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Stephen Cookman-My

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BREEZIE LANGTON;

A STORY OF FIFTY-TWO TO FIFTY-FIVE.

BY HAWLEY SMART.

“Time turns the old days to derision,
Our loves into corpses or wives;
And marriage, and death, and division
Make barren our lives.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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THREE YEARS.

CHAPTER I.

ON THEIR WAY TO "THE FRONT."

THROUGH scud and foam, through haze and mist, the good ship "Meanee" labours painfully across the vexed waters of the Black Sea, having amongst her passengers Clarke, and Jack Travers, both now returned "fit for duty." They had had a beautiful start up the Bosphorus; but upon emerging into the Black Sea, the clouds began to drift, the moon became obscured, and the wind began to rise with that low, moaning, sobbing sound, that to practised ears infallibly betokens rough weather. They had been now six-and-thirty hours pitching about in that seething

caldron. Twice had the tiller ropes given way; but despite wind and water they were now nearing the land-locked harbour of Balaklava, a little more and they rounded the point, and entered the narrow inlet. With "slowed engines" they crept carefully to the berth allotted to them in the crowded little bay, where ships small and great were packed like herrings in a cask.

The two friends made their way on shore, and were soon wading through the sea of mud that characterized Balaklava. What a sight it was at that time! officers in every variety of costume foraging with an intentness and regardlessness of price, that would have filled the mothers who bore them with mingled admiration and horror. Seizing with avidity upon brandy at twelve shillings the bottle, upon butter and hams at three shillings a pound, laughingly bidding against each other to reckless amounts for geese, sheep, or turkeys. Here a man having filled his forage bags, puts a friend up to a good and newly discovered vein of pickles. There, one told of

cheeses and port wine to be had on board the "Polly Jane." "'Princess Alice' in, old fellow, with no end of pickled salmon and preserved meats," whispered a third.

Meek-faced, stolid-looking Turks slowly dragged their allotted boards through the mud, evidently resigned to their "kismet," a sort of despairing feel, that Allah was great and the English quarter-master-general his prophet, at all events for the present. Grinning sailors went trotting along, each carrying his shot in the bag slung over his shoulder, and revelling in the idea of pitching it at the Great Redan or elsewhere, as soon as he got it up to the batteries. Staff-officers splashed on their big horses through the mud, almost overturning the half starved "garrons" of the regimental officers; but then the horses, like their masters, had rather better times of it, and waxed fat and saucy after the manner of this world. Commissariat officers might be seen as near raving mad as despairing man can be driven, when he has a hungry division depending upon

him for food seven miles off, with all but impracticable roads and some fifteen or so ponies and pack animals to get it thither.

Through all this chaos, Coningsby and Jack made their way with the confidence of old hands. Many a greeting did they receive on their way, with congratulations on their return, for they were both well known and popular men. At last they arrived at Oppenheim's store, at that time one of the most frequented rendezvous's in Balaklava. Not for what he sold, though he sold, at a price, pretty well everything; but men on all such occasions tacitly agree to assemble at some point or another, to exchange chaff, gossip, and ideas. Very much to Mr. Oppenheim's benefit his store at that time had been selected for this purpose, and there after their day's work or foraging were done, did men congregate for a talk and a glass of something to drink, before they faced the rough tedious ride to the front. The idea of a seven miles ride being tedious may probably cause a smile; but in the then state

of the roads on a half starved pony, it was an affair of between two and three hours—
"crede experto."

One of the first to spring forward and welcome them there was young Rolls, or 'Crumbs' as he was more generally called.

"God bless me! Jack," he exclaimed, "how glad I am old fellow to see you again, and Coningsby too. It's a treat for sore eyes as they say. Coningsby I knew was all right; but as for you, Jack, when Herries packed you off, we were all a little nervous as to whether you'd pull through. However, you both look all right again now. 'Richard's hisself again' in both cases, *n'est-ce pas*. I am getting up my French fast, Jack, fraternising with our gallant allies, and generally make that observation when I'm a little heaped. How's the fin, Coningsby? Could you hold a boring four year old with it yet over a couple of miles of grass with hounds running?"

"No, Master Crumbs, nor you either with *both* hands."

“Come, I say, no disparagement of a man’s horsemanship. Here somebody bring some champagne, look sharp, Oppenheim and Co.; here’s two gentlemen arrived who’ll settle Sebastopol and your business together.”

“Shut up, Crumbs,” replied Jack. “How am I and my baggage to get up to the front?”

“Oh, leave that to me. I can’t fetch you to-morrow because I shall be in the Ditches; but I’ll be down the next day with something for you to ride, and a pack animal to carry your traps. I suppose one will do, won’t it? In the meantime, I’ll see a tent’s all ready for you. You’d better come and mess with Herries and me again.”

“All right, Crumbs, then I shall stick to the ship to-morrow, and depend upon you the next day, eh?”

“*Certainement, Monsieur.* Now, Coningsby, have a glass of ‘Oppenheim’s particular.’ It’s very sweet, very nasty; but always reminds one of the hill at

Epsom. The only consolation is nothing hurts one out here."

"Here's your health, Crumbs. How's the horse trade going on?"

"Well, I was rather unlucky the other day. Picked up a goodish pony cheap in the Naval Brigade Camp. I never ask any questions when I buy there. Confound it, he was claimed by a man in the Light Division the first time I rode him out, and I had to give in and allow it. Two sovs, and a bottle of rum clean thrown away."

"Serves you perfectly right. You didn't suppose he was honestly come by, did you?"

"Well, not exactly; but I thought he had been what we call 'found' rather further away from our lines."

"I say, Crumbs," cried a man in another regiment. "Do you know anything about the row in 'the Ditches' last night. On the French left, wasn't it? Our people had nothing to say to it, had they?"

"I wasn't down; but I think not. All in front of the Bastion de Mats, I fancy.

The French have got up very close there. The Russe don't like it, and have a turn at 'em whenever they find their evenings hanging at all heavy in hand."

"Well," said another, "they needn't be at all jealous of us, we haven't advanced a yard since poor Tryon took the Rifle pits; that is on the left. I don't know what you right attack people are doing."

"Sticking pretty close to the old drill-sergeant maxim of 'as you was,'" laughed a Light Division man. "All we want to instil into Gordon is, that our trenches would be benefitted by a little under draining. Wish he had farmed a bit on the Norfolk or Lincolnshire claylands."

"Ah, sloppy to sit in," quoth Coningsby. "I'm afraid you'll find that discomfort exist till the siege is over. It is a drawback that the comfort of those employed therein cannot be more considered; but I am afraid those engineers would always prefer digging a new ditch, to making the last dry and pleasant to reside in."

"None of your chaff," cut in Crumbs.

"You cavalry swells certainly went a 'cracker' at Balaklava, and ought to have a thing to yourselves for that same, instead of a confounded clasp which will be worn by men who were eating their breakfast in Balaklava and elsewhere, while you were riding straight through the thick. But you don't know anything about 'the Ditches,' Coningsby, so let us give vent to our feelings on that subject without interfering."

"Well crowed, my cockerel," said Travers. "In the meantime, Crumbs, mind you turn up the day after to-morrow with transport for myself and baggage."

"All right, old man, you may rely upon me, bar accidents. But I must be off now. It will be pretty well dark as it is before I get back to 'our lines.' And it's deuced easy to lose your way."

"Good-bye, tell the Chief I'm here again," said Travers, "feeling very fresh. Love to Herries and all of them."

Crumbs accordingly got on his pony and rode off, while Travers and Coningsby

remained smoking and listening to the various gossip that went on.

“Not heard it!” said a good-looking, heavily bearded man of the third division. “I call it one of the best stories of the siege. It was the two gun battery next the French Piquet House, manned by the Naval Brigade fellows. They opened like the devil the other day. As you know, all our batteries are silent now, and hardly ever fire a shot. What was up? what was the row? nobody could think. In the meantime, bang, bang went the battery; at last some staff dignitary thought it a thing to investigate and went down there. He found a sky-larking midshipman in charge, surrounded by a group of grinning sailors, who, just as he arrived, broke out into a loud hurrah.

“‘He’s hooking it now,’ laughed one of them, as the staff-man came up.

“‘What are you firing at and for what reason?’ inquired he of the cocked hat.

“The midshipman, I believe, looked six ways for Sunday, as the saying goes; but one of the sailors promptly responded

“ ‘Well, your honour, there’s a chap in there,’ indicating Sebastopol, ‘left his donkey cart in the middle of the square, in the most haggravating manner, and we’ve been a trying to persuade him to move on.’

“Blessed if they hadn’t blazed away some dozen or more Lancaster shell, costing six pounds or so a piece, to say nothing of the labour of getting them to the front, to make a donkey cart move.”

A roar of laughter followed this anecdote, with many inquiries as to what had been the fate of the midshipman. Whether he had been recommended for promotion and a C.B., or whether, as some of the speakers expressed it, his excess of zeal had been nipped by the cold blight of officialism.

“Well, good-bye, old fellow,” said Coningsby, “I’m off. Here’s my old servant with the horses, and it’s not much over a mile to ‘our lines.’ You’ll come and see me whenever you come down here, won’t you? I shall call in for some lunch amongst your people in a

few days, for I want to have a good look at the front again."

"Always welcome, you know, to what we have. Good-bye."

For the next six-and-thirty hours, Jack was doomed to kick his heels about Balaklava, than which anything more wearying or tiresome can scarcely be conceived. A few hours in a dull country town with which one is unacquainted are trying—a couple of hours at a small station with no book are hard to bear; but I pity sincerely the man who in those days had to lounge about that chaos of filth and peculation, called Balaklava.

"No fate so hard, but runneth to an end,"

and in due course of time, Crumbs made his appearance with the necessary transport. But that enterprising young gentleman at once announced his intention of doing a bit of foraging, as he was in Balaklava.

At the expiration of two hours, according to appointment, Travers again met the speculating forager; but Crumbs' per-

turbed countenance at once showed that something had gone amiss.

"Confound it, Jack!" he said. "Blessed if they haven't stole my pony while I was shopping. It's true, I've got hold of another; but he's not half as good as my own. Besides, somebody may claim him any minute. I haven't an idea whose he is. Wait a minute while I get a pair of scissors. He's very rough, and wants trimming a bit. Won't look quite so like himself either after I've operated on him, which will be an advantage."

Having obtained the scissors, Crumbs proceeded to dock the tail of his surreptitiously acquired steed, and finally deciding that a hogged mane would improve his appearance, also bestowed that upon him. These preparations complete, they mounted and started for the front. The 'annexed' animal carrying Travers' baggage.

They had got rather more than half way—the pack-pony being some half mile behind them in charge of a soldier-servant—when they were overtaken by an artil-

lery officer, evidently in a wrathful frame of mind.

“Which of you, gentlemen,” he exclaimed, “is Mr. Rolls of the —th?”

“I am,” said Crumbs. “What’s the matter?”

“Your servant behind, sir, is in possession of a pony of mine, which I must trouble you instantly to restore. It was stolen from me in Balaklava about an hour ago.”

“I don’t know about that,” said Crumbs. “I know I lost one there about that time; another came into the yard, my servant caught him, and I am using him now to get my friend’s traps here up to the front.”

“I can’t help that!” replied the irritated claimant. “I can swear to my pony, and will trouble you to hand him over at once.”

“Well, if you say it’s yours, I can’t swear the contrary,” said Crumbs. “We’ll come back and see about it.”

There was nothing for it but to ride back, yield the claimed pony, and trans-

fer the baggage to the back of the one Crumbs was riding.

"But you've cut his mane and tail, sir," said the artillery man, still wrathful, while the saddles were being changed.

"Well," replied Crumbs, "I'm sure it wasn't before they wanted it. How could I tell he was yours?"

"You must have known very well that he wasn't your property, anyway. In England, I should think they would consider felony the most appropriate term, and the consequences thereof the most appropriate reward for your labours."

"Well, I am very sorry; but, you see, we look upon these things in a milder light out here. I was in difficulties for a pony, having had my own stolen. I found a stray one, and used him after the manner of the Army generally, and the sailors in particular."

Spite of his irritation, the artillery man could hardly help laughing at Rolls's consummate impudence.

"Well, Mr. Rolls," he said, "I'll trouble you to keep your hands off all stock of

mine in future," and he rode away triumphantly with the retrieved pony.

"Nothing for it, Jack, but to ride turn and turn about for the rest of it; luckily we've got the longest and worst half the road done."

An hour's hard trudging, or thereabouts, brought them to the lines of the —th, and many were the congratulations and hearty shakes of the hand with which Jack's old comrades welcomed him back. Rolls' misadventure with the pony was received with roars of laughter.

"He's always at it," said Herries, "and if they hung for horse-stealing out here, as they did in olden times in England, his life wouldn't be worth two day's purchase. Luckily for him, there seems to be an acknowledged laxity on that point at present, so we may be spared an early parade to witness his premature departure from this world. By the way, an old friend of yours called on me a week ago, to inquire after your whereabouts and health generally, I mean Langton. He is doing reporter to something or other here."

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"Where is he?" inquired Jack.

"He's left a few lines for you which I have got in my tent, also another letter. Begged me to tell you to inquire for him at Head-Quarters where he has got a tent or hut, or something that he considers his 'home'—what a nice fellow he seems. I 'liquored him up,' and sent him on his way, I can't say rejoicing, for he seemed anxious about you; as to say the truth, old fellow, we all were."

"Thanks no end; but I think I shall do now. I'm going to mess with you and Crumbs as formerly. The 'young un' has been actively engaged foraging to-day."

"Yes, nothing pleases him more, bar a felonious trade in ponies. We gave a big dinner about a week ago, had three fellows to dine with us, Crumbs in his glory. He had got a goose somehow; I am always afraid to ask how, when I find we are suddenly the possessors of such luxuries. Crumbs spent his day in what we call the kitchen, engaged in the manufacture of a highly superior 'plum duff,'

the sauce, for which he ransacked our whole store of drinkables, would, he informed me, be something startling. Perhaps it was; but as our soldier-servant sent it up all over the roast goose instead of the pudding, the effect was rather marred; it seems Crumbs forgot to inform him what this elaborate sauce was to be used with—hence this deplorable error; however, we ate the goose with the sauce, and the pudding without it,

“‘Good digestion waits on appetite’

out here. With the exception of Crumbs’ wrath at the *contretemps*, the dinner was a decided success.”

By this, they had arrived at Herries’ tent.

“Here are your letters, Jack,” he observed, taking them from a bullock trunk. “That’s what Langton wrote here, the other’s the letter he left for you. I shall do a pipe while you read them; my appetite is more to be depended upon than the dinner in these parts, so that I am never afraid of taking the rough edge off. It’s

Crumbs' receipt, in short, when we have a guest and a shady banquet. 'Put dinner back half-an-hour, give him a pipe of Cavendish, and two or three glasses of Crimean sherry, and depend upon it his dinner will be a matter of great indifference to him.'

Jack tore open Langton's note first; in the other, he at once recognised Breezie's somewhat masculine hand.

"Dear Travers,

"I leave a few lines for you with your friend, Captain Herries, who welcomed me the other day on your account with Arab or Crimean hospitality—insisting upon my not only trying the commissariat rum of the division, but also some extremely curious and pernicious curaçoa, lately obtained in Balaklava. How correspondent's brains bear up against these insidious attacks is miraculous. I am rather anxious about you; Herries don't speak well of your departure, and says he shall be very glad to hear you are all right again; to that I need scarcely say ditto,

and the most satisfactory proof you can give me, will be to come to 'my diggings' and let me look at you. I have a letter for you from Breezie. She says she has also written to Scutari, and I need scarcely add, is in a sad way to know how you are; I trust, though, you have written to her. Hoping most sincerely that your shadow may darken my doorway very shortly.

“ Believe me, ever yours,

“ CIS LANGTON.”

It is almost needless to say after this that Jack and Langton had already met several times in Bulgaria, and that the latter was perfectly aware of the footing upon which Jack and Breezie stood. The engagement met his decided approval. He liked Jack, and admired and recognised his thoroughly honest and chivalrous nature. He knew, moreover, how far Breezie's heart was committed in the matter, and now that she had confided her whole history to her lover, and that lover cared nothing for the scandal, he felt there was every reasonable probability

of happiness for the girl whom he loved as sincerely as if she really had been his daughter.

What shall I say about Breezie's letter—do you want me to tell you? Can you not picture to yourself what a warm-hearted, loving English girl might write to her lover in those days? There were plenty such letters in the mail bags at that time, with more poetry and pathos in them than is given to the poetical pens of this day generally. De Quincey says, somewhere, if you want to read the purest English, 'stop the mail,' break open all the letters in women's hand-writing, and in three-fourths of them you will obtain it. Whether he is right or not I can't say; but I fancy if you could have seized the women's letters in a Crimean mail, you might have found poetry and pathos enough.

Well, I suppose it will be so till the end of all things.

"Men must work, and women must weep."

The bearded moustached lords of creation read these letters over their short

pipes and ration rum, and with a mendacious apology for their shortcomings under the head of 'duty,' scrawled a few hurried lines in reply, and then went out dog hunting.

"Tell you who I hear is out in these parts," said Herries, as he and Jack sat smoking their pipes, preparatory to turning in, "that's Delpré; he's a captain in that refuge for the broken and distressed, the Bashi Bazouk Contingent. Did you meet him while you were away?"

"No, but I heard of him. He has a troop in it, and I fancy is down Eupatoria way. As a rule, I think those fellows live more at Constantinople than anywhere else. There, clad in shining raiment, they drink confusion to the enemy, and if absorption of champagne shakes Sebastopol, they are certainly doing us 'yeoman's service.'"

"Hum," grunted Herries, as pipe in mouth, he rolled between his blankets, "Good night."

"Good night!" responded Jack, who of course sat up another ten minutes or

so to read Breezie's letter again, by the flickering light of the candle that the porter bottle held. A half groan, half sigh, enough to have disturbed a delicate sleeper, and he too sought his pillow. When you live for months within sound of the batteries, it takes something pretty serious to interfere with your night's rest. I fear Jack's sentiment, too, disappeared with that solitary groan and his last gulp of rum and water.

"The devil's own day, your honor," quoth Mr. O'Flannigan, Herries' servant the next morning. "It's not quite made up its mind whether it will snow or rain, so its thrying a taste of both. Snowing for choice, though your honor's for nothing, Lord be praised, to-day in the way of duty, and faith if you'll take my advice, ye'll stick to the blankets, and Mister Thravers there too. *Will you wash or take tay?*"

"No chance of both," said Herries.

"Faith, your honor, with the snow on the ground it's the devil's own lottery finding a root. Jem Bales, the batman,

and myself was out the whole of yesterday afternoon, and taking off what we must have to cook the dinner with, there's only about enough wood to boil one kettle."

"What do you say, Jack," cried Herries, "I'm all for tea? Washing we'll do the first chance. In the meantime, tea and something to eat. I don't leave this till wanted, while the weather stands as it is."

Readers may laugh at the idea of two healthy men electing to take their day 'out' in beds; but any Crimean man who *did* the winter campaign, will bear me out with the probable addenda of "deuced lucky to have the chance."

"You don't believe much in the day?" remarked Jack.

"No," replied Herries, "for the next twelve hours I shall pin my faith on tobacco and blankets. We'll get up about four, trudge round and see our fellow-sufferers, have a chaff, no news ever going such weather as this. Come back, eat, if we have got anything to eat, smoke and turn in again. Such is

life in your winter campaigns, more amusing to read about than to go through. We shall both be for the Ditches at four a.m. to-morrow morning, and there never was a grander day for hedging one's sleep. If you've brought anything amusing to read up from Constantinople, chuck it over, if not, I'll take a spell at 'Elia' and go to sleep again."

"I say, you fellows, this is pleasant, isn't it?" cried Crumbs, thrusting his head into the tent. "Blessed if the whole corps ain't in bed. I'll be hung if I believe there's a soul up except the guard, sergeant-major, and myself, and what to do I don't know. I'm coming down with you to-morrow morning, Herries. What time shall we dine? Make it early, there's a good fellow. Will half-past five do?"

"All right, that will do perfectly. Only hope there will be some food then."

"Bless you, yes, I'm going to spend the afternoon in the hole we call our kitchen, smoking pipes and skimming soup. I'll give you some devilled sar-

dines, too. If O'Flannigan has only been careful with the fuel, I shall cook two or three to try this afternoon. Let you fellows know the result about three, only mind, in the present hard times, you must wait till dinner to practically test it. How nice you look, Jack. Jolly place to pass a winter in, ain't it, my chick."

"Get out, you young scamp," roared Herries.

"Be calm," responded Crumbs, "I shall call the whole camp if it clears. Till then or dinner time, bless you."

CHAPTER II.

A QUIET DAY IN "THE DITCHES."

THROUGH the misty morning murk rose the hoarse cry of, "get dressed the covering party." Obedient to the summons, shortly issued from the various tents dark shadowy forms, who rapidly made their way through the snow to the parade ground. Herries, Jack Travers, Crumbs, and two or three more of their brother officers speedily found themselves trudging along the ravine that led to the left attack, with orders to relieve the guards on the right of the second parallel, and those in the advanced trench.

1 Silence and darkness so far enveloped the English trenches; but the Russians

were treating the French on the left to a grand pyrotechnical display in the shape of shells and rockets; the deep boom of the big guns being heard in rapid succession, varied by the sharp faint whizz of the rockets. Crimean men's ears at that time were not particularly startled by such sounds. It was only when they heard the quick rolling rattle of musketry, that they fancied things were getting serious. That was generally a pretty sure indication of an attack from one side or the other, though occasionally induced by a false alarm.

Stumbling along through the snow and the darkness, in command of fifty men, and accompanied by Crumbs, Jack Travers found himself in the advanced trench just as the first faint grey streak of dawn began to glimmer in the East. It was held by day at that time by merely a small party. As yet there were no guns there, though it was destined to have heavy artillery in it shortly.

The sun rose bright and clear after yesterday's downfall, gleaming over the

city, which as yet, to the naked eye, showed but few symptoms of the bombardment of October. Travers stood looking at it with all the curiosity of one who had been for some time away. He was nearer to the town, perhaps, than he had as yet been, as he had been invalided to Scutari soon after the battle of Inkerman, and at that time the ground upon which he now stood had been occupied by the Russians as rifle pits. Now he was overlooking the town, which lay like a panorama below him. You could see people moving about. Make out all the principal buildings, hazard conjectures as to what they were, trace the faint line of mast tops that marked the submerged fleet across the harbour entrance. Fort Constantine with its pocked-marked face, memento of the naval attack, Fort Paul, Fort Nicholas, shone out cold and white in the February sun. Boats were busy flitting about the harbour, except for the occasional distant puff of smoke and faint report of some sharp-shooter's rifle, you could hardly believe

one of the most tremendous duels of modern days was then being fought *à l'outrance*. The angry cannonade of some two hours ago had wholly ceased. It seemed as if both sides were weary of the night's passion, and would fain breakfast in peace. The Sebastopol clocks musically chimed out eight.

The sound woke Crumbs from a reverie into which he had fallen.

"Hurrah," he said, "that's feeding time. We may begin to look out for breakfast now, I told our servants to be down sharp at eight. Tell you what, old fellow, if you keep staring over that parapet any longer, you'll find your attention playfully reciprocated. It ain't, as they say, altogether safe in broad daylight for too long at a time."

Almost as Crumbs finished speaking, the faint ping of a rifle-ball showed Jack that he had at length attracted the attention of some distant rifle pit.

"I fancy you're right," he observed; "but we don't get many men hit here, do we?"

"No, but it's not much of a parapet in some places, and of course the Russian riflemen are always on the look out for a shot, if it's only to pass the time."

At this juncture the breakfast arrived, and when men have been up since five, that practically beats any view in the world. Seated on a couple of stones with their backs to the parapet, the two were speedily absorbed in the demolition of the contents of a field canteen.

"Now, Jack, look here! Here's something extra luxurious to top up with—some potted beef I picked up at a sale the other day. A box sent to some poor fellow who had gone away sick. They put it all up to auction, and I bought this—paid a lot of money for it too. But I go on 'Major Dalgetty's' principle, Lay in food whenever you have a chance. Can't campaign a yard without it, you know, though some of our poor fellows have had to try a good bit lately."

"Capital, you young gourmand. You're

wasting your substance in pampering your unholy appetite."

"Come, I say, don't eat it if you are so anxious about my substance."

"Must; wish I could eat it all to punish your gluttony."

"Like your cheek!" grinned Crumbs. "I'll keep my potted beef to myself next time."

"Quite right. Don't lead me again into becoming a partner in your enormities," retorted the imperturbable Jack.

With this little friendly spar, the breakfast, and the potted beef came to a conclusion, and the pair were left to get through, as best they might, a long wearisome day in the trenches. The days were far more tedious than the nights. In the latter, the necessity for vigilance kept you alive. In the day, the greater part of the guard slept if they could. In the night, you could move about freely. In the day, in the advance at all events, the Russian riflemen restricted your movements considerably.

"Rum chaps those sailors are," said Crumbs. "Last October, I was down in the first parallel one warm day just before we opened fire, there were some half-dozen or more of them laughing like fun not far from me, so I went up just to see what the chaff was. One of them had caught a little green lizard, and I'll be hung if these great hairy fellows hadn't formed themselves into a court-martial, like so many schoolboys, to try it as a Russian spy. They went through all the forms, eventually erecting a miniature gibbet, and hanging it with the greatest gravity."

"The talk of our fellows is amusing enough sometimes," smiled Jack. "Let's draw up there to the right, and listen to what that knot are talking about."

Lighting their pipes, they accordingly shifted their position, and sat down within ear shot of a group of their own men, who were killing the time by consumption of tobacco and lively converse.

The principal talker, and evidently licensed jester of the party, was a tall, fair-

haired, blue-eyed grenadier, some six feet one in height and of athletic build. A fine specimen of muscular developement with a devil-may-care cast of countenance, an eye that sparkled with fun, but the face spoilt by a strong animal expression.

For a second or two, the men stopped talking and glanced at their officers, but finding the latter had sat quietly down, soon continued their previous conversation.

“Yes,” said the soldier above mentioned, “it’s been hard times this winter and no mistake; but we must be getting near fine weather now, though this here snow don’t look like it. Still, though the cold’s bad enough, I can stand anything but that d—d wet. It gets into one’s bones so—kind of cross between cholera and ague, and not much to take either for or against it. Now you chaps, I tell you what stood to me more, and does still, than anything else all these times—that’s chewing tobacco. It warms you, blunts the hunger and keeps

you going. Smoking aint no manner of use alongside it. I aint going to deny but what rum's a good thing if one could only get enough of it; but these commissariat chaps are all abroad. I've been thinking," he continued, "of going to see the General about that rum question for some time."

A broad grin convulsed his audience. Even Jack Travers could scarcely keep from laughing. The speaker was a notorious offender on the subject of 'drink,' and everybody knew in what light he viewed getting enough of it.

"Well, John," observed another of the party. "You can tell us all about the General when you've seen him. Tell us another story. What do you call your hardest times out here; and what did you do when they came?"

"Well, about my hardest times, I reckon, was the beginning of last month. The salt junk was that scarce and that hard that day, blowed if I don't think the Commissariat had put us on *piece work*, same like the Engineers do on a

working party, only perhaps the Commissariat's job was the toughest of the two. The ration might be small, but I'm blessed if there wasn't as much chewing as would last three good dinners at English rations. From some wrong ideas of the Colonel about that time, I was under half stop-pages of rum."

Here he and his audience grinned.

"Well, I'd no money, and what's worse, no tobacco; and my chum, Bill Riley, he was in the same quandary.

"'What's to be done, Bill?' said I. 'No, nothing else I can stand, but baccy I must have.'

"'Don't know, John,' said he. 'I should like a bit of baccy, awful; but as I don't know where to get none, I shall take it out in sleep.'

"'I'm off on the cadge,' says I. 'Don't you believe in me any more if I comes home without something to chew.'

"Well, up I goes to the fourth division to beg, borrow, or 'happen on' baccy. There I sees an old Turk a selling it at sixpence a stick. Not a deal of good to

me, you'll think, who had no money. Wait a minute. There was a Frenchman there who had just bought five sticks, a Zouave—one of the right sort, and spoke a little English. I asked him to lend me three sticks, and told him my game. Well, he did, so I stands close by the old Turk with the three sticks in my hand for a few minutes. At last I said :

“ ‘ Now, then, Johnny, where's my change ?’

