"

Both of them started. Dr. Lynch stood hardly a rod distant, looking at them. His face was flushed, and he appeared to be angry.

"I beg your pardon," said he, advancing towards them.

"You are out early, doctor," said Julia, striving to hide her confusion.

"Excuse me for interrupting you," he replied, significantly; "but the nature of my business required me to do so."

"What has happened, doctor?" asked Julia.

"Captain Kingman had a bad turn this morning, and I was called in at five o'clock. I think he will not live through the day. Mrs. Hungerford is going down to the island. Mr. Hungerford desired to see Mr. Birch before he goes, and I volunteered to find him."

Dick, leaving Julia with Dr. Lynch, hastened to the house.

"I am very sorry to have disturbed you, Miss Hungerford," said the doctor.

"You need not be at all disconcerted," she replied, turning away to hide her blushes.

"You seemed to be very pleasantly employed," he added, with something like a sneer.

"You are rather cynical in your manner this morning, Dr. Lynch."

"Pardon me, Miss Hungerford, but may I yet know whether I am to be banished from your presence?"

"I shall never banish you, doctor."

"Mr. Birch seems to be on excellent terms with you."

"As he should be," she answered with dignity.



DR. BILKS INTERRUPTS A PLEASANT INTERVIEW. — Page 398.

“Do I annoy you?”

“Only when you refer to Mr. Birch.”

“Pardon my rudeness, Julia. I love you, and it does not improve my temper to see another so intimate with you. I have no right to feel so.”

“You have not, certainly.”

“Will you answer me only one question?”

“If it is a proper one.”

“Must I cease to hope?”

“You must hope or cease to hope with no aid from me. The circumstances have not perceptibly changed since we last spoke on this subject.”

By this time they had reached the house. The doctor professed to be satisfied; but he was not.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A HOMŒOPATHIC DOSE.

CAPTAIN KINGMAN died that day, as the doctor had predicted. Mary and Eugene stood by his dying bed; and the daughter, forgetting all that he had been, and all that he had done of evil, ministered unto him as though he had been the best and truest of fathers. He was her parent, and there was not a wrong he had done which was not forgiven.

Mary wore the mourner's garb now; and no token of respect to a father's memory was omitted by her or by her devoted husband. Captain Kingman had been a sufferer for a year, and during the last months of his life he had been an imbecile. He had passed away now, and it was best that it should be so. He was at rest after his stormy career.

Eugene's balance in the Poppleton Bank began to disturb him again. In spite of his best efforts to keep it within a reasonable limit, it continued to get the upper hands of him. His own wants were few and simple, measured by the means at his command. He was obliged to be very extravagant in order to dispose of twenty thousand dollars a year. He hoped to do better, however, the coming season; but there was still a formidable balance in his favor, which, as the almoner of God's bounty, it would be idleness and neglect to permit any longer to remain unused.

"What shall I do, Mary?" said he to his wife, a week after the funeral. "There is a large balance in the bank, and I feel as though I had not half done my duty."

“Nobody else thinks so, Eugene,” she replied, putting her arm around his neck, and gazing with tender admiration into his face.

“Perhaps not; but I do not judge myself by what others think. Can’t you help me, Mary?”

“I think I can.”

“Do.”

“I was thinking the other day that we might have a cemetery here like Mount Auburn, Greenwood, or Laurel Hill.”

“I thank you, my dear, for the thought. It shall be commenced at once. Do you think of any suitable locality?”

When they went to ride that forenoon, they visited half a dozen places which might answer the purpose, and gave the preference to a tract of land beyond Pine Hill, between the river and the Summerville Road. The territory was purchased, and there was plenty of work for poor men in Poppleton that summer.

The building for the Poppleton Library was in a forward state, and the institution itself was in practical operation in temporary quarters. The books were circulating through the town, and the bowling alleys and billiard saloons afforded recreation without expense to all who chose to use them. They were under the care of a good man; were closed at ten o’clock; and no gambling, drinking, profanity, or other improper speech, was tolerated.

The amusements of the people were full of interest to Eugene; for innocent recreations were so many preventives of vice. When a dozen young men would form a club, and adopt certain necessary regulations—such as prohibiting intoxicating drinks, profanity, Sabbath breaking—in the association, he presented them a boat, and provided them with a building, uniforms, and other appliances. Four of these clubs were formed at the Port, and three at the Mills; the latter navigating the pond above the dam.

At Mary’s suggestion, sundry thousands were given to various associations in the city, whose object was the moral

social, and religious improvement of the race; and thus Eugene's charities began to extend beyond Poppleton. What he gave in this way was always contributed secretly. He made a literal application of the Scriptural injunction not to let the left hand know what the right hand doeth. If he had any vanity to be known in connection with his liberal gifts, he deemed it a duty to exorcise the feeling. A letter, enclosing a draft for ten thousand dollars, to the treasurer of an association having for its object the wider diffusion of Christianity, contained these remarkable words: "I desire to remain unknown in connection with this gift. It is the Lord's money, though I give it. To Him give the glory, not to me. If, by the postmark of my letter, or other means, you should discover my name, you are positively prohibited from making it known. If you should disregard this injunction, all future donations will be withheld."

It was not disregarded. He did not choose secrecy for the purpose of being found out, and to give an additional halo to the deed. He was sincere. If he ever thought how pleasant it would be to be known as a munificent benefactor of the race, a liberal patron of Christian enterprise, he regarded the sentiment as unworthy of him, and adhered to his fixed rule from principle, not affectation.

The present balance was happily disposed of, with Mary's cordial coöperation, and Eugene was at peace with himself. But he did not look upon giving as his whole duty. He went among the poor himself, with his loving wife upon his arm. In actual contact with them, he studied their needs. He gave with his own hand. He went to church at the chapel every Sunday with his wife, his mother, and his sister; and he did not occupy an extra-cushioned pew, but took such seats as were vacant. He was a member of several associations, and performed his duty as such with care and fidelity. As an Odd Fellow and a Mason, he watched with the sick himself, be the brother who needed his assistance rich or poor. It was suggested to him that he might hire a

man to perform this sacred duty ; but he indignantly repelled the idea ; and even oftener than his turn came, he kept vigil at the bedside of the sick ; for, he said, he could better do it than those who had to work all day. Eugene was a Christian in his own way.

Not every man who went to Eugene Hungerford with a subscription paper was sure of a donation. He had very decided opinions ; and he was so ultra and strange as to believe that it was almost as often necessary to withhold as it was to give. He was a decided man ; and certain pious, but narrow-minded, people denounced him because he declined to help forward their projects to make all men believe the same theology. He did not believe that theology would save any man from his sins ; and while he would help to build a church for any denomination of Christians, he would not devote a penny to give one man's creed the advantage over another's. The good God would condemn no person for the errors of his belief, if he was a sincere and earnest seeker after the truth.

Eugene had a belief precious to himself. It was not at all necessary that others should adopt it. He not only tolerated, but respected, others' creeds. What he gave, he gave for truth, rather than for the triumph of any human system ; for Christianity itself, rather than for the dogmas of men. It required no small degree of discretion and faith to discharge his duty, as he understood it ; and between Mary and himself there was much discussion upon these interesting questions ; for, fortunately for both, she was a thinking woman, as he was a thinking man.

To these considerations of important topics Dick Birch and the other members of the family were freely admitted ; and not unfrequently Dr. Lynch took a part in them. The doctor was still a constant visitor at Pine Hill. He had not "lost hope ;" though, since he had surprised his rival in the garden, he could not help thinking that the battle was going against him. He was jealous. He hated Dick, though

policy compelled him to treat the offender with the utmost apparent respect and esteem.

Dick was certainly gaining ground. Now that Julia understood him, he found his path more flowery. She oftener placed herself in his way, oftener took his hand when she got into or out of the carriage. He was bold enough to press it; and once he was surprised and delighted to feel a slight return. Then it was constantly replied to; and Dick was almost ready to speak again, to propose once more.

Dr. Lynch could not help noticing this increasing tenderness. It was fatal to his hopes. Julia was kind to him, had not remitted a particle of the gratitude she owed him; but his rival was winning the prize. If it had been possible to bring Dick into disrepute again he would have done it; but a word against Dick was treason against the whole family. Something must be done. He loved her; whatever he was, he loved her with all his soul. If he had any ambitious schemes, they were secondary to the possession of her.

“Something must be done. I am losing ground. One half million is safe; the other is almost beyond my reach; but, worse than this, I shall lose Julia herself,” muttered the doctor to himself, as he left Pine Hill one evening. “I would rather have her than all of John Hungerford’s money.”

He got into his sulky, and drove off, stung by the madness of disappointment, and fully resolved that something should be done. To the pangs of a love growing every day more hopeless, add the prospect of half a million slipping from his grasp, and the feeling of Dr. Lynch is described. If there was much that was good in him,—as there is in all men,—there was much that was bad—base and wicked beyond the comprehension of an honest man. Those at Pine Hill were pure Christian men and women. They were trusting, confiding, unsuspecting. They could not fathom the depth of evil in the honored guest, the beloved physician. He had sinned and been forgiven. They knew his capacity for evil; but to them he was like the tranquil summer sea,

which the storms of winter lash into fury, and make the most treacherous of elements.

Dr. Lynch went to Pine Hill the next day. He sat in the sitting-room with the family, giving his opinion in regard to the sanitary effects of bathing, called forth by a project of Eugene's to erect a bathing establishment in each of the two villages. Dick Birch entered while he was there. He looked paler than usual, which the quick eye of Julia promptly detected.

"Are you ill, Dick?" she asked, in a tone so tender that the doctor wished he could be sick himself, in order to be spoken to so fondly.

"No; not ill; I have the headache," replied Dick, pressing his hand to his forehead.

"Can I do anything for you?" continued Julia. "Let me bathe your head in cologne."

"Thank you, Julia; it is hardly necessary that anything should be done," replied Dick, with a grateful smile.

"Let me prescribe for you, Mr. Birch," interposed Dr. Lynch.

"No, I thank you; I don't believe in your system, doctor," laughed Dick.

He went to the library, and presently returned with a little vial filled with small globules.

"This is my medicine for the headache," he said, exhibiting the vial.

"What is it?" asked the doctor.

"Belladonna."

Dr. Lynch laughed heartily, and indulged in some sharp strictures upon homœopathy; called it a humbug and a delusion.

"One thing is certain, doctor," replied Dick, as he swallowed half a dozen of the globules, "either homœopathy is true as a medical science, or all medicines are unnecessary."

"That is a rather violent conclusion."

"I have taken no medicine but these globules for ten

years, except a blue pill you prescribed for me last summer ; and I was a fool to take that."

" Because you have not been very sick."

" Yes, I had a fever four years ago."

" Then you got well in spite of your medicine, not on account of it."

" But it proves that medicine was not necessary, if it does not show that my system is correct."

Dick mentioned a dozen desperate cases, where patients had been saved by homœopathy, and the doctor mentioned two dozen, given up by homœopathic practitioners, who had been cured by allopathy. As usual in such cases, nothing was established.

" Doctor, my headache is gone," said Dick, triumphantly, after the three dozen cases had been adduced.

" Do you suppose the belladonna had anything to do with it?" asked the doctor.

" Of course I do. I am satisfied the globules cured me this time as they have twenty times before."

" Nonsense, Mr. Birch! I should not hesitate to take the entire contents of your vial."

" That is the beauty of the system ; if it does not cure, it does not kill."