“ ‘ No change, Johnny,’ said he, ‘ you no buy !’

“ ‘ You d—d old thief,’ said I, ‘ haven't I just bought these three sticks, and given you half a crown ? Give me my change, or I'll knock your wretched old head off.’

“ He looked rather staggered at this ; but the Zouave backed me up, and I 'spect I looked a good deal like doing it. So at last he handed over a shilling.

“ ‘ Now, give me two sticks of baccy,’ said I ; ‘ but he'd have nothing more to say to me, so I was forced to get the Frenchman to go and buy 'em for me, and

as he stole a couple more on his own account while he was doing it, the Turk didn't make a good day of it altogether."

The same hero subsequently related how he had raised supplies upon another occasion, by disposing of his boots to a Turk for five shillings. On receiving payment, he concluded the transaction by knocking the unhappy buyer down, recovered his boots, and bolted; buying part of a soldier's kit, leading, if discovered, to a short but stirring interview with the Provost-Marshal, the purchaser knew better than to seek redress.

But enough of trench stories. There is perhaps but little humour in them, though these two are genuine enough. Still, in those wearisome hours, in that early spring, or for the matter of that in the hot summer days that were to follow, a little wit went a wondrous way. The tobacco fraud was artistic. In another sphere, the perpetrator might have made his fortune as a bank director, &c. As a soldier, in spite of many great points, I

fancy he turned out a failure. His theory of what constituted 'rum enough,' leading him to unmitigated irredeemable grief.

Oh, dear! will anything take place? Will they shoot, I don't mean *particularly* at us; but at somebody? Something to throw a little life into this tedious watching and waiting. Do you recollect those lines of Browning's in "the Glove?"

"Heigho, yawned one day King Francis,
Distance all value enhances,
Here we've got peace, and aghast, I'm
Caught thinking war the true pastime."

Something of that sort ran through Travers' head, as the weary day dragged on. It was no bravado—simply the feeling that anything would be a relief from the present monotony. Moderate danger was preferable to being bored.

Slowly the cold bright March day wears away. Now and again comes a sullen shot from the beleaguered city, while the occasional faint crack of a rifle betokens that some sharp-shooter can stand the mono-

tony no longer, or that something has offered a mark too tempting to be resisted.

On the left of the allied attack alone, is there much sign of vitality. Here, the French and Russians ever and again break out into a sharp angry sputtering of musketry for some ten minutes or so. They are too close to be peaceable neighbours for many minutes together, and are jealous of the slightest encroachment. The small piece of debateable ground between them is as dangerous to tread upon as Tom Tidler's. Placing foot on, or even looking at it, is fiercely resented. They are jealous as two keen sportsmen shooting on their boundary fence, with a licence to kill their neighbour's keepers as well as pheasants, and the penalties of the law of trespass at their own discretion. That little piece of debateable ground is destined to be carpeted thick with corpses before three weeks are over. A few nights more, and a French column will reel back broken and blood-stained, leaving its leader and half its number behind it. A

disaster which elicits from the iron French commander, the brief stern order. "The army will attack nightly till the position is carried. General ——— will lead the assault to-night." The second time the French succeed, though the Russians fought long and doggedly for Tom Tidler's ground.

Rolls and Travers have crawled down to have a look at that queer-looking cave, called 'the Ovens,' in which, when the trench they now occupy was but a line of unconnected rifle-pits, the Russian sharpshooters, who then occupied them, had been accustomed to cook their dinners. They have smoked till they feel equal to no more pipes, exhausted every resource they can think of for killing time, and are now sitting silent and dejected, wishing the tedious day was over.

Four o'clock comes at last. The usual spattering fire of sharpshooters is beginning. Men and officers anxiously consult both watches and sun. Ears are pricked to listen for the Sebastopol chimes. A round shot comes clipping

the parapet, and goes skipping along in the direction of the second parallel.

“That looks well,” said Crumbs. “Sure sign it’s getting about relief time, when they think it worth while to pitch a shot or two our way. They won’t be long now.”

That last half hour waiting for the relief, was generally as tedious as that much abused quarter of an hour before dinner. However,

“Time and the hour run through the roughest day,”

and with great satisfaction Travers and Crumbs eventually hailed their substitutes, and prepared to tramp back to camp. Some three or four round shot came spinning over them; but they hurt no one, as they seldom did at that time. The Russians, I presume, rather blazing on the old sporting maxim, “you can’t kill if you don’t fire,” than with any definite object.

“Very decent dinner to-day, Jack,” said the irrepressible Crumbs, “so look sharp and get ready.”

You may laugh at the stress laid on eating and drinking in this Crimean life, but eating and drinking are most important events in campaigning. It is rather a sensual life after all, and is apt to bring forward prominently the innate selfishness of our natures. It is wonderful, too, how interest in dinner increases with an uncertainty regarding it.

"Halloa! mail in from England," said Herries, as he and Jack entered their joint tent, and he pointed to a small packet of papers and letters that lay on the table.

Jack pounced upon one which he recognised as in Breezie's handwriting, and was soon absorbed in the contents. Love letters are sacred things and one has no business to meddle with them; but for the furtherance of this story, we must peep over Jack's shoulder upon this occasion.

"Dearest Jack,

"I am so anxious on your account, that I sent a few lines, under cover to

papa, to the Crimea for you, besides writing to Scutari. I think you must have been very ill when you could not write to me, and in the few staggering lines that I got the other day, I am afraid you made light of it for fear of frightening me. Ah, Jack, the old Jeannette and Jeannot song often rises in my mind. You are having shocking times and dreadful hardships out there, my dearest; but us poor women at home are having very little better.

“You don’t know what this weary watching and waiting is. I am not given to be nervous; but I cannot help a slight shiver at every mail. If I don’t hear from you and papa it’s agony, and I’m half afraid of my letters when I do get them. You are very good about writing, pray continue so if it is ever such a scrap. I sit down to my water-colours; but it is stupid work now. There is no one to laugh at me when the trees won’t come right, and refractory cows show a decided want of foreshortening. I got two guineas for one though last

week—what do you say to that, sir? Do you not feel ashamed that you ever dared to laugh at my trees?

“I went to spend a fortnight with my aunts down at Hitchin the other day; but I had no spirits to tease them as in former days, and they had it all their own way, doing as they liked with me. They bothered me so to know what was the matter with me, that I was at last fain to confess,

“‘My love was a soldier, and to the wars gone.’

Then they petted me dreadfully, and almost insisted on putting me to bed and feeding me on jellies and beef tea. Don't laugh, Jack, they were very good about it.

“How I wish I could come out to be somewhere near you. I daresay hundreds of women feel the same; but both you and papa say it is impossible, so I suppose it is, but it is such lonely work for me living here by myself. I went to see Belle Bartley the other day. She is very kind to me whenever she

is in town. I told her of our engagement. You know you told me to make no secret of it to any one. She spoke so nicely about it, praised you, sir, and said she was sure we should be happy. Perhaps we might if you could but come back. Don't think me very foolish, I know you can't now, and will wait as patiently as I can till you do. Good-bye, dearest.

“ Believe me ever,

“ YOUR OWN,

“ BREEZIE.”

P.S. Such news, and oh, so kind of Laura Lyttlereck to come down with the paper to show me. You are a captain, Jack. I *do* hope what Laura says is probable, will come to pass, and that I shall be the first to tell you.

“ Lots of kisses ‘on promotion’ to *Captain Travers* from his own Breezie.”

“ By Jove, Jack!” cried Crumbs. “ You're in the Gazette, they tell me, some of the fellows who have seen the papers. I congratulate you, old fellow.

We ought to have some champagne and drink your health to-night; but, you see we ain't got none. Never mind, we'll do it in rum and water now, and do it again in champagne the first opportunity."

The tramp of a horse is heard outside, and a voice inquiring for Captain Herries' tent. The similarity renders it difficult to distinguish one tent from another, unless you know the camp intimately.

"Langton's voice, by Jove!" said Jack, springing to his feet, and going to the door. "Here you are, just in time, come in and feed."

"Ah, Travers, the very man I came to look after. Somebody told me to-day you were back again, and all right, is that so? I need hardly ask, or you would not be here."

"Yes," replied Jack, "I am all sound again now, and just come out of the trenches; but get off and come in. Here, one of you men, come and take this horse."

"Can't, indeed, I must get home and

do a deal of scribbling to-night. I was up in the Fourth Division, and thought I would ride round your way just to ask after you. Did you get my note?"

"Yes, thanks, and Breezie's. I am coming down to lunch with you to-morrow and have a talk, that is if you are likely to be in."

"Sure to find me in from twelve till two, unless something quite unexpected turns up. Of course you have seen the Gazette; I congratulate you."

"Yes, I heard it first though in a letter from Breezie; but do get off and come in and take your chance of what's going."

"Can't, indeed, thank you, I'll drink your health here if you'll give anything to do it in. How do, Herries, glad to see you've got your chum here back again. I can't tell much how he looks in this faint moonlight; but he talks as if he were all right again."

"Yes, I think he'll do now; sorry you can't stay and have some of such dinner as there is."

"So am I, but I've lots to do to-night. Ah, that will do, here's your health, and may the brevet majority soon follow," and, without question, Langton tossed off some compound Jack handed him. "There now," he continued, "get along in and astonish the dinner. After a day's trenches, no doubt you are all ready for it; shall expect you to lunch about one to-morrow. Good-night; good-night, Herries," and Langton disappeared through the faint moonlight.

Dinner and a quiet talk over their pipes. The vivacious Crumbs voted his companions uncommonly slow, and rose to seek more congenial and festive spirits, remarking:

"Well, Jack, if accession of rank is not a more exhilarating affair than it seems to be in your case, I hope I shall never be a captain. You're both shocking bad company this evening, so I shall wish you good-night; shouldn't wonder if there's a little loo going on in Johnson's tent."

Herries and Jack continued to smoke

and talk for more than an hour, and then rolled into their respective blankets.

“ Good-night, old fellow,” said Herries, “ thank Heaven we’re not wanted at half-past five to-morrow morning, we’ve done our day in the Ditches.”

CHAPTER III.

THE LYTLERECKS AT HOME—A CRIMEAN LETTER.

“WHAT will they say in England?” was the title of a popular song of those days, written just after the victory of the Alma. No doubt this idea predominated very strongly through the ranks of the army whenever they did *do anything*; but as at the time of which I am writing, they were doing virtually *nothing*, instead of speculating upon “what they said,” suppose we go back a little with our story, and see what they had been doing in England during the last few months?

Since the time Jack Travers sailed from Plymouth, till we again met him at Miseri’s hotel in Constantinople, an interval of nine months had elapsed. The regi-

ment had sailed for the East in April, and it was in January we once more encountered him on the banks of the Bosphorus. I love to be particular about my dates. They give a general dove-tailing to a story like a train of good circumstantial evidence, and though, reader, you may make the mistake of supposing all this narrative to be fictitious, take my word for it, that if it did not all happen as I have chronicled, something very like it did.

We left Delpré, of whom we have heard but flying rumours of late, "in grievous case" on the steeple-chase course at Harrow, if you remember—a broken arm, and an unascertained number of ribs also injured, though two or so were the conjectured amount. The Nemesis that there overtook him, one can scarcely deny was a righteous one. Punishment does not always follow quickly on offending, and though for many years he had gone through the agony endured by those "who live by bills," it was the first time physical suffering had befallen him.

He had taken the wrong turn almost at

the outset of life, and though of course, morally, he had been "gone to the bad" for many years; yet his nerve, talent, and thorough unscrupulousness had enabled him to keep a fair appearance before the world. Now, both character and caste were fast slipping from him—he was already looked upon as one of those only to be spoken to upon a race-course. Society, in short, was at last recognising him in his true character, that of "a leg."

I read in an American humourist the other day, who, by the way, would be far better worth reading, if he did not distort the humour Nature has given him, by seeking to make himself more funny by absurdities in spelling.

"There is one advantage in going to the devil—the road is easy, and you are sure to get there."

Delpré had travelled that highway much slower than most men. Not from any moral scruples on the point; but his clear head was always keenly conscious of the advantage of keeping position and a cer-

tain amount of character as long as practicable. He was quite aware that that was all over now, and though it may seem a paradox, felt acutely the humiliation of his present position. It is a very simple and an every day case. Utterly callous as regarded conscience, laughing all moral scruples to scorn, he yet suffered bitterly at being "found out." He was carried, after his accident, to an inn at Harrow, where he remained some few days ere the doctor would sanction his removal to London. Once back at his old rooms, he lay fretting on a sick-bed for some weeks; the arm was of course soon in a sling, and in a fair way to come right, but the ribs turned out a more serious business, and the doctors feared some internal injury as yet beyond their ken. But gambler, libertine, as he had been all his life, he had always been moderately abstemious in his living, and that, conjoined with a naturally good constitution, pulled him through.

Still, his reflections were none of the pleasantest. None came to see him

during that weary convalescence but his "leg friends," Messrs. Hart, Davidson, and Co. The former even grumbled at his uselessness, utterly ignoring the fact that but for Delpré's desperate expedient, he never could have won the race at Harrow. Whilst, as for the latter scoundrel, he simply preached cold comfort, grinning :

"It's a devilish lucky thing, Del, as it's turned out. That fellow, Plum, swore if you could have been brought there, he'd have had you up before the stewards for foul riding, and showed the whole thing up. It was a master-stroke of yours thinking of it, and you did it beautifully ; but if you hadn't been so badly broke, there would have been a deuce of a row to top up with. As for old Hart, though he sacked a pile of dibs over it, he ain't a bit grateful ; but merely looks upon it as money out of his pocket you ain't well enough to do it again."

Debts and duns, too, were pouring in ; for Delpré's liabilities to tradesmen were very heavy, and he felt that arrest was

imminent. If it once took place, he knew that "the detainers" that would be lodged, would make release hopeless. Since the fiasco he had made by burning the will, his sisters had steadily declined all communication with him, as might be expected. True, they could not bring it home to him, but they had made up their minds which, as the Countess had no idea of prosecuting, was enough for their purpose. Hart would certainly not come to his assistance unless he were well enough to be useful, and even then was hardly likely to pay the price.

Far advanced towards recovery, he was moodily skimming the papers one morning, when he read an account of the formation of the *Bashi Bazouks* under *Beatson*.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I'll go, there's a chance—I'll make a clean bolt of it. I'll go down to the *Horse Guards* this minute, and see what they'll do for me."

Delpré was a man of decision. He was at the *Horse Guards* in less than half an

hour. He was of the very stamp they wanted for that service. A man of long service, with many years Eastern experience. Unscrupulous, and a steeple-chase rider. He came away with the promise of a troop, and a recommendation to be all ready to start in a week or so.

“The sooner the better,” thought he. “Now to put the double on everybody.”

His preparations for departure were quickly and quietly made. To Hart and Davidson, he merely made out that he was making no progress towards recovery. A couple of bullock trunks, in the meantime, containing all necessaries for the campaign, were “waiting till called for” in the cloak room at the Waterloo Station. At the end of eight days he received a big official letter, with the mystic O. H. M. S. on the cover. It contained the desired commission, and a passage for Constantinople. Telling his landlady he should not dine at home, Delpré walked quietly out of the house, hailed the nearest cab and started for the East.

Furious were the revilings, and savage the denunciations of Mr. Hart, when he found Delpré had slipped through his fingers. Piteous were his lamentations as to how he had been robbed and swindled out of eleven hundred pounds, by trusting in a gentleman's honour. As if in the whole course of his existence, Mr. Hart would have trusted to that or anything else, not substantiated by stamped paper—as if he had not bought Delpré at that price, and fairly had his money's worth out of him. It's true he meant to have a great deal more; but commend me to a "Hebrew leg" who gets worsted, if you want to hear lamentation over unsuccessful rascality. Davidson only chuckled; he bore no good will to Delpré, and was too fast in Hart's clutches himself ever to dream of escape, even had he wished it—what else could he do? Burglary he hadn't pluck for; nor for thimble rig, talent; a hell keeper's bonnet and race-course tout was about all that he was now fitted for.

But let us turn from these dregs of humanity to something more pleasant.

That Tom Lyttlereck and Laura were married, Breezie's letter has already informed us. They were now comfortably established in a small house down Pimlico way. Tom was getting very fair work in the literary way; as has been said, "by no means a bad walking stick, though it hardly does as a crutch." Pimlico, in those days, mind I am speaking of fourteen years ago, had not then grown to its present imposing dimensions. Down Pimlico way now-a-days, might mean anything; at that time it meant a little the other side Eaton Square. Though small, Laura's was a pretty drawing-room, tastefully furnished. Full of all those feminine surroundings which a true woman of taste and intellect loves to gather about herself. There was nothing gorgeous, but there was harmony of colour. The lounging chairs and *fauteuils* were cosy places made to lounge and chat in, and not gilt straight-backed abominations made only to look at. Flowers in the window, flowers in the vases, books littered about

as if read and not merely laid out; an open piano and scattered music. The acquaintances of the newly married couple voted Laura's drawing-room a charming place for a gossip, and the *piquante* sunshiny hostess, perfection.

Laura had just come in from walking, and was flitting about her domain with her bonnet still on, waiting the return of her lord and master. Now looking at her flowers, now trying a snatch of an air at the piano. I have called it flitting about, though perhaps had anyone been in the room who wished to read or write, they might have snappishly designated it as "fidgetting about." If truth must be told, Laura was in a slight state of impatience about her husband's return. What did she expect, news from the Crimea? Not at all, but she did want to know whether he had got those stalls for the Olympic for Monday next. Her sister was coming to stay with her, and she had set her heart upon their going to see Robson.

A sharp knock at the door, and Tom entered.

“Well, Tom, did you get them?”

“Get what?”

“Now don’t be teasing; the stalls, of course, for Monday.”

“Oh yes, I’ve got them; but you put ‘did I get them’ with such alarming energy, that I was afraid I had been guilty of some awful case of omission and oblivion. But look here, is there anything for dinner?”

“Of course there is; but why do you ask the question?”

“No, but, Laura, is there an elaborate table to be spread to-night?”

“No, if you wanted an extensive dinner why didn’t you tell me?”

“Oh, well I have asked about six people to dine. Send out at once for another loaf and a couple of pounds of cheese. They must be fed, you know.”

“Oh, Tom!” laughed Laura, “I know you too well. Six people indeed; but you have asked some one, who is it? any one I know?”

“Yes, my little wife—Charlie Repton. We needn’t trouble our heads much about him, besides I told him you hadn’t the remotest idea of house-keeping. He said he could easily fancy it, beyond a general idea that there always ought to be champagne and ices.”

“You audacious libeller; and if I thought Charlie had really been so impertinent as to say so, you should have nothing but bread and cheese to-night. What did the Magazine say to the story?”

“They are going to look it over, and I think will take it; but I shan’t get quite so much as I had hoped for it. So be very careful of your bonnets please, at present, and only venture out when the barometer’s high.”

“Certainly, sir; your commands shall be attended to. I’m so glad Charlie’s coming, I haven’t seen him since our wedding-day, I think. Do you want dinner put back at all?”

“No. Now run away and dress, or else you’ll be too late. Not that the

bread and cheese will spoil much, I suppose."

"How dare you laugh at my house-keeping? Look at the symbols of my authority," and snatching up a small basket containing some keys, she shook it merrily in her husband's face and tripped out of the room.

Charlie Repton arrived in a Hansom at a fair approximation to punctuality for him; he being a notorious offender in that respect, one of those whose invitations to dinner ought always to have been headed with Brillat-Savarin's aphorism, to wit that: "To wait too long for a tardy guest is a want of regard for all those who are present." A maxim which might be beneficially acted on a great deal oftener than it usually is.

"How do do, Charlie?" said Laura. "I'm not much given to find fault with men on the score of calling; but really when we have given you some dinner, I do think I am entitled to talk severely to you."

"Well, you know," said Charlie, after

he had shaken hands, "you haven't after all been established here so very long, and I have been but little in town lately. Then you are a little out of the way."

"Just what I tell her," said Tom; "but she still clings to the idea that she's a swell, and has her name in the Court Guide."

Dinner is over. Tom, his wife, and Charlie Repton are gathered lazily round the fire in the drawing-room. Though it is the end of April a fire is still pleasant, as for my part till you can sit out of doors I think it always is. "And so Laura, you have settled down quite into a domestic character, and forsworn dancing, flirting and all such vanities," said Charlie balancing his tea-cup.

"Don't believe her," cried Tom. "I think she's as bad as before I married her, and danced at the Gregorys till four the other morning. I thought she never would be ready to come home. Her flirting, of course, she has the decency to conceal from me as much as possible.

At present, my only consolation is, it seems pretty general."

The laughing glance exchanged between husband and wife showed that, at all events, the latter's flirting gave Tom very little uneasiness.

"That's just like him, Charlie, why I had to wait patiently because he was engaged to Miss somebody or another—I forget her name now—a pretty little thing in blue, all curls, for one more gallop"

"And this," said Charlie, with mock gravity, "is the domestic felicity we hear so much about?"

"Never mind, old fellow. We are not altogether unhappy, are we, Laura?"

"Nothing to complain about at all events to such sceptics as that," and she threw an affectionate glance at her husband.

"It's true," continued Tom, "when you come to have to face a milliner's bill suddenly, it brings serious reflections along with it."

"Oh, don't tease me any more," said

Laura laughing. "Let's be rational."

"Delicious!" muttered Tom, "what could have put that into her head?"

"Be quiet, Tom, do. Tell me, Charlie, have you heard anything from the Crimea lately? I know you hear occasionally from Mr. Travers. I'm so interested about his well-being, on account of poor Breezie Langton. She's such a dear girl, and it is so lonely for her, poor thing, with her lover and father both away—living by herself too. I go down and see her as often as I can."

"Yes; by the way one of the very things I wanted to see you about, I brought his letter to show you. I got a most amusing yarn from Jack yesterday. Shall I read it out?"

"Yes, do please."

"Camp before Sebastopol, April 17, 1855.

"Dear Charlie,

"Don't shy at the violets, and fancy you are in for a dose of woman's pathos from these parts. It's only me, and you

can give the violets to any one you choose, Laura Lyttlereck if you see her.

“(You’ll find them in the envelope,” observed Charlie, tossing it across.)

“I gathered them on the Inkerman battle-field only yesterday, in a spot that you may safely say was watered with blood last autumn, though there are but faint traces of that Sunday morning’s work left now. How are you all getting on at home, and what is going to win the Derby? Wentworth looks to me like a real ‘good thing;’ but of course we can’t know much about it out here.

“Do you recollect Herries, of ‘ours?’ he dined at head-quarters the other night, and described it as something like dining in a telegraphic office. Click, click; message after message kept coming in from the generals in front. ‘All quiet and very little firing.’ It looks as if we meant *staying here*, don’t it; telegraph lines down in all directions, and a railway nearly completed.

“The Russians made a stiffish sortie on us about three weeks ago, beating up

both attacks; cost us some half score or so of officers, killed, wounded and taken prisoners, and a proportionate number of men. Of course they were driven back, as no doubt they expected to be; but they had the best of it on the whole. One of my friends got winged, and another taken prisoner. The day after we had a flag of truce up for the purpose of burying the dead, and all met on the 'debateable ground.' There was a large muster of officers on both side, French, English and Russians. All the amenities thoroughly carried out, interchange of cigars, and one old Russian major in particular was extremely busy with his snuff-box. His cap off and his box offered to whoever came near him. At the end of a couple of hours, the senior Russian officer walked up to the French commandant, took out his watch and suggested time was up. The French officer proposed a cessation of hostilities for another fifteen minutes, till we all got comfortably back. At the end of that time, down went the white flags and we

immediately plumped a ten inch shell into the Mamelon. What we call the courtesies of war, Charlie; quite reverting to the age of chivalry, taking a pinch out of the Russian major's box one minute, and a shot at him with an Enfield the next.

“Our cry at present out here is, where are our reinforcements? The weather is fine, and our men would be healthy if they were not killed by trench work. Last night was the third night running our fellows have had in ‘the Ditches.’

“Our fraternization with our gallant allies is fraught with great difficulties, so many of us being indifferent Frenchmen. They are hospitable as Arabs if you go to see them; but have a way of returning your call by dropping in about eleven, a.m.; spending the day and staying till midnight, which is embarrassing. It becomes fatiguing, interchanging ideas by broken language and pantomime for ten hours or so.

“For my part, having found they are death on egg-flip, I produce it quickly;

it is always received with a smack of the lips, and 'Ah, c'est bon zee egg-fleep,' and as my servant has instructions to keep increasing the strength of every brew, I generally, in the turf vernacular, 'have em safe' about four. We a little overdid it though the other day, and had to find a bed for a Captain of Dragoons who got overcome; otherwise, they generally make their adieu as soon as they find they are 'bit.' "

"Charlie," said Laura laughing, "you don't believe Mr. Travers about his 'egg-fleep,' do you?"

"Yes, nothing more probable. Just the sort of thing Jack would delight in."

"Yes, and fancy these unfortunate Frenchmen," broke in Tom, "accustomed to the imbibition, if there is such a word, of nothing but light claret, suddenly put to pass an afternoon on the stiffest of egg-flip."

"Oh! I don't know," said Charlie, "some of them dabble a little in absinthe, recollect. If you drink that, I fancy you can drink anything."

“Well, never mind,” said Laura. “Go on, Charlie; it’s a most amusing letter.”

“Do you recollect young Rolls, Crumbs as we call him?” continued Charlie, reading. “He’s great in French society—immense in patter and pantomime. We have a couple of good stories about him, and true ones too, mind, which I must tell you.

“He and I were out riding the other day, and pulled up at a French canteen, got a fellow to hold the ponies and went in. There was a knot of French officers drinking there, who raised their caps, smiled pleasantly, and tossed off their glasses with an ‘*à votre santé, Messieurs.*’ We bowed and grinned, and then one came across and asked us to join them in a bowl of ‘zee champagne ponche.’

“‘*Avec beaucoup de plaisir, Monsieur,*’ cried Crumbs.

“We drank that, and then Rolls and I considered we ought to stand one, so we ordered in some champagne which one of the Frenchmen manufactured. It was

the deuce to drink; sweet champagne, sweetened again with sugar. Can you fancy anything much nastier?

“ ‘*C'est bon, n'est-ce pas?*’ inquired the Frenchman.

“ ‘*Ah, oui, avec beaucoup de plaisir,*’ responded Rolls.

“ Well, we *trinqué'd*, clinked glasses immensely and did a deal of fraternization. At last the bugles sounded the last post. The Frenchmen rose with many bows, they deplored they must leave us, shrugged their shoulders, said they were *desolé*; but duty must be their excuse.

“ ‘*Ah, oui, Messieurs,*’ replied Rolls, bowing like a Mandarin. ‘*Avec beaucoup de plaisir. Bon soir, Messieurs.*’

“ Crumbs faintly denies it, but it's a true bill.”

Charlie's reading was here interrupted by the laughter of his auditors.

Laura, in particular, was tremendously tickled by the story, and declared she should never be happy till Tom had brought Mr. Rolls there to dinner.

“ Though what I should do if you did, Tom, I don’t know ; I couldn’t look at him without thinking of ‘ *avec beaucoup de plaisir.* ’ ”

“ Well, as far as one can see, your gravity is not likely to be taxed just yet. He’s three thousand miles away in the first place, and I don’t know him in the second. Do you, Charlie ? ”

“ Just recollect meeting him once or twice with the Regiment, that’s all,” replied Charlie. “ Will you have the rest, the other story’s not bad.”

“ Oh dear, yes,” cried Laura ; “ let’s hear it. Why don’t Mr. Travers send his letters to something or somebody ? ”

“ Wish to goodness he’d send them to me,” said Tom, taking a most literary view of the question.

“ The other is this,” continued Charlie, once more resuming his reading. “ It was a mixed party at an English officer’s hut. Several French officers present. There had been a good deal of singing, toast-drinking, &c., ‘ they are jolly good fellows ’ had been chorussed more than

once. Suddenly a French officer, one of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, started to his feet and said he had a toast to propose. Silence was proclaimed, with some little difficulty.

“The Frenchman in a short speech, begged to propose ‘The memory of those who had fallen before Sebastopol.’

‘*En silence, Messieurs,*’ he continued, raising his glass.

That unlucky Crumbs who was chaffing in a corner with a friend, equally destitute of French, immediately sprang to his feet and burst out with,

“‘They are jolly good fellows which nobody can deny.’