" If there is no virtue in the medicine, what is the use of taking it?" laughed the doctor.

" Fire won't burn water. It is the nice adaptation of the medicine to the system which gives it efficiency. If you are well, there is no work for the medicine. If you are sick, it finds something in the system for which it has an affinity."

" All bosh !"

" Why don't you try the system before you condemn it?"

" Try it! Why don't I try the spells of the Indian medicine men? the charm of the Hottentot? the vagaries of mesmerism and spiritualism? Simply because I don't believe in them. Why don't I try a hangman's rope for scrofula?"

" There is reason in all things."

“In everything but homœopathy. Do you believe those little pellets cured your headache?”

“I do.”

“What a delusion!”

“What did then?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps you had reached the end of the malady when you took the pills; perhaps a change of air cured you; perhaps it was the excitement of this discussion, which started your blood, removed some stagnation, and restored the equilibrium of the circulation.”

“Excitement does not generally cure the headache,” said Dick, incredulously.

“Sometimes it does. About a week ago, a man came to my office at daylight in the morning to have a tooth extracted. He had been in agony all night; but the moment he saw my instrument his toothache left him, and he would not have the tooth taken out. What cured him?”

“I don’t know.”

“Perhaps it was the smell of belladonna in my office! It was the excitement. If one of your friends — Miss Hungerford, for instance — were dangerously sick, as she was last summer, would you trust her in the hands of a professor of this humbug?”

“I would trust her in the hands of a skilful homœopathic physician.”

“Would you trust yourself to such treatment, Miss Hungerford?”

“I am entirely satisfied with my physician, doctor, and I am not competent to give an opinion,” replied Julia.

In the library, half an hour later, the doctor picked up the bottle of globules, and examined them for a moment. He took a couple of the pellets, and restored the vial to its place. He looked strange as he did so; perhaps he was indignant that sensible men should have faith in such puny helps.

The next day he called, in the afternoon. Eugene and Dick were both out, but Parkinson said they would return in

a short time. The doctor would wait in the library; there was a book there he wished to examine. But the book seemed to have less interest than the vial of homœopathic globules. Dr. Lynch kept the bottle a few moments, and returned it to the place where he had found it, but with its contents changed. There was something diabolical in the looks of the doctor as he restored the medicine. He sat down in an arm-chair; he took up a book, but he did not read it. He turned the leaves, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

The carriage stopped at the front door. Eugene and Dick, with the ladies, had just returned from a visit to the new cemetery. Dr. Lynch rose from his chair, and went into the sitting-room. He paused before the looking-glass. Was he pale? was there any change in his countenance or his expression?

“Waiting for us, doctor?” said Eugene.

“Only a few moments. I have just come. How do you do to-day, Miss Hungerford?”

“Pretty well; but I have a headache. I believe when Dick lost his yesterday, it passed to me, for I have had one ever since,” replied Julia.

“Let me cure it for you, Julia!” exclaimed Dick, as he rushed into the library, returning with the vial of globules.

If the doctor had looked in the glass now, he might have seen that his face was deadly pale.

“Here, Julia, take half a dozen of these. I am sure they will cure you,” added Dick, as he removed the cork from the bottle.

“No, no!” cried the doctor, with energy. “Don’t take them, Miss Hungerford.”

“Why not, doctor?” asked Dick, surprised at the emphatic tones of the physician.

“They will injure her,” gasped the doctor.

His ashen face and pallid lips attracted the attention of all in the room.

“Yesterday you said you would be willing to take the whole bottle full.”

“So I should, but I am not willing Miss Hungerford should take them. As her physician, I protest against her taking them,” replied the doctor, with a decision which seemed to be out of place in a matter of so little consequence.

“I am not afraid to take them,” laughed Julia. “If they will cure my headache, I should be very glad to swallow the whole vial full.”

There was a little vein of opposition in her character, which prompted her to be obstinate in a case like the present; and the doctor’s decided manner did not please her. He had been her physician when she was sick; but he was not with her just then in that capacity. His interference she regarded as rather tyrannical — as an assumption of power which she was not prepared to acknowledge.

“Give me the bottle, Dick,” said she.

“I don’t wish you to take them, if the doctor objects,” replied he, handing her the vial.

“I do object,” added Dr. Lynch.

“How many make a dose, Dick?”

“Six.”

“Don’t take them, Miss Hungerford!” exclaimed the doctor, rushing towards her.

“O, but I will, doctor, if it is only to plague you,” laughed she, retreating a step or two.

“Do not! They will injure you.”

“These harmless little things?”

“They will, indeed.”

“You are afraid they will cure me, doctor, and you will lose an interesting patient.”

“No; far from it. I never beg for patients.”

She turned the bottle to pour some of the globules into her hand.

“Have I no influence with you, Miss Hungerford?” pleaded Dr. Lynch.

“But these are harmless.”

“They are not harmless.”

“Mr. Birch takes them.”

“They are not harmless to you.”

“How pale you are, doctor!”

“I am quite well.”

“Let me have them,” interposed Dick.

“But I am going to take some of them.”

“Don’t, Julia, since the doctor objects so strongly.”

“I will take them!”

“To please me, Julia, do not.”

She looked at him. Dick was pale now, as well as the doctor. What had been a pleasant frolic seemed suddenly to have become a very serious affair. Dick’s lips quivered. What was the matter?

“Give them to me, Julia,” said the doctor.

“Of course I will not take them if you all object,” said she.

“Give me the bottle,” repeated Dr. Lynch.

But Dick Birch took it out of her hand, and put it in his pocket.

“I think my headache is better,” said Julia. “It must have been the odor from the vial that cured me.”

Dick looked intensely troubled; so did the doctor. Each gazed at the other. It appeared as though the old doubts, the old suspicions, had been suddenly revived. The ladies went up stairs, and the gentlemen retired to the library, Dick going directly to the office.

“Mr. Birch, I hope you will pardon my apparent rudeness,” said the doctor, as Dick joined them.

“Don’t mention it, doctor; you are very careful of your patients,” replied Dick.

“I always intend to be. Will you allow me to examine those globules?”

“I hope you will pardon my apparent rudeness if I refuse,” replied Dick.

His answer filled Eugene with consternation. *for* it certainly boded a quarrel.

“If six of those globules cured your headache yesterday, they are not a safe medicine for a delicate female. I should like to analyze those pellets.”

“I meant no offence, doctor,” replied Dick.

“I took none.”

“Do you really wish for the bottle?”

“I do — for the purpose I stated.”

“You shall have it. I put it in the office. I will go for it.”

Dick went to the office. On the desk lay the vial. He poured out the globules into a paper, and refilled it from a larger vial taken from the desk. He rolled up the pellets in the paper, and put them in his pocket. Returning to the library, he handed the bottle to the doctor, who soon after took his leave.

“That was a great excitement to grow out of a small affair,” said Eugene. “I hope you will not discuss medical topics again.”

“Not so small an affair as it might have seemed,” replied Dick, as he left the house.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CRIMINAL CARELESSNESS.

DICK BIRCH soon returned to the house with a small covered basket in his hand, which he placed on the table in the library. He then brought from the dining-room a white plate, on which he deposited one of the homœopathic globules, and divided it into minute fragments. On one of these particles, with the pointed end of a glass pen-holder, he dropped an infinitesimal portion of strong sulphuric acid, a vial of which happened to be among the chemical stores of the library. Dick was not a practical chemist, and not a very skilful manipulator. Several times he referred to a volume, open on the table, for information; but evidently he was not laboring to advance the cause of science.

He watched the experiment with as much interest as the philosophers of old watched the crucible in which the baser metals were to be transmuted to pure gold. He was anxious and troubled. The result of his chemical investigations was almost certain to create a storm at Pine Hill. While he was thus engaged, Eugene entered the library.

“What are you about, Dick? What in the world are you going to do?” he asked.

“I am trying an experiment,” replied Dick, as calmly as he could speak.

“I was not aware before that you had any special taste for chemical science.”

“I have not.”

“What are you doing, then?”

“Do you see this plate?” said the operator, pointing to the spot on the plate where he had deposited the acid.

“I see it.”

“I put a drop of sulphuric acid on one of the white particles. It was of a violet-blue color; now it is a mulberry-purple: let us wait.”

“Now it is a light red,” added Eugene, when the spot again changed its color. “Dick, this is strychnia.”

“Yes.”

“What is the experiment? What are you doing this for?”

“You see these?” continued Dick, in great agitation, as he took the paper of globules from his pocket.

“I see them.”

“They are the globules which I offered to Julia!” gasped Dick.

“Well, what of it?”

“I put one of them on the plate, and added a minute drop of sulphuric acid to a particle of one of them.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean that these globules are pure strychnia—the globules that I offered to Julia.”

“Merciful Heaven!” exclaimed Eugene, turning pale at the thought. “But you take them yourself.”

“I never took any of these. If I had, I should have been in your new cemetery before this time,” replied Dick, with a ghastly smile.

“Why don’t you speak, Dick, and tell me what you mean,” said Eugene, impatiently. “Of course I don’t believe you offered those globules to Julia, knowing them to be strychnia.”

“I endeavored to persuade her to take them.”

“You did, and Dr. Lynch protested.”

“Why did he protest? *He* knew they were strychnia; I did not. Neither the doctor nor myself intended to poison Julia—that is plain enough.”

“He knew, and you did not,” repeated Eugene. “How should he know?”

“Because he poured out the globules of belladonna from my vial, and substituted globules of strychnia for my especial benefit.”

“O, no, Dick. That is too horrible!”

“The globules were belladonna yesterday; to-day they are strychnia. Who takes the medicine from the bottle on the table? No one but myself. Did I intend to commit suicide?”

“It is diabolical, Dick.”

“Who wanted the bottle? Who wanted to analyze the globules? Who was pale and trembling? Who protested so violently, and even rudely, against Julia’s taking the innocent pellets?”

“You mean that Dr. Lynch intended ——”

“Intended to poison me!” added Dick, when his friend paused, unable to give breath to the horrible thought. “That is precisely what he intended to do.”

“He saved Julia.”

“Thank God, he did!” said Dick, fervently. “He did not mean to poison her.”

“Why should he wish to poison you?”

“I am in his way. Why did he involve me in falsehood, — perjury?”

“I thought he had repented.”

“So did I. I would have trusted him with all I hold dear on earth an hour ago. Hungerford, on the day that Captain Kingman died, the doctor surprised Julia and myself in the garden. He was not pleased with the discovery he had made.”

“But his manner towards you has not changed.”

“No, it has not. We are certainly rivals, but I have scorned to seek any advantage over him. I have left the matter entirely in the hands of Julia. I was willing she should decide between us.”

“Has she decided?”

“No; but, Hungerford, I think I have been gaining, while the doctor has been losing. But never mind these things. Let us look at the naked facts.”

“Are you sure that Dr. Lynch put the poison into the bottle?”

“Who else could have done it?”

“I don't know; but before we accuse a man of a crime of this magnitude, we must be sure.”

“We need not accuse him. We may not be able to prove it, though we shall be satisfied of the fact. Nobody has been poisoned. He prevented Julia from taking the medicine. If he had not done so, — if she had taken the globules and died, — I should have been accused of a great crime, or criminal carelessness. We can prove nothing.”

“Not yet.”

Eugene pulled the bell, and Parkinson answered the summons. The man was questioned in regard to the doctor's movements, after he was admitted to the house. He had gone into the library; that was all Parkinson knew. Eugene sent for the ladies.

“What are you going to do, Hungerford?” asked Dick.

“I am going to expose the villain.”

“Is that advisable?”

“The wretch shall never cross my threshold again!” replied Eugene, with emphasis.

“It would hardly be wise to make this matter public.”

“Why not?”

“We have not sufficient evidence to convict him.”

“Perhaps not; but if there is, he shall be punished. He that would poison one man for his own interest, would poison another. We have a public duty to perform. We must protect the community from such a man.”

“What can we prove? Only that the vial contained globules of strychnia. We can believe it, but there is not a particle of direct evidence to prove that Dr. Lynch put them

there. He was in the room alone; he protested when Julia was about to take them. Public opinion would be divided in regard to his guilt. I should be accused of attempting to put him out of my way; he certainly would not be convicted of the attempt to kill, and possibly would become more popular on his persecution, as some would call it."

"But this is placing expediency before justice."

"You must believe in many wrongs which it is absolutely quixotic to attempt to redress publicly. We will look for evidence; if we find it, we will act accordingly."

The ladies entered the library.

"Julia, Dr. Lynch is an unmitigated villain!" said Eugene.

"Not so bad as that, I hope," replied she, startled at the announcement.

Eugene took the plate, repeated and explained the experiment which had been performed before. Dick now prepared a solution, in which one of the suspected globules was used, the extreme bitterness of which was a second and most convincing proof of the strychnia nature of the substance tested. A live frog was taken from the covered basket, and his body and hind legs immersed in the liquid. Though none of the poison was taken into the stomach of the animal, that which was absorbed through the skin produced convulsions, and the experiment resulted in death. This third test conclusively established the poisonous nature of the pellets.

The facts in regard to the globules were duly presented, and those who had observed the doctor's pale face, quivering lip, and trembling knees, realized the meaning of his energetic protest. He was convicted by that interested group. The ladies were sick with horror. The idol was broken; the demigod of Pine Hill was dethroned and cast out. They were all iconoclasts at Pine Hill.

"What a terrible man he is!" said Julia, shuddering, as she walked out of the library with Dick.

"I tremble when I think that I was pressing you to take those globules," said he.

"It is horrible!"

"If the doctor had not been here you might have taken them."

"I certainly should; I was on the point of taking them as it was."

"He adopted a very careless method of poisoning me. The vial always lies on the table in the library, and any person might have partaken of its contents. He deserves to be hanged for his carelessness, if not for his crime."

After tea Dick walked down to the Port, and paid a visit to the doctor, whom he found in his office.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Birch; I am happy to see you, as I always am," said the doctor. "Have a cigar?"

"Thank you; I don't like your cigars. Doctor, have you that little bottle of globules I gave you?"

"Yes, here it is," replied the wretch, taking the vial from his pocket, and handing it to his visitor.

"Do you really think these little pills would have harmed Julia?"

"I suppose they would not, but I was afraid of them. Miss Hungerford's organization is exceedingly delicate, as I have had occasion to know when administering medicines to her."

"But you said, yesterday, that you would not object to taking the bottle full yourself, thereby intimating that there is no virtue whatever in them."

"For a strong man, like you or me, no doubt they would be harmless."

"Suppose you try them," suggested Dick.

"Of course I should not object to taking them," laughed Dr. Lynch, with one of his ghastly smiles.

"Oblige me by doing so."

"Thank you; I have no occasion to take them."

"You think they are harmless?"

“Certainly I do; but I may be mistaken. I was quite unwilling to have Julia take them, without being sure what they were, and how much medicinal virtue there might be in them. For this reason I wished to analyze them.”

“Won’t you oblige me by taking those?” said Dick, pouring out half a dozen of the globules into the palm of his hand.

“Excuse me, Mr. Birch; I would rather not.”

“I only wish to know whether you believe what you say.”

“In regard to what I said, I may have been mistaken. After the miraculous cure they wrought upon you, I must conclude that I was mistaken.”

“Won’t you indulge an old friend so far as to take these half dozen harmless pellets?” continued Dick, in the most insinuating tone.

“I really cannot do so, Mr. Birch. I am opposed to homœopathy on principle. I will not countenance the humbug in any way, shape, or fashion,” replied the doctor, eloquently.

“Do you think they would harm me?”

“You know best. You have taken enough of them to know what virtue they contain.”

“Are you willing I should take them in your office?”

“Am I willing? Of course I am. You are your own physician. I am not responsible for their effect upon you.”

“Should you advise me to take them?”

“To be consistent with my own belief, I should advise you not to take them; but you are not under my medical treatment.”

“Do you think they will harm me?”

“I advise you not to take them. Have you the headache?”

“No; but I merely wish to prove, in defence of homœopathy, that they are harmless,” replied Dick, as he tossed the six globules into his mouth.

The doctor started. He looked troubled for a moment, though he struggled to maintain his self-possession. He believed the globules were pure strychnia. They were of the smallest size; but there was poison enough in them to kill a man in a few hours. Dick knew they were nothing but sugar of milk, with an infinitesimal mixture of belladonna. Dr. Lynch was agitated. Dick Birch was calm.

“Having taken half a dozen myself, to make sure they are harmless, I will go home and cure Julia’s headache with half a dozen more,” added Dick.

“Don’t give them to her,” protested the doctor.

“Why not?”

“Don’t give them to her.”

“Why not?”

“My patients must not be trifled with!” exclaimed the doctor, almost frantic at the idea of Julia’s taking the poison.

“You are in earnest, doctor?”

“I am.”

“Do you think they are poison?”

“Of course they are not poison.”

“Why do you object?”

Dr. Lynch, fearful that Dick would put his terrible threat into execution, entered into a long disquisition on the practice of medicine, and the quality and effects of various drugs, evidently for the purpose of detaining him. Dick listened patiently, and to the surprise of the medical gentleman, he did not begin to exhibit any of the effects of the poison.

“Have a cigar, doctor? These are of the right sort,” said Dick, producing his cigar-case.

“Excuse me. I must go and visit a patient now.”

“And I will go up and cure Julia’s headache.”

“No. If you insist upon doing that, I shall go up to Pine Hill, and prevent her from taking them.”

“You are unreasonable, doctor.”

“I have not analyzed the globules yet.”

“When will you do so?”

“To-night, when I return. Give me the vial, Mr. Birch.”

“I will give you part of them.”

“Give me the whole.”

“No; I want part of them.”

Dick defended his system for an hour longer, without being troubled even with the stomach-ache, very much to the surprise and disgust of his host.

“Mr. Birch, you will excuse me now; for, really, I must visit my patient.”

“Very well. I will remain till you return.”

“But I must lock my office.”

“O, no; I will keep office for you till you get back.”

“Really, Mr. Birch, it is after nine o'clock.”

“No matter for that.”

“I was up last night, and must retire as soon as I return.”

“Do you really wish to get rid of me?”

“Certainly not.”

“I think you do.”

“By no means.”

“Are you afraid I shall die of the poison?”

“What poison?”

“The globules.”

“Are they poison?”

“Don't you think they are?”

“How should I know?”

“You ought to know. I see you object to having me die on your hands.”

“Do you intend to die?”

“Not if I can help it.”

“What do you mean by poison?”

The doctor was ghastly pale. His hands trembled.

“Nothing,” replied Dick.

“You spoke of poison,” stammered the doctor.

“Of course the globules are poison. Why did you object to Julia's taking them if they are not.”

“You ought to know best.”

“I do know best, doctor. They are not poison. You need not be alarmed about me. I shall not die in your office.”

“I am not alarmed about you.”

“Yes, you are.”

“Why should I be?”

“Because you think I have taken poison; but I have not.”

“You are a little wild to-night, Mr. Birch.”

“Dr. Lynch, I came down here for the purpose of expressing my mind very freely to you, and for the purpose of delivering a message with which I was charged by Mr. Hungerford.”

“I am happy to hear anything you may have to say on your own account, or Mr. Hungerford’s,” answered the doctor, gasping for breath as he spoke.

“In the first place, let me speak for myself, and upbraid you for your criminal carelessness. You left that vial of strychnia globules on the table in the library, where any one might have taken them, and been poisoned to death. You deserve to be hanged for a bungler, as you are! If you wished to poison me, why didn’t you do it without exposing the lives of others. Why didn’t you take my life like a man, and not render half a dozen others liable to the fate you prepared for me! Why, you careless wretch! I came very near giving the poison to Julia. You have nearly taken her life, instead of mine. It was not my fault. I didn’t know you had substituted strychnia for belladonna in my vial. The crime would have been yours, not mine, if she had been sacrificed. Why didn’t you put the poison into my ice-cream? Why didn’t you invite me to a banquet of arsenic, strychnia, and hydrocyanic acid? Doctor, you are a cowardly bungler, worthy the contempt of all decent assassins. I commend to your attention De Quincey ‘On Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts.’”

“Mr. Birch, you are sarcastic,” said Dr. Lynch, with a

labored grin, which looked like the sepulchral smile of the staring skull that lay on a shelf in the office.

“I am nothing, if I am not more than that.”

“Your words insinuate that I have been guilty of something wrong.”

“Do they insinuate it? Don’t they charge it as plainly as words can express human thought? I say, directly and unequivocally, that you have attempted to poison me.”

“Mr. Birch!” exclaimed the doctor, springing to his feet, throwing back his head, and looking as dignified as a trembling man could look.

“I know what you are going to say. Don’t trouble yourself to say it.”

“You accuse me of a crime at which the blood of an honest man creeps with horror.”

“And for that reason your blood does *not* creep with horror.”

“Mr. Birch, this is hard and cruel of you.”

“Don’t whine.”

“I speak as an innocent man,” continued the wretch, who, having faced the full force of the accusation, was now beginning to recover from the blow. “You charge me with a crime at which my soul revolts. You do not give me the particulars. You do not furnish me with a particle of evidence as to what you mean, and you ask me to defend myself.”

“No, I don’t. More than that, I will furnish no particulars, and I will hear no defence.”

“Mr. Birch, this is very harsh, and very unchristian. I should at least be told of what I am suspected,” whined the culprit.

“Suspected!” sneered Dick. “You are convicted and condemned.”

“Without being heard?”

“I have a message to deliver to you from Mr. Hungerford.”

“I am ready to hear it.”

“He desires me to say that he positively and imperatively forbids your coming to Pine Hill again, under any circumstances that can possibly occur.”

“This is very unjust and cruel,” groaned the doctor. “Without a word of explanation, without an opportunity to remove any unfavorable appearance that may be urged against me!”

“Let me add, for myself, that, if you cross the boundary line between Pine Hill and the public highway, I will take the liberty to kick you off the premises.”

“I did not expect this from you, Mr. Birch.”

“I have been so criminally indulgent towards you and your crimes that you had no right to expect it, I confess.”

“I may be called to Pine Hill as a physician.”

“You will never be called there again as a physician. They would all die before they would see you.”

“Does Julia know of this?”

“She does.”

“And Mrs. Hungerford?”

“And Mrs. Hungerford.”

“Is it possible they can treat me with so much harshness and injustice?”

“They fully concur with Mr. Hungerford and myself. Not one of them would walk on the same side of the street with you.”

“I am human, and I will not attempt to conceal my grief and astonishment at the conduct of the Hungerfords.”

“Do you expect them to pet you again, as they did before?”