“The Frenchman ground his teeth, and muttered *sacré*. The Englishmen who understood the toast looked aghast, and it was not till some one who understood the extent of Crumbs’ French had forcibly put him down, explained and apologised, that the Frenchman was pacified.

“Still, Crumbs’ daring attempts at the language are beyond all praise.

“Well, our second bombardment is just over, and the Russian batteries, beyond looking a little pelted, are very little the worse. The whole thing has been a failure.

“There, I have spun you ‘no end of a twister,’ as they say, and expect two average letters back. Love to your sister and people, also to the Lyttlerecks when you see them. In the meantime,

“Ever, dear Charlie, yours,

“JACK TRAVERS.”

“Ah!” said Tom, critically, “they are two rattling good stories; but I like the first one best. What a deal of story and anecdote a man might pick up out there. I’ve no doubt Langton has a budget of them, that he has not yet served up in the papers. Keeping them back for a book, of course. I half wish I was there.”

“You don’t do anything of the kind, sir,” said Laura. “You might never come back to relate them. Besides,

what's to become of me, I should like to know?"

"By Jove, yes, I forgot you temporarily," replied Tom. "What a blow it would be for your relatives, too, who flattered themselves they had got rid of you, to have you sent back on their hands as a widow, lamenting. Come and smoke a cigar, Charlie, in my den. You'd better go to bed, my dear."

"No," said Laura, "I shall come and sit a little while with you."

"All right then, little woman, ring the bell and tell them to take the lamp there. Only don't blame Charlie and me if the dress smells of tobacco in the morning."

"Well," laughed Laura, "it's been there a good many times before. We generally sit there when we're alone. He writes and I read. Sometimes I get manuscript to copy or check. Sometimes pens to mend. Don't you think he does all the work, Charlie? I assure you, like the printer's devil, I've a deal to say to it."

“She isn’t a bad assistant, and that’s a fact,” said Tom; “but come along.”

“Yes, and we’ll have what he calls a ‘night off,’ a good cheery gossip.”

CHAPTER IV.

“WOMEN ARE KITTLE CATTLE TO SHOE.”

THE vagaries of fashion are wonderful. Still fashion continually repeats itself. The dames of Imperial Rome wore false hair and complexions two thousand years ago, much as the ladies of Imperial London do now. Crinoline is but the hoops of the early Georges; knickerbockers were worn in the days of the Stuarts.

“It’s a d—d atheistical age, wife,”

quoth Sir John Brute. Certes, belief seems to get harder day by day. I pity men who have dabbled in theatricals, and have so become conversant with what can be done with a little rouge, powder, Indian ink, a camel-hair brush, burnt

cork and a lining wire. For my part, I bitterly regret my lost innocence; I had infinitely rather believe in those magnificent *toilettes* and brilliant complexions. Now, I sometimes question if we should know our dearest female relations, did we by chance meet them as nature made them. A sceptical friend of mine, when called upon last year to admire a gorgeous specimen of fashionable beauty, retorted that "he was a sincere follower of the best masters, and preferred Millais to the works of inferior artists."

Trains get longer and longer. Fashion reverts to the time of Charles II. Dresses are worn lower and lower; fashion is recurring to the days of the Regency—to that mode which called forth Sheridan's bitter line,

"And bare their bodies as they mask their minds."

Are we returning to that period in our morality also?

I really forget what was the fashion fourteen years ago. Our masculine memories retain these things but badly.

Still, I have an idea that women trusted more to their own hair in those days, and less to the *coiffeurs*; and yet I have a shadowy recollection of plaited coronets, that sometimes were not quite the same shade as the silken tresses they crossed. Perhaps I was more credulous in those days, more prone to believe,

“Whatever is, is right.”

As we get older we lapse into scepticism, and are apt to think everything is deteriorating. As De Quincey says: “Thunder and lightning are not the thunder and lightning I remember. Roses are degenerating. The Fannies of our island are not visibly improving.”

But a truce to digression. What have the vagaries of fashion to do with this story?

High swells the fatal chorus of the ‘Eumenides.’ Disgraceful, cry her compeers, ever keen to ostracize and cast their shells into the ballot box. What has she done? Flirted dreadfully with her old lover. My dear lady, you cannot

have mixed in good society if that shocks you. Never mind the conventionalities. Let us talk of the world as it is, not as they tell us it should be.

Belle Bartley loved Charlie Repton, and married the stockbroker. It's an everyday occurrence.

Few women marry the man they love. They may come to do so afterwards, but they don't do it to begin with. It is very natural, the nice people never have any money. We can't get on without carriages and opera boxes, so Providence and chaperones arrange it for us.

Belle is looking extremely handsome this season. The influence of love has softened her stately beauty. The proud grey eyes are more than ever bewitching in their languor. Repton is ever at her side. She seems to have shut her eyes to the consequences, and to have abandoned herself entirely to her passion. Belle's few friends tremble for her. She alone, perhaps, is ignorant how busy scandal is with her name.

The passion-tossed, we are told, generally bear the lines thereof in their faces, whether for good or evil, whether they struggle against the tide, or drift helpless with the stream. I cannot say I believe this. Some of the smoothest faces I have ever seen, have been worn by men and women whose past lives were not good to look back upon. Grief and hardship have more to do with it. Still, women, even in their sorrow, are seldom given to ignoring "the appearances." Widows, in particular, are wont to pay great attention to their mourning. Some of them may have had happy releases, certainly. That men do drink and behave badly to their wives, there is no denying. We do not knock them down in good society; but you can put an educated woman through more severe torture than personal violence.

Did you ever read "The Autocrat of the Breakfast Table?" Wendell-Holmes says therein :

"I am satisfied that there are as great masters of this nerve playing as Vieux-

temps or Thalberg in their lines of performance. Married life is the school in which the most accomplished artists in this department are found. A delicate woman is the best instrument, she has such a magnificent compass of sensibilities. From the deep inward moan which follows pressure on the great nerves of right, to the sharp cry as the filaments of taste are struck with a crashing sweep, is a range which no other instrument possesses. A few exercises on it daily at home fit a man wonderfully for his habitual labours, and refresh him immensely as he returns from them. No stranger can get a great many notes of torture out of a human soul—it takes one that knows it well.”

I have said before, things had not been looking pleasant in the City for some time. War, as a matter of course, had exercised its usual depressing effect upon all sorts of securities: in short, the money market was desperately tight. Mr. Bartley, like many other men, made the very commonplace mistake of losing his temper

as he lost his money. Speculations had turned out delusive and unprofitable. The stockbroker's temper waxed acidulated and snappish. He wanted money to carry on some of his schemes. He found he had to pay pretty heavily for the accommodation. He grew morose over his port and filberts, and actually snarled at his wife's moirés, grew petulant on the subject of opera boxes, and sneered at Belle's French maid.

Now, as he had never imparted his money difficulties to his wife—indeed, there were few confidences between those two—it is not to be supposed that a high-spirited woman like Belle would bear these little attacks with much patience. He never suggested any reduction of expenditure or establishment, but simply quarrelled with the cost thereof. Like most men accustomed to wealth, when in difficulties, he had not the moral courage to acknowledge his position. Belle, on her side, in utter ignorance of the true state of affairs, thought her husband had turned disagreeable and miserly. Had she known

the truth, she would have proved a true wife to him. Had she loved him, she would have rather gloried in the sacrifice of some luxury. What woman who loves, does not glory in mild martyrdom? Belle did not love in this case; but she had a deal of natural chivalry in her disposition. She had fought many a gallant fight in behalf of the oppressed of her little world, as the penniless Miss Brabazon. She was not the woman to be afraid of abandoning luxuries, if you showed her why and wherefore. If you marry a fool, tell her as little as may be; but if you have the luck to marry a sensible woman, the less you keep from her the better.

When to all this, you add the man she really does love ever lounging by her side, and unmistakeably showing his devotion, if Belle is not on the verge of a domestic convulsion, she is a fortunate woman. I am writing not of high-principled people who have their passions under perfect control, but of weak, frail, worldly mortals, to whom sore temptation

is a sore struggle ; who perhaps come out of the trial triumphant, but bearing reproachful scars on their breasts, if not on their faces. Those who have never known temptation should look with some little leniency on their fallen brothers and sisters. Stealing a loaf is indefensible ; but ere you administer the extreme penalty of the law, pause and think whether you ever knew what starvation really means.

And so the domestic feud raged, and those whose union had been an unblessed lie, sundered wider and wider. They had married without love. Neither had ever sought the other's love or confidence. No feeling of jealousy mingled with the stockbroker's wrath. A man of slow feelings and dull perceptions out of his own vocation, he was merely venting on his wife the ill-humour caused by unsuccessful speculation. Exasperated because she refused to bend, and fiercely returned taunt for taunt. It was left for a foolish woman to light the train.

Mrs. Inglemere has figured but slightly

in these pages. Still, as "walking ladies" and "gentlemen" on the stage sometimes have a good deal to do with the action of the drama, so in real life you will find catastrophes, crises, or whatever you may please to call them, brought about or averted by men and women who scarcely figure as foreground characters in the tangled woof of our lives. Like the walking gentleman of the stage, they seem to cross our path to deliver the important message, letter, or piece of information that makes or mars us, and never more to be associated with our career.

Now Mrs. Inglemere might be a foolish woman; but she only acted after the manner of women generally, when having come to the conclusion that Charlie Repton was in love with her, she at once put him down as her own peculiar property. Women are wont to do this whether their own feelings are interested or not, and are apt to resent bitterly any breach of allegiance, even amongst those on whom their smiles have fallen chill as "the pale moonlight."

Charlie Repton could plead no excuse of this kind. On him the widow had lavished her sunniest smiles. He had even been a most favoured cavalier. By careful reticence, by accomplished use of her magnificent eyes—"playing her eyelids like Venetian blinds," as Sheridan has it—by a judicious display of her pearly teeth, to say nothing of the graceful posing of her really perfect figure, she had kept him enchained for some time. A man may be in love with two women at the same time; but if they once meet on equal terms before him, he speedily succumbs entirely to one. Mrs. Inglemere had quite made up her mind to marry him. She probably would have done so; but after again meeting Belle Bartley with her sparkling conversation, animated manner, real cleverness and acute observation, Charlie found talking to Mrs. Inglemere wearisome and boring.

Frightful fatality! Oh, woman, when we once take to yawning, thy sceptre has departed! You might as well waste your

smiles on the nearest asphalt. Heaven only knows what fools you may make of us in our hour of weakness; but when man is once bored by your pretty prattle, he has burst his fetters—he will eschew the boudoir for the smoking-room once more.

Mrs. Inglemere might be a weak woman; but that did not prevent her being a spiteful one—moreover, had not her vanity been wounded? Few women and not many men can altogether forgive that. She had not strength of character to become a revengeful woman, so she simply became a malicious one. She was wrath with Charlie Repton; but the full tide of her indignation was naturally reserved for Belle. She pondered deeply how this slight to her vanity should be atoned for. She had hazarded one or two skirmishes with Belle, on the few occasions they had encountered each other in society—a dangerous experiment that showed how deeply she resented Charlie's desertion. The extremely unsatisfactory result of such left her more embittered than ever

against her rival, and angry with herself, for having so far forgotten her *rôle*, as to try conclusions in words with anybody on any point. She knew she was not clever; but she knew she was handsome, and showed perfect teeth when she smiled. How could she have been so foolish as to forget her part was to look beautiful, and trust to her charms, not her conversation. Women do make this mistake sometimes; Helena sets up for Aspasia, and Venus for the Queen of Sheba. Born a beauty, she would fain be praised for her wit.

Failure in women of this kind leaves a bitter sting behind. Mrs. Inglemere felt extremely spiteful on the occasion, and was quite willing to wreak that spite, with little regard to consequences, whenever she should see her way.

She watched the imprudent flirtation of Belle and Charlie Repton with mingled feelings of gratification and annoyance. She had not patience to wait for the *dénouement* she so anxiously expected, and in an evil hour made up her mind to accelerate it. She had already contri-

buted her quota to swell the tide of scandal now running tolerably strong against poor Belle; but what she called "the stock-broker's obtuseness," irritated her. Suppose she should give him a hint on the subject! But how? She barely knew him to bow to. Good! Yes, She might write. No need for putting her name to the letter? It was only right the poor man's eyes should be opened. Mrs. Inglemere had naturally put the very worst possible construction on Belle's flirtation. It was true, she had heard of anonymous letters recoiling rather heavily on their writers. 'Tush! it would never be traced to her; besides, she would confine herself simply to the truth, merely what all the world knew. It was high time Mrs. Bartley was ostracised, and made aware she had forfeited her position—that her caste was gone—that she was without the pale. Then if Mr. Repton's infatuation for that designing, degraded woman continued, she was sorry for him, that was all. Perhaps, too, after his eyes were opened, he might

return to his lawful allegiance. Who could tell? Yes; that would be a triumph worth having.

So one fine afternoon the handsome widow sat down, and, after much thought, indited the following pleasant little note to John Bartley, Esq.

“Will you remain wilfully blind to what all the world is talking of? Do you intend to remain passive and acquiescent in your own dishonour? Are you the easy-going husband who sees everything with his wife’s eyes, or has her will and temper crushed all independence out of you? Are you her slave, or her master? Do you tremble at her frown, or dare you assert your own authority? If you have any manhood left, and do not wish to figure in the contemptible character of an injured husband, it is time to put a stop to the scandal connected with your name. A little later and it will be beyond your control, as also will probably be your wife. If you do not now see your danger, I am sorry

for you, and must deem you far blinder than,

“ A LOOKER ON.”

The widow dropped this precious epistle into the post office with her own hand, and rather nervously waited the result.

Of course she anticipated a furious scene between Belle and her husband, which she concluded would lead to the catastrophe she so anxiously desired.

Mr. Bartley received his letter in due time. He read it over and walked away to his own room. It was a letter calculated to disturb most men; but Mrs. Inglemere had no knowledge of Bartley's temperament, or she would scarcely have resorted to this expedient.

He was a man of phlegmatic disposition, and though acute enough in business matters, of no very keen perception upon other points. The result was this, that instead of being thrown into a state of indignation or crushed with despair as other men might have been, his natural

phlegm induced him in the first instance to merely sit down and think the matter over. It was a course, though perhaps the best he could pursue, that not one man in a thousand would have followed. You must bear in mind that he had been actuated by no sentiment in his wedding with Belle; he had wanted a wife, much as he might have wanted a pair of carriage horses; there had been neither love nor esteem between these two since their ill-starred marriage—she had gone her way, and he his. As long as she looked well at the head of his table and entertained his guests pleasantly, he had troubled himself about little else; and to do Belle justice, she had always made herself agreeable to his business friends, though she had rather shirked their return of hospitality.

Moreover, Bartley, in the way of business, had seen a good deal of bogus telegrams, false reports, rigged markets, and even anonymous letters to the disparagement of certain firms, so that he was not at all prepared to swallow the bait off-hand.

He read it over some half dozen times, and then sat with the letter in his hand pondering over it. First of all, immersed as he was in business, being no very close observer and seeing as little as he did of his wife and her friends, he was not very clear as to whom it alluded. Secondly, who was his correspondent? It was evidently a lady's hand-writing, he had few female relatives, and no feminine friends or correspondents. Thirdly, it was an anonymous letter, and such he generally looked upon as malicious fabrications with some ulterior object in view.

Though somewhat puzzled, he came to the conclusion that the accusation was false. Still, Belle had angered him much lately. Quarrels had been rife between them, and Belle's cutting retorts had left a sting behind. Finally, he thought that it might be made a formidable weapon in his hands, with which to curb his somewhat rebellious wife, and, in the meantime, he would watch closely to discover whom

his unknown correspondent might have indicated as dangerous to his domestic felicity.

When a man once makes up his mind to seek information on such a point as this, it is astounding how intelligence pours in upon him; and ere forty-eight hours were over, numberless kind friends had dilated upon how Mrs. Bartley was "carrying on" with that Mr. Repton, to her somewhat astonished husband.

Still the stock-broker had faith in his wife; that she was carrying on a desperate flirtation he had no doubt, and that the knowledge thereof should be applied effectively in the next family jar, he had firmly made up his mind; but he acquitted her of ought else, and summed up his unknown correspondent's letter with,

"Exaggerated, no doubt, though the old adage is generally true: 'There's no smoke without some fire.' I recollect when I got that unsigned slip of paper to say Bilson and Weeble must stop payment on the Monday. They didn't,

but they owned afterwards it was very near it. A discharged clerk gave me that bit of information, and if I had pressed them, I shouldn't have got ten shillings in the pound. No, they had to give me good terms not to swamp them, and so shall you, Mrs. Bartley, at our next difference. It won't be long before it comes, I'll be bound—more especially if things go on in the City as they have lately, and you continue to want money in the same inverse proportion. I believe I'm a d—d fool not to tell her the truth."

Perhaps he was; he was, at all events, right about one thing, and that was that he and Belle would differ shortly.

Contrary to custom, and slightly to his wife's astonishment, Mr. Bartley presented himself at her breakfast table some three or four days after the receipt of the above letter. Whether things looked so uncommonly unpleasant in the City that he really could not stand looking at them any longer, or whether he could not further resist the temptation

of trying the effect of his newly acquired information on his wife's haughty spirit, I don't know; however, there he was.

"A somewhat unexpected pleasure," cried Belle, gaily, as she entered the room and saw her husband lounging over the paper.

"Glad you think so," was the somewhat ungracious rejoinder. "It's not often I favour you; shall I ring, or do you expect any one else?"

"Oh dear, no, not likely. Poor Breezie Langton is the only person who ever breaks the solitude of my breakfast-table, and she always drops a line to say she's coming. It's not often now, poor child, that she can pluck up heart to come and see even me. No wonder, with her father and her lover both out in that horrid Crimea."

"I thought, perhaps, you were in the habit of receiving *your intimates* at breakfast. Not unusual, I believe, is it, amongst your fashionable associates?"

Belle gazed keenly at her husband; there would not have been much in the words, had

it not been for the sneering tones in which they were uttered. Already she felt intuitively that the domestic barometer was falling, and that there were strong indications of a storm.

She replied carelessly, though with a shade of defiance in her tone :

“I don’t know what other people do. I breakfast alone, because I like it best ; I hate the bother of having to entertain people in the morning.”

“And yet, if my information is correct, you are never tired of entertaining some of your friends.”

“I am not good at riddles,” she replied, coldly, “and can only trust you thoroughly understand your information, *however* obtained.”

His face flushed at the taunt.

“At all events, Madam, report says you are more partial to *tête-à-têtes* than the generality of wives.”

“Indeed ! I can’t say I’m favourably impressed with the present.”

He set his teeth ; for a few seconds his passion all but induced him to burst

forth in a torrent of invective and accusation. Mastering it by a strong effort, he exclaimed :

“ Perhaps not ! A *tête-à-tête* with one’s husband is, I am aware, not recognised in good society. May I trouble you for another cup of tea ? ”

Belle handed it to him in silence.

“ By the way, I want to have the Glumbersons to dinner here on Thursday night. Get a few people to meet them. ”

“ I am sorry I can’t ; I have made arrangements to go to the Opera that evening. You must have the Glumbersons some other night. ”

“ But I tell you it don’t suit me to have them any other night. You must put off your opera engagement. ”

“ Indeed I shall not, ” replied Belle, “ had you told me you wanted a dinner party that night, I would not have made it. Now either have your dinner without me, or have it some other night. ”

“ I tell you I have particular reasons for wishing them to dine here on that evening. ”

“Perhaps you will condescend to explain what those particular reasons may be?” rejoined Belle calmly.

“No, it is not in the least necessary that you should be acquainted with the reasons for all my actions.”

“Apparently not, judging by the extent to which you honour me with your confidence.”

“My confidence!” returned the now exasperated husband. “It strikes me I have confided in you too far. If all I hear is true, a devilish deal too far, Madam.”

“If you are about to use coarse language, Mr. Bartley, perhaps you will permit me to retire,” and Belle rose from her seat; “I’m not accustomed to be sworn at.”

“Sworn at, or not, you will stay till you have heard what I have got to say to you. Do you see this letter? Do you know what it contains? Do you know that in it I am asked if I intend ‘to remain acquiescent in my own dishonour?’ Do you know that I am warned it is time

to 'put a stop to this scandal on my name.' That an unknown correspondent tells me that if I don't restrain my wife now, she will ere long be beyond the reach of my control. Do you think that I—"

"Stop, sir!" and Belle's voice rung out clear, cold and silvery. Her cheek had paled a little at the first burst of the torrent, for she knew she was not wholly guiltless; but her woman's wit hit off the weak phrase of "unknown correspondent" like lightning,

"Stop, sir!" she repeated, drawing herself up to her full height, "And you dare to meet me with this vile accusation, on the strength of an anonymous letter. Let me see it."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," he replied, sulkily, already cowed by her manner, and it must be borne in mind but partially believing in the letter.

"I insist," she replied. "I claim it as my right. Every criminal," here her lip curled, and no words can describe the bitterness of her tones, "every criminal is

allowed to see upon what charges he is arraigned."

"I have told you, you shall not see it," he replied.

"Then let me pass; had you been a man, you would never have rested till you knew who traced those vile lines. It were time enough to talk to me then. May I trouble you," and she motioned to him to open the door, as she swept towards it.

An execration was Bartley's only response, as he turned savagely away, and Belle was constrained to perform that office for herself; Bartley remained for some time musing, occasionally bursting forth into fierce imprecations. It was certain this new receipt for taming his wife had turned out a total failure, and with what he considered a charge to crush any woman, he had been signally worsted.

"Curse her," he said, "why did I marry her? There's no meeting that slippery tongue of her's. She always has, and I suppose always will beat me to the

end of the chapter. She's worth angering too, though; by Jove, how handsome she looked in her rage. But I'll cow her yet, she shall fear me before I've done."

CHAPTER V.

DISCARDING A LOVER.

WHEN Belle regained her own room, her nerves rather gave way. She bathed her temples with Eau de Cologne, and sat down to think. She was quite aware, that before any one would have dared to conceive the idea of writing an anonymous letter about her proceedings, that they must have been tolerably well canvassed in her own circle.

She had put a bold face on it to her husband; but the defiant front had vanished now, and Belle felt very miserable. She knew too well what scandal could do when the tide ran strong. She had seen women "dropped" before now.

She thought of the upraised eyebrows of her dear friends, and the "Poor thing, I'm so shocked. Pray don't mention her; I never could have believed it." Had it come to this with her? Where had she drifted to? How far had her imprudence led her? That rather sarcastic tongue of hers had done her no good. There were plenty of people who would willingly cast a stone her way.

Then she thought of her husband. True, she despised him. She had married him in a moment of pique, while her heart was another man's; but till lately, he had been kind to her in his way, grudging her nothing. Might not her own conduct have wrought the change? Then she thought of Charlie Repton. Her face softened, and she owned to herself that she did love him dearly. Ah! why had they quarrelled? Why, in that fit of indignation, had she yielded to her aunt's persuasions, and accepted Mr. Bartley's offer? Why had Charlie not spoken before? She knew he loved her all along. Had she been too

hard upon him? No, it was his fault. No, she ought to have waited; and here Belle burst into tears, and indulged in the luxury of a good cry.

What was to be done now? She must see no more of Charlie, of course; and then she shuddered at the idea of how lonely her life would seem under that restriction; and after all, might it not be too late even now to set herself right with the world? Odd, no whisper of the scandal had ever reached her ears before. It would have been curious if it had. Are not the actors in such scenes always the last to hear how the world regards their proceedings? and if their intimate friends do call their attention to society's inuendos, are they not, of course, immediately pool poohed, and intimate friends no longer? We know it is so, and the proverb that "reckless man must have his way," is equally applicable to "reckless woman."

It has been the fashion to describe women, particularly wives, as having a decided prejudice against clubs. Their prejudices

have been attributed to the selfishness and taste for luxury thereby engendered.

For my part, I imagine that the far-seeing eyes of the matrons of England at once detected that a smoking-room congregation would prove as scandalous as a dowager's tea-table, and at once made a stand against such an infringement of their privileges. It is certain that when a lady oversteps the limits of prudence, the club smoking-rooms are not quite the last place in which she is tried and sentenced without evidence.

Now, the Thermopolium was no worse than its neighbours; but its numerous members were to a considerable extent men "about town," and poor Belle's case had not escaped the eyes of these critical and not over scrupulous commentators. They would have delighted Mrs. Inglemere, for they quite agreed with her in predicting the worst. One authority there had gone the length, indeed, at the termination of a *séance*, in which the case had been somewhat fully discussed, of

expressing his opinion on the subject, by the remark of "Take any one's two ponies it's a bolt before the season is over;" but he had been sceptical ever about the existence of much virtue in human nature.

Yes, the chorus swells rapidly on these occasions. Since the days of King Midas it has been ever so. Of course, charming women have no business to get into such scrapes; but alas! it's the charming women who always do get into these scrapes, and then do not their plainer and less interesting sisters let them know that they have done so? As long as you do not outrage the proprieties, it matters little what you may do. Once rend the flimsy veil that covers them, and who troubles themselves about the truth of the arraignment. You are lynched by your dearest friends without further inquiry.

The day wore on, and still Belle sat lost in thought. Who was her anonymous accuser? How she did wish she had seen that letter. It might have given her some clue as to whence the attack came

from; but her husband had refused to show it to her. She would ask him for it no more. Then she bethought her whether she had a friend to consult in her trouble. No, not one. The only one she could have confided in and asked advice from, was thousands of miles away. Yes; had Cis Langton been in England, she would have told him all, and abided by his decision. Now, there was but one thing for it. She must see Charlie Repton. She knew he was neither a proper *confidante*, nor adviser. Who could be worse? Still she must see him once more. It should be the last time. She must tell him that all was over, must be over, between them. Tell him—ah! no, not that; he must never know how she had, how she still loved him. Yes, she must see him, and that to-day. Had she better write a few lines to say she begged he would call? No; it was not often he missed now. He knew she had no engagement that day; best leave it to chance.

As if there was much chance about

it; but it was, perhaps, soothing to her conscience to think so. How many of us do likewise, and palliate our transgressions by laying them on the chapter of accidents, forgetting how much we ourselves have contributed towards the accident.

Bartley having relieved his feelings by a soliloquy of swearing in the breakfast-room to begin with, had, perhaps, feeling that such a flow of language ought not to be thrown away, indulged the household generally with the tail end of the storm. Having brought the butler to a state of great nervous trepidation, threatened the cook with warning, and frightened a stray house-maid nearly out of the little wits she possessed, he condescended to tell the butler to order "the —— coachman to bring the brougham, and not be all day about it," which, for his own comfort, the butler took very good care he should not be. Then, to the great delight of his household, Mr. Bartley drove off to see what they were doing in the —— City.

Things had been looking black in the

said City for some time ; but now they had become positively inky. Glorious war is inimical to commercial prosperity, and Victoria Crosses play the deuce with the price of cotton, &c. When Government must have money, and lots of it ; private speculators have to pay high for accommodation. The nation is speculating in glory, and doubling on every reverse. C.B.'s, it's a fact, though a curious one, affect the carrying trade, and a great victory increases the price of tonnage. War ! war ! there's plenty of money to be made in war, though not by war. Commerce flows out of the old channels which get rather clogged in these days ; but the Army requires breeches and boots, and the Government don't look much into the material, as long as it holds together till shipped. There is a great opening for those who see it, and every Crimean medal will pay them its weight in gold. Why, if you have but a ship or two, you may make their price in "demurrage" before six months are over. But Mr. Bartley, unfortunately for himself, had not speculated on the

wants of the Crimean army, and, to use his own phrase, "Everything was down to nothing."

When all securities present that phase, and you are an extensive speculator, it's odds that ruin overtakes you, and this is pretty much what Bartley felt must shortly be his destiny. Now he had been, to a certain extent, the architect of his own fortunes, felt a pride in the fortune he had made, and was proud of his name on 'Change. It was a heavy blow to this man to find the whole fabric crumbling beneath his feet, and that from no reckless speculating, but simply from the natural depreciation of all property that a state of war inevitably produces. No wonder he felt soured and morose; but as his wife was in utter ignorance of his affairs, it was hardly fair to shower his ill-temper on her head.

Who Bartley's father was, is a question I don't think anyone could answer. One took it for granted he had a father, and that was all. Some of his City friends might know the fact, though I doubt it. Otherwise,

one would have as soon thought of asking him who his father was, as from whom he got his boots, a point on which, except for purposes of curiosity, no mortal could be desirous of discovery. Anyhow, to this day, that remains a mystery. He had some money to start with and made a plum, is all I know concerning him.

But I must leave Bartley to struggle with the adepts of the Exchange, to dive into those mysterious little parlours where things are done at five-eighths for the settling, &c. ; merely remarking how very much simpler a Tattersall's Monday seems to my uninitiated senses, and return to poor Belle, whom we left feebly devising how best to meet the fatal chorus of the Eumenides.

Belle had not to wait very long. Some half hour or so before luncheon time, came a tap at the door, and Belle's maid informed her that Mr. Repton was in the drawing-room.

"Say I'll be down in a few minutes," and then Belle began to collect herself for the interview. It was not quite such an

easy task to let Charlie Repton know the precise state of affairs, and also that she would see him no more. Easy it might have been if she cared nothing about him, but then, unfortunately, she did care a good deal. Her woman's intuitive tact, too, told her that Charlie had been dreadfully in earnest lately. Of course, she had no business to have allowed him to be so much in earnest. Flirtation is a game of counters; but she knew they had been playing for considerably more than counters of late.

Your indolent men who hate trouble, on these occasions, are something like the men who rarely play, when they do begin, they do it with a vengeance. Charlie Repton had sauntered through almost as many flirtations as he was years old. Few of them had given him a moment's uneasiness, and even those few had but little disturbed his equanimity. At last he was really in earnest—he had thrown the prize away when he might have won it; but had doggedly persisted in the pursuit ever since. He had wilfully shut his eyes to what the

consequences might be, and had dreamily resolved to drift with the tide wherever it might lead him. He made no disguise to himself, and admitted that he loved Belle better than any other woman he ever saw. A hundred times a day he cursed his own vacillation of purpose; but for that, he knew Belle might now have been his wife. As it was, he didn't know, and declined to think how it might all end. He only knew that to win Belle, he was prepared to sacrifice anything and everything. If the thought crossed his mind of what she must sacrifice, he impatiently dismissed it as something unpleasant to reflect upon. A mode of dealing with such difficulties that keeps a good many consciences easy.

Belle took one last peep at her glass, and ran downstairs. Even in dismissing an admirer, a woman would fain look her best. He was leaning lazily on the mantelpiece as she entered; but advanced to receive her.

"Pray sit down," she observed, as she took possession of a low lounging chair.

“Don’t walk about and make me uncomfortable.”

“Too glad, I’m sure. I hate locomotion, and know it’s bad for the carpets. How well you’re looking!”

And she did look well in her fresh morning muslin, with the dark masses of her hair turned back, and braided behind into the old classical knot that you may see on the old Greek statues. A little pale from the morning’s scene and after-reflections, while her magnificent grey eyes had a dreamy languor about them, that her husband, who had seen them flash in the breakfast-room, could have hardly believed in. She looked beautiful then; but the stately beauty of the morning had softened into something much more seductive, in the presence of the man she loved.

“What are you going to do this afternoon?” continued Charlie. “Shall you ride, and if so, will you accept me as your escort?”

“No, I don’t think I shall ride,” said Belle musingly.

“Well, if you drive, will you give me a seat?”

“No,” said Belle, and she looked steadily at him.

“What’s the matter, are you ill?” inquired Charlie.

“Yes—no, I don’t know what’s the matter with me. Excuse me, I have had a disagreeable morning, and don’t feel quite myself.”

“Good heavens! I am so sorry, and here am I boring you about riding and driving. Like my stupidity. Tell me what it is. Can I be of any use? You know well I utter no idle words, when I say that it would be a real pleasure to me if I could be of any assistance?”

“Yes,” she said, “you can—you must; I wanted to see you to-day—if I never see you again. Do you know that scandal has been busy with my name—that the world’s gossip already couples it with yours? Do you know that anonymous scribblers have dared to write to my husband, and insinuate—I won’t sully my lips by naming it; but you can be at

no loss to guess. Have you heard this rumour?"

Charlie hesitated; undoubtedly he was aware that his name had been coupled with Belle's in the talk of the town.

"You have," she continued, "I can see it in your face—Charlie Repton, was it well done to expose me to this?"

"Belle, I love you!" he muttered faintly.

"Yes, I suppose so. Love me as you men do love us poor women, in your own selfish way, and you would sacrifice me without scruple, sooner than give up the gratification of seeing me every day. Ah! I have been a fool; but Charlie, Charlie, I did think better of you! I thought you loved me too well. I thought if you had known that—" and here Belle gave way, and burst into tears.

"Belle don't cry, listen to me. If you knew all I have suffered since your marriage, you would be merciful. I have always loved you; but I never knew how much till I found I had lost you. Lost you I have thought, you know whether

rightly, through my own folly, pride, want of purpose, what you will. There were times in the old days when I thought, and still think, that if I had asked you to be my wife you might have said yes. But I threw, fool that I was, my chance of happiness away—you must recollect on what pitiful grounds. I little knew then, that when next we met, you would be married, and that I should discover too surely that I had let another carry off the only woman I ever really did or ever shall love. I thought we should meet again, and that you would be still Miss Brabazon. It was not so—to see you once more was to feel the old spell around me stronger than ever. I could not help myself. It was happiness to see you! sweet intoxication to listen to your voice! I thought of nothing else. I don't defend myself. I only say I love you, and that no power can prevent. If I am never to speak to you again—never to hear your voice again, till stricken by death or blindness, I will yet see you, if it be but as you pass through the streets. I may have done

you grievous harm—you, whom I would fain shield from every ill; if it is so, pardon me, and make some allowance for the greatness of my love.”

He was standing by her side, holding her hand in his, as he finished his passionate speech. What woman who loved the speaker could have listened unmoved to such an appeal?

For a second, Belle's disengaged hand played caressingly with his hair, as she murmured, “My poor Charlie!” then, drawing her hand quickly from his, she rose, and stood opposite him.

“Charlie, dear,” she said, “it's too late to talk of what might have been. We might, perhaps, have been happy together; but that's all gone by now. Sit down, and talk over what is best for us as it is. You must bury this love, and—I shouldn't like to think you could do it just yet—in time you will find somebody else who may be to you what you say I am.”

“Never, Belle! and you know it. I have fancied myself in love many times

in the course of my life; but you have taught me the little reality there was in such love. I never loved really before. I shall not again."

Charlie said the last words in a quiet, resolute tone, that made Belle's cheek flush. She had not been woman, if she could have refrained from some secret exultation at hearing her proposition so firmly rejected. There was a silence between them of some two or three minutes. She stood, leaning her arm on the mantel-piece, and her cheek resting on her hand. She was the first to break silence.

"You must come here no more," she said. "Yes, it must be so!" she continued, making a gesture that he should not interrupt her. "You must do this for me. Leave town, and then it will appear all simple enough. They may say," she added, with a melancholy smile, "that I'm doomed 'to wear the willow.' Let them; it will be best so."

"You cannot mean to utterly banish me?" he said.

"I see no help for it. You must go."

“Oh, Belle! you never cared for me, or you could not tell me that.”

“Hush!” she said. “Do you think I shall suffer no pain? Do you fancy that the time will pass very pleasantly for me? I shall have many a weary hour to endure, and many a bitter taunt to submit to. Charlie, won’t you think of me a little?”

“I do!” he cried, vehemently. “Why should you endure all this? Is there no other way?”

“None!” she murmured, faintly.

“Yes, there is. Why should you waste your beauty and brightness on a man who appreciates neither—on one who knows not the pearl he possesses; who recognises not the graces of your mind; one whom you cannot love?”

“Oh, stop! stop!” she cried.

“No; hear me out!” he continued, passionately. “You know I speak truly. A man who insults you; who cares no more for you, or ever could care, more than he does for a carriage horse; who systematically neglects you. Belle, you

know how I love you. There is one other way. Will you take it? Love such as ours should not be divided."

"Silence! Madness! You know not what you say—what you ask. Charlie!" she cried, vehemently, "I did think you would help me!" and Belle buried her face in her hands, and sobbed audibly.

"Dearest!" he murmured, "forgive me if I have frightened you." He was by her side now, and his arm stole round her waist. "I spoke passionately, for I felt so. It is so hard to think of losing you. Tell me it is not so!" and his lips touched her cheek.

For an instant, she yielded to his embrace; then wrenched herself from him.

"Madness! folly!" she exclaimed. "Misery! destruction! No, I have asked you to be true to me, and you listen to nothing but the dictates of your own mad passion."

He made a movement towards her.

"No, stand back, sir! Charlie Rep-

ton, listen to me. I love you too well to involve you in what you propose. We part now, to meet no more for many a day; till we can meet once more as friends—till our pulses beat no longer as wildly as they do now. Till then, our paths must be wide apart.”

“Cruel, cruel, ever!” he muttered.

“Unjust!” she cried. “You think you could face the world under such circumstances. I doubt you; but even so, have you no thought for me—of my disgrace? Could you bear to see the woman you love ever pointed at with the finger of scorn?”

“I will risk all and everything!” he exclaimed, fiercely.

“Ever you, never me,” she replied, sadly. “No, Charlie; I love you as much as ever woman loved man—too well, indeed, to do what you would have me. God for ever bless thee!” and she was gone.

He sprang forward to intercept her; but he was too late, the door closed behind her ere he could reach it. She

did not trust herself to look round.

He stood for some minutes with his eyes on the door, then threw himself on a chair. Surely she would return? It was impossible they should part like that. The clock on the mantel-piece ticked with horrid monotony. Charlie felt as if he was in a dream. How long he had sat there he didn't know. At last he rose and rang the bell.

“Will you inquire,” he said to the servant who opened the door, “if I am to have the pleasure of seeing Mrs. Bartley again?”

The man returned in a few minutes with :

“Mistress desires me to say, sir, that she has so bad a headache it's impossible she can ride to-day, and she's going to lie down for the afternoon. Begg, sir, you will take luncheon without her.”

Charlie picked up his hat, and followed the man down-stairs.

“Thanks, no; I'm not hungry,” he said, as the servant threw open the door of the dining-room, and Charlie found himself once more in the street.

Verily, if Mr. Bartley was a little morose, and inclined to dwell on his anonymous correspondent's communication that morning, he had better reason than he knew of for so doing.

CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANDS OF THE CORD.

A BLAZING May sun, such as we see but little of during that capricious month in these Isles, was shining down on the soft grassy banks of the Tchernaya. Some few days previous, our troops had advanced in force and re-occupied, without molestation, the redoubts and position lost on that fatal 26th of October. The day of the glorious death-ride of the Light Brigade. A day which bore to the lookers-on at Balaklava the same distinction as that bestowed on the remnant of the gallant band engaged in that deed of maddest chivalry. A day which makes the Russians sneer at our decorations, and contemptuously remark, "We thought

you gave clasps for *victories.*" A day of oblivion to many, of anguish to England, and heart-burning yet to the gallant survivors.

Three Turkish ponies picketed, are quietly cropping the sweet grass with a gusto, which ponies who have been hard worked and living on next to nothing only can appreciate. Wiry little brutes, with more or less a stamp of blood about them, which accounts for their hardihood and clever performances under welter weights on longish excursions. On the edge of the stream, some twenty yards off, lie three men, sacrificing to the goddess "Vacuna." Shell jackets flying open; short pipes in their mouths, and a bottle of something or other circulating amongst them. They are old acquaintances of ours, to wit: Herries, Jack Travers, and Crumbs.

"Bless us, how jolly it is," remarked the latter, "after that hot dusty plateau and the hotter, dustier trenches, to get down here by the water amongst the grass, and smoke."

"Yes," replied Herries, stretching himself out, if anything, a little longer than before. "Wasn't a bad idea of yours, 'young 'un,' this ride. Send that claret across, if you've left any."

"All right, there's another bottle towing at the end of the string in the water there. I say, Jack, what are you thinking of? Out with it, your jokes don't improve by polishing."

"Well, I was thinking of poor little Clift. Sad thing, that poor boy's being shot. Only seventeen, and not out here more than six weeks, they ought not to send them out so young. You were close by at the time, Herries, weren't you?"

"Yes, it was in the advance, just where they are making the new saps. Very sketchy cover, you know, he was sitting with his back to two gabions getting his breakfast. Bullet came just between them, and cut his spine in two. Couldn't have suffered, he just moaned, winked his eyes some half dozen times, and all was over."

“Poor fellow, yes, and he was so very cheery and full of fun.”

They smoked on in silence for some minutes. Men get pretty indifferent to death when they see it occurring round them daily, still, they could but think sadly of the bright, gay, light hearted school-boy, (for he was little more), who had run so short a course among them; whom they were just learning to like for his fun, spirits and good qualities; who, for such a few weeks had dated his letters home so proudly, “Camp before Sebastopol;” now, alas! lying cold on Cathcart’s Hill, while many a bitter tear was dropped at a quiet English vicarage for the fair haired boy, who would be a soldier.

“I say, Jack!” suddenly exclaimed Crumbs, “I forgot to tell you. I’ve got a deuced good thing for these Third Division Races. You’ll have to ‘stand in,’ more especially as I want your assistance.”

“Why, you don’t mean to tell me that Uncle Tom or The Dwarf are any

good in the pony races, and I shouldn't place much reliance on that weedy chestnut thing you picked up the other day."

"Don't be hasty, Jack, I shall turn money over the weedy chestnut yet. I got her cheap in a lot, with two dozen of marmalade, some flannel shirts, an India rubber tub, a broken down bedstead, a couple of bottles of curacoa, and some other things. As for The Uncle," and here Crumbs turned round, and fondly regarded a very plain looking but strong black pony, "he's the best 'night hack' in the whole army, and will canter straight home to his own picket peg on the darkest possible night, from anywhere, in ours or the French lines, you choose to mention. He's worth forty guineas to any man who dines out much. But you haven't seen my last purchase, Jack, and don't deserve to for your confounded scepticism."

"What is it?"

"Well, it's a mule, if you must know, and a good one too."

“And what’s the good of that?”

“Put him in the ‘moke’s race,’ of course. He’s a good big one, runs kind and goes a fair pace.”

“Well, but that cavalry mule that’s won everything, will beat you.”

“Don’t you believe it; my mule amongst his other eccentricities, of which kicking to start with is one, has conceived an enormous affection for Uncle Tom there, and will follow him like mad anywhere. If you’ll only be at the straight run in on The Uncle to give me a lead home, he’ll come quick enough to beat all the rest easy.”

“Are you quite sure he can do it?”

“Quite; he can keep with The Uncle that distance well. I don’t say The Uncle is fast, but he is fast among mules; the only chance is the brute may turn rusty at starting.”

“You young nobbler,” said Herries. “By the way, what became of you in that dog hunt on Monday, when we ran up to the monastery?”

“Oh, nothing much,” replied Crumbs,

“I wanted to see if that new chestnut could jump stone walls.”

“Well?”

“Well, she couldn’t.”

“You came to grief then?”

“Well, I don’t call it ‘coming to grief,’ especially out here, unless you are broke seriously. If you mean, did I get a cropper? I should rather think I did, and intend to leave the finish of the education of that chestnut to her next owner. I say, you fellows, don’t let out she can’t jump,” added Crumbs with considerable anxiety.

“Not I,” said Herries laughing; “but I don’t think you’ll get well out of the chestnut, Crumbs.”

“Oh, I don’t know, there’s a good deal of character about her head and tail, especially the latter—suit a Frenchman or an Infantry field-officer perhaps.”

“Shut up, you inveterate young horse chaunter.”

“I say, Jack, you’ll have to give me that lead with The Uncle, in the run in for the moke race, just to mettle my animal up; spurs won’t do, only make him kick, and

he don't care a rush about ash plants."

"You think it a 'good thing,' then?"
said Travers.

"'Good thing!' I shall back it for all my next half-year's field allowance. Don't grin, Herries, but put down your money; it's bound to come off."

"You're a sanguine young man. Jack and I have seen one or two 'good things' turn out hottish for backers ere this. But come along, the claret's done, and it's time to be moving. Besides, I'm not quite clear that I may not be for the trenches to-night."

"Then fill up my cup, then fill up my can,
Go saddle my horses and call out my men."

sang Crumbs, as he went to draw the picket-pegs of the ponies.

"Now, gentlemen, 'boot and saddle' and on we go again."

"What's become of Langton?" inquired Herries, as they walked their ponies slowly campwards. "I haven't seen him our way for a good bit."

"No; after the failure of the April

bombardment, he thought there would be nothing doing for a while up here; so he went down to Constantinople, and from thence, I fancy, went on somehow to Kertch. I, amongst others, was to write him word to Misseri's when we looked like another move, and I scribbled a line to him the other day, to say I thought there would be a row here shortly. I don't think the French fellows will stand that Mamelon in their front much longer, and one of the Engineers told me the other day, whenever they made up their minds to have that, we were bound to take the Quarries. Stands pretty well to reason, we shall try for both places simultaneously."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Herries, "and it will be a stiffish night's business, too, on both sides. To do them justice, those Russians make us fight hard for every yard of ground we get."

"Yes. Halloo, Crumbs! what the devil are you looking for? What's the matter? What have you lost?"

"Nothing. Don't you recollect riding

down here a month ago, when it was barely as safe as it is now, and finding those fragments of a Russian dragoon about here? Nothing left of him much, poor beggar! but the skull and some of his jacket, which told us what he had been. Evidently one of those who fell on the Balaklava day. I was trying to find the place, it's somewhere hereabouts."

"Yes, only the grass has grown so, since. You will never find it now."

Crumbs still kept walking his pony round and round, and suddenly exclaimed, "Shan't I? look here!"

Herries and Travers walked their ponies to the spot. Yes, there it was, with a few fragments of the laced jacket, a few buttons, and a few scattered bones—preaching as grim a sermon as ever Yorick preached to Hamlet. There were men and women, perchance, far away over the great Russian steppes, who had shed many a tear, felt many a pang, when the fatal return of "missing" after the great battle of Balaklava had come to their ears. Some one, perhaps, still clung to the

hope that he was but a prisoner, though

“His scalp was in the wild dog’s maw,
The hair was tangled round his jaw.”

He had fallen there, and perished probably unknown to his comrades.

Glorious war confers honours, and other not much *gilded* laurels to the few ; but it distributes obscurity and oblivion to the many.

“Well, you fellows,” cried Crumbs, whose nature was of a practical turn, and little imbued by sentiment. “What shall I do with it? Not much use to the original owner, and I can’t see it’s any more to the finder. We’d have given him decent burial, if possible ; but one don’t know what to do with a skull. I’ll take it home with me and keep it as a relic of the Valley of the Tchernaya,” and Crumbs dismounted, and placed the skull in his haversack. “It’s time we pushed for camp though, so come along, and let us see if those ponies of yours can keep alongside ‘The Uncle,’” saying which,

Crumbs led the way to "the front" at a smart canter.

"Captain Herries for the advanced covering party," was announced by an orderly corporal, on their arrival in camp. So snatching a hasty dinner, Herries departed for "the ditches," leaving Jack and Crumbs to enjoy a more elaborate meal, and talk over "the good thing" in mokes, till the "gurrie" rang out midnight.

* * * * *

The moon shimmers as bright over the Black Sea this night, as the sun during the day had shone over the dark and sluggish waters of the Tchernaya. Slightly pitching and rolling, for there is a subsiding swell still left from a recent gale on those turbulent waters, a steam transport is making her way through the glittering sea to Constantinople, or to speak more correctly, Scutari.

She carries a melancholy cargo of worn-out, broken-down humanity. A feeder, in short, to the insatiable maw of the great grim Scutari Hospital. A building over

which—till Miss Nightingale's noble efforts, conjoined with the tardily recognised dictum that one doctor was not equal to the work of twenty—might have been inscribed Dante's awful line

“Those who enter here, leave all hope behind.”

It was the fashion in those days to abuse the Medical and Commissariat-Staffs. Having cut these corps down to their minimum in time of peace, we were surprised to find them unequal to the emergency of war. It was suddenly discovered that fifty thousand men, whom you can neither fight at once, or move, were but so much live-lumber, that to feed them required an extensive organization. Able men were reviled because they did not happen to be twenty able men a-piece, and were consequently unable to cope with the work thrust upon them.

We are approaching the ancient Athenians in our customs of late years, and ostracism follows quick upon failure; when things go wrong, retribution must come speedily on some one, or the nation is not

content. If the authorities do not provide a scape-goat, Exeter Hall is apt to select one, with about as much judgment as charity. As Mr. Carlyle says, "safer to humour the mob than repress them with the rope about your neck." A maxim which Colonial governors and soldiers will do well to reflect on.

There had been a sharp skirmish round Eupatoria, and it was the wounded of that struggle that the steamer was conveying to Scutari. The Englishman and the Osmauli lay side by side in their blood-stained bandages. The Russian had been beaten back; but he had left his mark as that crowded ship too clearly testified. They were grim foemen those Russians, and if they did not always succeed, they never yielded without a stern tenacious struggle. The almost forlorn hope of the Tchernaya was a specimen of this, where they were shot down in scores, still awaiting orders to retire from officers already numbered with the dead.

Tramping up and down the deck in the glorious moonlight, anon looking over

the side to watch the showers of phosphoric light, which the vessel threw up in her rapid course, were Cis Langton and the doctor in charge of the invalids. Cis had been up to Kertch in the interests of the Journal which he represented, as likely to furnish more interesting matter than the Camp before Sebastopol could afford in the present state of apparent stagnation.

“You’ve had a busy day of it, doctor,” said Cis.

“Yes—there’s several of them though, poor fellows, who wont trouble anybody much longer.”

“Why, I thought we left all the hopeless cases behind us?”

“So we did, all those actually hopeless then; but many of these are hopeless now. It is hard to predicate of a gun-shot wound what the chances are. Some bear the shock at first so wonderfully, you think they will do well. It is only after three or four days they begin to sink, and that exhaustion, we so much dread, sets in. Others who seem prostrated at first, rally

wonderfully when you once get their nervous system composed."

"Some, of course, have more stamina than others."

"Yes—then some never lose heart, while others seem to give in at once. Pluck pulls a good many through, whose chances, otherwise, are to say the least of them indifferent."

"What a night it is," remarked Langton, after a short silence as he emitted a huge puff of tobacco smoke from under his thick moustache.

"Glorious! though I wish there was a little less motion, on account of those poor patients of mine."

"Yes, some of those poor fellows, I suppose, have little chance of recovery. What do you think of that dark fellow's case?"

"You mean the officer who got so horribly cut about in that affair with the Cossacks the other night?"

"Yes, one of the Turkish Contingent, isn't he?"

"Yes; he's a Major Delpré, and I hear

distinguished himself greatly in that brush. His is as bad a case as I have. I won't bother you with technicalities, but he's cut all to ribbons, and has no less than seven wounds, two of which might kill any man. It's my belief that most men would have sunk already under the injuries he has sustained, but there's such unflinching pluck in that man, that it is just barely possible he might recover. He stood the amputation of his leg wonderfully, taken off just below the knee, bone smashed to atoms. All he said was :

“ ‘ I've been broke and mended, steeple-chasing, a good many times, doctor ; but I fancy the results of a grape shot are not so soon patched up as those of not rising at a stone wall, or jumping rather short at an oxer. If the leg won't splice and I fancy it won't, the sooner it goes the better. Don't waste my strength in attempting to save it.' ”

“ Well, but if he has borne this so well, why shouldn't he pull through.”

“ Because to say nothing of flesh wounds

which are all taking it out of him, more or less, he will have, unless, I am fortunately wrong in my opinion, to lose his left arm besides. They couldn't take it off up there. A man can't stand two such operations almost simultaneously—very little chance indeed of his ever showing stamina to go through the second. At Scutari they will judge whether it's inflicting useless pain, or whether he has a chance. From the man's great nerve, I should think they will try, as I fancy mortification must result if they do not. But of course it is asking a tremendous thing of a man's constitution, more especially so knocked about as he is besides, to stand the shock of two such operations. Did you ever hear of him before?"

"Yes; I have seen him some few times as a gentleman rider in England, but know nothing about him. I was interested in him from the pluck and patience with which he bore his hurts, poor fellow."

"Yes, he is about as plucky and cynical a patient as ever I had."

"How do you mean?" inquired Cis.

“Well, he seldom speaks without a sneer, and those keen dark eyes of his seem to read me like a book. His talk, too, is garnished always with turf metaphors, which I very often don’t understand, and he has a low mocking tongue that’s bad to listen to. I was speaking cheerily to him this morning about himself, when he interrupted me with :

“ ‘ You are trying to rig the market with me, doctor ; you’re a good fellow, have done all you know, and been very kind to me. Dare say you are to most of us ; but I know I’ve got to give away a deal more weight yet.’ Here he motioned to his wounded arm. ‘ It will be a very close thing, and win or lose, doctor, I’m grateful to you. No dead heats, either,’ he muttered, ‘ in this race. Good bye, I’m going to try and sleep.’ ”

“ Well, it’s about time to turn in, so good night ; ” and Cis sought his shake down which was of the roughest, all accommodation being reserved for the sick and wounded.

Delpré’s story had roused a strange in-

terest in Cis, and during the few remaining hours they remained on board together, he paid great attention to the wounded man. Little did he think that his good offices were bestowed on the man who had marred his life. That the mutilated being, to whose parched lips he held the tepid lemonade, had crushed the spirit out of his early ambition, and left him the driftless, purposeless man he was. Dead to all his youthful dreams of fame, his profession abandoned, Cis had for years written only to live. He might have made a name in that career, but a facile writer, he reeled off his articles as occasion required, and troubled himself little about his reputation, as long as his work brought him the required money.

And what did Delpré think? A strange glitter came into his feverish eyes, when he found out the name of the man who had constituted himself his nurse on that Euxine passage. For, though the name of Delpré brought no memories to Langton, Cis's name recalled to his recollection one

of the darkest pages in his somewhat dark career. Yes, there had been a time when he had known that name only too well. He had never, to his knowledge, seen Langton before; but he knew now well who it was that was "doing the Samaritan" to him daily.

Could he bear it? Yes; with a peculiarity sometimes seen in such cases, nothing seemed to soothe Delpré more than attentions from the man he had so deeply injured. Whether he thought forgiveness seemed conveyed in them by their unconscious bestower, I can't say, but so it was. Delpré did not deceive himself with regard to his chances of recovery. He was anything but blind to the serious nature of his injuries, and would probably have sneeringly described his situation as "a hundred to one chance." Nevertheless, he and Langton were great friends when they landed at Scutari, and when Cis bade him "good-bye," to betake himself to Misseri's Hotel at Pera, it was with a speedy promise of coming over to see him in the big Scutari Hospital.

* * * * *

The same moon that shone so bright o'er the still heaving bosom of the restless Euxine, flashed its pale rays over a small terrace at Fulham. At an open window there, sat Breezie Langton, gazing out into the moonlight with her large, serious eyes; her light muslin draperies almost blended with the light curtains. Her face was rather pale, and looked all too grave for that of the laughter-loving girl of little more than a year ago. You must remember the whole bank of her affections was staked on that Crimean struggle. Her lover, and he who stood to her in the light of a father, were both engaged therein. Her adopted father might not be engaged in the actual strife, but did not every mail record fearful gaps in the ranks of the non-combatants? The fatality of shot, shell, and steel accounts for but a small percentage, after all, of those who perish in a great campaign. Disease and exposure are much more deadly. A reporter to a large army, in pursuit of his avocation, undergoes a

great deal more hard work than the world in general give him credit for, and not a few of them have undergone their baptism of fire pretty smartly.

Poor Breezie! she was doomed to sit and wait; to watch and weep; to tremble at every mail, while "Second Editions with Glorious Victory," made her heart stand still. The bells rang out their jubilant tones, and the cannon thundered salutes; but many a fond woman's heart turned sick at those sounds, as she thought how it might have fared with those she loved in that far away land on that day of glory. The feverish waiting till the dark list of killed and wounded was published, was hard to bear.

Breezie, too, had few friends to sympathise with her. Laura Lyttlereck was kindness itself; so was Belle; but of late, Belle had been absorbed in her own troubles, so Breezie led her lonely life as she best might—nothing left her but to pray and hope.

"Absurd!" she murmured to herself,

as she rose from the window. "I am weak and foolish. I grow nervous, living here so much alone. Yet I can't help feeling as if sorrow was coming upon me ere long. As Jack says, I am making but a bad attempt to fit myself for a soldier's wife. His last letter was cheery enough, too."

Here she took it from her bosom, and read it for the fiftieth time.