“When they were sick, even unto death’s door, I dared not sleep. I watched with Mrs. Hungerford as though she had been my own mother; with Julia, as though she had been my own sister. I was permitted to be of service to them. I labored night and day for them, as I would have done for my own salvation.”

“If you had labored half as hard for your own salvation as you did for them, you might have been worthy to stand in their presence now. Dr. Lynch, it was like breaking the heart-strings of Mrs. Hungerford and Julia to convict you of the intention to commit such an abominable crime as that you meditated. They were grateful to you for what you have done; they are so still; and they will remember your good deeds, and grieve that the evil in your nature overshadowed the good. The blow is as heavy to them as to you; but they cannot, and will not, tolerate the presence of a murderer.”

“A murderer, Mr. Birch!”

“I call things by their right names, Dr. Lynch.”

“I can understand your motives,” added the culprit, bitterly. “I have been a stumbling-block in your path, Mr. Birch, and you adopt this method of prejudicing Miss Hungerford against me.”

“I have nothing to say, doctor,” added Dick, with dignity.

“I am banished from Pine Hill; but I shall defend myself before the people, and explain why I am thus treated. This miserable charge which you have trumped up shall be understood by the community.”

“Am I to infer that you threaten me and others?”

“If there is such a charge as you say, why don't you take it to a court of justice?”

“I have nothing more to say about it. I think I have been sufficiently explicit.”

“But of course you intend to prosecute the matter legally.”

“I shall give no answer. I have discharged my whole duty to you and to the Hungerfords.”

Dick put on his hat, and left the office, without even the ceremony of bidding the doctor good night.

“One half million is gone, but the other is safe,” muttered the doctor, as he rose from his chair half an hour later. “No matter; they can prove nothing.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DICK BIRCH AND LADY.

PINE HILL could hardly be the same without Dr. Lynch that it had been with him ; but he went there no more. His name was not even mentioned after a few days ; by general consent all allusions to him were avoided. It was not pleasant to think of him, for his conduct had been loathsome. Eugene trembled when he thought of Julia's escape from death by poison ; and he trembled when he thought of her escape from a union with the doctor, which had at least been possible, and which would have been worse than poison.

This second treachery on the part of the late demigod of Pine Hill revived the remembrance of the first. The doctor's penitence had been a deception. He had never even regretted his first failure to ruin Dick Birch, except so far as it subjected him to humiliation, and rendered his rival more powerful and dangerous than before. His purpose was to win the hand of Julia, and to this everything else had been made subservient. The occupants of the Pine Hill mansion realized that the honored visitor, the beloved physician, had been a hypocrite ; even his devotion to Julia and her mother, in sickness, was grounded on a selfish policy. Though Dr. Lynch did love Julia with all the earnestness of which his vile nature was capable, he lost even the credit of this genuine sentiment.

All the doctor's base plans were not yet apparent to the Hungerfords ; and they could not perceive that he was actuated by any other motive than jealousy — the desire to

possess Julia. There was but little prospect that he would inherit the contingent half million, as it appeared to them, and therefore the conduct of the doctor seemed to be less contemptible than it really was, as the sequel will show.

Dick Birch and Eugene Hungerford supposed the doctor would not tamely submit to his banishment from Pine Hill. He loved Julia; he had wooed her as an enthusiastic lover, though she doubted his affection. It was a cruel fate to be excluded from her presence, though it would have been the height of impudence for a man who had attempted to commit a murder to bestow another thought upon her. But the doctor was not like other men; and the genius for treachery and deceit, which had carried him safely through his former trials, might again be called into action to explain away the poison, and to make peace with the Hungerfords on the ruin of Dick Birch.

Dr. Lynch had threatened to appeal to the people — to the public sentiment of Poppleton — for his justification. He was bold enough and unscrupulous enough to do so. It would be an easy thing for a man so powerful as the popular physician to make the people believe in his wrongs. He could readily persuade them that he was the victim of a conspiracy; that Birch, from jealousy, had invented the illusion of the poisoned globules. The fact that no legal steps had been taken by the family — that not even Dick Birch had publicly proclaimed the story — would operate in the doctor's favor.

Eugene believed the wretch would resort to measures of this kind to vindicate himself. He was prepared for such action; he was fully resolved that, when the doctor made his first move, he should be arrested, and the whole matter passed upon by a court of justice. It was true, a conviction could not be expected; the doctor would escape upon a "reasonable doubt," for the evidence was entirely circumstantial, and the connection between the parts was not perfect.

But Dr. Lynch did not mention the subject. He drove furiously through the streets of Poppleton, as before; he ate good suppers at the Bell River House, and was as popular as ever with the multitude. He did not even sneer when Dick Birch or the Hungerfords were alluded to; he avoided all mention of them himself, but he spoke of them respectfully when compelled to speak. Hungerford waited weeks and months for the development of the doctor's plan of redemption, assured that it was yet to come; but there was not the slightest demonstration in that direction. If he had known what thoughts and purposes filled the mind of the demigod of Poppleton — as he still was — he would have been better prepared for his politic silence.

It was not possible that men so prominent as Eugene and Dr. Lynch could wholly avoid each other, or that Dick could entirely escape the presence of his intended murderer. They met in public places — in the church, in town meeting, in the library, in the streets, and not unfrequently at the social gatherings of the two villages. They bowed to each other; they even spoke upon indifferent topics when compelled to do so, and it was many weeks before the people discovered that the doctor had ceased to visit Pine Hill. The sufferer had the tact to explain everything in a plausible manner. He had given up Julia, and he left people to infer that his absence was caused by the severing of his relations with her. People were sorry for the doctor; they thought he ought to marry Julia, if he loved her; he was more popular than Dick Birch, blunt, honest, and plain-spoken as the latter was, and they sympathized with the doctor.

Eugene was not satisfied with himself, in the mean time. It was wicked to let such a man as Dr. Lynch play upon the credulity of the people — to pass himself off as an honest man. It was trifling with the justice of God and man to allow a murderer at heart to go at large, to be petted by the public, to become the joy and the solace of young and innocent maidens, as well as old men and decrepit women; to be the

counsellor, guide, and friend of all. It was true that his conduct, so far as was known, was unexceptionable; even the ministers, who thought the doctor was rather "fast," did not believe he was a bad man.

Eugene was troubled, and felt that he himself, as well as the doctor, stood in a false position. He could not avoid the conclusion that it was his duty to expose the hypocrite, and it required all of Dick Birch's logic and eloquence to keep him quiet. Mrs. Hungerford and Julia, in their gratitude to the skilful and devoted physician, would not have the doctor injured. They reasoned that, if exposed, he would lose all incentives to even an outwardly correct life; the simple facts, if proved, would ruin him, and cast loose upon the world all the evil propensities of his nature. Dick, as a lawyer, reasoned that the evidence was fatally deficient, and it would be demoralizing to the public conscience to exhibit a crime which could not be proved. Instead of sustaining the majesty of justice, the exposure would tend to bring it into contempt. A crime was to be alleged, but not proved.

The culprit had been in the library where the globules were kept; he had protested when they were offered to Julia. He alone could have known that the pellets were poison, which satisfied the family of his guilt. But the doctor was a bitter enemy of homœopathy, and a jury would attribute his protest — the full force of which could only be appreciated by those who had seen his pale face and heard his earnest words — to his dislike of the system; and he was certain to escape. Eugene could not even say that, as a jurymen, he should be willing to convict a man on the evidence that could be adduced. Once more the tempest was permitted to subside. Eugene and Dick bowed to the doctor, and the doctor bowed to Eugene and Dick, when they met. Julia, Mrs. Hungerford the elder, and Mrs. Hungerford the younger, were coldly polite to him; and each party was scrupulously careful not to injure the other in word or deed.

They were at war, but a perpetual truce had been tacitly agreed upon.

If Julia Hungerford had ever hesitated between her two devoted lovers, there was no longer any room for a doubt. The doctor had fallen, and had disappeared like a lost star from the firmament of her imagination, but Dick Birch had become a whole constellation of himself. The comparison in her mind between Dick and the doctor, always favorable to the former, had now become a contrast.

One morning, a month after Dr. Lynch had made his last visit to Pine Hill, as Dick was coming up from the river, he met Julia near the brook. He was about to cross the bridge, which he had planned and built with the proprietor's consent, when he discovered her. He came to a halt, and awaited her approach. The scene on the former occasion, when he had first spoken to her of his love, came vividly to his mind. Close by was the bench on which they had sat.

"Met again," said he.

She stopped as she was about to step upon the bridge. She smiled and she blushed. The figure of speech used by Dick when they met before came to her mind. They were on opposite sides of the stream.

"Why do you stop?" asked Dick.

"You startled me; I did not see you till you spoke."

"Stop, if you please, Julia. I have built my bridge. Have you built yours?"

"I am not a bridge builder."

"We are still on opposite sides of the stream, Julia. If you come over you are mine," laughed Dick.

"Of course you do not expect me to go over in the face of a threat," she replied, turning abruptly on her heel, and walking away.

Dick was vexed.

"Julia!"

"Well, Dick?"

“I am going to build a monument on the spot where you stood,” he added, joining her.

“I protest; it would obstruct the path.”

“Then I will remove the bridge and the path. I wish the bridge were burned up.”

“Burn it then.”

“It has become hateful to me.”

“Keep away from it then.”

“Don’t you think I had better leave Pine Hill?”

“Certainly, if you wish.”

“Are you quite willing to see me no more?”

“I should endeavor to be resigned, if such were your majesty’s pleasure.”

Why didn’t she ask him why he would build a monument, burn the bridge, leave Pine Hill, see her no more? It was very provoking of her not to help him even with a little encouragement.

“I thought you loved me, Julia — just a little,” said he.

“What made you think so?”

“You told me so.”

“But I have had time to repent of my folly.”

“Are you in earnest, Julia?”

“Are you, Dick?”

“Your question is not an answer to mine.”

“Then I will not ask or answer any questions.”

“Have I offended you, Julia? If I have, forgive me.”

“I forgive you, Dick. Do you wish me to go down on my knees to you?”

“No, no; I will go down on my knees to you.”

“Don’t do it; the ground is damp; you would get the rheumatism in your joints, and injure your clothing.”

“Julia, I love you!” exclaimed Dick, desperately.

“But you wish me to go to you, instead of your coming to me. You wish me to unsex myself,” pouted she.

“Far from it.”

"Must I cross the bridge alone? You did not even come after me."

"I have come now."

"Tardily."

"May I lead you over the bridge?"

"You may."

"In the sense I meant before?"

"Not yet."

"I love you, Julia. Will you not thus make me happy?"

They had returned to the verge of the bridge, where she stopped.

"Not yet. This is the site of your monument?"

"Yes."

"For what?"

"To mark the sad spot where you refused me; where you virtually said you did not love me."

"Very pretty; but a very weak idea for a sensible man. Why burn the bridge?"

"Because it has been associated with all my thoughts of you."

"A good reason for burning it!"

"They would be sad thoughts, if you and I are to remain on opposite sides of the stream."

"We are on the same side now; brought together by your coming over, and not by my going over."

"Will you go over with me, Julia?"

"If you wish."

"In the sense I meant?"

"In any sense you please."

"Come!"

They crossed the bridge.

"Do you love me, Julia?"

She gave him her hand.

"You do love me!"

"I do, Dick!"

Why one so strong-minded as Julia should weep at such a time is a mystery. The heart is mightier than the brain.