"Don't be nervous about me, my darling, or your father either. We are both in the rudest of health and highest of spirits, and shall, perhaps, return home such eminent people, you will be almost shy about speaking to us. Why fret yourself about casualties, which will, probably, never occur. I have no intention of getting shot, with a sweet wife waiting for me in England. I'll admit, getting a little wounded would be nice. It would be so charming to let you in for all the trouble of nursing me; and what an exacting patient I should become. If he would but do it dexterously, I could

find it in my heart to pay a Russian to shoot me. There, Breezie, I have no time to write more nonsense. You must learn to be a soldier's wife, dearest. Quite time enough to be frightened, when I write to say I'm hurt, and don't like it. Once more, good-bye, darling, &c., &c."

"Ah!" she said, with a smile, "it would be too good luck. If they would send him home just a little wounded. No, I must still wait and hope, I suppose; but oh! this weary waiting! I've half a mind to go to my aunt's at Hitchin for a few days. One gets the news there almost as soon as in London. It would be a change, and I could get Laura to telegraph if there was anything of importance"

She closed the window, and took a few turns up and down the little drawing-room; paused for a moment opposite her easel, upon which rested a half-finished water-colour.

"And that should have been finished,"

she murmured. "Don't I know we shall be poor when we marry? and didn't I vow to make use of the little talent I have in this way, to help a little. I have been lucky, too, with the few I have sold. Jack, my dearest, if you were but safe back again, how I could paint!"

She stopped; for her heart smote her that she had expressed no anxiety about her father all this time.

"Ungrateful that I am! Yes, I must have him back safe, too, before I'm happy. Well, I'll go to bed;" and Breezie turned out the lamp.

Our "Three Years" are drawing to an end. As in most three years in men's lives, changes have come fast. Who can tell what combinations this kaleidoscope, we call life, may present at the end of any three years? Little thought many a gay looker-on at the Epsom triumph of "West Australian," that his first knowledge of what had won the Derby in Fifty-five would be the curt announcement at the

bottom of General Orders, bearing date,
Camp before Sebastopol, "The Derby was
won by 'Wild Dayrell.'" "

CHAPTER VII.

SCUTARI HOSPITAL.

THE wind sighs softly through the vast grave of cypresses that constitute the great Scutari Cemetery, as if whispering lovingly to the countless Osmanli who lie below. A wonderful place to muse and loiter in is that vast graveyard, with its thousands of broken crumbling tombs and head-stones. The queer Turkish characters, the roughly carved turbans, the dark solemn looking cypresses, and above all, the vast extent of the place strike upon the imagination, and make one feel the great city on the other side has produced its dead facsimile upon this. The huge troops of gaunt savage-looking dogs prowl about and lope off

amongst the grave-stones like so many evil spirits, while here and there you come upon one gaunter, greyer and bigger than his fellows, as if doubly accursed; vicious brutes they are, too, when night-fall gives them courage, for they resemble the refuse humanity on the other side, and grow bold with darkness. In the broad daylight, they view the stone in the hand of the Anglo-Saxon, with as much awe as the Philistines felt for the sling of David, while one crack of a revolver suffices to send them yelping away to remote haunts. For more than a mile, if memory serves me right, much nearer two, you may wander through cypresses and broken grave-stones. Fit subject for an elegy, though it has not yet been sung.

It is a gala day, and the Turkish ladies have congregated thick as their London sisters for a botanical fête. I am afraid though, the dames of the English metropolis would hardly appreciate a gathering conducted on similar principles. Cavaliers there are none; on a grassy common

at the head of the Cemetery, and running between that and the great hospital, (a barrack till the exigencies of the present struggle transformed it), are assembled several hundred women, apparently for purposes of conversation, coffee drinking and sweetmeat eating. A perfect Babel of conversation seems to be going on to uninitiated ears. I would I could say it was as musical as women's voices should be; but truth compels me to admit that they are rather shrill in their notes, and that high notes predominate. It is a pretty sight, however, the mantles are all of the brightest colours. Orange, blue, and purple are, perhaps, most popular, though there is not a colour in the rainbow unrepresented. Through the thin muslin yashmack you see the dark eyes flash and sparkle, no more dismayed at the admiration of the wandering Frank than women about the world generally. Eyes are the strong point of all Orientals, their complexions are generally pasty, perhaps they consume more sweetmeats than are good for them. Whether they have figures

or not, their dress precludes any possibility of ascertaining; and what woman could possibly walk who had spent her life in slippers down at heel—to be sure they never do walk, and perhaps hardly look upon themselves as created for such a purpose.

Looking lazily on at all this, lounged Cis Langton. He had seen it all before, so that it was no novelty to him; but it made up a pretty enough picture that summer evening. The picturesque costumes, with their brilliant colouring moving over the grassy carpet, with the dark cypress grove for a background, was the very thing for an idle man's eye to revel in as he smoked his cigar.

“And not a soul amongst the whole of them according to Mahometan doctrine, or a mind according to our more enlightened creed,” mused Cis. “Well, they seem very happy without either, though they doubtless enjoy their jealousies and heart-burnings like other people. I am not quite clear if there is not a good deal of happiness in total ignorance, as long as you keep

it of a primitive and Arcadian type, when it takes the form of drunkenness and brutality, it is simply not ignorance, but the first sign of civilization on the unenlightened mind. Yes, I have very little doubt that civilization and the unestimable blessing of an introduction to strong waters, which in modern days always accompanies it, will quite preclude Macaulay's New Zealander taking the seat prophetically assigned to him. The North American Indians have enjoyed the blessing of intercourse with us for some years, and cannot be said to have thriven thereon. Bosh! what's the use of speculation on future ages. I wonder, by the way, what they'll say to all this business in nineteen hundred, when they are still paying taxes for it. About that time, they will have perhaps settled why we went to war at all. However, that's not my business. All I have to do is, to let the public know how we carry it on now we've begun. I must go now and see this poor fellow Delpré, then cross the water and wind up my letter for the mail."

Cis had seen Delpré twice since their passage down. As the doctor on board the transport had predicted, the man's pluck and vitality were such that the medical men had resolved to run the chance of the second operation. He could not possibly live without it, and they thought it was just possible to save him by it.

"Just what I fancied," he replied, when they told him. "I thought it must go. I don't much think I can stand it. I have had a good deal taken out of me already; but I never played a funking game in this life that I didn't repent it. I suppose there's no chance without it, is there?"

"Rely upon it we should not suggest such a thing, if it could be averted. If you are to live you must lose that arm, and we can simply trust to your nerve and your excellent constitution to pull you through. It may shorten your life a few days, it may save it. Without it, your hours are numbered."

"Thanks, Doctor, I like a straightfor-

ward statement. Keep me alive if you can, do what you think best. But, recollect, I have a friend over at Pera I must see before I die. Let me know if I am going the wrong way in time for that. I will throw a day or two's life away willingly, for a last talk with him."

Cis entered the Hospital and walked slowly through the long aisles, bordered on each side by what seemed endless beds only too well filled. Sometimes a bandaged head would raise itself from the pillow, and stare after him with a wandering feverish glance, then a pair of lack lustre eyes met his gaze with stony indifference. Here, a quiet, calm, resigned face full of hope and patience—there, one whose twitching lips and restless motion told but too plainly of pain that was hard to bear. A walk through the wards of a hospital is a melancholy sight at any time.

The long passages at Scutari afforded no exception. At the time of which I am now writing, the miserable

confusion of early days had disappeared, and if the beds were still crowded, yet quiet, order, and cleanliness reigned throughout. Beyond the extra ghastliness caused by the numerous cases of mutilation, inseparable from the hospital of an army in the field, it looked, I fancy, like most other hospitals.

At a small door opening off one of the long passages, Cis tapped gently. It was opened by a medical officer, who, upon seeing Langton, closed it behind him.

“Good morning,” said Cis. “Is he so bad then, that you do not wish me to see him?”

“Not quite that; but I want to speak to you before you do see him. I am afraid, poor fellow, there is very little chance of his pulling through; there has been a return of fever since the second operation, and in his exhausted state, that is almost certain to prove fatal. An interview with you will do him no good; but, on the other hand, his feverish anxiety to see you for some purpose or other is agitating him to that extent, that I think it

will be the less of two evils. Will you allow me to ask you a question or two?"

"Certainly," said Cis, with a blank stare of astonishment.

"You knew Delpré, I presume, well in former days?"

"No—nothing of the kind. I never exchanged a word with him before a week ago on board the transport. I recognised him then as a pretty well-known 'gentleman rider' in England. I have taken some interest in turf matters in my day."

It was now the Doctor's turn to be astonished.

"Well, to tell you the truth, Delpré was a little delirious last night, 'off his head,' as they say. I was with him part of the time, and in his incoherent ravings, he mixed up your name with some wrong he had done you in early days. I cannot tell you what. But will you bear in mind that I want your visit to be as short and as little exciting as you can make it? I let you see him, as I have told

you, judging it the less of two evils."

"I'll bear what you say in mind, though for the life of me, I cannot fancy there being anything to excite him in seeing me, unless, indeed, under the influence of delirium, he mistakes me for some one else?"

"I don't know. I should doubt it. He mentioned your name distinctly several times."

The Doctor might also have added a female name as constantly recurring in Delpré's wanderings; but he thought it unnecessary.

"Shall I go in then?"

"Yes; you will find an attendant with him who will wait outside here. I shall not be far off, and he will know where to find me if wanted."

Cis entered quietly. Delpré was tossing restlessly on his pillow. His dark hair, beard, and moustache only made the pale face more ghastly, while the fierce fever-lit delirious-looking eyes glittered with a light that, to the practised glance, betokened speedy dissolution.

“What nonsense they talk!” he muttered. “Not excite yourself; as if that was in man’s hands! Why not tell the sea to be still, as tell me to control this restless mind? I’ve told them what alone can quiet me—laudanum! they say they’re afraid to try it—quiet me for ever, perhaps. If I’d but seen Langton, it’s little I’d care if it did. Better to die than live the wretch I am now. Fool that I was to let them touch the arm! I knew it was all over before, useless pain, and I’d have been stronger now. Has that doctor deceived me? he swore he would send for Langton!”

“And Langton is here!” said Cis, in a low voice.

“Then he’s kept his word; here, help me round this side, so that I can talk to you.”

Cis and the hospital orderly gently moved the wounded man into the required position.

“Wait outside,” said Cis, in answer to the requisition of Delpré’s eager eyes.

“Yes, Langton,” said Delpré, “I

wanted to see you much. There was a parson wished to talk to me this morning; but I told him I wanted all my strength, my book I fear is a bad one, but it's too late to hedge—”

“Hush! hush!” said Cis.

“No cant, old fellow, I know I'm going fast; but don't believe lives like mine are made white by crying over them during their last eight-and-forty hours. Stop,” he said, as he saw Cis about to speak, “give me some of that drink there, it's a stimulant, and I want it.”

Cis lifted the tumbler to his lips.

“Thanks, now don't interrupt me more than you can help. My talking's nearly over in this world; you've been a friend to me the last few days, and it's years,” he said bitterly, “since Ralph Delpré has known what a friend was.”

“Very little, I'm sorry to say, that I have been able to do for you; but I've promised the doctors to keep you quiet now, and either will or leave you.”

“Don't talk nonsense, Langton. I tell you doctors have no more to say to me,

I'm past their control and they know it ; all they can do, will not prolong my life twenty-four hours, you can do more for me than any doctors—you can't save me, but you can make death easier to me than anyone in this world."

Cis looked mere blank astonishment. "Was Delpré still wandering, what could he mean ?"

"No, my senses have not left me," he continued, interpreting Langton's look, "can you carry your memory back to the summer of thirty-four and Lucy Rawson ?"

Cis started as if he had been shot. Could he remember the grief of his whole life, the blighting of his whole career. Had it not been burnt too deeply on his memory ever to be forgotten. The agony of all that time flashed back upon him in an instant. The wretched misery of the succeeding months, the discovery of his betrothed, and the vacant wandering prattle with which she had sighed out her last breath, unconscious, in his arms. He buried his face in his hands, and when he lifted

his head and turned once more to Delpré, there was a set look upon his countenance that would have augured ill to any man who could have been held responsible for that question.

“I presume,” he said, hoarsely, “that no useless fancy of torturing me could have made you ask that. If not, why in God’s name do you do so, and what can you know about it?”

“Much, if I have strength left to tell it. No idle curiosity prompts me, Langton; I was Lucy Rawson’s husband.”

Cis half reeled back from the bed-side. The time had been when he had sworn that when they two met—if ever they did meet, he would demand a heavy reckoning from the man who had so ruthlessly blighted Lucy’s life and his own. Now, how was it? the dying man before him was already called to account for his deeds by a higher power.

“Yes, Langton, and it’s to tell you the whole of that miserable story before I die, which has made me so anxious to see you. I wronged her deeply—with the exception

that I did marry her, as deeply as man can wrong woman."

"Stop! it's no time to talk bitterly to a man whose hours may be already numbered."

"Are!" murmured Delpré.

"But," continued Cis, not heeding the interruption. "You killed her—God forgive me, I'll try not to think of how I have ever meant to stand face to face with him who bereft her of reason, and left life a blank to me—what I had vowed should come to pass, if ever in this world I met with poor Lucy's destroyer. Whether it pleases heaven to spare you or not, no human hand could ever be lifted against you now."

"You'd have killed me, if you could?" inquired Delpré, with a fierce gleam of his dark eyes.

"Don't ask me! though why shouldn't you know; there was a time in the first delirium of that grief, when I'd have shot you like a dog, and little recked what came of it. I don't think for years afterwards I would have even given you a chance for your life."

Delpré's eyes flashed again; there was something in Cis's concentrated hate and thirst for vengeance, that suited well with his own cynical, reckless, and vindictive temperament.

“And you'd have been right,” he said in a low voice; “but hear my story. Right, perhaps in avenging her wrongs; your own you would have been mistaken about. Listen! That summer of thirty-four I came down to South Wales, principally to get out of the way of my creditors. Two years in the Guards, during which I had graduated in turf and every other description of gambling, had about finished me. Like most beginners, I had paid pretty dearly for my initiation. My debts were numberless; but not being of age, I could not of course be touched legally on that score, still creditors can make town unpleasant if they can't actually touch you, whilst unsettled play accounts and unmet engagements at Tattersall's had left the London world no place for me to show my face in. My friends had come to the

rescue; I was to be exchanged to an Indian Regiment and everything settled; but the family solicitors thought it would conduce very much to an easier arrangement with the Jews, if I could be got out of the country before I came of age. It became a fine point whether the exchange could be completed in time, as I wanted but little of my majority, and these matters are sometimes a good while in hand. Yes, a couple of months there would have altered this life a good deal to two or three people," Delpré paused, and sank back on his pillow. Cis regarded him with the same dogged silence he had maintained since the beginning; all the doctor's directions had vanished from his mind. He was thinking only of the past, and burning with impatience to hear Delpré's story.

"Well," he continued, after a minute or two's silence, "you can fancy what that monotonous existence was to me, fresh from the whirl of London life, and accustomed to the excitement of constant gambling. I felt fit to cut my throat, and

inspired with the devil's own capabilities for mischief. Chance threw me a little into society, and at a small pic-nic I first met Lucy Rawson. No need to tell you what a pretty girl she was. Scarcely less to tell you, that as the prettiest girl there I paid her particular attention."

Cis shivered, he had but half buried his dead love.

"Langton, I won't say forgive me; but believe me I wish to wound you as little as I can. God forgive me! I wish only to tell you a true story."

"Go on," muttered Cis, "I can bear it all now, and would know the truth."

"She was shy at first, but I may say it now without vanity, I was voted a good-looking guardsman in those days, and I could soon see it flattered her vanity to have me numbered as an admirer in her train. I tell you fairly I was not the only one. With my London talk, and the assurance of two seasons, I was soon voted a great card in that little provincial society. How swagger and impertinence assert their

rights over better men, you know as well as I. Young men were scarce in those parts, and with those there were I could hold my own in all athletic sports, and give a good two stone besides, when it came to the ball room. After riding the winner of the hurdle race in the local races, and proving myself a decent stroke at the second four in the regatta, I had established myself as no muff, and something beyond 'a carpet knight.'

“ Still, I believe that nothing gave me so much credit as a retort I made to a young lady, who maliciously volunteered to me the information that Miss Rawson was engaged, to wit: ‘Of course she is; you could scarcely suppose I would reckon myself amongst the admirers of any woman, whose charms were not at least recognised that much.’

“ That it was the first I had heard of it, I need scarcely more observe, than the rapidity with which my remark was repeated. That sort of thing flies like wild fire, and if the men d—n you for your cheek, the women rather admire you for

your impertinence. I must apologize for my egotistical moralizing," he continued, with a faint smile, "but if I haven't a right to moralize now, one never has."

Cis merely nodded.

"From that out, I made downright love to Lucy. I knew nothing of whom she was engaged to, and cared less. My slight experience of women, gained in by no means a good school, had taught me to place little reliance on their constancy, and a good deal on my own audacity. I began it simply as an amusement; I wound up by falling head-over-ears in love with her. Pardon me, Langton; but Lucy was a flirt by nature. She was weak in character as ever woman was; a lover at hand to her unstable nature would always eclipse one absent. She was at this time staying, as you are doubtless aware, with her aunt, a foolish worldly woman, who, in her foolishness, thought me a catch for her niece. She threw no obstacles in my way, and so things drifted rapidly on.

"From my boyhood, I had never been accustomed to place the slightest restraint

on my passions. I had always at least 'played' for all I coveted; I was not going to stop now. I was fairly in love with Lucy Rawson, and did all I knew to win her. That she had little money; that my own position was desperate, I never thought an instant. What was to become of us if we did marry, I never reflected. And to do Lucy justice, if such a thought as winning her without marriage did cross my brain, it died away almost before it was formed." Again he paused, Langton's face was set hard and stern. No one could read the expression better than Delpré. He honoured it. It suited his own temper. He felt that had he been other than he was, he would have been struck down ere he had told his story thus far, and that it would have been no bloodless quarrel between the two.

"Give me a glass of that champagne," at last said Delpré, breaking silence. "I am allowed to drink as much as I like now of that. Pretty sure sign of what the doctors think of my chance."

Cis poured out, and handed him the wine.

“Go on,” he said, between his teeth, “I must hear the whole of it now. They said something about not exciting you; but if you have strength to tell it I must know all. I’d have lain as you do now willingly enough in those days, when life seemed all a dreary waste, and I had nothing left to hope for.”

“Don’t think of me. A few hours of life more or less makes little difference. I owe you some atonement, and if I can make that and shorten my own sufferings at the same time, why who can say it is not good hedging?” and Delpré laughed bitterly. “Well,” he continued, “there is not much more to tell, fortunate, perhaps, or I would hardly last to relate it. Reckless of everything, I pressed Lucy to run away with me. She hesitated for some days; but at last not daring to cut the Gordian knot of her engagement with you in any other way, she consented. An appeal to her father, I pointed out under the circumstances, could only lead to her recal home. We fled, and a few days afterwards were married at a small

parish church some fifty miles off. I had taken a cottage in the place, and there we lived for a little more than a month. In the first intoxication of my success, I had forgot all about my desperate situation,

“‘The world forgetting, by the world forgot,’

those few sunshiny weeks slipped away rapidly. Our eyes were barely beginning to open. We had but just begun the contemplation of what was to become of us; I was but just beginning to wake to the consciousness that all my previous escapades had been light compared to this—while Lucy, to whom I had disclosed something of my position, though but partially comprehending it, had at last discovered that her future life was not destined to be a bed of roses, and that her husband's temper was not quite so even as she supposed.

“At this juncture, to my astonishment, I was honoured by a visitor. In short, the family lawyer who was striving to make some compromise with regard to my

affairs arrived at the cottage. His business was urgent. I was to be in the next gazette exchanged to the —th in India. My inquiry as to how the devil he found me out? he met with—

“ ‘ Not so very difficult as you suppose. Moreover, I am not the only man who has discovered your retreat. In this charming seclusion, it may have escaped you that you came of age some fortnight ago ; but ‘ the tribes’ have made no such oversight. Issachar Ben Israel has already loosed his war dogs. To drop metaphor, I left the emissaries of Simeon & Co. last night at Carmarthen, a little at fault as to your actual whereabouts. A doubt, which, depend upon it, a very few hours will unravel. Your passage is taken in the Ararat, she sails in forty-eight hours, and you must sail in her. Even that is quite as long as you will be able to evade Simeon’s ban dogs. Once in his hands, you destroy all hopes of compromise. You must leave this with me to-morrow, at daybreak. You can, I hope, give me some sort of bed and something to eat.’ ”

“I readily promised the latter, but vainly demurred to leaving.

“The lawyer was inexorable, he dwelt upon my liabilities, quoted the sternest directions from my family, and finally threatened to abandon me to my fate if I refused to be guided by him. He dined with us, was extremely polite to Lucy, as any man of the world would have been, though I could see plainly he had not the remotest idea that she was my wife. I caught a half smile as he glanced at her wedding-ring. He had probably seen a good many fictitious rings of that description in his time, and I had not the moral courage to undeceive him. We sat far into the night; I, vainly protesting the impossibility of my departure; he, cool and inexorable as fate. The one plea of leaving my wife so suddenly I never had courage to advance.

“I yielded. By daybreak next morning I was on my way, leaving a few lines for Lucy on her dressing-table, to the effect that I was called away suddenly for two

or three days on business. I also wrote to Mr. Rawson avowing my marriage, my desperate situation, my departure for India, and entreating him to come to his daughter and shelter her, till I could send for her to join me out there. Giving him also my future address, and requesting he would write to me."

"Coward!" hissed Cis. "You left that unhappy girl to her fate! It is well we did not meet sooner!"

Delpré's face flushed, as he rejoined bitterly.

"A few short weeks ago, and no man would have said that to me. You have it all your own way now."

Cis coloured. "You are right," he said, "forgive me. But," he continued, mournfully; "you don't know—such as you can't know—how I loved and how I suffered. Let me hear the rest."

"There's little more to tell. Give me something more to drink. No; not champagne—that ammonia stuff is better. Thanks. I never received a line from either Rawson or Lucy. Three years

clapsed before I was able to return from India—though I had written two or three times, no answer ever reached me. On my return to England, I went down to South Wales only to discover that Rawson had long left the country, and that my wife had disappeared with him. Lucy's aunt could tell me nothing more, than the great scandal which had been raised by Rawson *versus* Rawson. Her brother had left the country, and she had never heard from him since. I set every inquiry on foot, and after some months, attracted, I suppose, by some of my many advertisements in the papers, I received a letter without date or signature, but in Rawson's handwriting, and bearing a Prussian post mark, which informed me that my wife had died in such an asylum, was buried close by, and that I might verify these particulars for myself. The letter was short and bitter in the extreme. I could hardly expect otherwise, and yet, Langton," and Delpré's voice softened; "was it all my fault?"

"Yes!" said Cis, sternly. His old

romantic ideal of Lucy still remained enshrined in his heart. Loyally he clung to his old love. Still he refused to believe she was the light weak coquette she had been in reality. "Yes!" he reiterated, fiercely, "what right had you to snatch a weak timid girl from her home, her friends, her betrothed; to throw her on one side as soon as your desperate circumstances compelled you? You might have known the result to one so fair, so fragile as she," and Cis covered his face with his hand, and saw once more before him the fair girlish face, with its blue eyes and soft sunny tresses, that had blighted his life and caused him so much misery.

"I have done," said Delpré, "beyond that I went down, stood by her grave, and found that you had been with her when she died. I have no more to tell," and he sank back exhausted. "I have committed, I suppose, as much ill as most men in my time; but, somehow, poor Lucy's fate comes home to me more than anything else. Langton," he continued,

faintly; "you've been kind to me lately. I should like to hear you say you forgive me?"

"Forgive you!" said Cis. "I don't pretend to be a very good christian, and I swore when poor Lucy died in my arms, that forgiveness should be the last thing I would think of, if ever I met her destroyer. My dream of vengeance is over. It's not in my nature to say it heartily; but as far as I can say it, I do forgive you."

A smile flickered on Delpré's lips, and the dark eyes lit up for a moment. Even then he recognised a nature somewhat akin to his own, and perhaps liked Langton all the better for his half-sullen forgiveness.

"Thanks," he said, extending his one wan, feeble hand; "and good-bye, I can't talk any more now. Come and see me to-morrow—it will be the last time."

"One more question."

"Ask it to-morrow," and Delpré turned his face away.

Cis moved silently to the door. The Doctor met him on the threshold.

“Mr. Langton, have you kept your promise?” he inquired; but Cis passed him like a man in a dream.

When next he saw Delpré, he was beyond the reach of questioning, his face set, pale, calm, and immoveable in death. Langton and the Doctor alone followed him to his last resting place in the Scutari graveyard.

Whether he knew that he had a daughter, could now be no longer ascertained; but it seemed unlikely that he had ever been aware of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRUMBS COMES OF AGE.

THE siege progresses. The capitals of Europe anxiously await telegrams from the Crimea. Funds and *rentes* fluctuate with every report. The besiegers begin once more to speculate on seeing the inside of the grim fortress they have gazed on so many months. Days of plenty and sunshine have succeeded to those terrible days of famine and frost. There is a good deal in what Hugo calls "a satisfied intestine." The units of the great army wind their way to the trenches and destiny, with a far livelier and more inspirited step than that of some few weeks ago. If we are predestined to be shot, let us at all events not be shot

fasting. “*Dum vivimus vivamus,*” and there was but little of that in the drear winter months.

It is but little past seven in the morning, and the early June sun already glares fiercely down on the white tents that stretch far away across the plateau, wearying the eye as some one humorously observed at the time, with their ‘monotonous architecture.’ The piled arms glitter in the sunlight, and the crossed colours droop drowsily in front of the quarter guard. Soldiers, in their shirt-sleeves, are busy preparing breakfast, cleaning their accoutrements, or indulging in a morning-pipe, with a running accompaniment of chaff on their more active comrades’ proceedings.

Midst the officers’ tents as yet, there is hardly as much sign of life, though from one of which the flap is thrown open, comes a mixture of prose and poetry that might arrest one’s attention.

“Jim, Jim;” exclaims a voice, “where the devil are my boots—and where the devil are you? and,

“’Tis all amongst the ditches,
’Tis there we take our ease ;
Yes, all amongst the ditches
Midst heat, and dust, and fleas.”

“Here you,” to a passing soldier.
“Just sing out to number three company
for Jim Delany. Fellow never is here
when I want him.”

“One day is like another,
Only not so fine,
And ration rum is very
Poor substitute for wine,
Salt pork they’ll never make me
Think nice as Easter lamb ;
Yet they say we should be grateful,
That still here, ‘still we am,’
Yes, all amongst the ditches.”

“Shut up you noisy young villain,”
roared a voice from an adjoining tent. “If
you can’t sleep yourself, let other people
remain unconscious, will you ?”

The warbler stepped from his tent in
slippers and shirt-sleeves, and with mock
gravity, addressing the tent from which
the voice had proceeded ; replied—

“Captain Travers, I pardon the rude-
ness of your remark, in consideration of

the debasing influences to which this unfortunate and protracted struggle has subjected you. But the man who would crush the spirit of ingenuous youth, when saluting from the fulness of his heart the first blush of the day of his nativity with a burst of melody, is unworthy of the name of a christian, and can only be aroused to a sense of his demoralization by the immediate application of a wet sponge." At the termination of which tremendous harangue, Crumbs, for he it was, snatched open the flap of the adjoining tent, and hurled a dripping sponge into the interior.

Crumbs had barely time to put some twenty yards between himself and the tent door, ere Jack Travers bounded out in his shirt, and a heavy shooting boot whizzed through the air in pursuit. The scrimmage brought out various inhabitants of the neighbouring canvas, in every description of *deshabile*. There being no ladies in the vicinity, trousers were not looked upon as a necessity, and after a considerable amount of chaff, a truce was pro-

claimed, and the company generally proceeded with an *al fresco* toilet.

“Forgot it was your birthday, Crumbs. Many happy returns of the day,” said Jack. “By the way, you give a lot of us a feed at Kamiesch, don’t you?”

“Yes. It was only my anxiety regarding your appetite, led me to terminate your peaceful slumbers so abruptly. Langton and Coningsby Clarke are to meet us there at the big restaurant at four, we’ll dine about five, and shall have a jolly ride home in the evening.”

“Good, my son. A very pretty programme for a hot day, and this looks like a piper. What time do we start?”

“Muster here soon after two. It’ll be a hottish ride, we can’t help that. It won’t signify, only make fellows more thirsty—cooler than trenches any how.”

“Yes, and a deal pleasanter. All right. By Jove, there goes the parade bugle,” and Jack hurried away.

Half-past two saw some six or eight of Crumbs’ particular chums, mounted on

their Turkish ponies, and then the party set out on their ride.

“Niceish thing of yours, that chestnut, Crumbs,” said Jack, mischievously, as they jogged along. “Pity she can’t jump.”

Any imputation on his horse flesh in public, was a certain “rise” out of Rolls. In confidence, he might admit their weak points; but in public never. He was riding the same chestnut that had given him such a ‘cropper’ in the dog-hunt. But though he had owned to her being an indifferent performer across country, in the easy *abandon* of that afternoon on the Tchernaya, he could not submit to such a public attack on any animal he owned.

“Not jump,” he said, “oh, she was a little awkward at first, raw, you know, but she jumps like a bird now.”

“Don’t much believe in these sudden conversions, unless I see them proved,” retorted Jack. “Let’s see you put her over something.”

“So you shall directly we come to anything. There’s nothing to try her at here.”

They were riding through the Naval Brigade Camp during the above colloquy.

“Nonsense,” said Jack, “there’s a very pretty jump, if she is as handy as you say she is,” and he pointed to a *tente abris*, standing a few yards to their right. “That’s the sort of thing to try a really clever horse.”

“Oh, come now, you don’t mean to call that a fair jump?”

“Well, perhaps, not for a pony like yours. Pretty bit of practice for anything that knows its business.”

“I don’t call it a fair test, mind you; but if you think my pony can’t hop over that, you’re confoundedly mistaken,” and Crumbs who was rather piqued at the depreciation of his nag, turned her a few yards back, and then brought her down to the *tente abris* at a smart canter.

A touch of the spur, and a slight lift of the rein, and the chestnut rose gallantly, crashed her hind legs through the ridge pole, and landed safely on the other side, leaving a perfect chaos behind her. The tent levelled to the ground, having

resolved itself into a confused heap of canvas and cordage. Roars of laughter from some lounging sailors greeted this feat, while from beneath the ruins suddenly poured forth, in deepest base, a torrent of the most nervous and forcible Anglo-Saxon that human ear ever encountered. The fallen canvas writhed as if in convulsions for a few moments, and then emitted a bronzed black-bearded physiognomy, quickly followed by a stalwart body, the proprietor of which could be hardly accused of not speaking his mind plainly.

“Halloa, my man,” cried the unabashed Crumbs, “sorry I disturbed your slumbers; didn’t know there was anybody inside when I jumped it. Here’s half-a-crown to drink my health, and your own, too.”

The sailor stared, ceased his anathemas, scratched his head, pocketed the half-crown, and cast a bewildered look at his wretched habitation.

“D—mme, if I understand it all,” he muttered. “What the —— et cetera’s up?”

“Well, your tent is not,” laughed Travers.

“Can’t you see, you dumb-foozled old idiot, the gen’leman’s practising for the races. What business had you to be asleep under that old awning, when quality wants to try their horses jumping over it,” said one of his grinning mates.

“What the blazes—you don’t mean to say he jumped his horse over it?”

“In course I do, and if it hadn’t been for your d—d snoring, which’d a frightened an alligator, let alone a horse, the gen’leman would a cleared it well enough.”

“D’ye mean he jumped it! Hold on, your honour, wait till I rig the cussed thing up, and let’s see you do it again.”

“Aye, aye, that’s your sort,” cried two or three of the lounging lookers-on. “It won’t take us a minute, yer honour. Have another shy at it.”

In almost less time the tent was again pitched, and thus adjured, Crumbs once more took the chestnut over, crashing through the ridge-pole as before. The

sailors were delighted, and none more so than the strong-languaged proprietor; and it was not till he had performed the feat twice, no great difficulty with a steady horse, that Crumbs was allowed to proceed. A hearty cheer heralding his departure.

What a ride to Kamiesch that was! the stone walls that were "larked" over with more or less grief. The sprint races that were run for crown sweepstakes, a quarter of a mile on the road. Nobody ever dreamt of thinking of the legs of a Crimean pony. The forming in line to "do" a cavalry charge, in which some were run away with, some out-paced, and some floored by unexpected obstacles. Then an unwary dog was sighted, and hunted as far as he could by any possibility be driven towards Kamiesch; then somebody sang a song, and everybody sang the chorus he liked best to it, without any regard for the original singer, and then they burst out into indefinite cheering, like so many school-boys broke loose for the day.

At last, hot, tired, and dusty, with rather beaten ponies, they arrived considerably after time at their destination. Langton and Coningsby Clarke, who had ridden over from Balaklava together, were quietly smoking in front of the restaurant as they rode up.

“How do, Crumbs?” said Coningsby. “How are you, Jack? Why, you fellows look as if you had started late and hadn’t got here in time. What’s been the matter?”

“All Herries,” said Jack, “thinking we could turn that last dog; brute ran like a greyhound, and has made the Bastion de Mats by this, I should think. How are you, Langton? Heard you were back from Scutari, but haven’t had a day to look you up as yet.”

“I suppose not; you must be getting pretty busy at the front, if one may judge from what one hears? I don’t think the French mean to be out of the Mamelon much longer, and I fancy our people will think it right to have the Quarries at the same time. I only got back last Friday.”

“What from your reiving and raiding at Kertch?”

“Well, I stopped ten days or so at Constantinople, and got your letter there, for which accept my acknowledgments.”

“And how are you, Coningsby? How do the horse soldiers get on?”

“Suppose I ought to say swimmingly. We’ve plenty to eat, plenty to drink, and nothing to do. Can’t see that we ever shall have anything to do again, till you people have done with Sebastopol. They might as well let us go home for Goodwood.”

“Here, *garçon, garçon!*” vociferated Crumbs. “Every thing to drink in the house! *Apportez moi quelque chose à boire*; when I say *quelque chose*, I mean everything. Here, tell him, some of you fellows, who can patter the lingo—fool don’t seem to understand me! Everything cold and drinkable, bar water, the place contains.”

Some Samaritan, whose throat was as

parched, but whose French was more fluent, instantly complied with Crumbs' request.

"About dinner time," said Crumbs, as he finished a huge jorum of something frigid. "Just wait till we get the ponies all squared up, and then we'll to business," with which he disappeared into the house.

Queer houses were those restaurants, long, low, wooden sheds, divided into a number of compartments, with furniture of the roughest. Rude deal tables and chairs; napery not of the cleanest or finest; plates and dishes of all sorts of patterns; glasses of every variety; cruet-stands of the usual common tavern kind; forks and spoons of steel and Britannia metal. But for all that, they turned out a decent dinner, or, at all events, what seemed one to men accustomed to camp rations, and gifted with vigorous appetites. Kamiesch itself, was Balaklava over again, with, perhaps, a little less mud, and a little more regularity in its laying out. In the present fine weather, the

mud had transformed itself into dust, and on that score, there was little to choose between the two places.

“Come along, food’s ready,” cried Crumbs, from the interior. “Take the bottom, please, Herries, and do preserve a little order, if you can. Don’t let Travers sing till we’ve finished our soup, or ‘Sledge’ lick the waiter till we have done with him.”

A laughing jesture from the accused followed, as they took their places.

“Too hot to eat,” quoth Sledge Barton (we have not met him since the fight at Epsom;) “but the weather seems ordered expressly for drinking.”

“That’s right, waiter *garçon*, or whatever you are. Run along with the Champagne. Take that water-jug away from Captain Travers’ elbow, somebody, please. Some one put some water near him early this morning, and it drove him nearly insane—began throwing his boots about, and all sorts of games.”

How is one to describe a scene of this sort? Till photography has extended to

word and gesture, I know not. The song that made you roar; the jest or story that convulsed you; how vapid and flat they seem on paper. Christopher Norths occur once in a century, and I have even known men fail to catch the aroma of "The Noctes." The evening's humour is apt to lose its zest when criticized by daylight. Our pleasant friend of last night shirks his breakfast, swallows oceans of tea, and growls, not wittily, but sulkily, over his toast.

Ah! reader, order something stimulating when you come to scenes like this in a story, and if I might be allowed one more suggestion, it should be, do it twice.

The cloth is drawn; the Babel which attends some half dozen gentlemen talking at once is going on, though it would be libel as yet to suggest "and some of them in strange tongues," too.

"Send the claret along, somebody," cried Crumbs.

"Don't let the jug pace round the board like a cripple,"

as some jolly Ancient or Modern sings, though I don't know who; sensible old cock, whoever he was.

“‘Drink, drink, laugh and be gay,
Life from its gloom let us sever.’

That's your maxim, isn't it, Herries? Suppose you sing us that, just to set us going.”

“All right,” said Herries, smiling; “though the present company don't apparently want much preaching to on that point. Still, for fear of any backwardness on their part, here goes.”

“I saw Delpré down at Scutari,” said Langton in an undertone to Travers, during Herries' song.

“Did you? how is he?”

“Dead, poor fellow. He died in the big hospital at Scutari from his wounds. He was in the thick of that scrimmage down at Eupatoria.”

“God bless me!” said Jack. “He was no great friend of mine; but I'm sorry he's gone; you saw him in the hospital?”

“Yes, and saw him buried. I have a long story to tell you about it, though not now. Ride over and dine the first day you have to spare. When did you hear from Breezie last?”

“Three days ago. Have you heard from her since?”

“No; you’ve later news than I. Don’t forget to come over, as I want to see you about something that concerns you and her.”

“All right; I’ll not forget. Bravo, Herries, here’s your health.”

“Now this is what I call jolly,” said Crumbs, he could barely see the end of the table for tobacco smoke. “We should always combine sentiment with melody, and tone the whole down with the best available liquor. With regard to the latter, if anybody can suggest a better tap, we’ll try it. In the meantime, it becomes my duty to propose a toast. It’s no use talking about love and lovely women out here; there’s nobody to make love to. The Minette of Tom Burke exists only in the brain of the author, the

genuine article is a coarse avaricious canteen-keeper. The worship of Venus then being out of the question, I am afraid, gentlemen, there's nothing left for us but to 'go in' for glory. I presume honour, glory, loot, and promotion are the principal incentives to our residence in these somewhat out of the way parts ; I say out of the way, for you must admit the roads, railways and hotels are in a shocking state. I'll not remark upon the want of cab-stands, as you all know there is not even a Hansom to be had to take one into Sebastopol, the reason probably so many of us have not as yet been there. Much less will I advert upon the apparent want of hospitality on the part of the natives. It is true, they are always looking us up without any regard to time or season ; but whenever we endeavour to return the compliment, they seem to throw obstacles in the way. Of course it may be, I trust it is merely their unfortunate manner. I'll say no more, gentlemen, but give you, 'A speedy visit to our friends inside. May we hold our own,

and not be overcome by the warmth of our reception.'”

A shout of laughter, and numberless hurrahs greeted Crumbs' speech; and then a nearly asphixiated youth of the artillery was called on for a song. After considerable pressure and many misgivings, he burst forth a good octave too high, with :

“ Far, far, from those we love,
With the wintry sky above,
How sadly we muse o'er pleasures gone ;
How we curse the weary hours
As drenched by wintry showers,
We still the trenches hold, while the siege drags on.
Disease increased apace,
Starvation looked us in the face ;
And Inkerman's fierce struggle then came on,
Yet spite of wet and cold
Shot, shell, or sortie bold,
We still the trenches hold, and the siege drags on.”

But here came an unfortunate check, the singer's memory failed him, and after singing the above all over again, and making two or three abortive attempts at the second verse, he was forced to plead *non mi recordo*.

“A judgment on you, Lester,” called out Travers, “after getting through that confounded winter, it was too bad of you to recal it to our recollection.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Crumbs. “I think it rather jolly to think over, now it’s past and gone. Foraging now-a-days isn’t half the fun it was then. There was some credit in making up a decent dinner in those times; now, if you haven’t one, it’s your own fault. Do you recollect that goose we had in the winter, Herries? I never dared tell you how I got hold of that.”

“No, how was it? I always had dreadful suspicions, and was afraid to ask questions.”

“Ah, I happened to be cruising about our lines rather early one morning, and met my friend waddling along not very far from the colonel’s tent. ‘Deserting, by Jove,’ said I, and immediately knocked him on the head and picked him up. Put him under my coat and cut away to my own tent. Then it struck me I had

heard the colonel had got hold of a goose or two, so I sat down and plucked him right off. Precious fluffy I got too in the operation. There was a rumour that afternoon that somebody had lost a goose. I am not sure, but I think it was the colonel's servant who was making so many inquiries. However, it might have been the sailors who took his; any way, I was rather relieved when that goose was eaten."

"You young marauder," laughed Langton; "'he who stole my purse, stole trash' in those times, but he who robbed me of my goose—by Jove, penal servitude was too good for you!"

"You see, you didn't belong to our mess, Langton," said Crumbs, "or, like Herries, you'd have pitched in and asked no questions."

"You're right, one should always take the goods the Gods provide blindly, never scrutinize your commissariat department till clamorous tongues compel. You've learnt the alphabet of campaigning, Crumbs."

“And the rule of subtraction too,” said Herries.

“Never mind my acquirements, and it’s bad taste to dwell on one’s little acquisitions. When you do light upon loot, pocket it, and don’t talk of it. In the meantime, Langton, give us a song.”

“Of course I will; but in the first instance, I must propose a toast.”

“Hear, hear,” from the table generally, and Langton rose.

“Gentlemen, we have met here to-day to do honour to our host, who, upon this occasion, I am told, attains his majority. You have already heard with a glow that must have thrilled your very heart strings, the patriotic speech he has just made upon this interesting occasion. But what is this to the bright example he sets us? Weighing carefully the onerous duties incurred by arrival at the dignity of manhood, in the eye of the law he has decided to devote himself here to the service of his country, in preference to disturbing the bosoms of his creditors, or causing needless excitement among

the people of Israel by an undue return to his native country. Instead of raising hopes that he knows the impossibility of realizing amongst a concourse of worthy tradespeople, he prefers like some 'paladin of old,' to trust to his bow and his spear, for the obtaining a supply of those precious metals, to which arbitrary custom has assigned a stern but fictitious value.

"Avarice, gentlemen, is one of the vices of the age we live in, and instances have been rife of people, who, lost to every sense of patriotism and national honour, have objected, in pursuit of their own sordid vices, to their clients going 'where glory waits them.'

"Coming of age, meant to most of you, I presume, as it did to myself, the entering upon a property so limited that one's hat could cover it—in short, being simply,

"'Lord of oneself, that heritage of woe,'

together with the responsibilities and none of the rights of citizenship. What a con-

solution to think that this mischance has happened to him, in a land where the old chivalric rule is yet in full force that,

“They may take who have the power,
And they may keep who can.”

“From the accumulative powers already displayed by our talented host, I augur many successful applications of this golden rule. Imbued as he is with the great principle that ‘war should support war,’ I trust we may hail his return to his native country with a head covered with laurels, and a carpet-bag bursting with plunder.

“Gentlemen, I’ll detain you no longer, for though I could dilate for some time on his virtues, some of you look so confoundedly thirsty you might hardly bear with me. Without further oration, I give the health of Harry Rolls, more popularly known by the pseudonym of Crumbs, with three times three.”

Long and loud rang out the cheers in Crumbs’ honour. They generally do

when the glorification of the giver of the feast is in question.

Crumbs returned thanks in a very easy and unembarrassed manner, and then Langton burst forth into one of those camp ballads, so popular at the time, so flat when seen on paper.

“There’s a good time coming, boys,
A good time coming,
Subalterns no more you’ll find,
Worn down by drill’s oppressive grind.
In the good time coming,
They shall roam through hunting fields,
Till limbs and mind grow stronger,
And all shall have perpetual leave,
Just wait a little longer.”

Such was the final stanza; but as our poets have spared us an epic, so in common courtesy I must refrain from a song book. There is one who used to relate a laughable whaling adventure in those days, who could, if he chose, publish “Songs of the Crimea,” and a quaint memento it would be.

Fast and furious grew the fun. Song succeeded song. One final stanza from

a ballad of Coningsby Clarke's and I have done.

“To the West, to the West, on the steps of ‘the Rag,’
How proudly I’d uphold the national flag,
And with stiffest of collars and beniggest of face,
Hope that always right men might be in the right place.
With biggest ‘regalia’ and gin sling then at night,
With what coolness and science those Russians I’d
fight,
While o’er soda next morning I’d think it the best
To send the East to the devil and stick to the West.
To the West, to the West, &c.”

Then arose a cry for horses with much confusion anent saddles and bridles. A glorious moon made everything light as day. As for the homeward ride can you not picture it? If you ever chanced to see half a dozen midshipmen mounted on hacks on their way from Malta to Civita Vecchia it may help you to an approximation. Let us trust they all got back to camp without any definite grief.

CHAPTER IX.

A DOMESTIC CRASH.

FROM the Crimea to May Fair seems a strange change. Yet hearts beat as quick at the rushing telegrams there, as in the rustic village, the ivy-wreathed rectory, the fetid suburbs of the big towns, the lonely farmhouse on the Yorkshire wolds, midst the fens of Lincolnshire, or the gay clustering hop-gardens of Kent. Jim, Tom, Jack, the Honourable Alfred, and my Lord of Foxaby are all engaged in the same great game of life and death, and my lady's *berthe* rises and falls as quick as pretty Sue's boddice at the dread tidings flashed by the ominous wires.

London was a little dull that season. Even in the best society, they a little drop balls, fêtes, and déjeûners, when sons and brothers are constantly claiming that last six feet of soil to which we all come. The most worldly mothers feel compunctions when the next telegram may record the fate of some scapegrace boy, about whom they shall never feel anxious more.

Few people in London that season felt more dissatisfied than Mrs. Inglemere. The fair widow, as she glanced at her mirror, felt that sufficient incense was not being burnt at her shrine by a considerable quantity, or at all events if it was, it was by the wrong people. She was quite aware that that little anonymous *billet doux* might occasion some inconvenience, should it ever be traced to her door. She considered the result quite incommensurate with the risk. It was true, as far as she could ascertain, she had succeeded in detaching Charlie Repton from the train of Belle Bartley, and that without an *esclandre*. She was not so much grieved at the latter. Her nature did not admit

of very strong feelings on any subject, and she bore her rival no great malice. She was also a little frightened at what she had done. But then again it was no use Charlie's giving up making love to Belle, if he was not to recognize her as his divinity instead.

A clever unscrupulous woman, in Mrs. Inglemere's place, would have been very well satisfied with the success of her scheme so far. To have detached Charlie from Mrs. Bartley, and that without creating a great scandal, would have satisfied her well. She would have trusted to time and opportunity for the rest; but the widow was neither clever nor patient. Her theory had been that Charlie would immediately resort for consolation in his bereavement to herself. Women do this sometimes, men rarely. They are more given to take a misanthropic view of life when jilted. A woman is apt to soothe her wounded pride by encouraging another lover.

Again Charlie Repton, though his dream of love was crushed for the present, knew

that he was loved in return—a very different thing from being jilted. Again and again did that last interview recur to his mind. He cursed himself, his fate, the stock-broker; but of Belle, his lips breathed nothing but tenderness. As for the rest, he conducted himself after the manner of his kind under similar circumstances; was voted a bore in his Club smoking-room, and unbearable to dine with. Was morose over the best of claret or choicest of ‘cabanas,’ found continued fault with his servitors, from his valet to casual cabmen, and talked vaguely of going to Jerusalem, the Crimea, South America, or up the Nile.

And how all this time was it faring with Belle? I described things in the City not long ago as looking not merely black, but as being enveloped in a perfect fog. The fog has lifted, as fogs sometimes do, only to be succeeded by a regular thunder-storm. Banks are crashing, and Stock Exchange lightning flashing in a manner that sends Mr. Bartley home in a state by no means pleasant to those who have the

ill luck to encounter him. He has never again alluded to the anonymous letter to Belle. Neither has he confided his difficulties to her in any way. Sullen and savage, he confines himself to spiteful sneers at any slight extravagance she may commit, is sarcastic on her dresses or things of that description, only to give vent to a furious outburst of passion, if the lavish expenditure of his table or household be touched on in any way. Belle meets these storms with haughty indifference as a rule ; but is occasionally stung out of all control, and gives free rein to the vein of sarcasm that lies within her. At such times, her husband generally retires foaming and discomfited from the encounter.

The stock-broker, in his troubles, sought relief in brandy. He found it as has been said of old servants. A very good servant to begin with ; but a very bad master after a time. Ardent spirits on a sullen temperament are apt to produce crime. On such temperaments, it sometimes induces knocking a wife's brains out, and cutting

the throats of a family to wind up with. It produced a mild form of that feeling on Bartley, and even the servants began to complain "there was no standing master's temper!" Most of them kept out of his way pretty well; but the butler openly stated he couldn't stand it much longer, though "the pickings" were considerable.

"No, ma'am," he observed, to the housekeeper, "never having set up to be a Van Amburgh myself, I can't be expected to cope with a wild beast, and that's about the nearest description, Mrs. Feeder, I can give of him this blessed evening!"

And yet there are allowances to be made for this man--this commercial boar at bay. You must remember he has been the architect of his own fortunes. That to be a great City name is to him what titles, crosses, or political power are to other men. That the edifice built up with years of toil is now crumbling beneath him. That he is fighting alone this losing battle inch by inch, with all the stubborn

tenacity of his character. That he has no stock invested abroad in other names, no pleasant assignment to his wife. In short, that when the crash comes and the averting it seems almost hopeless now—not only his name is gone, but nothing will remain to him except the marriage settlement he has made on his wife.

It was well for them, that that worldly old aunt of Belle's had insisted on that twenty thousand pounds being securely settled on her niece, and invested in the three and a half per cents. It ensured them a competence at all events. Bartley had grumbled a good deal at the time, at what he termed such absurdly small interest for capital, muttered much about old-fashioned notions; but the old lady was firm, and the events were about to prove her right. It might seem small to a man who had looked upon his income as nearly as many thousands per annum; but quite as good people live happily on a good deal less than what the settlement would leave.

Confidence had never been between these two. Indifference had been succeeded by sparring and recrimination, and now, something very like positive hatred had come between them, at all events, on the part of the lady. Belle began to ask herself whether her burden was not greater than she could bear, and to think vaguely of a separation. This continued skirmishing was more than she could endure. A battle royal seemed almost a relief. Nor were they wanting—indeed, they were becoming only too common between them.

Belle felt her life was becoming miserable past endurance. Her spirits were giving way under this daily warfare—how long could it last? how was it all to end? She longed for peace. Her husband, too, now habitually under the influence of drink, frightened her with his sullen moroseness. She never showed it, but bore herself proudly as ever. She had a strange idea that if she once showed want of nerve, there was no knowing to what her husband's temper might lead

him. If he once thought she feared him, she felt she should hardly be safe from violence. Bitterly did she repent her ill-starred marriage. Her thoughts ran too often on Charlie Repton for her peace of mind. Had he appeared on the scene, I doubt whether she would have had the firmness to forbid him her presence; but he had accepted his sentence of banishment, and she never saw him to speak to now.

Bartley and his wife are seated at dinner, that dreary tête-à-tête where there is no common ground to meet upon.

He has consigned the cook to the hottest corner of realms unmentionable, on account of too much pepper in the soup. Snapped viciously at the housekeeper on the subject of fish. Wondered why Mrs. Bartley persists in keeping such inefficient servants. Has already cursed the butler for administering sherry instead of madeira, pronounced the *entrées* uneatable, and has a second time exploded at the butler with reference to the condition of some rather curious hock.

If you dip deep into brandy, what can it matter ?

There is a lull. The master of the house is yet muttering over his duckling, while Belle's face bears that bored expression that never yet failed to rouse an irritable temper.

“Perhaps, Mrs. Bartley, you can possibly account for this disgusting dinner ?” he inquired, when the cloth was removed.

“I don't see so much to find fault with, but of course Mrs. Feeder is accountable.”

“And as I said before, having found Mrs. Feeder so thoroughly incompetent to perform the duties she professes, why is she still here ?”

“You have been fairly satisfied with her so far ; but of course she can go,” Belle answered carelessly. “We shall probably get somebody not so good.”

“Don't talk nonsense. You know I've been dissatisfied some time. There can be little or no difficulty in getting a decent housekeeper.”

“As you will,” said Belle, wearily.

“I wish it was as I willed,” he exclaimed, savagely, “it’s not; you’ve *carte blanche* to manage the house, and you don’t do it.”

“I hear enough sometimes about my extravagance, to make me careful of incurring additional expenses.”

“That, madam, is on the subject of your own infernal fripperies. On your taking opera boxes for nights when you know I want to give dinners.”

“You had better announce your dinners a little sooner, in future, and then I shall know what to do.”

“And would do the same again, I tell you.”

“Excuse me, opera boxes, as you well know, must be engaged some time beforehand; if you give me sufficient notice of when you want to ask your friends to dinner—”

“My friends,” he interrupted, “they should be yours. Do you know, madam, that as you have condescended to marry a business man, it is your part to assist him to keep his connection together. The fine

friends of your girlhood eat my dinners, drink my wines, and are indulged with your ladyship's smiles, while you scarcely condescend to speak to my friends whom business requires I should be on good terms with."

He was gradually working himself into a rage, much as one has seen a bull churn itself into tremendous wrath at some unwitting intruder on its domain. He, moreover, kept gulping down some fine old port, in a way that was to say the least of it injudicious, both as regards justice to the wine, and prudence to himself.

"I don't think you can ever say that I was anything but civil to any of your acquaintance. You can scarcely suppose on our marriage, that I was to make all your intimates mine," said Belle, with contemptuous indifference, in those cold silvery tones that always stung him to the quick, that made him feel that though his wife, she was not of his kind. A woman, more especially a clever one, can sting bitterly any man with whom she has near relations. Though, perhaps, more essentially a wo-

man's faculty, many men have it, and God help the woman who is tied to one, so that she can but endure his bitter practice. That ceaseless gibing that never misses a blot, that never lets the wound heal. I have seen women tied to the stake for life, to whom the fire and torture of the Indian would have seemed child's play. They bear it well, too, mostly, but you can read their story in their faces. It leaves lines, the nervous mouth and startled eye are an easy book to the physiognomist.

If ever woman bitterly repented "a golden marriage" (in the present English sense of the term) Belle did. A month of that marriage of pique had shown her that the apple she hardly even coveted, was verily of the Dead Sea kind. She strung herself to meet its bitterness and ashes. She had early wrapped herself in the armour of cool, cutting sarcasm. It had served her well in many a hard fight as Miss Brabazon, though I rather doubt whether it was doing her quite such good service now.

I am afraid Belle's principles were not strong. She feared ostracism perhaps, yet might have even dared that; but she thought, as women do sometimes think, more of her lover than herself—far higher of him probably than he deserved. She never pictured his tiring of her, but she thought deeply of his broken life that would be under such circumstances, of how his home and friends would be closed to him, and with her woman's wit she read Charlie Repton right. He would never abandon her, but he would feel these things sorely. No, better face the fate she had made for herself, than suffer such agony as that—to live to feel she was like a mill-stone round the neck of the man she loved.

Bartley sat sullen and brooding for some minutes before he again spoke.

“And you think, of course, your fine friends will cherish and be fond of you always. Especially if they should find that you can give them no more dinners. I wonder what they'd think of you without a carriage, did you ever try to fancy? Suppose you had no more opera boxes, had

to wear cottons instead of silks, had to sell your bracelets and think twice about buying a ribbon. How then about your swell acquaintances?"

"It would be much I fancy, as you suppose. I know the world pretty well, and am quite aware that acquaintances are not friends. I know that I have not made many of the latter. It's not my nature to do so. People whom you have turned upon sharply and spared not, instead of bending to their imperiousness, meanness, or whatever it may be, don't forget when their turn comes. No, I quite agree with you on that point; but do you suppose your friends are much more to be depended on?"

"I don't know, but you'll devilish soon have a chance of seeing."

"What do you mean? what is the matter?"

"Matter, not much. Simply this—ruin. Before a month is over, you'll have neither a carriage nor a silver fork to your mouth. Neither a house nor servants. You'll be living in lodgings with a maïd of all work

to attend upon you. I wonder," he said, bitterly, "whether you can use a needle?"

Her countenance was quite unmoved as she replied.

"And why was I not told of all this before. Such ruin does not occur without some omens and forebodings. Could we not have reduced our establishment and made some retrenchment to meet this blow?"