Julia and Dick were late at breakfast that morning.

Both of them looked as though something had happened. That forenoon Julia told her mother and Mary of her engagement. That afternoon Mary told her husband of it. Dr. Lynch heard of it within a week. He used some expletives in the solitude of his office; but he was prudent in the presence of the people. The marriage was to take place in November.

"Julia," said Eugene Hungerford, as he met her alone one morning after the day had been fixed, "this package belongs to you."

"What is it?" she asked, with some astonishment.

"Certificates of stock, treasury notes, and a check, to the amount of one hundred thousand dollars."

"Then it is not mine."

"It is."

"Please to explain."

"You are to be married in November."

"All the world knows it by this time."

"What are your plans? Dick is a poor man. I have never been able to make him accept more than his salary of five thousand a year."

"We shall not suffer on that. I have twenty thousand dollars of my own."

"Dick has to support his invalid father and his family."

"So much the better."

"Have you any plans?"

"We have."

"What are they?"

"Dick thinks of building a small house, in which his income will keep us very comfortably and pleasantly."

"That is all very pretty; but I shall build a house like mine for you in the spring."

“That would be very pretty! Dick could not support that style of living.”

“Julia, I have never intended that you should suffer by my marriage. The half million mentioned in uncle John’s will shall be yours. It will not be convenient for you to wait till I am thirty years of age. Here is the first instalment of your portion.”

“I object, Eugene.”

“Why?”

“I am too proud to receive a gift.”

“Why didn’t you decline uncle John’s legacy of twenty thousand, then?” laughed he.

“That was different.”

“Just the same. The half million comes from uncle John.”

“Dick will not consent.”

“It is none of his business. I give you the half million to-day. Here is one fifth of it. I will give you my note for the balance.”

Eugene was the most powerful personage at Pine Hill, and Julia could not prevail against him. Dick attempted to protest when he was told of what had been done. He talked about feeling mean; about being the “victim” of charity; but Eugene proved to be the better logician.

“Dick,” said he, “Julia has been accustomed to our style of living at Pine Hill, and it would be cruel to deprive her of the luxuries and comforts which she knows so well how to use.”

“Then it is cruel in me to ask her to be my wife.”

“Marriage is absolutely necessary to both of you, and has been from the beginning, in my opinion. Dick, you are trying to be a tyrant towards Julia or me.”

“No!”

“You wish to take her away from the luxuries of wealth, and you wish to deprive me of the pleasure of doing for her what I may do for others.”

“But my salary is sufficient to support her in what you and I both, a few years ago, would have deemed the most princely luxury.”

“Doubtless you think it would be very pleasant for me to live at Pine Hill, while my sister is cramped up in a small house, and reduced from plenty to comparative poverty. I say, Dick, it is cruel for you to insist upon such a state of things. You may humor your pride, and think it is magnanimous in you to choose poverty instead of wealth; but I am to be the sufferer — not you. I am to bear the pains and penalties of your reduced circumstances — not yourself.”

“I do not wish to render you uncomfortable, certainly,” replied Dick, musing.

“Then you will not object to Julia’s half million.”

“There is something humiliating in the situation.”

“Nothing of the kind. What your pride does not permit me to do for you, I shall do for my sister.”

“The same thing under another name.”

“No; the real question is, Shall I let my sister suffer for your pride and obstinacy? If I were to sacrifice anything at all for your sake, or even for hers, it would be different. I am giving her what I do not need, and cannot use. There is no merit whatever in my deed.”

Dick yielded only when he could no longer contest the point; but his pride was not entirely overcome.

“Now, Dick, you will be a rich man in spite of yourself,” said Julia, when they met alone after the conversation; “and I shall have the happiness of making you so.”

“There is a man at the Port who will say that this wealth is what I have been aiming at.”

“But there is not a person at Pine Hill who would believe him.”

“Julia, I wish you had not a dollar in the world, and could not get one,” replied Dick, still galled by his situation.

“You would love me none the less; but I am glad to be worth taking.”

“You do not need wealth to make you a prize. I am not sure that you wouldn't be better without it than with it.”

“I will try to be good with it, Dick.”

“Julia, I used to love you before I saw you. I wish we had met before the shower of gold fell upon you.”

“I have no need to complain; and sad and unfortunate as the circumstances are, we must endeavor to be resigned,” said Julia. “It is hard to have wealth thrust upon you, to be rich in spite of yourself; but I hope we shall be reconciled to our unhappy lot.”

We must do Dick Birch the justice to say that he endeavored to submit with good grace to the grievous misfortune of half a million. He patiently bore the cross, and richly deserved the crown. But it should be added that, in his doubts and fears, his trials and vexations, he was supported and cheered by the fairest and truest of women; that Julia did all she could to comfort him in his affliction, and render tolerable the load of wealth he was compelled to bear on his shoulders. When he desponded, she pointed him to the redeeming joys of his condition. Without her in this trying emergency, he would have been forlorn indeed.

There is nothing like the comfort and solace which a true woman is to a man burdened with trials, especially when there is any money to spend. In such a strait as that to which poor Dick was reduced, she is a blessing which cannot be over-estimated. She is more than a comforter: she bears his burden, and labors assiduously to remove far from him the cause of his sorrows.

Under such gentle ministrations as those of his betrothed, it is not strange that Dick Birch soon recovered his wonted cheerfulness, and looked with tolerable calmness upon the heavy burden he was doomed to carry. He had faith in woman; and he knew, if she could not relieve him of the load, she could help him spend it. When November came,

and the bridal day dawned upon him, he had attained a very happy frame of mind; so that he hardly needed the consolations of any one besides Julia to sustain him in the great trial.

They were married by the Rev. John Porter. The Pine Hill mansion was thronged again, though the wedding was a comparatively quiet affair, measured by that of Eugene and Mary.

Dr. Lynch was not present. He was not invited. People did not know whether he was asked or not; but they thought it quite natural that he should not care to witness the crowning triumph of his rival. The doctor said nothing; he kept his own counsel, and bided his own time.

“There will be a fall at Pine Hill one of these days,” he muttered more than once, when he thought of Julia as the wife of another, and of his own banishment. “There will be weeping and wailing over broken ties and unlawful heirs. I shall be satisfied then.”

Dick had long cherished a desire to visit Europe. When the marriage day was first arranged, he had even thought of a bridal tour across the ocean; but his own means were insufficient. Julia was pleased with the idea of a second visit; but Dick abandoned the project after a careful examination of his finances. When the half million dropped into his lap, Julia opened the subject again, and Dick gladly assented to the project. The whole family went to the city to see the happy couple start.

Pine Hill was dull without Julia; but there was nothing but happiness there. Mary Hungerford was all that her husband had hoped or desired, and he was never tired of being at her side. There was enough to occupy their time; and if the house was not as lively as it had been when Julia was at home, there were no heavy and weary moments there.

The Library building was completed, and the institution was in full operation, much to the satisfaction of Poppleton,

though the people at the Mills complained at its location, and said it ought to have been placed half way between the two villages.

In June, when Mr. and Mrs. Birch returned, their house — a duplicate of the Pine Hill mansion, and placed within ten rods of it — was half done ; but the happy couple were cordially welcomed to their old home. In the autumn they took possession of their new residence ; and we will leave them for a time, as happy and contented as love and plenty could make them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THIRTY YEARS OLD.

FOUR years have passed away. Pine Hill is still glorious in its beauty ; more glorious in its men and women, for the true life has been rich in true progress. The twin mansions are full of joys. Life has blossomed and borne fruit.

Eugene Hungerford's birthday is at hand, when he will be thirty years old. The time for the disposal of John Hungerford's three millions has been nearly reached. Dick Birch, and Julia, and Mary have insisted that the occasion shall be celebrated. The lord of the manor is not partial to celebrations, but he has consented to a gathering of his most intimate friends on the occasion, and a letter from the three eminent trustees in Baltimore has just been received, announcing that they will be present in a body, attended and supported by the distinguished lawyer who invented all the repetitions in John Hungerford's will.

Eugene does not look so old as he did when he returned from Europe, though five years have been added to the calendar. He has been happy since that time ; he has had enough to occupy his mind. Manly exercise and abundant fresh air have kept him healthy, and he certainly looks better than ever before. Mary has hardly grown older, though there is a certain maturity in her looks which does not lessen her beauty, or render her less interesting than before. She is a shade stouter, but she is as elegant in form, and as graceful in movement, as before. She is the mother of two children.

Mrs. Hungerford senior is still a hale, healthy old lady, happy in seeing her children and grandchildren happy. She walks over to the "other house," as she terms it, every day, unless the weather is very unfavorable, and even oftener if Master Eugene Hungerford Birch, now happily just entering his third year, has the "snuffles," or any indications of croup, measles, whooping cough, scarlatina, or chicken pox.

Dick Birch, perhaps somewhat modified by matrimony, is a happy man. He is hardly appreciated by the people; if he had been, he would have gone to Congress before this time; but Mrs. Birch declares that he is the best man in the world, though he is just a little too fond of having his own way — a grievous fault, said to be almost universal among husbands. By no means let it be supposed that Mr. and Mrs. Birch quarrelled, though without any positive information on the subject, we will venture to say that Julia occasionally went into a huff, and that Dick had to pacify her. As each had a will and a way, it is more than possible that concessions were necessary on both sides; but as both were reasonable, and there was true love, concession was easy, and even pleasant. There was only a little spice to give variety to life, and no happier couple lived in the whole world. They still continued to be on the same side of the bridge.

Master Eugene Hungerford Birch is a remarkable child; it is absolutely necessary that this fact should be stated, otherwise it would not be known. Besides being able to sleep and to eat bread and milk, which he did very naturally, if not gracefully, he could perform as many tricks as the clown in a circus, and he was duly exhibited to the crowds of admiring guests who came to Pine Hill. He could fall off the sofa, tumble down stairs, and roll out of bed with remarkable facility; and these feats were usually succeeded by healthy exercise of the lungs, causing them to grow strong and vigorous.

Master Johnnie Hungerford was even a more remarkable

young gentleman than his cousin. He was four years old; and though he had, as yet, made no speeches in town meeting, or in the hall of the Poppleton Library, he could talk faster, and say more in a given time, than any other child of his age in the county. His extraordinary talent in this direction already pointed him out as a future member of Congress, to which honorable position no one doubted that he would ultimately arrive.

Johnnie was not surpassed in anything by his remarkable cousin. He could fall off the sofa, tumble down stairs, and roll out of bed with no less facility than Master Eugene H. Birch; and, in the preceding summer, he had contrived to outdo him by tumbling into the duck pond, to the great astonishment of the ducks, and the mortal terror of his mother. This was certainly a very enterprising feat, and Johnnie was a hero for seven days afterwards. Besides his strictly gymnastic ability, John had other talents and accomplishments of the highest order. He could break crockery and glass ware beautifully; he could purloin his mother's scissors and hack a cambric handkerchief to pieces in the most artistic manner; he could root out a rare geranium in the conservatory in the twinkling of the eye.

Parkinson was quite sure that Johnnie would become an author, he was so fond of books and of writing. He could use up a twenty-dollar copy of Spenser in four minutes by the watch, accomplishing this remarkable feat by climbing up to the desk, and with pen and ink scratching and scrawling strange diagrams on the dainty pages. Johnnie was quite enterprising, too, in the department of mechanics. The barometer, which hung in the hall, was a great mystery to him; and one day he climbed up to it on a chair, to make an examination. In the course of his investigations, he managed, by the exercise of great skill, to destroy the instrument in a very brief space of time. But Johnnie's greatest achievement in this line was picking his father's gold watch to pieces,

in order to find the "tick" in it, thus exhibiting a thirst for hidden knowledge worthy of encouragement.