"Yes, you looked like retrenchment; no, you'll be kind enough to bear in mind that while I had money you were allowed to do as you liked. Now it's my turn. You'll have to dress in prints and learn something about the art of cooking. How nasty your efforts will all be. Did you ever try to wash your own collars and gimcracks? I should think half-pence were half-pence with that old aunt of yours."

"I don't say they were not; but mark me, I was treated as a lady, and treated as a lady I will be still. If you've neither servants nor carriages, you can still try to be a gentleman."

The bitter accent on the "try" came home.

"Curse you, madam!" he replied, "I believe you are glad I am ruined."

"I had better at once tell you I shall not remain here, if you are not more choice in your language. Glad we are ruined! Do you suppose I am a fool? apparently so, or you would have made me your confidante long since. If instead of jeering at me for spending money, you had told me the truth, you would have had little cause to complain on that head. As you delicately observed just now, I have had before this to do with small means. While I supposed we had money, I spent it. I should again—I am no economist, except by compulsion. Had you trusted me, it would have been better for you; as you did not, I don't feel myself in fault."

Yes, she had the best of it still, ever placing him in the wrong—a curse on her clever tongue. But the port wine was telling, and his losses had stung him almost to madness.

“Yes,” he said, fiercely, “a fine opportunity for you to return to your old friends and your old lover. If you have forgotten the pleasant note I received a short time ago, I have not.”

“Stop!” she cried. He had moved her at last, and broke through the contemptuous coldness she had hitherto preserved. “I told you before I married you that I did not love you. What was your answer? Do you recollect it? I do ‘that we should get on very well, people didn’t care much about sentiment in these days,’ and God help me, I thought so, too; you took very good care that no sentiment should intrude upon our wedded life. When you read that letter to me the other morning, you refused to let me see it. I told you you were wrong. Do you think a husband that cared for his wife would take it as you did? From that day to this he has never entered your doors, or except by inerest accident have I ever even seen him. I tell you now as I told you then, you are on dangerous ground. Take warning, I am not one of those natures that bear

much. Where you never confided, be careful how you suspect lightly."

Belle was taking high ground, with what justice the reader may determine; for my part, I should say the case hardly justified it; but most women would have, I fancy, done the same.

A muttered execration, and another bumper of port was Bartley's immediate rejoinder.

"No," he at last said sullenly; "I was a fool to marry you I know—they told me so at the time—I'm broke; it's a fine opportunity for you to leave me, and stay where you may see more of him."

Belle rose. "I will not subject myself to further insults; whether I could have proved a true wife to you in your troubles or no, is a question that you have evidently already decided in the negative. I think I should have tried—you have determined apparently I shall not. There is no more to be said. Good-night," and she moved towards the door.

He sprang up, and intercepted her.

“No, madam; we don’t part thus!” His brutal nature was now thoroughly aroused, and past control. “By G—, you are my wife, and it’s getting time you knew it! You’ll sit up till I please you to go to bed. I’ve not half said my say out yet.”

“Better wait then till you are more fitted to express your ideas in decent language.”

He stepped forward, and ere she could avoid him, struck her heavily on the cheek with his open hand.

Belle reeled slightly from the blow; but not a cry escaped her.

“Coward!” she hissed, between her teeth; as she jumped back promptly, and laid her hand on the bell.

Half-cowed, he shrank back; but still stood between her and the door. He had never ventured this length yet.

Belle rang.

“A bed-room candle, immediately!” she said, as the servant appeared; and till his return, she stood with her hand on the bell. Advancing, she took it from

the man's hand, and swept from the room.

Bartley said never a word; a muttered execration on the servant, and he resumed his seat. Pleasant thoughts they were to be left alone with. He thought over his coming failure, and wondered where he would be this time next year. Then he thought over the quarrel with his wife. He wished, now, he had not struck her—curse her! Why did she anger him? Then he wondered whether, if he had told her all, she would have been different and tried to help him? bah! what did women know of such things! Was not their vocation to spend money, while their husbands made it? Yes; confound that blow! Nice story for his wife to take to her friends—then he fell to wondering what she would do. She had the best of him always—more than ever now. Then soda-brandy, oblivion, and bed occurred to him, and he rang.

A quick ear might have detected the slam of the street-door, as he did so. Closely veiled, and carrying a small

travelling-bag in her hand, Belle stepped out into the night, and left her husband's roof.

Half an hour afterwards, in an advanced state towards the oblivion he craved for, Bartley sought his dressing-room. A note lay on the table; but failed to catch an eye past anything nearly but the multiplication of candles. It mattered little, though it was no sedative for him when he mastered its contents the next morning.

“You can scarcely suppose,” it ran, “after what has taken place, that I should remain under your roof. If your circumstances are such as you represent them, it may be necessary that we communicate on business matters; personally, I trust we shall never meet again. I shall therefore send an address, at which a letter may reach me, to your solicitors.”

As may be supposed, there was considerable confusion in the house next morning, when it was discovered that Belle had departed—no one knew whither.

Bartley, after some few inquiries, betook himself to the City, and left his household to wonder and conjecture as they might.

Forty-eight hours afterwards, or less, it was town talk. The Thermopolium knew all about it.

“Only wonder Repton’s been so long about it!” said old Carribosh, most notorious of *quidnuncs* at that venerable institution. “In my time, we lost or won our battles quicker. Troy seems to have been revived in Sebastopol; but Charlie Repton’s not the form of Paris.”

Some juvenile member, still young enough to have some regard for veracity in his scandal, ventured to enquire particulars. “Cleverly planned, sir. Met him at Waterloo Station, in time to catch the night mail for Havre. Bartley went to Southampton by special next morning, like a fool—came to his senses, and returned to consult his lawyers; not the sort of man to fight about it; besides those days are over. When our wives leave us

now-a-days, we treat it as a little legal difficulty. Queer view to take—sensible perhaps. Such women are hardly worth being shot at for.”

Poor Mrs. Inglemere seemed most to be pitied; when she heard the news she took to sal volatile, and her maid had a hard time of it for three days. As far as it was in her weak nature to care for any one, she had cared for Repton. She was like a child over its lost sugar-plums.

CHAPTER X.

THE EIGHTEENTH OF JUNE.

JUST forty years ago, the British Army lay waiting for daylight on the memorable ridge that lies between Hougomont and La Haye Sainte. On their wet cheerless bivouacs, the Waterloo men shivered away the night, knowing that the morrow would see the great struggle of years brought to a final issue. It was the evening before.

“That great day of milling when blood lay in lakes,
When kings held the bottle and Europe the stakes.”

Napoleon versus Wellington. The Champion of Europe against the Champion of the Peninsula—stake, independence of Europe and the belt of the universe.

A great fight, a close thing; but the Duke won.

We are once more amongst the bell tents of the Crimean army, as they glisten in the light of the setting-sun. That luminary descending in gorgeous splendour, flashes his dying rays over the plateau before Sebastopol.

There is another biggish fight of the same kind due here the morrow's morn; but the British and French armies this time stand side by side. "In the multitude of counsellors is safety," saith the Psalmist. "In the multitude of counsellors is weakness;" quoth the practical soldier of the nineteenth century. Better one ordinary man who plays his own game than half-a-dozen clever ones, who play a game of combination. Give me the man who plays his own hand, and I'll back him against him who plays under advice, at Racing, War, or Ecarté.

Think of Clive, who after calling his captains together, and listening to their opinion of not fighting, determined he

would—winning Plassey and India as the result of his resolution.

High went the shells; deep boomed the guns, and everybody in that vast array felt that Sebastopol's hour had come. That the Russians meant fighting it out, and stubbornly too, nobody doubted; but of course if the allies were to "go in" they'd get in, though some might not live to see it. The Russians had shown too often how they could, and would fight, to leave much doubt about its being a stiffish task that the allies had set themselves; but of course if they did fairly assault, they would be successful.

The dying sunlight flashes on the bayonets, as the various covering parties wend their way to their several *rendezvous*, looking like so many glittering snakes as they wind up and down the sides of the ravines. Very different from that cold drizzling rain of forty years ago, in which the Waterloo men passed the night before their deed of "derring do."

Everybody knew that the assault would take place at day-break. Indeed, so well

was it known, that I could fancy the Russian General Orders for the day, concluding some how in this way. "Soldiers, the enemy will assault at daybreak, on the signal of three rockets from the French right. The Emperor has no doubt of their repulse. The Czar places implicit reliance on his children, and already congratulates them on the results of their unshrinking valour and steadfast fidelity. There will be deaths to deplore; but regret for the fallen will be softened by their glorious end."

The officers break into little knots as they arrive at the Divisional Parade ground, and talk cheerily over the morrow's work which is to end all this dreary trench duty. Every one knows there are many who have already seen their last sunset; but nobody fancies he will be included in the list of killed, or badly wounded,

"Hope rests eternal in the human breast."

Well it is so, or not only would men, like Falstaff, have "no stomach for fighting,"

but would succumb to those far fiercer battles of ordinary life, compared to which Inkermans, Solferinos and Sadowas are but child's play.

Jones's play was d—d, does it follow that mine should not succeed. Thompson has lost his last shilling in speculation; but mine are more surely based than his. Young Henderson went down, riddled at Inkerman; but his cousin got the brevet and a C.B. I don't know whether being killed clean in the game of war, is not preferable to being utterly ruined in the game of commerce. You are spared all anxiety about beginning again. You have thrown deuce, ace, and there's an end of it. Your commercial man may throw out to the end of the chapter.

Stay, let us listen to what some of our friends have to say on the subject.

“It will be hottish work to-morrow morning,” said Herries, “however, it's a thing we'd have been glad to compromise a week's trenches for, any time these six months.”

“Of course,” rejoined Crumbs, “and

think of 'the loot.' Shouldn't wonder, Jack, my boy, if I found enough spoons inside there to rig our mess up with, regular Russian fiddle pattern, till some body goes 'a mucker' at loo."

"More kicks than half pence, young'un about getting in there," and Jack Travers jerked his head in the direction of the city. "Do you recollect a remark of poor Delpré's, Herries? I don't know what brings it into my head now. It was when we were quartered at Milton. We were sitting round the mess-table talking about the sensation of first being under fire. Delpré was the only one of us at that time who had ever undergone his baptism in that respect, somewhere in India, you know; well, we appealed to him on the subject. Do you recollect his answer?"

"No, though I recollect something of the talk. What was it?"

"I remember it well. 'Being shot at,' he said, 'is disagreeable; so is standing a cracker on the favourite as he dies away at the half distance. For choice, I think I'd prefer the former, there's no row

you see with your friends afterwards.”

“He’s right,” laughed Crumbs. “It’s something the sensation of having to defend a heavy pool at ‘unlimited loo,’ with nothing in your hand.”

“Fall in men,” suddenly cried Herries, as the Colonel commanding approached.

“Who commands the —th trench guard?” inquired the colonel.

“I do, sir,” said Herries.

“Very well, you know the ground, no doubt. You’ll occupy and hold the right of the fourth parallel till daybreak, when you will receive further orders. In the event of not getting such orders for some little time after the assault has commenced, keep your rifles going on the embrasures of the Redan.”

Herries touched his cap, and moved his party off. They wound their way down the ravine, almost paved with the shot and shell that had fallen in it from the Russian batteries since the siege commenced, and in something under an hour had reached their destination. Herries

sent out his sentries in skirmishing order over the parapets, and observed,

“You go round them, Jack, to begin with, and see they are all in their proper places.”

“All right,” and Jack jumped over the parapet. It was a bright moonlight light, and withdrawing a sentry a little here, pushing one a little forward there, Jack pursued his way. Crack went three or four rifles as he came to his extreme left; he hurried on, and found that a slight collision had taken place between the sentries that connected with his own and two or three inquisitive Russian sharpshooters, who had crept up to the crest of the hill. A smart young non-commissioned officer was carried past Jack, as he made his way back to the trench, a victim to the sharpshooter’s bullet: but his comrades expressed great self-gratulation in that “they had tumbled the Rooshian down the hill also.”

All night long the whizz and roar of the shells was incessant. The sky seemed alive with meteors, as the allies persistently

rained on the devoted city a ceaseless storm of iron. The excitement was intense, and with high strung nerves, Jack, Herries, Rolls, &c., awaited the first streaks of dawn. With the earliest tinge of grey the sentries were withdrawn, and all now anxiously awaited daybreak. Nothing is heard yet but the constant boom and whistle of the shells. Suddenly the sharp rattle of musketry, and a rocket from the right announce that the French have opened the ball at the Malakoff. A hill intervenes between the ground occupied by the —th and the French attack; they can see nothing. The roar of the big guns is now accompanied by the incessant crash of musketry. Suddenly, a stir is seen in the advanced trenches of the right attack. Dark masses of men, and the dull gleam of bayonets can be plainly discerned through the grey of the morning with a race glass. An opaque column gathers outside the parapet.

“By Jove! what a handful,” exclaimed Travers. “Blaze away men at the embrasures of the Redan.”

There go the scaling ladders. A figure rushes to the front waving a sword, and away go the stormers, poor Sir John Campbell leading them. They rush on and are lost over the crest of the hill.

“There go the supports,” said Jack, as another mass slowly forms outside the parapet. Crash go the flank batteries of the Redan, and a storm of grape cuts up the ground in front of the forming column.

“Fire at the flank batteries,” shouted Herries. “Watch the flash of the gun and aim at that.”

The smoke now almost concealed the work; the trench is a blaze of musketry, and the fierceness with which the grape and shot whistle about it, shows that the Russians endeavour to reciprocate its attentions.

The smoke lifts; clear against the sky, standing on the parapet of the salient angle of the Redan, is the figure of a man. He is a Russian evidently, and is firing rifles at the assaulting party, as fast as his comrades can hand them to him. Good

God they have not got in yet, or he could not be there. More than a hundred rifles are aimed at him. He bears a charmed life, and continues to fire rapidly from his exposed position. Ah, he is hit at last, he throws his arms wildly in the air and falls backwards amongst his comrades in the interior of the work. Now some half dozen red coats are seen running back to the trench, one falls before he reaches it, another and then another. A dozen more come struggling back.

“They are come for more ladders,” exclaim Jack and Herries, simultaneously.

The fire gradually slackens, the supports have thrown out skirmishers, the grape cuts the ground all around them, three or four roll over never to rise again, the skirmishers retire still rapidly dropping. The truth flashes across Herries.

“We are beat back!” he exclaimed, “and the skirmishers are covering the retreat.”

“What the devil’s all this!” cried Jack, as the sharp continuous rattle of musketry on the left fell upon their ears.

“ It is Eyre’s brigade who have taken the cemetery and penetrated the suburbs, they can go no further ; to advance is destruction, the French are beaten back at the Malakoff, the English at the Redan. Retreat is impossible. It is broad daylight now, and they would be mowed down by the batteries ; there is nothing for it but to remain there till nightfall, passing the day in incessant skirmishing with the enemy jealous as ever of losing a few yards of ground.”

Extraordinary is the lull that seems to take place by eleven A.M., the furious cannonade that has been maintained without intermission for forty-eight hours by the allies has utterly died away. The savage storm of shot, shell and canister, so profusely lavished by the Russians some two or three hours ago, has entirely subsided. It is a glorious summer day. An occasional random shot from either side is all that remains of the tempest of the morning. It reminds one of a “white squall” in the deceitful Mediterranean, with its hereafter of bright sunshine, blue

dancing waters and low rumblings, to that which had anon been a seething cauldron of foam 'neath a sky as black as Erebus; and to keep up the metaphor, the sun pours down his burning rays on those poor splintered fragments of the wreck.

The stretchers have been busy this morning, and their canvas is stained blood red in proof of their industry; but yet the eye may see many a scarlet clad warrior lying out in the open who has dropped in his tracks like the stricken deer. Some of these figures move from time to time uneasily, others lie motionless in the grim foreground of that picture; and the sun shines bright, and the wearied trench guards sleep. No birds sing around this great arena. When the gladiators engage hourly, it is not good for innocent singing birds to flutter round the blood-stained soil. The blackbird finds himself in a pie quicker even than nursery tradition would indicate. Spartacus and Cribb are both savage for flesh of some sort. Neither gold-finch or gold-fish would be safe in the

Crimea. But there are restless eyes and hearts in those advanced trenches. Men are watching that brilliant sun with scanty patience, they know "Jim Thornton, lying out there two hundred yards in the open, ain't dead," as soon as it gets a bit dusk they'll have him in. "Jim moved his arm distinctly about an hour ago."

Here's another party, and a couple of boyish officers form part, and a prominent part in that conclave.

"Last I seen the Major, was just at the foot of the Redan ditch, he stumbled and fell, then picked himself up. 'Go on Jenkinson, d—n you,' he says, 'I've got my gruel; but you'll get in, and I can crawl back without any one. You're all wanted there'—them was his last words, and that's the last I see of the major," says a bluff-bearded corporal.

"Well, Jenkinson," said one of the officers, "as soon as it gets a bit dark, we must have you and half-a-dozen volunteers to go and look for the Major. I know there'll be no lack of volunteers;

but six are plenty, more will be dangerous.”

And the sun shines down on the cold faces of the dead, and on the parched and blackened lips of the wounded; and men execrate the sunlight that prolongs the agony of their comrades.

“On veut faire des omelettes, il faut casser les œufs,”

Count Pahlen remarked, when somebody suggested the Emperor Paul might object to abdicate, even under compunction. Yes, you must break a few eggs if you indulge in a big war.

Heeries and his command got no further orders, I need scarcely observe, that morning. The failure of the attack of course left them to spend the grilling afternoon in their original position; tired from the combined effects of night duty and the excitement of the assault, men and officers dozed away the mid-day hours. Towards the afternoon, race-glasses and telescopes were busy on those little scarlet heaps, that lay between the Redan and the advanced trench of the

right attack. Speculating on which were still alive, a deduction only to be drawn by closely observing whether any of them moved. At last, great interest was attracted to a couple of gabions that were simultaneously thrown over the latter trench, immediately followed by a couple of scarlet uniforms. Pushing a gabion before him, each man, slowly on hands and knees, crept in the direction of one of the little red heaps to see if he could render any assistance to a wounded comrade. The first two or three they came to, were evidently beyond human help. Emboldened by the leniency of the Russians, they pushed further forward, and one, at least, had evidently found some one alive; the little red heap was seen to move and doubtless gulped eagerly from the canteen that was held to him. Here a good-natured shot or two from the Redan warned against further advance, and leaving his gabion to protect his wounded comrade, the man ran back to his trench which he reached unharmed, as did also his rather less venturesome companion.

The Russians having abstained from firing on them, or the probabilities are they also would have been among the little red heaps on the open plateau.

They knew something of the courtesies of war, those enemies of ours, and could do a chivalrous thing at times. We are told great stories of their misdeeds among our wounded at Inkerman; but men, especially uneducated men, are hard to hold when their blood is up, when the tigerish thirst to kill has entered their soul; and I fancy after the Alma, or rather at the finish of that battle, our gallant friends the Zouaves behaved very little better. And now rumours fly about as to the losses of the morning. It is said (alas! too truly) Sir John Campbell is killed at the head of the stormers. That Eyre's Brigade has lost fearfully down in the cemetery below, and cannot yet extricate itself. That more than two thousand men and a hundred officers are *hors de combat*, (rumour always exaggerates.) That the assault will be renewed at day-break to-morrow. These, and other far

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more improbable stories travel through the trenches.

Very late is it before the order comes to withdraw; both the old and relieving covering parties having been kept to cover the retreat of that part of Eyre's brigade which has penetrated the suburbs of the town.

At last the welcome order comes, and Herries gives the word to retire. Slowly passing through the maze of trenches, and scorning the delusive safety held forth by an enfiladed boyeau, Herries led his party across the open. It was a bright moonlight night. Just before they reach the second parallel, fizz, whizz, whirr, whirr, just like the whirl of a flock of sparrows, a discharge of grape sweeps across them. One man drops dead, two or three stumble forward and then pitch over on their faces. Among the latter is Jack Travers. Quick as thought they are picked up by their comrades, and carried into the second parallel.

"Good God, Jack! are you much hurt?" cries young Rolls.

A low moan was the only response.

“Run back, Crumbs, and hurry the doctor forward, he is only just in the rear there,” cried Herries.

Young Rolls dashes back best pace, and within five minutes returned with the surgeon.

Travers was lying on the ground, with his jacket thrown open, Herries supporting his head, his eyes closed, a slight bloody froth oozing from his lips.

The doctor bent over him. Quick as thought the keen surgical scissors rip open the flannel shirt, and the doctor's eyes peer over that heavy-looking bruise, from the centre of which the blood slowly trickles. It is but for a minute. For a second or two his fingers linger on the prostrate man's pulse.

“A stretcher here, quick!” he cried. “Lift his head, Herries; while I force a little brandy between his teeth. There, that's so, now lift him on the stretcher and get him up to camp as quick as you can.”

“He's very badly hurt?” said Herries, interrogatively, as some of the soldiers

bore their captain campwards. "Is it likely to be fatal?"

"It's no use ever mincing matters out here. Poor Travers, I should think, will never speak again. It's doubtful whether he will live even to reach the camp—impossible he can last till day-break to-morrow. My own opinion is that he will not be conscious again, though some two or three hours may elapse before life absolutely ceases."

Sadly they bore him to his tent, and laid him on his own bed. Herries, the Doctor and Rolls watched by him to the last, but the Doctor was only too accurate in his view of the case. Poor Jack never spoke again. He lay for some three hours, a very low moaning and faint pulsation alone marked that he yet lived. At the end of that time, a slight fluttering of the half-closed eyelids, a few nervous twitchings of the muscles of the mouth, and all was over. Poor Jack Travers' course was run. The warm pulses of life were stopped in their prime—henceforth

“ Shall nought his quiet cumber.”

The golden bowl is broken. Love's young dream lies shattered. Poor Jack sleeps with thousands of others, in front of the famous fortress whose siege will be the talk of future ages.

“ They have lifted him up and his head sinks away,
And his face showeth bleak in the moonlight and grey,
Leave him now where he lieth, for oh, never more
Will he kneel at an altar or stand on a floor ;
Could his bride gaze upon him.”

CHAPTER XI.

BREAKING THE NEWS.

STRANGE rumours are rife about town this sunshiny morning:—Sebastopol is taken. No, the Allies have got the Flagstaff battery, but not the remainder of the place.

“Know it for a fact, sir,” says old Carribosh at the Thermopolium. “Met Jennings on my way through the Park, he had been at the War Office.”

“There has been a big fight, and our people were licked,” says young Thisleton (he hates Carribosh and always contradicts him on principle). “The French have had to abandon their trenches and fall back on Kamiesch. Hang your War Office information, I have just come back from

the city. They know what's going on a devilish deal earlier than your War Office people do. Funds dropping like a barometer before a cyclone, everybody looking as glum as a Methodist preacher who don't take. Bartley's shutters up by the way. Stopped payment yesterday. Nobody much surprised, he's been on the go these last three months."

People wandered up and down. Heard the news from the Crimea? was in every one's mouth. That a severe battle had taken place seemed certain. That the Allies had had the worst of it was the impression as the day wore on. In the afternoon, indistinct rumours of a heavy loss to the English were current, and the rush for the evening papers was great in consequence.

Tom Lyttlereck was restless and uneasy that morning. The report of Belle's elopement (only some three or four days before) had troubled him greatly. He liked both her and Charlie Repton much, and he knew the misery that such a step must entail. He did not moralize in the least

on the subject; simply two people he was very fond of had come to grief. Despite all inquiries, he could make out nothing. Belle had left her husband's house, and gone no one knew whither. Repton had been seen in town even the day after Belle's flight, but had now left. Such was all the information a call at Repton's rooms and cross-examination of his servants afforded.

"Bad business, I am afraid," said Tom, as he sat at breakfast with his wife in their sunshiny little house in Pimlico. "I can't make it out. I still hope that though Belle has left her husband, Charlie may have nothing to do with it."

Laura was not an uncharitable woman by any means, but she would have been hardly true to her sex had she adopted any other opinion than the one she held.

"I wish I could think so," she replied, "but you know all we saw at Folkestone, and in London afterwards. I fear there is no hope that she has not gone off with him. Poor Charlie! how foolish, how very foolish!"

Yes, woman like, her pity was for him, not for the supposed partner of his guilt, though the punishment would fall far heavier on her than her companion.

“Laura, Laura, be a little more charitable. Let us hope for the best till we get proof to the contrary, at all events.”

“I can’t help it, Tom, I can’t indeed; I know it’s wrong, but I can’t think otherwise. I don’t wish to judge Belle hardly, but it was her fault. I think I am sorry for her, but I know I am for Charlie; I trust you may be right, and that they are not together; but I don’t believe it.”

Laura may seem harsh in her views; but once let a woman sit in judgment on a sister’s delinquencies, and I fear impartial justice is seldom administered. She had spoken the truth. She was sorry for Belle, yet felt no patience with her, and persisted in looking on Repton as a victim. Society hardly judges such cases fairly, and metes out uneven punishment to the transgressors. The temptation comes as often from one side as the

other. Women run away with men quite as often as men run away with women; but most assuredly the social punishment is by no means even.

“Well, I must be off,” said Tom. “I am too restless to work this morning. Look out for me about two, little woman, and I’ll come and tell you the news of the day.”

“Do come home to lunch, and we’ll walk down and call on Breezie Langton afterwards. I haven’t seen her this week.”

“It’s a bargain,” said Tom, as he took his departure.

Tom wended his way towards the Temple, there to have a talk with some literary *confrères*. The rumour of Crimean news met his ear ere he had crossed St. James’ Park. In the Strand he met one of those ubiquitous persons, who having no business of their own are quite *au fait* with every one’s else. From him he learnt that Bartley had suspended payment. This took Tom very much aback. City gossip was a thing that

did not fall much in his way. Few people were much better up in the talk of the town, literary, sporting, scandalous, or theatrical, than he was; but he seldom heard anything more than the papers told him of the great money-making hive around Threadneedle Street.

He walked on, pondering on this. It made matters still worse, he thought. That a woman should leave her husband on the threshold of his trouble seemed to him monstrous. His faith in Belle began to be shaken, and it was with a much perturbed mind that he turned in under the low Temple archway.

Once there, and in the rooms of one of his friends, he found the Crimean news the all absorbing topic. What was really the result of the battle that had taken place? That it had been disastrous to the allies no one doubted. Before Tom wended his way home again, he had so far got at the truth of it, that he had ascertained there had been an assault on the town which had been heavily repulsed.

He had hardly opened his door when Laura, with her eyes full of tears, rushed to meet him.

“Oh, Tom, here’s such a shocking telegram just come for you. I opened it. There has been a dreadful battle in the Crimea, and poor Jack Travers is killed.”

“Good God! Where is it?”

“Here, dear. How terrible for poor Breezie.”

Tom looked at the telegram. It was from Langton, and ran as follows :

“Assaulted on the eighteenth—beaten back with great loss—poor Travers killed—pray break it to Breezie. Have telegraphed also to Belle Bartley. All particulars by mail.”

Grim things these telegrams, they seem to dispose of a life in three words—aye, of hundreds, “Great loss,” are two ominous words to receive by those fatal wires.

“Oh, Tom,” sobbed Laura, “what

is to be done? Shall you go down to Breezie this afternoon?"

"Yes, my darling, and you will have to go with me. It will be harder work for you than me, Laura. You will have to break this to her. No man can tell it so well as a woman. Don't think, wife mine, that I don't know how painful a task I am setting you. I would spare it you if I could; but you must undertake this. Be brave, Laura. Think what you have to undergo compared to her, poor girl. Don't cry."

"I can't help it. No, Tom, I will be quiet directly," said Laura, in an hysterical manner, highly contradictory of the implied promise. "No, don't say anything more to me. Yes, I know I must do it; but oh, I do so dread it!"

"Well, you may sit down quietly now. We won't start for half an hour; but recollect it must be done, and soon. Poor Breezie must not be left to hear this by chance."

"It will be terrible," said Laura, as about an hour afterwards they approached

Langton's house. "You don't know how she loved him."

Tom knocked. "I shall call for you again in an hour. You will want all your self-command, recollect. For her sake, poor girl, keep as collected as you can."

"I will do my best," said Laura, with a nervous tremour of the lip as the door opened.

Breezie received her cordially. "I am so glad to see you, Laura. Do take your bonnet off at once. I have seen no one all the week, and was just thinking I would trot up and have some tea with you. Now I will give you some, and you shall take me home to dinner, if you will be that charitable to a lonely young lady."