Dick Birch and lady once called Johnnie the "three million boy," because this sum depended upon him; but neither Eugene nor Mary liked the idea. The "little darling," with all his rare accomplishments, was the choicest gift of God to them, worth more than three millions, and was loved and prized for his own sake alone. Though his "nose was out of joint" now, and had been for a year, by the appearance of Miss Mary Hungerford, the young gentleman hardly suffered by the addition of a sister to share his caresses. Miss Hungerford, being but a year old, made no long speeches, though wonderful things were expected of her. She was, however, a remarkably forward child, and could tumble out of a chair, if they would only let her, almost as well as Johnnie himself. She had an astonishing talent for eating and sleeping, though, not being an epicure, she did not insist upon variety in her diet.

If Johnnie sneezed, all Pine Hill was thrown into commotion, and his father had seriously entertained the idea of having a physician resident at the mansion, that no delay might be experienced when the little fellow barked hoarsely, or exhibited any symptom of a dangerous disease. But, though the parents were inclined to be perniciously indulgent, they were sensible people in the main. Pastry, cakes, and confects were wholly banished from the tables, except on extraordinary occasions; beef and mutton, bread and milk, were the staple articles of diet, for parents as well as children, for the latter would not cry for what they did not see. Johnnie lived mainly on fresh air, and on the approach of his father's thirtieth birthday, he was perfectly healthy, and as fat and rosy as the child of a poor laborer.

Poppleton had been progressing during these four years. Eugene had been busy all the time. The library was in excellent working condition; the lyceum and the recreations were successful. The chapel had been diffusing the light of

the gospel; Miss Thompson still labored as a missionary among the poor, and John Porter preached practical Christianity.

Dr. Thomas Lynch still drove a fast horse through the streets, and was hardly less popular than when he first came into the town; hardly less, for he had actually begun to lose ground. He had purchased popularity, and he was not always willing to pay the price. It cost too much to keep up the farce of pandering to old women's whims. As he became more successful, he bowed less low to the magnates of Poppleton, took less pains to conciliate men and women who could do nothing but sound his praise. But the doctor was still great, though it was a fact that he had begun to decline.

Eugene Hungerford's birthday came. A gentleman arrived at Poppleton by the afternoon train. He went directly to the office of Dr. Lynch, who received him with a patronizing smile, and conducted him to the room in the rear.

"You have come at exactly the right time," said the doctor, rubbing his hands, as if in anticipation of some delightful event.

"I came when you told me," replied the stranger, somewhat roughly, for the doctor's greeting was rather too patronizing to be entirely satisfactory.

"I have been afraid, twenty times to-day, that I should not see you."

"But you knew I arrived from Italy a month ago."

"I did; but I feared you might take a drop too much, or that some accident might prevent you."

"You need not insult me."

"I had no intention of insulting you."

"What do you mean by a drop too much, then?"

"Nothing, nothing! You know you used to imbibe a little too freely."

"But I told you in one of my letters that I had drunk nothing stronger than red wine for five years."

‘ So much the better.’

“ When will this business be finished? ” demanded the stranger, with no little impatience.

“ This evening. ”

“ I am disgusted with it. ”

“ You have no right to be disgusted with it. I have paid you three thousand dollars a year for your services, which has supported you like a prince in Italy. ”

“ I have no fault to find with the pay ; that is liberal, but it would not buy me into such a mean transaction a second time. ”

“ You must not flinch now, at the last moment. ”

“ I shall not flinch ; I have sold myself to the devil, and I am willing to pay the price. ”

“ But you must do your part handsomely. You must ride the high horse. You must refuse all compromise. You must claim your own without the shadow of relenting. ”

“ This was not nominated in the bond. I will do my part with as little offence as possible. ”

“ You must be firm and resolute, ” persisted the doctor.

“ I will be firm and resolute enough to accomplish the purpose — no more. ”

“ I have been waiting five years for this night. I have longed for this hour as they that suffer wait for the morning. My time has come. I have been insulted, outraged in my feelings, cast out like an unclean beast —— ”

“ As you are ! ” interposed the stranger.

“ What ! ”

“ I know you, if they don’t. ”

“ This is hardly proper in you. ”

“ I will pay the bond, but I have the privilege of despising you. ”

“ Come, come ; you are riding the high horse with me, instead of my enemies. ”

“ They are your enemies, not mine. ”

"I have paid you to help me crush them," said the doctor, bitterly.

"And I will help you crush them, because I have been paid for doing so; but I am none the less a villain, though I am a respectable man compared with you."

"Have a care, sir."

"You need not threaten me. I doubt if I can help kicking you after I have done what you require of me."

"Be reasonable, my dear fellow. We cannot afford to quarrel."

"I can; you cannot."

"Neither of us can."

"I have had all the money you were to pay me."

"I will give you a thousand dollars more if you follow my directions implicitly."

"What are they?" asked the stranger, apparently tempted by the offer.

"You must be firm and resolute, and insist upon bearing your own away with you. My revenge would not be complete without that."

"I spurn the offer!" replied the stranger, proudly. "After I have inflicted the wound, I shall do the best I can to heal it. I shall be seen no more in this part of the country."

"Your sensibilities are very delicate," sneered the doctor.

"You will win your fortune: be satisfied with that. I am not so vile as you are."

The doctor handed the stranger a cigar, and then tried to persuade him to do his work after the heroic style; and while he is thus engaged, we will leave him, and return to Pine Hill.

The eminent trustees and the distinguished lawyer from Baltimore have arrived. Mr. John Lester has John Hungerford on his knee. He has no doubt that the little gentleman is "the legal son of the said legal father;" and being a man of ample fortune himself, he is rather glad to get rid

of the labor and trouble of managing the three millions any longer. The distinguished lawyer, who has already examined the records, is satisfied that Eugene Hungerford was duly and legally married to Mary K. Buckstone, widow of Eliot Buckstone — deceased beyond the possibility of a doubt, for his body was found at the bottom of the channel, fully identified, and buried in the town. The Rev. John Porter is present, and ready to swear, if need be, that he united the parties. Dr. Gardner, from the Mills, is ready to satisfy him that Master Johnnie is the child of his parents. There is no room even for a cavil, and no one proposes to raise the slightest objection.

In the evening the three dozen or so of intimate friends arrive. Ross Kingman and lady are there, among the first to come. When Dick went to Europe, Ross was installed into the office of agent, and since that time has acted in that capacity. Hubbard became skipper of the yacht, at Dick's suggestion, though the old fisherman wanted to know what he should do with a thousand dollars a year, which was more than he had been in the habit of earning in five years. Ross receives the same salary that Dick had, and is regarded as a person of considerable consequence in Poppleton.

He is what is called a smart business man, and his employer has entire confidence in his fidelity and his good judgment. He is honored and respected, though certain people are impressed by the fact that he has killed a man, in avenging his sister's honor; to such he is terrible.

On this occasion the library had been prepared as a banquet hall, for the dining-room is not large enough to accommodate the company. Eugene is at the head of the table, with Mr. John Lester on his right. Dick Birch sits at the other end of the board.

"What do you think of my brother-in-law now, Mr. Lester?" asked Hungerford, as the soup plates were removed. "You were not prejudiced in his favor the first time you came to Pine Hill, you remember."

“But, Mr. Hungerford, you placed him in a false position before me,” protested the eminent trustee.

“And Dr. Bilks?”

“Had you told me that Dr. Bilks was that scapegrace of a Tom Lynch, I should not have erred in judgment. Without correct premises, Mr. Hungerford, of course it is impossible to arrive at a correct conclusion.”

Of course Mr. Lester could have made no mistake; it was not possible for an eminent merchant like himself to blunder on a question of human nature.

“I did not know myself that Tom Lynch was amongst us.”

“You were deceived, and unwittingly deceived me. I have the highest regard for your friend Mr. Birch.”

The supper was finished, and Mr. Lester intimated that he should be happy to place Eugene Hungerford in possession of the deeds, bonds, notes, and other securities, which constituted the three millions. The party adjourned to the drawing-room.

“I believe there is only one person not present who has had any contingent interest in the property,” said Mr. Lester, who, being an eminent man, was of course disposed to be formal and precise in the discharge of a duty so important as that which now devolved upon him.

“Dr. Lynch,” added the lawyer. “His contingent interest ceases to-day.”

“It is quite proper that he should be present, being an interested party, and I have taken the liberty to invite him to come here at nine o’clock,” continued Mr. Lester. “You will pardon me for inviting this unwelcome guest, Mr. Hungerford, but I deemed it best that he should be here,” he added, in a low tone, to Eugene, who stood by his side.

“I am entirely satisfied.”

“I do not think he will come,” said Mr. Lester. “His contingent interest no longer exists, and I doubt if he will care to see all the property slip into your hands.”

The eminent trustee chuckled a little. He was so wel-

satisfied that the doctor would not come, that he had not even deemed it worth his while to say before that he had invited him.

“Dr. Lynch is not present,” continued the eminent trustee, “and we will proceed without him.”

“Dr. Lynch,” said Parkinson, throwing open the door at this moment.

“Ah!” ejaculated Mr. Lester, faintly.

“I am here at the request of Mr. Lester,” said Dr. Lynch, as Eugene stepped forward to receive the guest.

Eugene made no reply; he was courteous, but he said no more than was necessary to greet the guest. He gave him a seat.

“By the terms of John Hungerford’s will,” Mr. Lester began again, “a document drawn up with great care by my learned legal friend, whom you all have the pleasure of meeting on this interesting occasion, it was provided that the income of the three millions of dollars, the entire estate of the testator, should be paid over to Eugene Hungerford, his nephew, as fast as it accrued. This clause, I believe, has been faithfully and legally carried out, and the trustees have the receipts for all moneys paid over to Mr. Hungerford.”

Mr. Lester paused and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief. It was important business, and it must look important.

“By the terms of John Hungerford’s will, it further appears,” he continued, “that if, when testator’s nephew, Eugene, had attained the age of thirty years, he was the father of a son, who had been duly named for his father’s uncle, the whole three millions should be paid over to the nephew. In order to comply with the terms of the will, and entitle Mr. Hungerford to the absolute possession of the property, these questions must be answered. First: Is Eugene Hungerford legally married? Second: Has he a son? Third: Is this son named John Hungerford?”

“During the day, the trustees, with the valuable assistance of the distinguished legal gentleman, who drew up the original will, have considered these three questions, embodying the conditions on which they were to constitute Mr. Hungerford the sole owner of the property, and they are happy to say that they find full, complete, legal evidence which satisfies them that the three conditions have been duly and properly met.

“The trustees find that Mr. Hungerford was duly married to the estimable lady known as his wife.” Mr. Lester was so intent upon being verbose that he quite forgot his early view of the marriage. “They were united by Rev. John Porter. There is no room to doubt the legality of the marriage; but unpleasant as it is, this matter must be mentioned.”

Mr. Lester made this apology, because, glancing at Mary, he saw that her face was quite red, and that she was annoyed by the consideration of the question.

“There being no doubt on this point ——”

“I beg your pardon, Mr. Lester,” interposed Dr. Lynch, in a bland and almost supercilious tone, “but there *is* some doubt about it.”

All eyes were directed towards the doctor. Eugene looked stern and indignant; the conduct of the unwelcome guest appeared like a premeditated insult to him. Dick Birch’s fingers were involuntarily clutched together; he was in condition to lay violent hands on the doctor. Julia placed her finger upon his arm; and this prevented him from executing the purpose in his mind.

“Dr. Lynch, do I understand you to raise an objection to the legality of the marriage?” asked Mr. Lester, now quite startled out of his propriety by the unexpected event.

“I do raise an objection,” replied the doctor, who was already revelling in the misery he intended to produce.

“What objection?”

"The marriage was not legal," he replied, triumphantly, as he glanced at Eugene.

"The ceremony was performed by the reverend gentleman now present; the marriage is duly recorded, and there are plenty of witnesses of the fact."

"I appeal to your legal adviser, at your side, to say whether or not these are sufficient to constitute a legal marriage!" said Dr. Lynch, apparently bent upon prolonging the joy of his triumph, and upon keeping the parties in suspense as long as he could.

"If the parties are competent to marry, they are sufficient," said the lawyer.

"But the parties to this marriage were not competent."

"What do you mean, you villain!" roared Dick Birch, unable any longer to repress his rage.

"Soft words, if you please, Mr. Birch," replied Dr. Lynch, with affected politeness. "I purpose to prove all I allege."

"What do you allege, Dr. Lynch?" interposed the lawyer.

"I allege that the lady was not competent to marry. She was the wife of another man."

"Her husband was dead."

"I beg your pardon. He was living."

"Why don't you prove it?" demanded Dick Birch.

"I will."

Dr. Lynch went out of the room, opened the front door, and presently appeared with the stranger whom he had met at his office.

"Here is my proof," said he, pointing to the stranger.

It was Eliot Buckstone!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE LAST OF THE THREE MILLIONS

MARY did not faint, but all the springs of life within her seemed to be suddenly dried up, and she clung to the arm of her husband as though she feared he would be torn from her. The reappearance of Eliot Buckstone meant only one thing to her — that, whereas she had been the wife of Eugene Hungerford for five happy years, she was now no longer his wife. Those two children were Eugene's by the law of nature, but not by the law of the land. What was his was not theirs by the cold formula of the world's way.

Those who had known Eliot Buckstone were startled by his appearance among them. Had the dead risen? Had the grave given up its headless trunk, which, reunited with the temple of the mind, now stood before them to confuse and confound the living, and wrench asunder the loving hearts interlocked with each other?

Dr. Lynch stood with folded arms gazing upon his victims. His hour of triumph, so long waited for, had come. Banished for years from that mansion, he came now, like an avenging demon, with woe and desolation in his train. He was satisfied.

“Mr. Lester, you will perceive that I have established the truth of my statement,” said he, when the party had in some measure recovered from their astonishment.

“Who is this man?” demanded the principal trustee, unable fully to comprehend the situation, though he could

not help seeing that a tremendous change had suddenly come over the face of affairs in the Hungerford family.

"This gentleman is Mr. Eliot Buckstone; he is the legal husband of the lady who has hitherto been known as Mrs. Eugene Hungerford."

"Can this be true?"

"She is my wife," said Eliot Buckstone, hardly raising his eyes from the floor, upon which he had gazed intently from the moment he entered the room.

Ross Kingman stepped forward and looked at him. The murdered man was certainly alive. The grave in the old cemetery contained not the remains of Eliot Buckstone. The stain of blood no longer rested upon the brother of Mary. No one doubted the facts, and busy minds were eagerly seeking the solution of the problem. All looked at Dr. Lynch. There was a new chapter in the dark history of the murder yet to be read, and the popular physician was the only man to whom they could look for a translation.

"Mary, I have done all my evil work now," said Buckstone, looking towards Eugene's wife. "Do not shrink from me. I will leave you now, and you shall never see my face again."

"Was this person legally married to Mrs. Hungerford?" asked Mr. Lester.

"She has her marriage certificate and an attested copy of the records," interposed the doctor.

"And this was the reason why you were so anxious to establish the legality of her marriage," said Eugene, bitterly.

Dr. Lynch bowed coldly, while a devil's smile gleamed upon his face.

"Mr. Lester, are you satisfied?" demanded he.

"No one seems to dispute your astounding declarations," answered the trustee.

"No one can dispute them, sir."

"Villain, scoundrel, knave, as I took this man to be, I

never deemed him capable of such refined rascality as this," exclaimed Dick Birch.

"Mr. Birch, your opinions are entirely gratuitous," sneered the doctor. "You are a legal gentleman; if you have anything to say in defence of your friends' case, why don't you say it? — not waste your breath in idle vituperation."

"I am confounded by the measure of villany to which you have attained."

"These are not arguments, Mr. Birch," said the doctor, stiffly.

"The best argument for you would be a hemp rope," added Dick, stepping out into the middle of the floor. "I wish to be a gentleman and a Christian, but I never was so tempted to take a man by the throat as I am at this moment."

"Mr. Birch, I do not aspire to be a common blackguard. I cannot hope to reach your heights in that capacity."

Dr. Lynch was very angry, but he tried to look dignified and contemptuous.

"Mr. Lester," he continued, "I am willing to answer any questions affecting the matter at issue; but no doubts seem to be raised in regard to the truth of my assertions. I therefore protest against further proceedings in this settlement, and claim the half million which belongs to me by the terms of my step-father's will."

"The trustees are not prepared to admit your claim without further investigation."

"Certainly; any time you may desire will be cheerfully granted on my part."

"Perhaps Mr. Hungerford, who is the only party concerned in opposition to your interests, may be willing to admit your claim."

"I am not willing to admit it," said Eugene, whose breast was racked with terrible emotions.

"It would be well to settle the matter as quietly as possible," suggested the distinguished lawyer from Baltimore.

“Perhaps Dr. Lynch requires nothing more than the payment of his claim, and will be willing to permit a quiet and amicable adjustment.”

“Dr. Lynch is not disposed to put any one to unnecessary inconvenience; though he cannot forget that he has been banished from this house like a knave, and treated as one unworthy to associate with the magnates of Pine Hill,” added the doctor.

“And you are unworthy; if they were all beggars they would spurn and despise you,” said Dick Birch.

“You hear, gentlemen, what inducements I have to pursue a conciliatory policy,” continued the doctor.

“Pursue any policy you please,” added Dick. “Gentlemen, this is all a farce.”

“Do you think so, Mr. Birch?” demanded Dr. Lynch.

“I do; I know it.”

“Won’t you oblige the company present by proving that it is a farce,” sneered the doctor.

“I purpose to do so.”

“Will you deny that this gentleman is Mr. Eliot Buckstone?”

“I will not; that gentleman undoubtedly is Mr. Eliot Buckstone, in spite of some prejudices we might have to the contrary.”

“He was married to the lady who has for several years been known as Mrs. Eugene Hungerford. Can you deny this?”

“No,” replied Dick. “Do not be alarmed, Mrs. Hungerford.”

“And the marriage was a legal one.”

“No; it was not!” shouted Dick.

“Mr. Birch, you are a rash man to make such a statement.”

“If my rashness does not lead me to put my hand upon your throat, you need not complain of it.”

“Your threats are idle. Can you prove what you say?” continued Dr. Lynch, with a sneer.

"I can."

"Well, why don't you?"

All eyes were now directed towards Dick Birch. It was an exciting moment. Even Mary, who would have given all the world six years before to prove her first marriage, was painfully anxious to have it declared illegal.

"Do not mock us, Dick," said Eugene, fearfully agitated.

"I speak only the truth, Hungerford. The God of eternal justice does not permit this wretch to desolate your happy home. Be calm, Mary," added Dick, as he moved towards the door.

"The proof, Mr. Birch—the proof!" said Dr. Lynch, with triumphant assurance.

Dick left the room.

"That is the last of him," sneered the doctor. "Abuse proves nothing. I have been foully wronged and ill-treated by that man. Yet I am expected to be patient, and to be gentle and conciliatory. Mr. Hungerford, it has been your misfortune to have a bad adviser."

"Silence, sir!" said Eugene, sternly.

"As you please. I am not disposed to annoy you in any manner. Between you and me this matter can be speedily adjusted, but you must send Mr. Birch away."

"Mr. Birch is my friend; I will hear no abuse of him from you."

"This is a plain case, as you perceive. Here is Mr. Buckstone himself; he is the best kind of evidence."

"And here is Mrs. Buckstone herself!" shouted Dick Birch, leading Miss Thompson into the room.

The baby had been troublesome, and she had volunteered to sit by the crib when the party left the supper table.

"Who?" demanded Dr. Lynch, with a broad laugh.

"Mrs. Eliot Buckstone," replied Dick.

"I think not," sneered the wretch.

"Ellen!" exclaimed Buckstone, starting back as Miss Thompson came forward.

“O, Eliot!” cried she, bursting into tears, and sobbing as though her heart would break.

“What farce is this?” asked the doctor, beginning to look a little pale.

“This is a part of the old farce,” added Dick.

“Who is this woman?” gasped Dr. Lynch.

“She is my wife,” replied Buckstone, hanging his head with shame.

“Have you deceived me? Have you made a fool of me?”

“You were that in the beginning. Knaves and fools are twin brothers,” said Dick.

“If I did deceive you, I was deceived myself,” replied Buckstone.

“Is this woman your wife?” hissed the doctor, now so agitated by stirring emotions that he could hardly speak.

“She is.”

“When were you married to her?”

“Seven years ago.”

“Was it a legal marriage?”

“It was.”

“I have the certificate,” added the weeping lady, who now began to comprehend the situation.

“Then you have deceived, duped, cheated me!” cried the doctor.

“Unintentionally I have; but, from the deepest depths of my heart, I thank God that your villanous conspiracy has come to grief!” added Buckstone, fervently.

“Good! There is some hope of you, Buckstone,” exclaimed Dick.

Eugene threw his arms around the neck of Mary, and pressed her to his bosom. She smiled in her tears; she did not think that she had been no wife when she married him who stood by her side, and folded her to his heart. The world was not there; it could not frown.

Dr. Lynch flew up and down the room, smarting under

the sting of this final defeat, the object of contempt and reprobation to all who beheld him. The last half million had eluded his grasp; his dream of wealth was exploded; his vision of vengeance was dissipated in the most crushing blow he had ever received.

“Keep cool, doctor,” said Dick, in taunting tones.

The discomfited wretch paused before him, boiling over with passion. Dick laughed in his face, and he dared not resent it.

“We begin to understand the past as well as the present,” said Eugene.

“The doctor’s confession was the biggest lie of all,” added Dick. “I think we had better look up the facts at once, while the doctor is present.”

But the convicted villain at these words rushed from the house.

“No matter,” laughed Dick. “There is a hole in this millstone. Mr. Buckstone, you acknowledge that this lady is your wife,” he added, nodding to Miss Thompson.

“I do; and if she can forgive me, I will endeavor to atone for the wrong I have done.”

“Freely, Eliot,” said she, giving him her hand. “If you are truly sorry, and mean to shun your evil ways, I cannot reproach you.”

“I have hated this business from the beginning; but after I had been paid for it, I could not honorably refuse to complete the contract.”

“When were you married to Miss Thompson?” asked Dick.

“Seven years ago, at Eastport.”