"Of course, I will, dear," said Laura, "inwardly hoping she might. Tom is to call for me presently, and we will bear you off with us."

"There get into that arm-chair then, and we'll have a quiet chat till he comes. The Crimean mail is not in yet, is it?"

"No," said Laura, averting her face,

“I think not,” and her heart sank within her.

“I was in hopes you came to herald letters from Jack and papa. I always look upon you as the harbinger of good news, since you were the first to tell me of Jack’s promotion.”

Laura gave a great gulp, and said nervously, “There are rumours, Breezie, of a great battle in the Crimea, though no one knows as yet quite what has happened.”

The girl rose, walked across the room, and knelt at Laura’s feet. She gazed steadily into her face for a moment, and exclaimed :

“What is it, let me hear? I have a right to know. I can see it in your face. What have you heard? Is he wounded? In pity’s sake, speak! I can see you have bad news to tell me. Laura Lyttlereck, what have you heard?” and she grasped Laura’s wrist almost fiercely in her excitement.

“There has been a dreadful battle, Breezie, dear,” replied Laura, speaking fast

and nervously, "a great many are killed and wounded. Your father is safe, but poor Jack's regiment has suffered severely."

"Poor Jack! you have heard from my father, and I have not. I see it all now! oh, God help me, he is dead!" and she dropped her head into Laura's lap, and lay motionless.

For a few seconds Laura did not move. Twice she essayed to speak, but the words would not come, at last she faltered forth, "Breezie, listen to me," but the girl lay motionless across her lap. At last she raised her head, it dropped heavily across her arm, and then Laura saw that she had fainted. With some little difficulty she got her across to the sofa, and rang the bell. A maid servant appeared. They bathed her temples, dashed cold water in her face, and in a few minutes she gave signs of returning consciousness. She opened her eyes, looked at Laura for a minute, and then closed them again. A shiver ran through her frame, and she seemed like one stricken to death.

“We must get her to bed,” said Laura, “and you must find a room for me. I shall stay here to-night. I don’t think a doctor would be any use, at all events at present. She has heard bad news from the Crimea.”

They got her up to her room, and undressed her. She said nothing; but once or twice looked into Laura’s face with such a piteous expression of misery, that Laura was unable to restrain her tears.

Apparently she read it aright, for with a low wailing cry she turned her face away. There she lay for more than an hour, so still, she might almost have been a corpse. Her rich brown hair tumbled in confusion over the pillow; her eyes fixed with a stony stare, painful to look upon, while nothing but a nervous trembling about the mouth betokened consciousness. At the end of that time, Laura felt her wrist feebly grasped, the pale, wan lips moved anxiously, and the large brown eyes looked, oh, so eagerly into her own. She leant over the bed, and caught the faint whisper.

“Wounded badly; ah, yes! but not dead! in mercy’s sake say so!”

Laura hesitated. She felt her face told all. She saw the eager glance die out of the eyes, as she gently shook her head. Once more the low cry broke from the pale lips—the wail of a heart nigh breaking, the plaint of a spirit face to face with its misery.

Laura sat for a few minutes; then wiping the drops from her own tear-stained cheeks, glided from the room.

“Wait at the door,” she said, to the maid. “You say my husband is below; I shall be back in five minutes.”

She found Tom in the little drawing-room.

“Well,” he said, “how does she bear it?”

“It’s wretched to see her. I am afraid I broke it very badly; but the truth is, she read it all in my face at a glance. She has only spoken once since, and that was to ask if there was no hope. I thought it best to give her none. It seemed more merciful to say ‘No’ at once,

than hold out false hopes. I hardly know what to do with her. If she would only cry; but she has never shed a tear since she knew it. I don't think a doctor would be any use, do you?"

"No; not at present. You can't leave her, of course?"

"No. I shall stop here all night. You had better go home, and send Lizzie with some things for me. If I can, to-morrow, I shall bring her home with me."

"Quite right. I shall come up again after dinner, to see if I can be of any use to you. You must stay with her, poor girl! for the present; but the sooner we can get her away the better. Good-bye."

When Tom returned that evening, poor Breezie was delirious, and it was high time for a doctor. Laura did not return home for three weeks, and then she was accompanied by a pale, ghostly-looking girl, whose big brown eyes seemed ever gazing far away into the memories of the past. Those that knew her in her brightness, would hardly have recognised Breezie

Langton, as dressed in the deepest mourning, she sat with a listless air in Tom Lyttlereck's drawing-room.

"Breezie, dear," said Laura, one morning; some fortnight or so after her return home. "If you feel strong enough, there is a letter from your father we want you to read or listen to. I know, darling, it is re-opening the old, terrible grief; but I think it will be a comfort to you. We have told you how he died. Will it not be a consolation to you, to know how truly he loved and thought of you to the last?"

"Perhaps, yes; but I have never doubted it. Laura, if I had, I think I too should have died. I am very weak, but I think I can bear things better as they are, than ever to have doubted *that!*"

"And you never need do, Breezie. Your father saw him laid in his grave, and Captain Herries took your father over to his tent afterwards, and gave him a paper which poor Jack had placed in his hands some months before. It is a will, and he says there that he leaves

everything he has 'to her whom I look upon already as my dearly-beloved wife.'"

Breezie sat motionless. She cared little to know of what she had become the possessor. She felt that she had lost her all.

"There is also a letter for you. Should you like to have that now?"

"Oh, yes! Give me that," she said, softly; and the sweet, pale face lit up, as she stretched out her hand for it.

Poor Jack! he was but a good, honest, rattling, straight-forward fellow—nothing much in him—yet had he won such love as better men have striven in vain for. Woman is incomprehensible—Titania and Bottom—Beauty and the Beast, are they not true stories? How clever women cherish fools, aye, for the matter of that, clever men too. I suppose we all seek relaxation. Men of talent love their wives' prattle. Women of intellect their husbands' babble.

The girl opened the last letter she was ever to receive from him she had loved so well.

“My darling Breezie,—

“If ever this reach your hands—which I trust it never may—I shall be gone. Yes, dearest, shall never live to realize the most cherished hope of my life—the calling you my wife. It will be hard for you to bear, love, far harder than for me to die; and yet you have made life so sweet to me, that if it is given me to have time to think, I shall die with bitter anguish at not seeing your dear face once more. You are far too good for me, I can but say against it that I love you so truly. Dearest, if I fall, think that my last hope, my last thought, was of thee; that as long as my lips could move, they uttered thy name, with blessings on it. What little I have to leave is yours, my wife, dearly-loved wife, though no marriage ceremony ever passed between us. Once more, Breezie, dearest, farewell! Think of me a little as one who, had he been spared, would have done his best to make you happy. You will grieve for me, I know, darling; but trust as I do, that if Heaven wills I shall never see you

more, though hard to bear, it is for the best. God ever bless and protect thee, and believe me to the last,

“ Ever thine,

“ JACK TRAVERS.”

“ P.S. Your father will know about my affairs, and it will be a comfort to me at the last, to think that I have been able to leave a little to my darling wife.”

A faint smile curved Breezie's lips as she finished, and the tears ran down her cheeks.

“ Poor Jack,” she murmured, “ he did love me, spite of all my foolishness. No one will ever love me again like him! Never, never.”

Laura wisely said nothing for some time.

“ Now, Breezie,” she said at last, “ here's one little bit more of news for you. Your father is coming home. Are you not glad? I shall leave you to read his letter while I go and see what that

husband of mine is about," and Laura trotted off to Tom's *sanctum*.

"Ah! you little sceptic. Woman who thought there was no good left in this world. Unbeliever, maligner, traducer; I was just coming for you. Sit down and do penance for your uncharitableness," exclaimed Tom, as she entered his room. "Let me find you the hardest chair, and ring for the biggest pitcher of unsavoury water. Peas in your shoes, little infidel, I insist on. For me.

'Fill high the cup of Samian wine.'

"Bring me one, bring me two, bring me a dozen bottles of champagne."

"My dear Tom! What is the matter? What do you mean?"

"That you ought to be put on bread and water for a month, for your want of faith in poor Belle Bartley. I have just got a note from her. She left her husband because he ill-treated her, and is now staying with her aunt at Chiswick; I am as glad as if I had won a thousand pounds. Says she has written to Cis Langton to

tell him everything. Does not mention Charlie Repton, and is evidently in total ignorance of all the scandal connected with her name. Her note to me is principally to know when Cis is likely to be home; there, read it, sceptic, and recant," and in the exuberance of his spirits, Tom hugged his wife most affectionately.

"Oh, Tom! I am so glad. You may call me all the names you like, now this is so. I own I was afraid it was otherwise."

"Afraid, you know you never doubted it was."

"Well," said Laura, "if I have feared the worst, you can't rejoice more than I do in this. How nicely she writes too about poor Breezie's troubles."

"Laura, we'll go and see her, and make Breezie go with us if we can. Never thought much of Bartley myself."

"Yes; when do you expect Mr. Langton home?"

"Well, he might be here in a week or so now. But run away, there's a good

woman, for I have a lot to do before lunch, if possible."

Laura nodded, and tripped out of the room leaving her husband to his vocation.

CHAPTER XII.

TEN YEARS AFTER.

TEN years have passed and gone nearly, since the Eighteenth of June Fifty-five. It is the Monday preceding the Derby, and the smoking-room of the Thermopolium is in great force. The denizens thereof state their divers opinions with a confidence that many of them will find highly fallacious that day week. Several high principled members are looking forward to appeasing the most irritable of their creditors out of the "little pots" they feel so confident of landing next Wednesday afternoon on the breezy Epsom Downs; others are beseeching their friends not to miss having at least "a tenner on" such a really good

thing as—and here the several voices die away to mysterious whispers.

“I know all about his trial. Can’t lose, bar accidents. Had it straight from the stable. Mind you back it.”

Confidence in information seems proportionate with the youth of the speaker, and one young gentleman, who if he has attained his majority is still apparently some years off the attainment of whiskers, boldly states, “that The Carol cannot lose, and announces his intention of having a niceish yacht for the autumn, as soon as it has ‘come off.’”

He talks patronizingly to a stoutish well whiskered man, with an eye-glass, who in rather languid tones expresses an opinion that the French horse will take a deal of beating.

“Pooh, my dear fellow, it took all Grimshaw knew, to get him home in ‘the Guineas’—besides his legs are so shaky they’ve hardly dared to gallop him since.”

He is an old acquaintance of ours, that believer in the French horse, though

the slim Captain of the Balaklava charge, has in racing parlance 'thickened a good deal' since that memorable October day. Coningsby Clarke has had a turn in India since then, and did good service in the Mutiny times round about Lucknow, and through Oude generally. Fortune has favoured him, for his liver is still in tolerable repair, while he commands his old Regiment now stationed at Aldershot. Irreverent cornets occasionally whisper that the colonel is running a little to stomach; but Coningsby looks well yet, even if he can't quite get into the overalls of ten years ago.

"Tell you what 'young un,'" says Coningsby, "I don't believe in these wondrous dark horses. Blink Bonnies come out once in a life time. I won a tidy stake on the Frenchman over 'the Guineas,' and am standing him again. I shall have a goodish run for my money you'll see."

"How are you, Coningsby?"

"How do, Archer? What's the news with you?"

“Well, I don’t know,” said that gentleman, as he dropped into an adjoining chair. “No chance of rational conversation till this week is well over. Fellows don’t ask you now how you are; but what you’re on.”

“Come, you take as much interest in the Derby as most men.”

“Perhaps so; what I object to, is absorption in it. Why can’t some of these fellows take an interest in something else besides? Look at little Shadrach there, he couldn’t utter a connected sentence without introducing it to save his life. He’s bored me this month past. There’s one comfort, vengeance draws near; he’s got an awful book, and this day week is the settling.”

Coningsby laughed.

“By the way,” continued Archer, “I suppose it is all true that Repton is going to marry Mrs. Bartley?”

“I fancy so. He’s worn the willow a long while for her now—ten years and more. Bartley, you see, declined to take himself off for so long. About a

couple of years since he died, ain't it?"

"Hardly as much. What scandal there was about them at one time."

"Yes; rank libel though, I believe. Still, from all I hear—I was in the Crimea at the time—they gave very fair occasion for it, and couldn't complain much of being talked of."

"When a woman leaves her husband, she's always talked of, even if he's the greatest brute unhung, and Bartley was not as bad as that. Talking of marriage, when's your turn coming? Getting time it did, you know. Why don't you marry something comfortable, cut the Service, and settle?"

"Why, you see, for one thing, old fellow; I've got so used to debts and difficulties, respectability would be safe to bore me."

"Nonsense! You're verging on the forties. Have finished with sentimental paroxysms. Go in for money and comfort."

"Always cut heiresses on principle. If you are decently civil, they fancy you're after their money-bags, and freeze accord-

ingly. Never saw an heiress could afford to be natural, unless she was a perfect Gorgon. Knows somebody's necessities will make him take her at last."

"There you are wrong, Coningsby. I have known several men marry a bit of money, and live very happily with their wives, too."

"Can't say about that, I go by my own lights. You know Jim Chippindel? I don't know a much better fellow than poor Jim was, as long as he had only his debts to live upon. One of the cheeriest fellows out. In an evil day, he married a couple of thousand a year. One seldom sees him now. He turned up here about this time last year. Got quite himself again, and said he'd go down with us on Thursday to see the Ascot Cup run. I bet him a sovereign he didn't. Of course he didn't, and I've never seen him since."

"Just as well perhaps for Jim, he don't 'get quite himself again' very often. If, for some years before his marriage, Jim ever went to bed by candlelight, he was guilty of uncalled for extravagance."

“What’s that got to do with it? One can go to bed at decent hours and still remain a bachelor, I presume.”

“Don’t talk bosh, what I mean, is, Jim Chippindel is no case in point.”

“Well then, how the deuce was it you never got married yourself; eh, Archer?”

“How do you know I am not. You’ve met me here the last dozen years or more; but what do you know about me.”

Coningsby stared. Nobody did know much about Archer.

“If you are,” he said at last, “I can only say Mrs. Archer has a good many evenings to herself.”

Archer grinned; he rather enjoyed the little mystification he knew existed about himself, as to what he did, where he lived, &c.

“There’s a good many of us here,” he said, “don’t know much about each other’s lives, when we’ve once passed the hall-porter.”

“Perhaps not. Apropos to marriage. “Do you know Lyttlereck?”

“Hardly; but he didn’t marry much money, did he?”

“No, what did he want to marry at all for. I never see anything of him now. There’s another good fellow dropped out of one’s circle. That’s the worst of it, the minute a man’s married he gets lost to his old pals.”

“Don’t think you revolve in a respectable orbit, Coningsby, Lyttlereck’s making a name with his pen; that last book of his is a good deal talked about.”

“Bah!” said Coningsby contemptuously, “with his knowledge of the Calendar and judgment of racing, his Derby pencillings should be worth more than he’ll ever do with his pen. Don’t think,” he added musingly, “his wife likes me. She can be very nice, I dare say; but rather gives me the idea she’d like to be a good deal the other way, as far as I am concerned.”

“Lyttlereck knows what he’s about,” said the other, “and is not such a fool as to think racing the way to keep a family.”

“Come, you make a good thing of it.”

“Ah, very; you always hear of a man’s winnings, and never of his losings. No, old fellow, I can get my fun for my money; that’s about all. Good night.”

Coningsby sat musing and lazily watching the discomfiture of old Carribosh, to whom the inundation of the “height of the season” was a sore trouble. Irreverent youngsters took his particular chair, opened windows behind him, hinted that they had heard his stories before if not perused them in the works of “Joseph Miller, Comedian,” and otherwise made “the merry month of May” a social treadmill to the veteran.

At the present moment he was leaving the smoking-room in a shower of grunts, his custom always when much put out, and all the social *désagrémens* above

enumerated had been showered that evening on his thick though patriarchal head.

Coningsby's reverie was broken in upon by the advent of three or four men, one of whom exclaimed :

"Halloa, Colonel, how are you? charmed to meet once more."

"Crumbs, by Jove!" exclaimed Coningsby. "Sit down, old fellow. Bring Captain Rolls' drink here, waiter, and let's have some more cigars. When did you get home?"

"About a month ago, left the old corps at Lucknow; but hope they'll begin to work down to the coast with a view to England next year. Haven't seen you since that cheery night at Benares."

"Oh, the night we had such a 'go in' at loo, and cleaned out the wine-merchant. Won all he had down to his portmanteau. I remember I had to give him that back the next morning, and lend him two hundred rupees to get along with. Saw you rode a winner or two at the Lucknow Ski races after-

wards. More than you could do now, Crumbs. You're getting d—d heavy, not the popular feather of the Crimean days."

"Quite true, and what's more, if you had to ride through Balaklava again, it would be long odds against your pulling through. Poor old Trumpeter would find he'd twenty-eight pounds too much up, good horse as he was."

"Don't talk of it, I've subsided into the 'ornamental dragoon' the last two years, too heavy for real work. Look well in the long valley, yet, if they don't make the pace too strong for us. Up here for long?"

"Yes, mean to see the season out, now—that is, stay till after Goodwood."

"Come down and look at us on the Sunday. You know all our people, and of course there's a bed for you."

"Thanks. What's going to win the Derby?"

"Only wish I knew, backing the Frenchman, myself."

“Well, I’ve taken a long shot about The Carol, from a bookmaker called Davidson. Do you know him?”

“Yes. Fancy Delpré could have told you a good deal about him, if he had been alive. He bets largely, now, though I recollect him a small man some three or four years ago.”

“What do you think of The Carol?”

“Just the sort of ‘good thing’ poor Jack Travers would have been up to his eyes on.”

“Confound it! that’s not saying much! poor Jack’s ‘good things’ were expensive, as a rule.”

“By the way, isn’t Herries at home?”

“Yes; he’s a Major now, you know.”

Coningsby nodded.

“Rum thing. I don’t know whether you’ve heard it. He was down at Brighton, and there he met Langton and his daughter—the girl, you recollect, poor Travers was engaged to. As an old chum of Jack’s, they were very civil to

him, and it seems Miss Langton was never tired of talking to him about Jack and the Crimean times. At last Herries fell desperately in love, wanted to marry her; but she would have nothing to say to him in that way. Liked him well enough as a friend, but nothing more. Poor old fellow! he takes it grievously to heart."

"No; you don't say so! She's nice-looking, isn't she?"

"I believe you! Very handsome! Wears mourning for Jack still."

"Does she? Glad she didn't take Herries though. I object to my friends getting married on principle. Their wives, somehow, never seem to like me. I believe they fancy betting, unlimited loo, soda-and-brandy, with unholy hours, is my normal state."

"Not quite so bad as that," laughed Crumbs, "though in days 'long syne,' the sun has found us 'playing for a loo.' What business had the sun to be up so early?"

"Ah, why don't they make you astro-

nomer royal, Crumbs, and let you regulate the planets generally? What a devil of a mess you'd make of some people's noon!"

"Might make the world go pleasanter for you and 'the likes of you' all the same. Very jolly, all this, after the 'a-rid plains of Hin-dos-tan.' Comforting idea when you go to bed that there are no mosquitoes, and you don't want a punkah."

"What did you do with your blue-eyed little flame at Lucknow?"

"Broke my heart about her," laughed Crumbs. "She jilted me shameful! said she couldn't afford to wait while I made up my mind, and married a collector who looked like a badly-dried mummy. There's one consolation," continued Crumbs, with an expression of mock anguish; "she's promised to take me for the second, and throws out hopes that the mummy won't last till I get back."

"And you?" inquired Coningsby, smiling.

"Signed and sealed with a secret codi-

cil in my own favour, conditional upon how the Collector cut up."

"Ah; think you've got over it?"

"Not the least, I'm quite heart-broken still, I assure you. Waiter, gin and soda. Don't look shocked, it's all her fault, the doctors say I'm shattered in mind and body, and require great care, change of scene, a deal of stimulant—"

"And a sick certificate," chimed in Coningsby. "You're a nice young man. How do, Thisleton?"

"How are you?" said that gentleman, nodding at the same time to Rolls. "Nice business this of Jack Delafield's isn't it?"

"What," said Coningsby "And who's Jack Delafield?" inquired Crumbs simultaneously.

"Jack Delafield," said Thisleton. "Who is he? well, he was a little before my time. Coningsby, can recollect him; but I suppose there never was a much bigger rip came out, than the Honourable Jack; he'd made a name before he was three and twenty,

"At which the world grew pale."

that is would have done if the London world ever did change countenance. There was little, not positively felonious, that Master Jack had not committed by that time. He had run away with somebody else's wife, been convicted of cheating at cards, denounced as a defaulter and outlawed. Some how or other, he obtained a reversal of the outlawing, whether his friends paid or not, I don't know; but he came that far back again within the pale, though of course society still tabooed him. However, he was a plausible beggar, and some half-a-dozen years ago, down at Bath, he got hold of a good-looking widow with some money, and married her. A precious life, by all accounts, he seems to have led her ever since. At last she's summoned up pluck, and come before the Divorce Court, for a separation on grounds of cruelty, neglect, and the deuce knows what besides; but I hear nothing can be much worse than the way the Honourable Jack will come out of the whole business, which, from his antecedents, one can easily imagine."

“Whom did he marry? I mean, what was her previous name?”

“She was a Mrs. Englemere or Inglemere—I’m not quite sure which. Don’t know anything about her; but if any woman who married Jack Delafield didn’t pay dearly for her folly, report has cruelly maligned him.”

“Fancy I’ve met her in former days,” said Coningsby.

“Well, you can’t have met her recently, for they say he kept her almost a prisoner in some cottage down in Wales. Her friends knew nothing about it, for Delafield used to read all her letters, and make her answer them either according to his dictation or under his supervision. If he went away, there was a creature of his, nominally housekeeper, in reality, mistress and gaoler, who kept watch and ward. At last, it seems her misery touched the heart of some servant-girl, and by her assistance she managed to escape and take refuge with her friends. He has made use of all sorts of means to recover possession of her; but her friends, acting

under the advice of a crafty old family solicitor, keep her out of the way till they can bring her forward at the trial. They say her terror of him is so great, that if he once got access to her, she would yield and go back to him."

"Yes, I can believe that; I recollect her now. A rather weak, vain, but uncommonly handsome woman. I daresay Jack Delafield's taken the good looks out of her. I think he was about the most finished blackguard I ever came across."

"Suppose he was. About bed time, isn't it? At all events, I'm off."

"And I too. Come along, Crumbs. Can't say how many gins and sodas you've swallowed; but I'm quite sure it's as much fixed air as is compatible with keeping your feet on the pavement."

"Libel, gross and hideous! Just let me light a baccy to walk home with, and I'm your man. Good-night, Thisleton."

Down at Brighton, Cis Langton and his adopted daughter have finally fixed

their home. Many an admiring eye is turned upon the handsome woman in mourning, so often seen pacing the Esplanade side by side with the somewhat worn and grizzled man, who is still looked on as her father.

Breezie is an heiress in a little way, for she had come into some six thousand pounds, under the will of her lover, and besides Herries's offer, has had more than one opportunity of changing her name; but she remains constant to the memory of the Past, and has buried her heart in a narrow grave on the Sebastopol plateau. Do not think for one moment there is any melancholy or asceticism about Breezie. Though the bright, sun-shiny face of the girl has toned down into a chastened thoughtfulness that well becomes the handsome woman she has ripened into, she is cheerful, and enjoys life much in her quiet way. Delights in a run up to London to stay with Laura Lyttlereck, and can laugh her old ringing laugh, when the Haymarket or the Olympic pleases her. Still the old elastic vivacity

is gone. She takes her pleasure more sedately now.

Langton has told her the whole story of her parents, softening as much as possible the faults of her father. She knows only that he deserted her, lived a troublous life of difficulties, and died gallantly in the Crimea. She peremptorily refused to make her own existence known to her father's relations, saying :

“ You've been father to me so long now, you must continue so. Nobody loves me so well as you, and you know you would be dreadfully lonely without me. We two will live together.”

Cis, having done his duty, was only too glad not to lose the sunshine of his house, and knowing that she had now a little independence of her own, did not try to influence her determination.

“ Since you have made up your mind on this, Breezie, and I can't tell you how happy you have made me, the secret of your birth had better remain between us two, and unless you wish it, I think

you had better not assume your proper name."

"No, papa, I'm still going to remain Breezie Langton. Yes, Breezie Langton till death," said the girl musingly.

"We'll not say anything about that, my dear."

"No; but it will be so, all the same."

Ten years nearly have passed since then, and it is so still.

Frank Forbes is doing very well at the Bar, and Mrs. Forbes, *née* Clippington, believes immensely in her husband's forensic powers.

Agnes Repton—no doubt she's married; but one cannot be expected to account for every one, one knew 'ten years ago.'

THE END.

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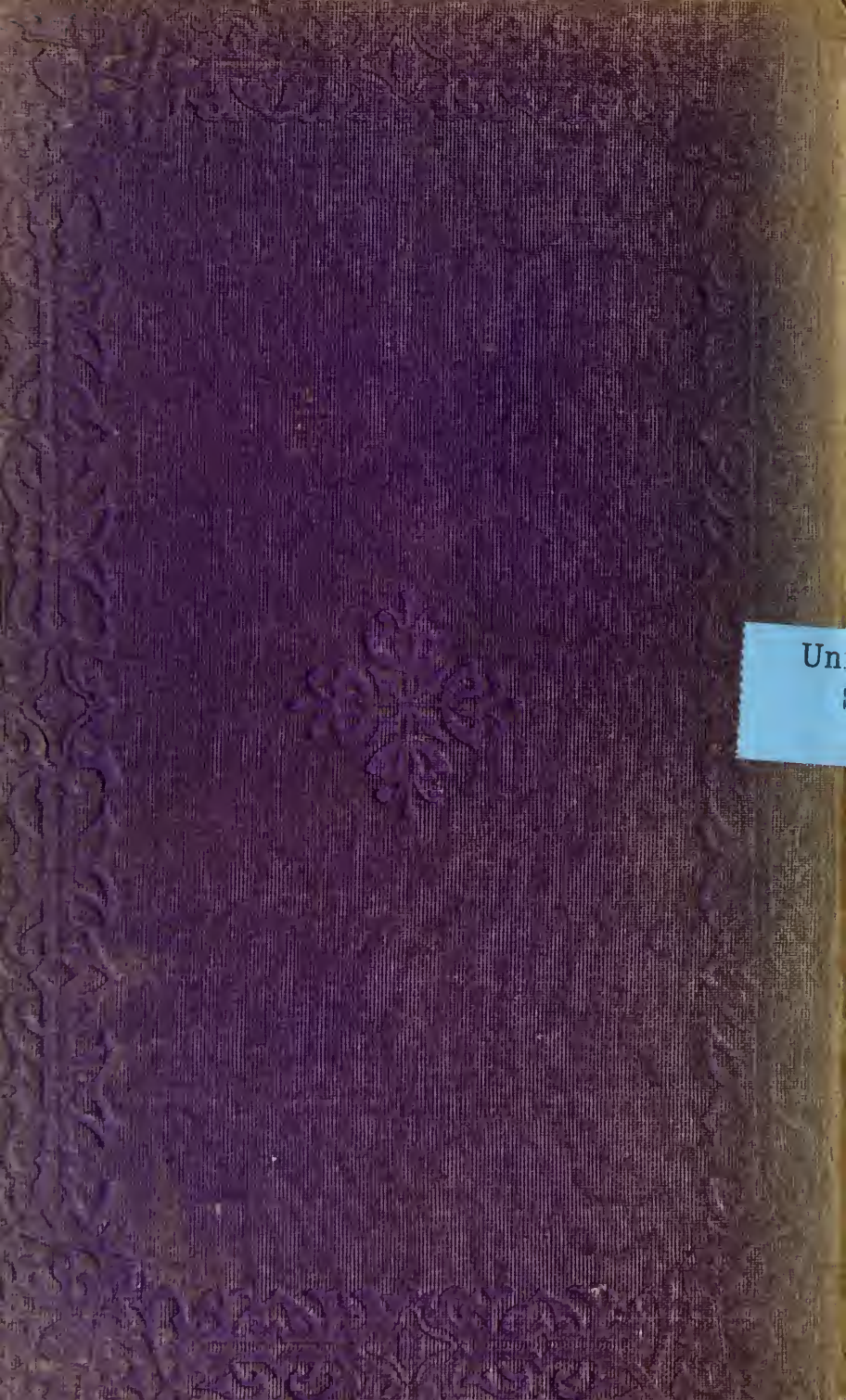
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