Buckstone told his story. On a visit to Eastport, while he was a student of art, he had fallen in love with Ellen Thompson, whose father was a sea captain. They were married, and went to New York. They lived happily for a year, when Buckstone’s dissolute habits destroyed their peace. He was a periodical drunkard. For three, six, or

even twelve months he entirely abstained from the cup, and then his period of dissipation lasted from four to twelve weeks. In one of these seasons he abandoned his wife, and she was left destitute, as Mary had been. She wrote to her father, and the indignant parent hastened to her assistance. He conveyed her to his home. She was an only child, and her mother was dead. Captain Thompson resolved that she should never return to her husband; but the stricken wife refused to be comforted. Her hopes had been wrecked.

Captain Thompson was appointed to the command of a brig for a voyage to the West Indies and back. He could not leave Ellen alone in her misery, and he thought the sea voyage would benefit her health, and help her to forget her grief. She went with him. Before her departure she wrote a letter to Buckstone, whom she still loved in spite of his bad conduct, inviting him to send his reply to Gonaives. This was the last he knew of her, until he met her in the drawing-room at Pine Hill.

Three months after the receipt of her letter, Buckstone saw in the newspapers an account of the wreck of Captain Thompson's vessel, and the loss of all on board, except the negro cook. He had written to her, as requested, but now his wife was dead. He was sober then, and he grieved for the lost one; and he was sincere, though his volatile nature could not long cling to a sorrow.

Ellen was not lost; she was not even in the brig when she was wrecked. On the passage out, she had become a great favorite with an English lady, whose husband was a merchant in Gonaives. On her arrival in Hayti, she was warmly welcomed at the house of her friend, and, as her father intended to make another voyage to the same port immediately, she was persuaded to spend a few months in the family of the merchant. Captain Thompson, finding her so well contented with her new friends, and thinking the change would be mentally and physically beneficial to her, raised no objections to the continuation of the visit. The

news of the wreck of the brig and the loss of her father was a heavy blow ; but having no friends at home, she remained with the family of the merchant for some months.

Her husband's letter reached her, though long delayed, and she determined to return to him. She wrote to him, announcing her intention, and sailed for New York. She expected to be folded in his arms when she stepped on shore ; but no husband greeted her, and she began to search the city for him. She found his last residence, and there heard the terrible story of his murder in Poppleton — an event which had occurred three months before her arrival.

At this time Dick Birch was in New York, inquiring into the antecedents of Buckstone. One of the persons to whom Ellen applied referred her to him for information. Her sad story was told. She was a penniless woman. Dick took her to the home of his father, on his return, and finally she was installed as the missionary at Poppleton, at his suggestion. He had advised her to resume her maiden name, and to conceal her relations with Buckstone. He was not altogether satisfied, at first, that she was the wife of Buckstone ; for it was possible that he had deceived her, as he had Mary. In Poppleton it would injure her to be known by her husband's name. It was the way of the world to condemn without much inquiry. It could not be pleasant to Eugene and Mary to be reminded of the past by his name. Whether he was right or wrong, he deemed it best for all that Ellen's previous history should be studiously concealed. It was simply a measure of humanity, for he had no suspicion that Buckstone was still living. There was no question of the marriage now ; no one denied it.

“Mr. Buckstone, we supposed you were killed,” said Dick, when the story of Ellen had been collated from both parties.

“I was not.”

“I supposed the blow I gave you would have killed any nan,” added Ross.

“I should certainly have perished if Dr. Bilks had not saved me.”

“Explain how it was,” said Dick.

“I was thrown off the cliff; I don’t know whether the water partially restored me to consciousness, or whether I struggled; but the first distinct recollection I had was of being on the beach with the doctor. What he did for me I don’t know, but I was as well as ever in half an hour, with the exception of a terrible pain in my head, caused by the blow I had received. I did not get over it for a month. Dr. Bilks ——”

“Dr. Lynch is his real name,” interposed Dick.

“Dr. Lynch, then, explained what he wanted of me. He had sent for me, and offered me a thousand dollars if I would publicly marry Miss Kingman. I intended to claim my wife again, but I wanted the money. I had always been short of funds. He wished me to marry her to prevent Mr. Hungerford from doing so. If I spoke of any doubts in regard to the legality of the marriage in Providence, it was only to get the money offered to me.”

“What did the doctor say he wanted of you?” asked Dick, when Buckstone exhibited a tendency to enlarge upon his own excuses.

“He laid out the plan just as he has carried it out. It would appear on the following day that I had been murdered by Ross Kingman. This was what he wanted, he said; he wished Mr. Hungerford to marry Mary then, if I would do as he wished me to do. He proposed to give me three thousand dollars a year for six years if I would assist. The offer blinded my eyes, and ——”

“You accepted it.”

“I did; and he stipulated that I should leave the town before morning, and remain in some foreign land until he needed my attendance. Mary would apparently be a widow. I told him how to procure the evidence of our marriage, and gave him a letter to Dorning. Hungerford would make her

his wife, and live in perfect confidence with her until the time when the three millions would come to him by the conditions of his uncle's will. Dr. Bilks, or Dr. Lynch, explained the whole matter to me. At the right time I was to appear, claim Mary as my wife, and thus prove that the child was illegitimate, if there was one.

“I had been wishing for years to go to Italy to study art. The means were now within my hand, and the doctor promised to remit the three thousand dollars to me every year. He has done so faithfully and punctually; though I hoped he would fail, for I was disgusted with the business.”

“What did you do while on the beach? We found a body at the bottom of the channel which was identified as yours.”

“There had been a man by the name of Goodwin drowned that day. The doctor took me into the boat, and rowed down to the cliff, where he had found the body wedged in among the rocks. We conveyed it back to the beach. We then went to the doctor's office, where I wrote the letter to Dorning, and he wrote something—I don't know what. He gave me a suit of his clothes, and a draft on New York for three thousand dollars, the first instalment of the reward. I put on the clothes, and we returned to the beach. The garments were removed from the corpse, and mine substituted for them. My wallet, porte-monnaie, and all the contents of my pockets were left upon the body. Even the rings upon my fingers were transferred to the hand of the dead man.

“To my horror the doctor cut off the head of the corpse, tied it up in his handkerchief, and put it into the boat. He said this was to prevent any one from supposing the remains were not mine. We then took the body out into the channel a little way, fastened a fifty-six pound weight we found in the boat to it, and sunk it with a rope. He fastened a stone to the end of the rope, and threw it overboard.”

“What was that for?”

“Dr. Lynch said after the body had laid there a month or so, there could be no possibility that any friend of the deceased would recognize it. He intended to make everything perfectly sure. He meant to fish up the rope some night, and let the body be found, and it would satisfy all that I was dead. When all this was done, we left the island, landing near the Point. I left him there, and walked ten miles before morning. At East Summerville I hired a boy to drive me to Newington, in his father’s wagon. At this place I took the morning train for Boston, keeping out of sight in the cars, to avoid being recognized by any one from Poppleton. I took the first steamer for Liverpool, and made my way to Italy, where I resided most of the time till my return two months ago.”

The absorbing interest of these narratives had thrown the eminent trustees entirely into the shade; but when they were finished, Mr. Lester proceeded to hand the securities to Eugene, which he did with the utmost precision and formality.

“Mr. Lester, as a thank offering for the blessings this night has confirmed to me, not the least of which is my wife, I purpose to carry out the original intentions of my uncle, so far as the charitable institutions are concerned,” said Eugene.

“You astonish me, Mr. Hungerford!” exclaimed the chairman of the trustees, who might, with entire truth, have added that he believed Eugene was crazy.

“The city of Baltimore was the home of my uncle. His property was accumulated there; and I deem it no more than right that the place of his residence should have good reason gratefully to remember him. The three asylums shall be founded, and half the three millions shall be appropriated to that purpose. My sister has already received her full share. If Dr. Lynch had behaved like an honest man, he would have lost nothing by my marriage with Mary. It has been my intention, from the beginning, to carry out, not

only my uncle's primary, but also his secondary intentions. Dr. Lynch has defeated himself. I could have given him all the will mentioned, with a million still remaining. He has chosen to serve the devil, and his master has disappointed him."

"Honesty is the best policy," laughed Dick.

"Whether it is or not, we should still be honest."

"A man worth his million and a half can afford to be honest," said Mr. Lester.

"And a man who is not worth a penny cannot afford to be dishonest," added Eugene, whose ethics seldom agreed with those of the eminent merchant.

At twelve o'clock the party in the drawing-room separated. Squire Perkins and his daughter were sent home in the carriage. When the driver had returned, Parkinson went up to Eugene's room and knocked at the door.

"There is great news at the Port, sir."

"What is it?"

"Dr. Lynch has shot himself through the head."

The news was true. The discomfited wretch had sacrificed reputation, character, everything, to win a fortune. If he had won it, he could have conquered an ill name—it was the way of the world. He had lost it; and he had nothing to do but to die. He could not face the storm which might greet him the next day; and all unshrived, he went into the presence of the Almighty Judge.

Buckstone and his wife remained at Pine Hill that night. In the morning they departed for New York. A few days after their arrival, a banker in that city sent for Mrs. Buckstone, and informed her that she was entitled to draw twelve hundred dollars a year at his office, being the income of twenty thousand dollars deposited with him for her exclusive use. Eugene felt that his faithful missionary was deserving of some tribute of regard. But Buckstone had evidently sown his wild oats, and Ellen frequently wrote to Mary,

speaking in the warmest terms of his fidelity and devotion to her.

Eugene still continues to dispense his charities, on a large scale, but as silently as the dews of heaven water the flowers when all men sleep. Poppleton and paradise are every year becoming more similar under his influence, though he never expects to realize his highest ideal of a Christian community.

Ross Kingman has built a new house on The Great Bell, and is a man of influence in Poppleton. He still enjoys the confidence of his employer, and is not the less happy for the knowledge that his hand is not stained with blood.

One night, the gravestone bearing the name of Buckstone disappeared from the cemetery; but another, with the name of Edward Goodwin, was placed at the head of the grave. Dick Birch did this work, so that no questions were asked, no unpleasant remarks made.

Master John Hungerford, Miss Mary Hungerford, and Master Eugene Hungerford Birch are by far the most important personages at Pine Hill. ~~John~~ has passed safely through the measles, but Eugene H. B., on account of a little vein of obstinacy, probably inherited from his mother, refused to take them, though Mrs. Hungerford, senior, went over to "the other house" every day, in order to take the bull by the horns in good season. But the children are all doing well, and being treated to an abundance of fresh air we doubt not in due time Master John Hungerford will be a *millionnaire*.

"Eugene, I think I am a great deal happier than I deserve to be," said Mary, one evening after she had put the little ones to bed, and seen them both drop off into the slumber of innocence.

"You are happy because you are good, Mary."

"Have you never repented taking me?"

"Repented! I have never ceased to rejoice that you are mine."

"I owe all my happiness in this world to you."

"No; to the Good Father, who gives it to you because you are so true and good."

"But to you as His minister. I tremble when I think what I might have been without you, Eugene."

"My joy has been greater than yours."

"I was cast out, despised, loathed."

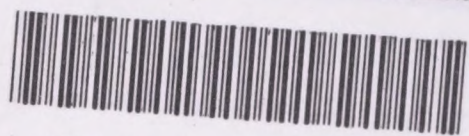
"But you did not deserve it."

"IT WAS THE WAY OF THE WORLD."

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